

**Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to
Work and other Measures) Bill 2005**
and
**Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work) Bill
2005**

Submission by Evelyn Scott OAM (Immediate Past President, ACT Down Syndrome Association; ACT Delegate, Down Syndrome Australia Network; and community representative, Disability ACT Reference Group 2 charged with the task of ‘Strengthening the capacity of people with disabilities, their families and carers to maximise control over their lives’).

1. The shortness of time allowed for submissions to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee is totally inadequate for particularly community organizations (consisting largely of volunteer staff) to prepare considered comments.
2. In general, people with disabilities want to work and to feel part of their local communities. Some people with disabilities may not have received sufficient encouragement/education/support to equip themselves with skills for the workplace for a wide variety of reasons; some people with disabilities may not be able to work; and some people with disabilities who receive a pension are highly fearful (and rightly so) that their current entitlements will be taken away from them when it is the only form of income they have/have been used to having. BUT a large majority of people with disabilities want a REAL job – a job in a workplace where they are treated as ‘just another member of staff’, where they are given work commensurate with their abilities, where workplaces learn to devolve duties so people with disabilities can be gainfully employed, where employers do not find it all ‘just too hard’ to design jobs for people with disabilities, and where people with disabilities are included in staff training and development exercises, social activities, etc.
3. Jobs for people with disabilities need to be designed to fit their abilities – not their disabilities.
4. People with disabilities have the same aspirations as every other employee in Australia: they want to save so they can buy their own clothes, pay for their own social activities, live independently, have holidays, travel overseas, buy things for themselves, and even buy their own home (whether they need carer/attendant support or not).
5. The existing system of supported job agencies to assist people with disabilities find/keep jobs is not working when people such as my daughter can only be employed as an ASO 1 for 8 hours a week with a federal government department. This has been the situation for over 5 years! What happened to job design? What happened to inclusion? What happened to on the job training? Why can her agency not find her more work? Why does she continue to stress about having no income to spare now she is living independently and paying private rent? With her skills, widespread

experience, past and ongoing training, my networks etc, if she can't find fulltime – or even more work than 8 hours a week – who can? (I understand that Prof. Allan Fels recently made a similar comment re his daughter.)

6. Job agencies who work with people with disabilities, and receive government funding to do so, still have to make a profit and are very constrained when it comes to stretching the tied resources they receive to adequately cater for clients without work, let alone those who may have some, but insufficient, work.
7. There has to be a culture/attitude change in Australian society before people with disabilities are recognised as people with abilities in the work force – quite apart from, of course, their local communities. When a woman with Down syndrome who has worked in a large privately owned laundry for 12 years can be told that the staff are starting work early (ie. 6 am, finishing at 2pm) on Melbourne Cup day so that they can go off to celebrate the Cup, and then find out when she is knocking off that the rest of the staff are setting up to have a Cup party to which she is not invited, something has to change.
8. There needs to be a campaign – funded to the same extent as the government's IR media campaign – to demonstrate to Australians that people with disabilities are people with abilities first and foremost and that they are employable and valuable members of society. People with disabilities themselves can tell the story, with the right support. The government should recognise that this will win many more votes than the recent contentious IR campaign. One in 17 people in the ACT have a disability; Australia-wide it is approximately 1 in 20 – and the ones over 18 can vote and are consumers/spenders/investors. The necessary spending on goods and services by the carers/families of people with disabilities is substantial. There is no doubt that the financial returns to government can be huge – provided that people with disabilities are given the right support and are not undermined by effectively singling them out for seemingly 'not doing the right thing by society'.
9. People with disabilities must be viewed as people first when it comes to government cost saving/cutting. Their needs now are not being met; the proposed legislation will add to the 'disabilities' of people who only ask that they be given the same opportunities to lead fruitful lives and to contribute to their communities as do all other Australians. Savings can be made, but savings can only be addressed once the right support networks are in place to allow people with disabilities every opportunity to maximise their abilities.