

# Valuing

**NOVA Employment chief executive Martin Wren says employing people with disability makes sense for businesses.**

Job success essentially comes from feeling that you're competent in your role, contributing something valuable and having a good time. It isn't necessarily measured in money, though a fair wage is essential. Security is also vital. You don't want to be working in job that's always under threat or in a doomed industry. For example, I wouldn't buy a video store today.

At NOVA, over 30 per cent of our staff has a disability. This is because as an organisational leader I believe a diverse workforce is good for business. Statistically people with disability are as productive or more productive than their non-disabled peers. They take less sick time and are only as likely or even less likely than their non-disabled peers to make Workplace Health & Safety claims<sup>1</sup>.

Of course, we're also putting our money where our mouth is. We're a vibrant example of doing what we ask others to do. NOVA Employment is tasked to find award-wage jobs for people with disability. We offer our jobseekers training, coaching [and] job-matching to their interests and skills, and strong post-placement support.

Just as women went through a passage from being considered second-class workers to now almost universal respect for the

# work

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work they do, people with disability are on that same journey. Where they are exceptionally talented, people no longer see the disability. If you saw Stevie Wonder, you wouldn't go: "Who's that blind black guy?" You'd say: "Wow, that's Stevie Wonder."

His talent surpasses the barriers, but it's harder for Joe Average. The general population are still coming to recognise that inability in a particular area does not mean inability in all areas. Nor does it prevent areas of specialisation or deny genius.

We need to value the broad group of individuals that is people with disability for each of the talents, skills and experiences they offer. Collectively they have proven they can work in the open employment market. Ninety-nine per cent of NOVA's jobseekers work in award-wage jobs. Some of these people have profound and/or multiple disabilities.

Subsidising this section of the labour force doesn't work. According to a study at the University of St. Gallen<sup>2</sup>, subsidies have no significant effect on exit rates out of unemployment or employment stability. Further, employment rates up to three years after subsidies show no significant improvement.

Wage subsidies also create a mindset that suggests we don't have to pay people properly for their labour because it's worth less than others. When I see a "50 per cent off" sign in a window, I don't think: "Oh good value here!"

I think: "What's wrong with it? Why can't they get rid of it?"

People with disability deserve far more than this. Achieving job success is the same for able-bodied workers as it is for disabled workers, but disabled workers have to think about it more because the barriers are bigger. We need to strive to change this and become passionate about what might be, not what is.

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<sup>1</sup> National Disability Authority (2012), 'Disability and Work: The picture we learn from official statistics' 12/1/12, <http://goo.gl/RNIg8>

<sup>2</sup> Schünemann B, Lechner M and Wunsch, C (2011), 'Do Long-term Unemployed Workers Benefit from Targeted Wage Subsidies' School of Economics and Political Science, University of St. Gallen, <http://goo.gl/xNers>



Nova Employment office administration trainee Jerome Perez at work.



Nova Employment receptionist Samantha Condon hits the phones.