

# Shining through and beyond mediocrity

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Three.

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- Background: This paper is based on a short series of articles published in *Link Magazine 2008*

and shortlisted for a Print Media award by the Australian Human Rights Commission in Dec 2008.

## *Mediocrity in the Disability Sector?*

During my 30 years work in Disability Services I regularly experience new people moving into the sector, from governmental Ministers and bureaucrats, to graduates, service staff, office staff and volunteers.

Some of these 'new chums' bring with them an **EXPECTATION OF MEDIOCRITY** that subsequently contaminates the culture in the Disability Service Sector.

## *Where does it come from?*

I believe this behaviour is historically based on the Twentieth Century's collective attitude to disability that devalued both clients and workers in the disability sector

...and where disability support came as a **charitable choice** rather than as a human right.

## *What does mediocrity look like?*

Lack of :

- commitment,
- involvement,
- innovation,
- activism or
- pride.

- For example, it becomes visible when school transition staff, training organisations and employment agencies encourage clients to accept training and employment below their aspirations so that they '*Dumbed Down*' into low skilled and tenuous employment.
- It is perpetuated when there is a lack of activism and innovation by agencies in taking clients and service partners beyond the mediocre.



# **‘Dumbed Down’: Experiences of disabled people in vocational training and employment in Australia.**

Submission to the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy 2008

**Dan Kearns**

(Australian Disability Training Advisory Council 2001-2003)

# Challenging mediocrity #1

**Be unreasonable** –ask for more - from clients, local employers, training providers, and other support agencies





# Challenging mediocrity #2

**Be aware of flawed arguments** from funders, training institutes or employers when we ask for more.

e.g., the Slippery Slope, Biased Generalisation, False Dilemma, Self-fulfilling Prophecy, Herd Instinct or the *Ad Hominem* fallacies).

# Challenging mediocrity #3

**Focus on innovation** rather than fear when  
‘reasonable adjustments’ conflict with  
‘unjustifiable hardship’

e.g., Workplace literacy programs, Wellness,  
Rehabilitation programs, Workplace diversity, &  
workplace culture, corporate social responsibility &  
marketing.

# Challenging mediocrity # 4

**Acknowledge the attributes of our clients,**  
and focus on mutual respect and  
interdependence between client and  
service provider.

e.g., client as 'Active Agent' Or the work of Jean Vanier  
or Marc Gold.

# Challenging mediocrity #5

**Read**, research and draw from international innovations and alternatives...and share yours!

e.g. , GLADNET, Workability International, ILO, EU Training Village, OECD,

**Actually...it is the women in our lives  
that push us beyond mediocrity!**

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Good luck with your endeavours for the rest of  
2009

Thank You