

Submission S109

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Family and Community Development Committee

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To Whom it may concern

Workforce Participation

The reason I submitted this paper for the inquiry is to highlight and address the issue of the lack of suitable and appropriate services available for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Goulburn Valley to gain and keep employment and how this affects me personally to gain regular paid employment and what I think should be done to improve the outcome not just for myself, but other people with ASD living in the same area as myself and ultimately the state of Victoria.

My name is Meaghan O'Brien I am 34 years old and I have Asperger's Syndrome. I was first diagnosed with this condition at 15 years old. As well as having Asperger's I also have anxiety and depression that are co-morbid to my condition. I am currently looking for paid employment and as I am under 35 and on the Disability Support Pension I am required under federal government legislation to look for work and be registered with an employment agency. This is pointless to me as I was already doing this of my own free will before the changes came into place.

I've never had a proper paid job, only many different volunteer ones with varied degrees of success and failures not turning into a paid job which has lead me to have low self-esteem and feeling like I am never going to archive anything in life and feel I bring shame to my family who bought me up with a good work ethic. Sure volunteer work looks great on a resume but doesn't pay the bills or put money toward bigger things like a holiday overseas.

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I applied for many jobs getting a few interviews here and there trying my absolute best in them getting my hopes up only to be disappointed in not getting the job. Getting a potential employer to understand why it is hard to engage in things like small talk is hard for me as it part of the Asperger's but it doesn't affect my work output where I am focussed on details and completing the work to a high standard in the allocated time given. I wish people would see these as positive traits to have in the workplace and totally outweigh my social shortfalls which I am working on improving all the time. I might be shy and quiet at first but after a while I am ok.

As I am a female with AS I get worse than males with the condition as it more accepted when it comes to them. Females learn to blend in to gain acceptance from others.

What would be ideally should happen is there should be a focus on the positives of ASD employees. Diversity in the workplace is way more than different races and religions disability affects people of different races and religious beliefs too. Employers need to realise this and think outside the box when considering employing people. Australia is one of the worst in the OECD for disability employment 21 out of 25 countries. We put more effort to being the best in sports in than looking after people with disability if only the effort put on that instead the benefits across the board would be massive.

My disability should not be a factor when looking to employ me, the positives yes the negatives not so much. What I and others need coaching and a mentor and direct feedback and critique. Don't be scared to do this I don't know what's wrong and what needs to improve if you don't tell me. Once I know what needs improvement I'll fix it straight away.

I would be more than happy to talk at a public hearing if required to be a representative of people with ASD and give my ideas and opinions on what could be done to improve the lives of ASD people in Victoria.

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In conclusion I hope that this will make a difference to services in Victoria.