



Minister for Disability Services

Our Ref: 29-13385

Mr Julian Roche

28 JUN 2010

Julian.roche@wapolicyforum.org.au

Dear Mr Roche

Thank you for your email dated 5 May 2010 and for the absorbing paper written by Professor Antonio Buti from the Law Faculty at the University of Western Australia.

I find Professor Buti's perspective interesting as I take the disability portfolio seriously and agree that discrimination on the grounds of disability is concerning.

Professor Buti raises a number of points which intersect with the philosophy of the Disability Services Commission and the disability sector more generally. Citizenship is the central concept of the Commission's strategic plan which sets the direction for disability services in Western Australia. The Commission works with government agencies, service providers, and the community in order to enhance rights and opportunities for people with disability. As Professor Buti's essay indicates, changing community attitudes toward disability is one of the greatest challenges we face in the sector.

Improving services for people with disability is a priority for this government and of great concern to me as Minister for Disability Services. The Premier has joined with me in committing to a number of strategies to improve services for people with disability and to support their full participation as citizens of Western Australia. These recognise the importance of taking a long term view and engaging in future planning.

A major initiative developed by the Disability Services Commission is Count Me In – Disability Future Directions, a 15 year strategy to tackle the challenges and barriers facing the more than 400,000 Western Australians living with disability.

The Count Me In – Disability Future Directions' three priority areas are:

- economic security and well-designed and accessible communities and homes;
- participation and contribution for people with disability in all aspects of life; and
- personalised disability services and supports, which are innovative and flexible for people with disability and their families.

These three aspects are supported by 13 priority areas that will result in a significantly enhanced quality of life for Western Australians with disability and their families and carers. More information on the strategy can be found at <http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/countmein.html>.

I am pleased to say that Western Australia's disability sector has a proud record in initiating innovative policies and programs. However, such innovation is not the sole responsibility of the disability sector and all agencies, services and citizens have a responsibility to ensure that people with disability are included and supported to participate fully in our society. Count Me In – Disability Future Directions is the vision for change across multiple sectors, to develop Western Australia as an inclusive State offering a good future for people with disability, their families and carers.

The *Disability Services Act 1993* (WA) provides a strong legislative framework to develop inclusive practices. Under the Act, all State Government agencies and local governments are required to develop Disability Access and Inclusion Plans and make progress towards ensuring that their services, buildings, facilities and information are accessible for and inclusive of people with disabilities. These plans provide a considered and systematic approach for these organisations to progressively improve and ensure access to all public services and facilities. They also ensure that information is available to all community members, including those who have a disability, providing citizens with the opportunity and choice to participate in all aspects of community life.

Under the National Disability Agreement, the State Government is working with the Federal Government to promote positive outcomes for people with disability through a number of reform initiatives. This work is further enhanced through the drafting of the National Disability Strategy, which draws on the *Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia (2009)* report and sets out a ten year national plan for improving life for Australians with disability, their families and carers. This Strategy has been developed under the auspice of the Council of Australian Governments and there will be a strong role for all governments in its implementation. The shared vision is for an inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens.

Currently one in five Western Australians has a disability and this will grow to one in four in 2025 as the population ages. When one considers the number of people affected by disability, if we take into account the impact of disability on families, then our focus must be on creating a society and the institutions in society that are welcoming of people of all abilities.

I congratulate Professor Buti on engaging with issues of disability and discrimination. There is value in these becoming a greater part of the academic discourse and to this end I welcome collaboration between the disability sector and local universities.

I have noted the book Professor Buti recommends and will ensure that policy makers in the Disability Services Commission are provided with this reference.

Thank you for bringing this important paper to my attention. I am happy for my response to be published on the Western Australian Policy Forum's website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon O'Brien', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

SIMON O'BRIEN MLC
MINISTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES