



Diversity Field Officer Service Pilot Evaluation

Summary of the evaluation of the Diversity Field Officer Service, an employer engagement strategy trialled in the Geelong region, Victoria in 2015-16.

Authors: Murfitt K., Zammit J., Bryant R., Strachan V., & Williams G,
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Executive Summary

While there have been significant efforts by the Australian Government to seek to improve unacceptable unemployment rates experienced by people with disability, most efforts have focused on the supply side – building the capacity and job-readiness of people with disability – with far less attention and resources to build the capability and readiness of business, particularly small business. Further, there has been very little investment to understand the specific needs of small and medium sized business (who employ over 90% of Australians) when it comes to employing and engaging with people with disability.

The lack of initiatives directed to work with, and understand, the needs of small business led to the development of the Diversity Field Officer Service pilot, a concept of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) piloted in partnership with Deakin University. The pilot, combining consumer disability expertise with business engagement skills and small business practice (a combination which is unique in both the disability employment and employment engagement sector), was funded by the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, Worksafe Victoria, the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Geelong Community Foundation, with the support of over 20 local, state and national stakeholders.

The pilot occurred over 12 months with 50 small to medium workplaces across over 15 industries in Geelong, Victoria during 2015 and 2016, with 36 businesses participating in the evaluation. The service worked one to one to assist to build ‘disability confidence’ and facilitate the development of more inclusive policies and practices within each business, with practical steps identified to put developing disability confidence into action.

The businesses who participated grew markedly in ‘disability confidence’ and awareness (10%) especially given the short duration and already high levels of confidence (over 70%) prior to engagement with the Diversity Field Officer Service. Businesses viewed the service highly, with 97% of businesses indicating that their expectations were fully met or mostly met. Businesses also ranked capacity building exercises consistently high (90% or more).

Irrespective of the short timeframe, 75% of businesses were employing people with disability at the end of the pilot, as compared to 39% of businesses at pilot commencement, with 86% indicating that there might be an opportunity to employ people with disability in the next 12 months, as compared to 58% at the start of the pilot.

Additional outcomes were generated that will contribute to the future employment of people with disability from entry level to CEO and retention. These include:

- 79% are actively implementing or planning to include welcoming wording for people with disability in job advertisements/descriptions
- 42% are actively implementing or intending to implement job carving (creation of a specific role or identification of tasks that can be performed by a person with disability)
- 36% are actively implementing or planning to implement guaranteed interview for people with disability who meet the key selection criteria
- 36% are implementing or planning to implement work experience
- 30% are implementing or planning to implement graduate opportunities or internships

- 64% are examining mental health related initiatives in the workplace as well as
- Improved accessibility of workplaces, including physical access and workplace flexibility.

The professional skills, knowledge, and disability expertise of the Diversity Field Officers were seen to be the most important attributes, highlighting that the model's unique point of view and its independence resonated with small businesses.

Despite the number of businesses reporting disadvantages or challenges to employing people with disability reducing four-fold during the service, just over half of businesses still reported some challenges around perceived additional costs of employment, additional time required and training challenges, accessibility and other business constraints, substantiating the need for ongoing support to address concerns and specific needs.

The literature review for this project (Murfitt et al, in press), and additional research (i.e. Waterhouse et al, 2010) has identified the voice and needs of small to medium businesses as a predominantly missing link in the disability employment support sector in Australia. The evaluation provides clear evidence that the Diversity Field Officer Service can help to fill that gap with appropriate resourcing.

The 'voices' of these approx. 40 businesses spanning over 15 industries were heard in this evaluation. The message is clear. As Waterhouse et al (2010) also found, they need direct, tailored, flexible support to build their disability confidence and inclusion in their workplaces before they will be in a position to link with employment services and/or other recruitment organisations to employ people with disability.

Addressing the needs of both jobseekers with disability and businesses is paramount to shifting attitudes about disability and generating employment pathways – addressing one side without the other will not be enough to generate significant change in employment rates. Improving the attitudes, and in turn, the practices of employers also requires the specific concerns of businesses to be addressed first before other efforts are pursued; without addressing these real or perceived barriers, creating employment outcomes is unlikely to be a priority focus, particularly for small businesses.

As indicated in this research, consistent with findings of disability-focused attitudinal change research and research on other barriers to inclusion, changing attitudes and practices takes time and requires a 'slow burn' approach. This is inconsistent with current employment programs seeking to rapidly build rapport with employers and place people with disability into jobs. This presents implications for the funding of employer engagement initiatives moving forward if these initiatives, particularly for small business, are to be successful.

The Diversity Field Officer Service concept has the potential to become an integral component of future employment reform to improve employment outcomes and has demonstrated its capacity to be expanded to benefit small and medium sized businesses across Australia. It is recommended that the Diversity Field Officer Service, incorporating refinements identified in this evaluation, is supported to scale up & rollout across Australia.

Background

In Australia, just 53% of Australians with disability of working age participate in the workforce, compared to 83% of Australians who do not report a disability; a figure that has changed little over the last 20 years (AHRC, 2016). International comparisons in 2011 show that Australia was ranked only 21 of 29 OECD countries in terms of employment of people with disability (PWC, 2011).

The Diversity Field Officer Service (DFOS) is a concept of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), a national peak organisation run by and for people with disability, piloted in conjunction with Deakin University. The project was developed as a result of work undertaken by AFDO in 2014, seeking to re-orient the current employment model to better meet the needs of business and jobseekers with disability.

The DFOS was developed as an employer engagement strategy to work directly with small and medium sized businesses to build 'disability confidence', as a result of research highlighting the 'missing voice' of businesses of this size, especially their experience, barriers and views of employing people with disability in Australia. The DFOS was piloted over 12 months commencing September 2015 with approximately 50 small to medium workplaces across over 15 industries in Geelong, a large regional centre in Victoria, Australia.

While initially focused on increasing employment opportunities for people with disability, the action research model used in the pilot led to an expanded focus to include retention of staff that may already have, or might acquire a disability (with one in five Australians estimated to be experiencing disability at any one point in time) and more welcoming and inclusive customer service. The DFOS was also positioned as a 'trusted guide' to connect businesses to relevant supports to implement their objectives that emerged from engagement in the pilot, and to become more welcoming, confident and accessible as both businesses serving the community and as employers.

To support implementation, a Reference Group drawing on employer representative organisations, industry bodies and funders was established. A Collaborative Employment Network was also formed of stakeholders with practical experience in supporting people with disability into employment. This included Disability Employment Services (DES), the Geelong Local Learning and Employment Network and state and national programs, with the aim of providing a non-competitive environment to support the DFOS to support businesses to employ and fill vacancies.

In total, over 20 local, state and national organisations provided connections and in-kind support. The DFOS comprised two Diversity Field Officers employed for one year, as well as a part-time Project Manager (0.6EFT) and a part-time Lead Researcher (0.4EFT) employed for two years to co-develop and evaluate the model.

Objectives

The key objectives of this pilot were to:

- provide one to one customised support to 50 small to medium businesses in the Geelong area to build their disability awareness / attitudes / confidence; and
- assist these businesses to develop more inclusive organisations in terms of workplace culture, policy and procedures and physical access to facilitate more employment of people with disability.

The concept of entry level to CEO was a crucial message, with very few participating businesses consciously realising the potential of people with disability, or the existence of people with disability in senior leadership roles in their line of work or other industries; a unique feature brought by AFDO as an organisation run by and for people with disability.

Diversity Field Officer Service elements

The DFOS included:

- business analysis
- 'disability friendly checks' regarding physical access and inclusive culture
- attention to disability awareness and unconscious bias
- a customised 'road map' with practical recommendations to build more confidence and inclusion and
- warm connections with peer businesses, employment service providers and disability focused/aligned organisations that could assist businesses to implement their objectives. The interest, intent, and action of recommendations and activities by businesses were recorded to track progress and confidence.

Recruitment and demographics of participating businesses

The majority (54%) of business recruitment occurred within the first three months, well exceeding the project plan. The predominant motivation for businesses to join was to be disability friendly. Alignment with business goals was also identified as a motivating factor.

Remaining businesses were recruited as identified, with three businesses joining in the last three months of the pilot. Over half of businesses (52%) were recruited through a DFOS event (of which there were two during the pilot) or through an existing business networking event. Twenty-six percent (26%) of businesses were referred through an industry organisation or a participating business.

Businesses with 5-100 employees were the target group for the pilot. Sixty-two percent (62%) of businesses who participated in the pilot employed 6-50 employees, with 30% of businesses with 51 or more employees. The DFOS predominantly engaged with business owners or at a CEO/General Manager level (40%), with 32% of engagement with HR and 26% with a senior manager or member of the leadership team. The level of influence of the 'drivers' the DFOS worked with was a critical element identified in the findings.

Evaluation method and research questions

The key purpose of the evaluation was to assess 'proof of concept. Ethical approval was gained from the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants were sent the Plain Language Statement (describing the research) and consent form by the Lead Researcher. On return, participants were then sent the pre-service survey before starting the service. At pilot completion, participants were administered the post-service survey.

The evaluation utilised both quantitative and qualitative research methods including:

- pre and post surveys with businesses
- semi-structured post-service interviews with businesses
- semi-structured post-service interviews with Disability Employment Services and other stakeholders participating in the pilot
- case studies from six businesses
- file note information recorded by the Diversity Field Officers throughout the pilot
- a focus group workshop with the DFOS team to identify themes evident from the data collected.

Eight research questions were developed to guide evaluation of the pilot:

1. What evidence is there in terms of increased disability confidence / more positive attitudes towards employing people with disability? *Or evidence of no change or negative growth.*
2. What evidence is there of change at the enterprise level that will enable the employment of people with disability in the business (i.e. building inclusion). *Or no change or negative change.*
3. What added value did the service provide to businesses? *Or no value or negative value.*
4. What was most important re the delivery of the service?
5. Should the service have a future role? And what should that be?
6. What peer connections / networks exist / have been created / should be created in the future?
7. What evidence is there showing the unique needs of the businesses?
8. What occurred that evidences the action research approach? *Both positive and negative. Including any unanticipated learnings or outcomes?*

Thirty-six workplaces¹ participated in both the pre and post evaluation; a response rate of 82%. This document is a condensed summary of the findings of the full evaluation, with excerpts and insights of businesses provided throughout this report. It is important to note that the DFOS worked primarily with one or two 'drivers' within each business, therefore the flow on effects within workplaces could be more significant than the findings indicate.

¹ A small number of participating businesses managed more than one workplace.

Findings

Increase in disability confidence

'We have gained so much confidence in regards to how/what we need to do to now employ people with disabilities'.

The businesses that participated in the pilot grew markedly in 'disability confidence' and awareness (10 percentage points). This result demonstrates a positive and credible impact, especially given the short duration of business participation (at best 12 months and for some only a few months). This is also especially significant due to the fact that businesses were over 70% towards the positive end of the scale when they started the service.

Virtually all businesses reported gains in disability confidence or awareness. This included: awareness about specific areas such as physical access, recruitment processes, disability being about more than people using wheelchairs, and appropriate language, to broader impacts about 'higher purpose' learnings, connecting with other businesses and community around common values, and making the community stronger.

'We are more comfortable now making advertisements appear more disability friendly and not thinking that a certain type of person can only fit a certain position.'

'The program opened my eyes to what is a disability. I would think about wheelchairs, but disability is a wide umbrella'.

'I see the main thing for us is the awareness around recruitment. What we need to put in place when we do get an opportunity to recruit, our turnover is minimal. Think about words and language so it's more inviting, an inclusive recruitment approach.'

It was acknowledged that the education provided through the DFOS led to greater awareness, leading to higher confidence:

'More interested because I understand more and I'm now more educated. You don't know what you don't know a lot of the time, I was blown away really, not with what I didn't know but with the depth of the knowledge that I feel that I have picked up along the way.'

Gains were reported for individuals, work teams, and more broadly across businesses, including to the Board or governance level. Very few businesses reported negative or no growth: one business reported gaining some information but having no gains toward employing people with disability, and another felt that bureaucracy, forms and processes complicate the process of disability employment. A few businesses acknowledged that further work to build organisational capacity was required.

'Still got a long way to go. Need more staff development to be disability confident across the organisation'.

Employing people with disability

'Recently recruited a 63 year old with Parkinson's – ex-electrician working really well on the floor. A great people person with huge knowledge being an ex-electrician.'

The ultimate test of disability confidence is actual employment of people with disability. While a lot of the work undertaken involved building a disability confident culture and inclusive processes, many businesses took concrete steps towards and into employment for people with disability through work experience, internships, job carving and actual jobs as a result of their participation. Data captured in the evaluation identified that

- 75% of businesses were employing people with disability at the end of the pilot as compared to 38% of businesses at pilot commencement
- 86% of businesses indicating that there might be an opportunity to employ people with disability in the next 12 months, as compared to 58% at the start of the pilot
- 42% are actively implementing or intending to implement job carving (creation of a specific role for a person with disability who could undertake identified tasks currently performed by existing staff)
- Only 11% of businesses said there were no challenges to employing people with disability at pilot commencement, compared to 44% who reported no challenges to employing people with disability after the service
- 67% had not received assistance to employ people with disability prior to the pilot.

Good examples of action on disability confidence, building inclusive practices and actual employment are evident in the following extracts:

'After attending the programs offered under this pilot our business would increase our opportunities to employ the right person for the job. Whether they have a disability or not would no longer be a concern'.

'Having the job carving support was the moment it started to become more realistic for us... Employed an admin support person during the DFOS period...Getting wage subsidy advice was really helpful as well. Finding out there is different ways to approach this – the DES [Disability Employment Service] was able to help.'

The quoted business (immediately above), along with a number of other businesses, were connected to the DES at the appropriate stage of disability confidence development. Just as people with disability have to be 'job ready', businesses need to be 'employment ready' for a successful job match through an employment service or other recruitment pathway.

Others gained the insight that employing people with disability is not necessarily difficult with *'enormous benefits to business [that] far outweigh the costs'*. One business not only developed to the stage of employing a person with disability through the DFOS and being connected with a DES, but has influenced the practices of other businesses in the region. This has included the introduction of a disability category in the local business awards and an accessibility focused criterion in all other award categories.

However, several businesses reported concerns about employing a person with disability because of perceived cost, time commitments needed to manage and train, unforgiving customers/public and staff engagement and understanding. These concerns are explored further in the section outlining challenges. Some businesses had few action steps reported mainly due to those businesses joining the service late in the pilot.

Measures to improve employment of people with disability

Table 1: Plans to implement or implementation of opportunities identified by DFOS

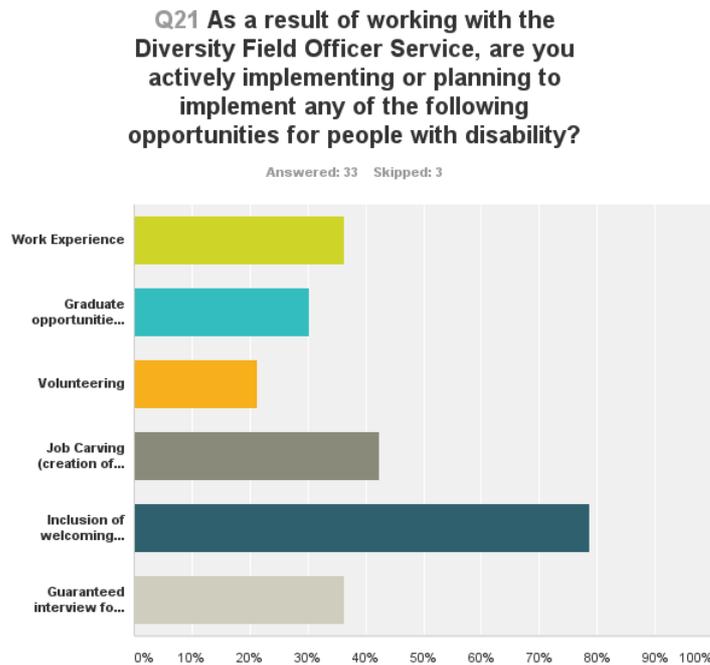


Table 2: Confidence of businesses - developing policies, practices and a culture of inclusion

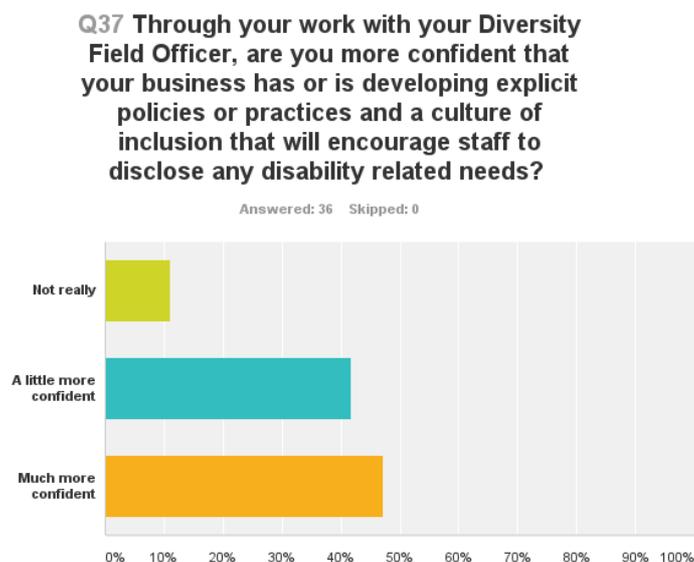


Table 1 highlights the commitment of businesses to opportunities identified by the DFOS. Responses indicate that 79% of businesses are actively implementing or planning to include welcoming wording for people with disability in job advertisements/descriptions.

'Disability friendly language was immediate for us and was something that I could influence straight way and an immediate need for our local and national business. Wording led to a person with disability applying for a role who was interviewed. We have 20 interstate offices and it was applied nationally.'

'The main one that stood out for me are things that have always been in a job advertisement. i.e. 'Drivers licence required'. If you don't drive for the job, you don't need it. Oral and written communication: They need to be able to communicate but good communication skills don't necessarily have to be verbal and written in the roles that we have here... We will make the changes to the job adverts.'

In a small number of cases, the disability friendly wording on job advertisements was seen as too narrow with broader wording suggested by the DFOS.

'The disability friendly wording that was offered was suggesting that we are specifically focused on disability, which didn't fit right. We're open to anyone applying who is suitable and capable of doing the job. Ended up using broader diversity wording which came as a result of [DFOS] suggestions.'

Changes were also made by a number of businesses to interview processes, with 36% actively implementing or planning to implement guaranteed interviews for people with disability who meet the key selection criteria. The guaranteed interview approach was introduced during the pilot, presenting an opportunity for businesses to 'guarantee' to shortlist one or more people with disability where they meet the requirements of a role but might not ordinarily be considered for shortlisting due to more competitive candidates.

'Changed my perception about how to interview different people. Some people only want to work a day or two, some people may only want to do phone work, we may get a person in a wheelchair who is capable of doing that. Opened up that it is not a one size fits all approach'

'Again, if the person can do the job then they should have the job.'

Table 2 indicates that confidence to develop explicit policies, practices and a culture of inclusion has grown for the vast majority of participating businesses.

Work experience, graduate opportunities and volunteering

As per Table 1, 36% of businesses indicated that they are implementing or planning to implement work experience for people with disability, with 30% implementing or planning to implement graduate opportunities or internships for people with disability. Twenty-one percent (21%) of businesses were implementing or planning to implement volunteering for people with disability (noting that this is only available to not for profits).

'We have had more confidence to employ one of our volunteers as a part time staff member.'

Retention strategies, including improvements to mental health in the workplace

Some businesses discussed how the DFOS assisted them to consider additional flexibility in the workplace:

'It's just about finding a different way to do it. It has just opened up our way of thinking.'

Increased awareness of the impact of mental health in the workplace was also a significant outcome (64%). Some received mental health training or developed mental health plans or strategies through connections established by the DFOS, while others viewed mental health as part of their overall healthy workplace plans.

'The service opened my mind. Previously did not think disability is so widespread. Mental health is such a big deal now. When doing pre-employment medicals, we are now more open minded with applicants.'

Capacity building and experiential learning

Virtually all businesses (97%) had their expectations of the DFOS 'mostly' or 'fully met', with none indicating expectations not met and only one 'somewhat' met, with 95% of businesses rating their experience as 'good' or 'very good'. All businesses rated the core capacity building exercises provided as 'good' or 'excellent'. The accessibility check was most favoured, with 97% rating it 'good' or 'excellent', followed by one to one conversations about specific needs and challenges (94%) and the session on unconscious bias (94%).

Businesses also acknowledged the value of experiential opportunities through the DFOS.

'Another staff member was a little bit defensive about making changes to the recruitment process but after [presentation about guaranteed interview approach] x has changed [their] ideas and is more open to doing things differently. When things were presented to our staff, I could see the HR Manager and others start to change their mind and I could see that happening and in conversations.'

'Mock interviews – that whole concept had a real alignment with our business as we do that with all our businesses/clients all the time. You tapped into what is important for our business.'

'Disability awareness training. Very useful. That was really good. Initially when I first walked in I thought they had a token disabled person and then when he presented I thought 'Wow'. He changed my whole perception and he is the main presenter. How well he presented. It is not an easy thing to do. '

The customised recommendations provided to businesses were also viewed as very helpful (47%) or helpful (36%). When asked whether recommendations were achievable, ten businesses noted the following areas as limiting to implement recommendations: physical changes being unachievable; funding limitations; internal capacity; internal changes; low turnover of staff and limited opportunities for staff growth. Others stated that the recommendations will form part of a longer term business plan moving forward.

Accessibility of premises

Sixty-one percent (61%) of businesses reported that they were 'much more confident', with 28% reporting that they were 'a little more confident' that premises are, or could be made, accessible and safe for customers with disability as a result of working with the DFOS.

'I felt very confident with the timing [of] bringing [the] person with disability on board. Accessibility checklist was very useful, wasn't even aware that [there were issues]. A number of items had been followed through. Heavy door and new contrast strips have been placed on stairs. Disability friendly language, that was good, we used that.'

Small and medium size businesses who operated out of leased premises reported limitations to improve access to their premises and facilities.

'Walk around (accessibility checklist) initially showed what we couldn't do in a rented building so thought about what we could do ourselves and alternatives i.e. changing some of the layout.'

Connection with peer businesses and services supporting their objectives

The other key area of added value emerging from the data were the connections made to other participating businesses, business networks and community resources; a key objective of this pilot. The value of connections was acknowledged time and again by businesses throughout the interviews.

'Collaboration with a law firm facilitated by DFO re internship, it was very helpful [to understand] the process that they use. It is a process that we will look at implementing.'

'Connected to providers. Think these connections will definitely be useful. The challenge is a matter of us finding times and resources to put things into place.'

'Greater visibility out there and to meet people. You have also provided the connections that we have been unable to make and get a good result from being involved in some events too. That was what I was up for and it brought that.'

'Spoke with a person at one of the breakfasts who shared the reasonable adjustments she made for one of her staff member who needed a longer lunch break to lie down.'

Another required wheelchair access to the building. She said to me, it is about thinking literally beyond your space.'

A few businesses spoke about the limitations of achieving workplace cultural change within a twelve month timeframe, as noted in more detail below.

Delivery of the Diversity Field Officer Service

While one of the prompts in the post pilot interview did ask how important the business felt the face to face interaction was (which may have primed answers on this), businesses were also asked if the service could be delivered in other ways (i.e. by phone). Understanding the mode of service delivery was crucial information for the evaluation of the pilot model. Given the above, the overwhelming view of businesses was that the face to face aspect is an important and unique element of the service.

'Service wouldn't have got off the ground without face to face element. It would have been just one of the hundreds of emails I get every day. You do not get focused or undivided attention other than face to face.'

'Getting the subtle message across re inclusive culture etc, you can't do that sort of thing remotely'.

Peer networking and specific skills training (i.e. disability awareness or guaranteed interview) were also mentioned as reasons face to face meetings were important.

'I think the whole thing is a good rounded package. I enjoyed the workshop on guaranteed interview and job carving, and anytime we got to sit around and feed off other people. Having ten other business contacts and being able to follow that up too and how they are going.'

There were also a good number of businesses who suggested that while face to face is important especially initially, some parts (i.e. follow up) could be by phone, email or other ways, or once the relationship is established it may suit businesses to have subsequent meetings by alternate means (i.e. Skype, facetime, phone, email).

The importance of being comfortable to be totally transparent coupled with open and honest communication was achieved by the face-to-face method, with several businesses offering up versions of the following statements:

'You didn't feel that what you were going to say would be judged. We were a bit worried about this, being honest and open right from the start is what has made the pilot so successful because everyone felt that they have a rapport with the person they are meeting.'

'All of the communication was relevant and in keeping with what we are trying to do. We were never brushed off, we really felt like you see, and had, our best interests at

heart. You took the time to tell us about different things. Doing that, we felt the DFOS was really keen to see us succeed and get up and running.'

'This is why DFOS needs to be ongoing, to be brutally honest. We're very busy, we have one meeting and then we forget about it. It has to be constantly reminded, it is not painful at all, this is good, we need to do this. Nothing has changed in terms of our motivations.'

The importance of follow-up was also underlined, with many businesses commenting on how time poor they were with competing priorities. Most businesses found the service moved quickly enough, although those who started later in the program felt they did not have the time to fully absorb and implement change, highlighting the value of follow-up.

'Because you have a unique service.... If you don't (follow up) it's going to fall down my list... If it is something that I am open to being reminded about to keep pushing me along, absolutely.'

'We are frantic here, if you were asking more in shorter time frames it would be difficult. It was like a pleasant degustation.'

This view was countered by other businesses sharing that they appreciated a 'one stop shop' - a unique customised service carried out by professionals with an understanding of small business:

'I think the model you have gone with is a great model... customisation for unique needs and DFO does that really well and therefore organisations not wasting time searching...'

Professional attributes of the Diversity Field Officer Service team

The professional skills, knowledge, and disability expertise; and employer engagement and communication of the Diversity Field Officers were identified as key attributes. This is in line with the key attributes of employer engagement skills and disability subject matter expertise seen as ideal for the DFO role in the design of the pilot, and consistent with the call for more attention to successfully engaging with specific business needs and priorities in the literature (Waterhouse et al, 2010A and B).

'The team involved were always extremely proactive and never pushed or rushed us into a decision. They took the time to truly understand our needs and customise an approach to suit us.'

'One of your skills [speaking to DFO] is you understand business and the skills available, understand what business' needs are and its relevance so the business gets value from doing it.'

'Our Diversity Field Officer shares similar values to us. She is both a great listener and a great verbal communicator. She is passionate and this is infectious'

Building peer networks and connections

The evaluation indicated that there is broad support for a peer network of businesses, with networking events needing to have specific content relevant to these businesses, particularly success stories from other businesses or hearing from people with disability.

'Get employers who are doing it to speak to other businesses... I will attend if our business will get something out of it. Need outcome based meeting otherwise I will not attend. Don't want someone lecturing us. Need informal, direction based. Have events that celebrate achievements. What differences has it made – Do a case study – Our business happy to be a case study. '

'I like speakers. When you are the only HR person, you can get cocooned, helpful to hear and talk about other areas.'

Some suggest quarterly, six-monthly, or annual opportunities, with few keen for anything more regular. Linking events with those already available, such as local Chamber of Commerce events, were also seen as a more efficient use of time. Some businesses indicated that they would like access to something like a directory of participating businesses and more opportunity for direct contact with business participants, such as an online portal with updates. Short targeted newsletters, again 'with personal stories important for businesses' or a closed Facebook page was also identified.

'There is already a host of information available online as you have shown with the documentation and links you have given us. Guest speakers that are topical can be of great benefit, getting together for the sake of a chat doesn't always achieve a whole lot and not a good use of time. Topical matters, structured events where what is going to be presented or worked on is understood up front so people go prepared and informed whether it be a breakfast meeting so you get involved.'

A few businesses have already connected with other participating businesses face to face and via email or phone but there is a strong need to formalise and promote this cross-fertilising of ideas and experiences. Business participation organised by the DFOS included the launch breakfast event, second breakfast to encourage networking and business connections, disability awareness training, guaranteed interview session and businesses participating in mock interviews with students with disability.

'The job you have done on the events has resonated with me around the content and the people you get up to host the event. The content aligned with where we are heading and where our work is about, the personnel who are not only experts in the field, case studies, interaction with the audience and professional level presentation and videos.'

'...I had a worthwhile experience and connections with two or three people who attended that have lasted over the 6 months. People who do go who want to take something from it.'

'[It's] Surprising how many businesses are doing great things.'

When asked, businesses shared ideas of what a peer network could look like or do:

'We should engage and have a network created between businesses that have successfully implemented and had commercial success that I can pick up the phone and speak to a peer or the network. Understanding what you have job carved, what has worked, financial benefits, staff morale, lack of turnover, absenteeism and find out where it has worked.'

'Say an organisation employs a person with disability, they come out the other end and say this young adult is fantastic but there is nowhere for him to go here [within the organisation] because they have these skillsets. Ring us to say we have a great person, it is a great recommendation to have. Of course you need to have the position there. Cuts through going to market rather than filter through and shortlist when it has already been done.'

'Reminds businesses to be kept updated and legislation has changed. More of what has been done. Participating businesses and their experiences and what they have found. It could be an example of a young person who is visually impaired and these were reasonable adjustments we made and it's all been fantastic, this is a barrier we might have hit so people learn from that''.

Future role for the Diversity Field Officer Service for current and new businesses

The responses to any future role indicate that an ongoing role is important:

'Ongoing accountability would be good. Not to rap over the knuckles, a touch point over the phone every 2, 3, 4 months to be able to action some things and keep things front of mind.'

'One of the key benefits of the service continuing is to provide that link, you know what services are out there, they all act separately to each other and hard to navigate your way through that. Having you as a conduit to that.'

Participating businesses observed that the following should be available for businesses new to the DFOS should it continue:

'A little wow package of the product offerings of the service. Marketing to get businesses on board.'

'As a starting point, you need to pitch from a financial perspective: This is the cost to your business around mental health and lack of diversity. There is a positive of having a diverse workforce and the statistics to back it up...and these are the costs of the businesses associated with it [mental health untreated and lack of diversity]. That sales pitch is lacking. I needed to have [these] things, the information that Provider provided later in the piece earlier as I can't quantify a direct return on investment [without it] that I need to get the budget [from International HQ].'

Ongoing access to the latest resources, opportunities to hear about case studies (positive and negative) and opportunities to continue to embed learning by connecting with other participating businesses were underlined in the feedback. The other role therefore seen as important for the DFOS is that of a 'connector' to services, such as mental health awareness providers, disability employment services and also to other businesses:

'Regular updates, continuing to build disability confidence, develop case studies, the 'tool box' for employers, and build the business case for employing people with disability and benefits of diversity.'

Case studies: meeting the unique needs of businesses

As per previous research (Waterhouse et al (2010), and Murfitt et al (in press)), small to medium businesses are frustrated that they are not getting assistance that is tailored to their unique needs to become disability confident and more inclusive organisations. The following two case studies illustrate the diverse contexts and unique needs small to medium businesses do have.

Case Study 1

A medium sized, community focused, not-for-profit organisation working in the aged care sector, joined the DFOS as it was having difficulties recruiting within its food services division. The business was also motivated to give people an opportunity, a sense of worth and independence.

One of the business' core values is cultural diversity, with the CEO drawing on the DFOS learnings to broaden the scope of this definition.

Building capacity across the leadership team was critical to the CEO, who invited the DFOS to present to 18 senior staff on two separate occasions at leadership days, in addition to undertaking the DFOS program. The first presentation focused on building confidence through training in disability awareness and unconscious bias. The second session introduced the concept of job carving, with a break-out session identifying forty tasks across multiple business areas. Attendees shared that the session opened up their minds to opportunities that had previously not been considered, and valued roles that could be undertaken.

The CEO recognised that cultural change within the organisation could not happen overnight, nor without the support of the leadership group.

'I want to challenge the leadership team to think about how friendly we really are and who would pose the barriers internally for us employing people with disability. I want them to think about their own unconscious bias. We focus on diversity, we celebrate diversity here. This flows in perfectly. If we don't have buy-in from the leadership team, it won't flow through the organisation.'

The business initially worked with the DFOS to assist with recruitment challenges in the food services area. DFOS assisted the business to change the wording on their job advertisements to be more disability friendly. As a result, one candidate with autism (ASD) applied for the position.

Prior to the interview, the manager accessed a JobAccess resource 'How to interview a candidate with ASD'; with JobAccess previously unfamiliar to the business. While the candidate was unsuccessful, the manager found the experience to be invaluable, excitedly sharing that he had felt more confident and was pleased that welcoming wording had opened the door to new people. Based on his growing confidence, the manager approached DFOS to help the business identify candidates for two café attendant roles in 2017.

Two staff attended disability awareness training that was arranged by DFOS for participating businesses. The business intends to introduce disability awareness training as a compulsory element of the 2017/2018 education plan for staff. Unconscious bias has also been identified as important. The business is also preparing a Wellbeing Plan in 2017 that will include mental health resources.

Case Study 2

An information services organisation joined the pilot in March 2016, motivated by the desire to understand their community further and better meet their clientele's needs, noting that *'staffing should reflect the community we serve.'*

The organisation has a staff member with Rheumatoid Arthritis and another with hearing impairment. The Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) via the JobAccess website was introduced regarding funding to support businesses to purchase modifications to assist employees with disability. This resource was well received.

Whilst the business had had a previous negative experience with an employee with disability requiring lots of extra time and effort who was not able to perform the inherent requirements of the role, the manager was empathetic and aware that every situation and employee is unique, with individuals having differing strengths and weaknesses. She agreed however that fundamentally the inherent requirements for the role must be met for any role to be productive. This message was reinforced by attendance at a session about how

guaranteed interview can present candidates with disability who may otherwise be overlooked during shortlisting.

An otherwise hesitant HR manager reported that this session enabled her to feel 'completely confident' to move forward in employing two people with disability shortly after as *'they were simply the best applicants.'*

One of the applicants had disclosed he had Aspergers and brought particular strengths to the role. To proactively support his transition into the team as well as the team's understanding and awareness of Aspergers, the HR manager asked the DFOS to help source an Autism/Aspergers specialist to assist them. This was discussed with the employee and an application was made to JobAccess (EAF) to assist this process i.e. training one on one with the employee, manager and for staff to be covered financially. The managers met with the specialist provider in December 2016 with plans made to action in early 2017.

The Disability Action Plan was reviewed by the Project Manager of the DFOS at their request. As a result of the review and the recommendations provided during the pilot, the business plan is to develop an Access and Inclusion Plan in 2017 incorporating all recommendations made by the DFOS.

'Everything [listed] we can start to work towards. I'm prepared to take this on as a road map.'

Recommendations from the program included reviewing the accessibility of their website; volunteering opportunities for people with disability; changes to recruitment policy/procedure; looking at a guaranteed interview approach as a permanent measure; internships; work experience; mental health training; increasing promotion of their EAP; and disability awareness training in conjunction with new staff with disability starting work. Additional questions about disability for workplace and community surveys were offered by the DFOS as well as looking at survey completion improvement i.e. accessibility of online surveys.

The case studies indicates that simply referring these businesses to a website for support, or offering a financial incentive to employ a person with disability, just won't work for these and many other small to medium businesses. The context and culture, particularly regarding disability confidence and inclusive policies and practices, has to be addressed first. These case studies not only show that the context and needs of these small to medium businesses are quite different and unique, but also illustrate the breadth of the DFOS and the service's ability to tailor support to address the unique needs.

The breadth and depth of activity in building disability confidence and inclusion in a large number of businesses over a short period (i.e. most in the 12 month pilot phase and some in the few months while this evaluation was being developed) is notable. Clearly, the DFOS role is comprehensive and unique for small to medium businesses.

Connecting businesses to existing services and programs – stakeholder perspectives

'I saw it as another avenue to open some doors which might not necessarily have been open already, and it certainly did that', DES provider

In addition to building the disability confidence of businesses, a key focus of the DFOS was to build connections between participating businesses to existing local services to support businesses to put their disability confidence into action. The DFOS was clear that its role was not to job match (the role of DES) but as a connector of newly confident businesses to existing organisations with specialist experience. This included connections to:

- Disability Employment Services (5 providers) and other recruitment channels (Enabled Employment etc)
- Work experience, school based apprenticeship and volunteering focused networks
- Mental health and disability focused providers (such as Me Well [formally Pathways]), Healthy Together Geelong and specialist disability organisations etc)
- Other opportunities as relevant.

During the pilot, 21 vacancies were shared predominantly with DES providers. Vacancies spanned professional roles (such as marketing co-ordinators and project managers) through to job-carved entry level roles, suiting people capable of working eight or more hours completing routine tasks. Across all vacancies, 45 candidates were put forward, predominantly for entry level / job carving roles.

The DFOS was overwhelmingly viewed to be useful and complementary to the work of DES.

'I think it's given us opportunities for our clients to gain employment, or the opportunity to apply for positions in areas that we haven't had before, and with employers and particular specific jobs'.

'You are walking the talk when you are approaching employers. Employer first approach is very healthy. Maybe we have been looking at the wrong direction all along. Brilliant, really passionate couldn't pick better people'.

DES were also asked whether the service duplicated the role of DES, with respondents identifying that the DFOS had a unique role and added value to their work.

'They can be complimentary, just need to clarify roles of DFOS and DES so to be clear'.

'DFO are not here really to sell something; they are here to collaborate and educate people whereas we [DES] will always have this perception [we do that] but our business is to place people....I think this could be a good thing in the sense that we complement each other...There would be some overlapping, but it is still complementary to us'.

A number of areas were reported where collaboration could be improved, including more timely and regular communication, identified by both the DFOS and stakeholders. The Collaborative Employment Network established, bringing together these stakeholders, is a good start to share what is working and resolve what is not working, with recognition that the mechanism could be improved as an integral part of the DFOS going forward. The intensiveness of communication with stakeholders would need to be considered in a refined model to ensure that the needs of businesses remain the priority focus.

The second area for development is to clarify the roles of the DFOS and employment pathways and where and how they articulate with each other. Some DES join with the service at the point when the business is ready to recruit and candidates have been forwarded by DES for shortlisting. The DFOS and DES pre-screen potential applicants together to ensure an optimal match between job seeker skills, attributes and requirements of the position. Others would prefer to negotiate directly with the employer once a vacancy has been identified and circulated by the service. However, multiple approaches, especially with small to medium businesses who have little capacity to respond, from multiple organisations like DES and other recruitment organisations, could undermine progress made through the DFOS. The necessary focus on getting people with disability 'job ready', and actual job searching, negates DES' ability and impartiality in addressing employers' needs and preferences, except around actual placement support.

In addition, some job applicants put forward were inappropriate for the positions or required a level of skill too high for their job applicants, highlighting a significant gap in the recruitment pool of DES for businesses seeking highly qualified employees or employees for more senior roles. This indicates that DES alone cannot be expected to re-dress the poor employment rates experienced by people with disability.

'Some of the prerequisites for the positions were far, far beyond what our people were capable of doing. The majority were, and that was enough to deter interest from the employment consultants. We needed to put a face to a name, then the DFO came in and the confidence of the team went through the roof but that was close to the end of the pilot'.

'I also think the level of skill required for some of the jobs were higher than what we had, like finance officer. The level is more an entry level type of role and repetitive type of role that we've got more chances to fill'.

Further channels are needed to build capability and skill level among people with disability to holistically address participation of people with disability and meet unmet employer needs. The DFOS is in an ideal position to facilitate a more broad and diverse catchment strategy that attracts job applicants with disability to fill vacancies 'from entry level to CEO', noting the challenges previously outlined. Nonetheless, the significant engagement with job carving by the businesses has the potential to deliver more entry level or lower skill vacancies for DES clients.

In addition to DES, the DFOS connected with other employment agencies, such as Enabled Employment. Suggestions to businesses seeking more highly qualified staff of a recruitment model approach were not widely embraced, with businesses indicating negative previous experiences with recruitment firms, no budget or a reluctance to spend on recruitment fees, or a preference for locally based talent (people living in the Geelong region).

Similar views of the value of the service were expressed by other stakeholders engaged with the pilot, including the Geelong Local Learning and Employment Network, Me-Well and National Disability Co-ordination Officer program.

'We would not have done as well [re outcomes] without them. The focus on the employer side is critical and it is not happening anywhere else; DES are necessarily KPI driven and are coming at it from a different perspective. They have an employment focus to get the outcome they need. DFO comes at it from both angles and build disability confidence. It is about a good match – we need to look after our employers. Dual approach so both succeed which builds confidence all round'.

The ideal role of the DFOS differed to the role identified by DES stakeholders' interviewed, with an expanded focus on developing other employment opportunities for people with disability and to change community attitudes.

'This service should be rolled out and funded across Australia to support our small to medium businesses and promote opportunities for people with disability. The service could also look at collaborating/developing social enterprise models/businesses to increase economic opportunity'.

'The ideal role would be to build capacity and then hand over to us or DES. It would be good to have more involvement of DES in school age, particularly Years 11 and 12'.

'DFOs are doing the sowing the seeds work, around changing attitudes of the businesses before they (DES) plant the tree'.

In closing remarks, one stakeholder noted:

'The service is a fantastic model and is something that is missing as stated above. The NDRC [National Disability Recruitment Coordinator] service focusses on larger organisations, which is wonderful for major cities and towns where most are located. The DFOS definitely fills the gap in regards to supporting small to medium businesses which are the economic backbone to many smaller towns across Victoria and possibly Australia'.

For the future, the stakeholders, as outlined, clearly feel the DFOS should be an ongoing program and available more widely for small to medium businesses who taken together employ the majority of people in Australia.

Challenges and areas for improvement

Observations of participating businesses

The majority of businesses – over 75% – reported advantages to employing people with disability, mainly around improved diversity, inclusiveness, culture, and business benefits such as an increased employment pool. However, there is still work to be done. Despite the number of businesses reporting disadvantages or challenges to employing people with disability reducing four fold during the service, just over half the businesses still reported some challenges. These were principally regarding:

- additional costs of employing people with disability
- additional time required, and training challenges
- accessibility
- OHS concerns and
- questions around people with disability's ability and performance, or anticipated issues with reactions from other staff in the business.

'Providing infrastructure required for certain disabilities (cost), the capacity to meet targets and provide efficient services as per our customer contract terms to allow us to compete with our competitors.'

'The physical environment, an unforgiving public/customer, available time to relay instruction/information.'

'In our current situation - the time commitment required to making it work is significant'

'Ability of the individual to carry out tasks required in the job... Job descriptions may need to be amended. Not sure if this places additional costs onto the organisation.'

Some businesses felt constrained by small staff teams and low staff turnover, with others reporting physical restrictions where co-operation of a landlord was required to enhance physical access. Other suggestions for improvement included:

- creating peer networks
- being more clear about the time commitment
- linking in with similar support organisations in the region and
- reducing the volume of written information.

In terms of building disability confidence further, businesses recommended more knowledge and information, getting to the point of actually employing people with disability, and continued DFOS support. As noted by one organisation:

'I think the obvious challenges exist for all orgs but there are also clear benefits'

Observations of the Diversity Field Officer Service team – delivery of service

Businesses are busy

While this would appear to be a self-evident statement, the sheer ‘busyness’ of businesses had an impact on what was able to be achieved during the project period, with business interests, expectations or desires not always matched with business resources.

As an example, a business leader indicated their interest in employing people with disability across a number of worksites very early in the pilot. While the filling of vacancies and jobcarving were explored in detail with the business, there were delays of over three months due to the workload of the HR manager, with sporadic responses to phone or email contact from both the DFOS and disability employment service provider.

In the post pilot qualitative interview, frustration was expressed by the business leader that no one had been employed. When examining this in more detail, actions had been taken to enable this to occur: the service assisted the business to identify tasks, develop job descriptions, circulated the job description to providers, handled questions, collated candidate details and shortlisted; processes that were facilitated on two separate occasions. While interviews were conducted on the first occasion, candidates were found not to be suitable to the roles due to the roles not being clearly articulated. This led to refinements to the pilot model, with more detail sought for roles and a shortlisting process introduced for future businesses, with DFOS meeting candidates prior to interviews being conducted to ensure suitability.

The sheer ‘busyness’ of businesses also impacted the progression of actions in a timely manner. This included needing to wait for sign off before advertising vacancies and waiting on businesses to provide additional information, impacting momentum. ‘Stuff coming up’, and the need to cancel meetings at short notice, represent the reality for small businesses of having to address multiple, competing priorities concurrently.

While many businesses were motivated to take part in the pilot due to their interest in retaining existing staff, tapping into a broader talent pool and becoming more confident, this interest was not necessarily a significant business priority. Some businesses reported feeling ‘guilty’ for being late, not being fully present at meetings, or not having actioned items, while other communicated that while it was an important consideration, this was not a high priority for the business.

All of these elements led to a fine balance needing to be struck by the DFO team of maintaining momentum and engagement through regular follow up vs not being too pushy. Some businesses actively sought to be nudged along and ‘reminded’, while others signalled that less engagement in the future is needed. Interestingly, those businesses in favour of ‘more nudging’ were more likely to be committed to, or implementing, recommendations suggested by the service, including creation of employment opportunities.

The researchers identified that mutual agreement regarding frequency of engagement and communication needs to be developed, taking into account organisational and industry pressures to ensure expectations on all sides (business, DFOS, external stakeholders, jobseekers etc) can be maintained.

Business leader engagement

Forty percent (40%) of the leaders the service worked with were owners or CEOs. While many of the challenges outlined were relevant to CEOs and owners, the buy-in of the organisation – its willingness to implement recommendations – was largely driven by whether the key contact had influence within the organisation.

While the service engaged with 16 businesses where the key contact was a HR manager, three businesses particularly stood out for implementing recommendations as compared to 10 businesses where the key contact was a CEO, owner or senior lead. To improve the effectiveness of the DFOS, senior leadership, and ideally the CEO or owner, need to be engaged from the outset to ensure organisational buy in and commitment. Where possible, involvement of the CEO or owner in meetings and to review recommendations made by the service is ideal.

Knowledge and commitment was often built with one business leader

This presented a particular challenge, with the key contact of three businesses leaving their respective workplaces during the pilot. For some businesses, this led to a loss of knowledge about disability that was built within the organisation, as well as a loss of the lead agent driving the commitment within, and of the business, to implement actions. As a result, the evaluation recommends that two or more leaders be involved in meetings to ensure momentum and progress, maximising the value that is generated by the DFOS.

Capacity of businesses to make improvements

While businesses were interested in learning about disability and challenging their assumptions, the capacity of some businesses to implement recommendations, particularly around employment, was low. Reasons varied, from very low turnover, limited scope to implement employment pathways due to the supervision required through to small teams. As such, the researchers recommend that criteria is adopted to identify businesses with capacity to implement recommendations and interest in exploring opportunities related to employment, employment pathways, retention of existing staff and customer service.

Connecting businesses with existing connections

While over 20 local state and national stakeholders were connected to the project, gaps were identified by the team throughout the pilot, including among the supports identified. This included

- The specific support that could be offered by services or programs, including what could be contractually delivered due to government or operational requirements, which did not always align with business needs;

- Limitations of existing government programs such as JobAccess and the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF), i.e. counselling support to staff working with an employee with autism demonstrating challenging behaviour could not be funded by the EAF.
- Programs or services focused on building general awareness of disability, rather than provide specific advice.

The success of the DFOS is largely dependent on the quality and breadth of existing services and government programs – the service is only able to refer small and medium businesses to ‘who is there’, who may or may not be able to address what businesses actually require to successfully employ and retain staff with disability, highlighting the need for additional programs and investment. Additional networks also need to be established by the service outside of region/s where DFOS operates.

While relationships with stakeholders were mostly positive, there were also challenges. These included:

- Knowledge by DES consultants of participation in the pilot (aside from the pilot contact) was mixed, leading to insufficient detail about candidates or unqualified candidates put forward
- DES timelines (action internally to seek candidates) were not always compatible with tight commercial timeframes for turnaround
- Inconsistent readiness of candidates, with some candidates well prepared for interviews vs some candidates who were unclear, unprepared or unsuitable for the role
- Government contractual requirements impacting candidates gaining experience; i.e. jobseekers with disability required to meet ‘benchmark’ hours, inconsistent with the amount of work hours businesses had to offer
- Business priorities changing, leading to people with disability being identified and shortlisted for roles that did not go ahead
- Siloed approaches between complementary organisations.

Twelve months is not enough time to gauge full impact

The 12 month pilot did not allow sufficient time to gauge the full impact of the disability confidence built. This was further compounded as the service elements were developed and refined during the pilot due to the action research methodology utilised. This led to a staggered introduction of businesses to the DFOS, with some businesses receiving a short intensive period of service, with limited time for implementation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The overall goal of the pilot was to establish proof of concept of an employer engagement strategy for small to medium sized businesses regarding disability confidence and inclusion. The response rate of 82% is a good indicator of the positive engagement developed in this pilot between the DFOS and the small to medium businesses involved. The consistency in the feedback from a relatively large sample of businesses also lends credibility to the findings and conclusions drawn.

The results of this evaluation provide compelling evidence that the DFOS has achieved this goal and the objectives underpinning it. Further, this pilot has established the concept as a unique and important element in addressing the seemingly immovable level of exclusion of people with disability from the workforce.

The very basis upon which employment and retention of people with disability is built, the workplace, is largely missing from strategies to increase employment of people with disability, particularly for small to medium businesses (Waterhouse et al, 2010 A and B; Murfitt et al, in press). The positive feedback from a large number of businesses clearly shows that the DFOS is addressing that gap in current strategies.

The businesses who received the service grew markedly in disability confidence or awareness, especially given the short duration of the pilot. Irrespective of this short timeframe, 75% businesses were employing people with disability at the end of the pilot as compared to 39% at pilot commencement, with 86% of businesses indicating that there might be an opportunity to employ people with disability in the next 12 months, as compared to 58% at the start of the pilot. Businesses also committed to creating additional employment pathways, such as work experience and other opportunities as outlined on page 11, which have been identified as critical steps to generating future employment for people with disability (Wakeford et al, 2014; Waterhouse et al, 2010B).

Just as there are necessary preparations or 'steps to work' on the 'supply side' of employment of people with disability (such as resume preparation and interview skills), the 'demand side' i.e. workplaces also need preparation. A job outcome is important, however its likelihood is dependent on the implementation of demand side 'steps to work' that build capacity and confidence, with practical steps that can be taken. This was reinforced by businesses who recognised that the DFOS was not a 'hard sell' to generate employment outcomes, but rather focused on building confidence to implement practical actions to become more welcoming, confident and accessible across each business.

The 'voices' of these approx. 40 businesses spanning over 15 industries were heard in this evaluation. The message is clear. As Waterhouse et al (2010) also found, they need direct, tailored, flexible support to build their disability confidence and inclusion in their workplaces before they will be in a position to link with DES and/or other recruitment organisations to employ people with disability.

'I think prior to the DFO experience, I think that we kind of just wanted to make it happen [improving inclusion], now it feels more achievable because there are some certain things out there. We would be keen for a DFO in the region, that would be ideal.... In that regards, there is a little bit of excitement there, if it did happen it would be a great tool for us as we are not the experts and having someone who can take you on the journey from here would be great. I think having a permanent appointment or a team perhaps. If nothing else what this whole thing has done it has forced us to checklist ourselves and that is a good thing. That is probably the most important thing that has been done. Checklisted ourselves to see where we are at'.

The business case studies show each business is quite unique in its situation and capacity regarding disability confidence and inclusion in the workplace. They all need a tailored and flexible service consistent with their particular situation and needs. As a result of the evaluation, a core set of service elements have been identified to address those key attributes needed for businesses to get to the point of successfully employing people with disability, with the flexibility to tailor the service as different needs and issues arise for businesses receiving the service.

Stakeholders overwhelmingly viewed that the DFOS had a unique role and added value to their work, with a number of areas reported where collaboration could be improved. The pilot identified that the employment needs of businesses did not always align with the candidate pool of DES. This indicates that DES alone cannot be expected to re-dress the poor employment rates experienced by people with disability. Further channels are needed to build capability and skill level among people with disability to holistically address participation of people with disability and meet unmet employer needs.

The Diversity Field Officer concept has the potential to become an integral component of future employment reform to improve employment outcomes of people with disability and has demonstrated its capacity to be expanded to benefit small and medium sized businesses across Australia with appropriate resourcing.

'I hope that this system is rolled out along with some ongoing semi regular accountability. It is the sort of forward thinking, proactive approach that both business and people with a disability will benefit from. WIN WIN WIN!'

Recommendation

The DFOS concept has the potential to become an integral component of future employment reform to improve employment outcomes for people with disability. This project has demonstrated its capacity to be expanded to benefit small and medium sized businesses across Australia with appropriate resourcing.

It is recommended that the Diversity Field Officer Service, incorporating refinements identified in the evaluation, is supported to scale up and rollout across Australia.

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