



# Strategies at Work

## Enhancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities

The articles below outline programs and strategies that have been developed by Western Australian public sector agencies to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

### City of Swan

The City of Swan is a medium sized local government agency that employs approximately 756 staff. The City of Swan has a long and productive history of employing people with disabilities. A key strategy within the agency's Equal Employment Opportunity Management Plan is to ensure equal employment access and diversity. This is achieved through the City of Swan People Plan.

The City of Swan has employees with cerebral palsy, dyslexia and learning difficulties. The length of service for these employees ranges from more recent recruits through to those who have been with the council for 20 years or more.

Some of these employees are employed in the Parks and Gardens Division at the City of Swan and are recruited through the council's partnership with a Disability Employment Network (DEN) provider. During the recruitment process, potential candidates are assessed for suitability and areas of employment are identified within the agency. When they commence employment, all employees sourced through the DEN provider are given an induction by the provider, as well as a comprehensive induction by the City of Swan. They are also given access to similar professional development opportunities as other staff within the agency. Supervisors at the City of Swan undergo training with the DEN provider to help them understand the needs of employees with disabilities.

Some of the employees have been employed on a traineeship through the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which involves a Certificate II in Horticulture (a six-month TAFE course). This allows participants to develop skills in areas such as plant maintenance and landscaping. The DEN provider gives assistance to the course participants, including one-on-one tutoring and consultants who accompany the participants to class. Partnering with a DEN provider in this way can result in positive outcomes for all involved.

### Department of Treasury and Finance

The Department of Treasury and Finance employs four people with disabilities on a traineeship in various business units throughout the agency. Improving outcomes for people with disabilities is a key initiative highlighted in the department's Equal Employment Opportunity Management Plan.



When recruiting people with disabilities, the department, in partnership with a DEN provider, assesses potential participants, identifies their specific needs, matches them to the skill requirements of the job, identifies supervisors who would be suitable to work with people with disabilities and ensures that work stations are suitable.

Traineeship participants study either a Certificate II or Certificate III in Business. A specific induction and work-based training calendar has been developed to further meet their needs.

Staff at the department are invited to participate in a 'buddy system', through which they are paired with employees with disabilities to ensure that they have someone in the workplace that they can seek advice or assistance from when needed.

All supervisors are trained in how to supervise people with disabilities to ensure a comfortable work environment. The employees with disabilities also have access to staff from the DEN provider who can sit with them at work whenever further assistance is required.

This strategy has enabled the Department of Treasury and Finance to enhance employment opportunities at the department for people with disabilities.

## Department of Commerce

The Department of Commerce takes a unique approach to the employment of people with disabilities. It runs an annual recruitment process, somewhat like pool recruitment, which is designed to:

- actively recruit and assess people with disabilities who are available for work;
- increase the department's performance in the equity index;
- provide a community service by giving candidates interview experience; and
- contribute to candidate personal development by acknowledging their capabilities to work.

The department undertakes the recruitment process in partnership with a DEN provider, who provides resumés and information on the skills, abilities and limitations of a range of potential candidates.

Interviews are informal and quite brief. They are held at the DEN provider's office as it provides a familiar environment. Support persons are encouraged to attend to ease any anxiety the candidates may experience.

Suitable candidates are listed on a database. When vacancies arise at the department, the EEO and diversity officer and the strategic recruitment team review advertised requests and check to see if any candidates listed on the database are suitable for the role. If a candidate is successful in being selected for an interview, human resources staff can accompany them to the interview. Their support person is also invited to come along.

Promotion and marketing of candidates are carried out during Disability Week and morning tea functions at the department. Training about working with people with disabilities is also conducted. The department reviews this process annually and discusses with the DEN provider ways that it can be improved.

Human resources professionals at the Department of Commerce have also benefited from this recruitment program, as it has brought to light the difficulties people with disabilities face in gaining employment. The program has also strengthened the strategic recruitment team's morale and focus in working more closely with the community as a true public service agency.

## Animal Resource Centre

The Animal Resource Centre's Equal Employment Opportunity Management Plan includes a specific strategy to increase the number of people employed with disabilities.

The centre currently employs Gillian, who has autism. After graduating year 12 with a certificate of secondary education at the end of 2008, Gillian registered with AIM Employment. AIM Employment is a specialist employment service established by Autism WA to assist people with autism succeed in gaining employment.

With the help of her AIM employment coordinator, Gillian applied for an Animal Technology Traineeship with the Animal Resource Centre. The employment coordinator and human resources officer notified the agency that Gillian has autism. The human resources officer suggested giving Gillian the opportunity to undertake the interview without disclosing that she has a disability so that no preconceptions would be formed by the interviewers.

The employment coordinator attended the interview with Gillian but let Gillian do the talking. At the end of the interview the employment coordinator gave the interviewers some basic information about the support Gillian would receive from AIM Employment.

Gillian was offered the job and immediately started to fit into the team and make friends with her co-workers.

Autism affects the way Gillian sees the world, but this has not been a barrier for Gillian in her employment. Supervisors and the employment coordinator work together with Gillian to help her adjust to the work requirements and to help the work place accommodate her needs. Mechanisms implemented at the Animal Resource Centre to assist Gillian include:

- daily schedules and instructions in a simple written form;
- regular homework times and regular mentor times each week; and
- placing Gillian in a work environment where she can be given maximum buddy time.

These mechanisms have assisted Gillian to successfully complete six months of her traineeship. The strategy has raised awareness of the needs of people with disabilities at the Animal Resource Centre. The success of the strategy will enable the agency to employ more people with disabilities.

### More information

If you would like further information on strategies for enhancing employing opportunities for people with disabilities contact a senior consultant at the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity by phone on (08) 9219 6000 or email at [deope@opssc.wa.gov.au](mailto:deope@opssc.wa.gov.au)



**Office of Equal Employment Opportunity**

Level 21 Governor Stirling Tower, 197 St Georges Terrace, Perth WA 6000

Tel: (08) 9219 6000 Toll free: 1800 676 607 Fax: (08) 9219 6001

Hearing impaired callers: 133 677 Web: [www.oeeo.wa.gov.au](http://www.oeeo.wa.gov.au)