

4 April 2011

Ms Julia Gillard
Parliament House
CANBERRA 2600

A New Approach is Needed

Dear Prime Minister

Hello I am writing in relation to the Disability care and Support system, which in my opinion is completely flawed. My name is Owen James I have been on the disability pension since 1980 due to a motorcar accident in 1970 in which I suffered severe injuries, also a severe brain injury describes as an acquired brain injury which has been damaging all of my life. As far as employment opportunities are concerned all I am asking for is a fair go towards being employed whatever has happened to Australia's fair go.

Currently I am registered with The Wool Factory here in Horsham in the wimmera. They have funding for 43 people with 9 on the waiting list in which I am one of those due to lack of funding. My Dr here in Horsham David Leembruggen whom is the chairperson at the wool factory, said if there was sufficient funding they could employ extra 55 people.

The Disability Support System overall is inequitable, underfunded, fragmented, and inefficient and gives people with a disability little choice. It provides no certainty that people will be able to access appropriate supports when needed. While some governments have performed much better than others, and there are pockets of success, overall no disability system in any jurisdiction is working well in all of these areas where change is required. The new system needs to work for individuals with a disability and their families, and provide benefits for the community as a whole. People with disabilities and their carers are also less likely to participate in paid employment. Around 28 per cent of people with severe or profound core activity limitations were in the labour force, compared to 50 per cent of people with disability and around 83 per cent of people without disability.

Employment in paid work not only has implications for income levels skill development and participation – it also affects peoples ability to save for retirement. As such both people with disability and their carers are less likely to have superannuation or other retirement savings. The government funds Australian Disability Enterprises like the Wool Factory and Karkana to provide employment for people like myself who have difficulty finding work in the open market because of their level of disability. This is my main issue there are no positions available at the Wool Factory and Karkana due to lack of funding also from my perspective this 13 weeks training at \$2 an hr is an absolute disgrace as my resume proves my working capabilities, then being assessed by an independent C.R.S employee on your working productivity then you may get \$15.40 an hr which is not even the minimum wage which is around the \$15.70 mark There needs to be a complete overhaul, in which the way wages are assessed not all put in the one category being on a disability pension. Some people have disabilities so severe that they could not realistically ever work- and the Disability Support pension would continue to be the major source of long-term income support for them. However, some people using the Disability Support Pension have the potential for employment –with the associated gains of higher income, social connectedness, health benefits and the contribution they could make to the Australian community.

What is required from this Labor Government is a vision, and create jobs for the most disadvantaged people in our society ,to enhance the quality of life and increase economic and social participation for people with disability and their carers.

Finally: Go to work to get well

Work is generally good for our health, while long absences from employment can make us miserable, doctors say. A group of Australian and new Zealand doctors said work was generally good for your health, while long breaks from work, along with unemployment and the inability to work because of disability, had negative effects. Work is also an effective means of reducing exclusion, particularly for indigenous people and other disadvantaged groups. “Work practices, workplace culture, work-life balance, injury management programs, and relationships within workplaces are determinates not only of whether people feel valued in their work roles, but also of individual health, wellbeing and productivity, they said Good outcomes are more likely when individuals understand the health benefits of work and are empowered to take responsibility for their own situation. Thank you

Yours faithfully

Owen James