

Grame Innes video transcript

Hello, my name is Graeme Innes I am the former Disability Discrimination Commissioner.

When I finished my law degree at university and completed my college of law. I thought I had proved that I could work as a lawyer. But then I spent 12 months going to about 30 interviews where employers told me they couldn't understand how a blind person could operate in that role.

Finally, I took a job as a clerical assistant, the lowest level in the New South Wales public service and worked my way up from there and that is the experience of many people who are blind or vision impaired and who are lucky enough to find a job.

The statistics are really against us. People with disabilities are employed at a rate of 30% lower than the general population. And when there are 15% of us of working age. Only less than 3% are employed by the Australian public service and this figure is reflected by many companies across Australia.

There are exceptions to those statistics, but they are exceptions rather than the rule. There is a lot of myths about employing people with disabilities. Employers assume that we take more sick leave whereas research shows that we take less. Employers assume that we won't stay in a job whereas research shows that we stay in jobs longer than the average employee. Employers assume that we will make more workers compensation claims. Where research shows that we are safer employees. And research also demonstrates that because of the things with which we are dealing with in our lives we're better than the average employee at dealing with challenges and issues that face us.

So, overall we are great employees to have, but the statistics aren't matching the myths. In the current system, on which the government is spending millions of dollars is not working in terms of getting us value for money and in terms of getting us as tax payers value for money and in terms of getting people with disabilities into jobs. That's why this function for the Parliamentary Friends Group of Vision 2020 Australia is so important because we need to show members of parliament that we can be effective employees and that we are effective employees.

Giving jobs to people with disabilities is a win on two sides. Firstly, it's better for us because instead of being on welfare we are taxpayers contributing to the community and secondly because the whole will benefit from the contribution that we can make. So it's better for us and it's better for you.