UBI presentation 1500-2000w

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My name is Jane Scott. I was born with cerebral palsy. It has always had an impact on how I participate in the community. I spent much of my life walking around on crutches, then a few years ago I started using a wheelchair a lot of the time.

When I was negotiating the world on crutches, finding employment and accommodation that I could live in was challenging. The choices were strongly shaped by what was possible, taking my physical limitations into account. Society in general, and employers in particular, often have low expectations of disabled people. That reduced my options even further. Using a wheelchair has made finding work and accommodation significantly harder than It was when I used crutches. Since I became a wheelchair user, I’ve spent more time out of work than in it.

Successive Australian governments have made the Disability Support Pension extraordinarily difficult to qualify for. I didn’t need it when I was younger, so I didn’t apply. By the time I did need it, it was refused. I've spent years of my life since becoming a wheelchair user receiving unemployment benefits and submitting the compulsory number of job applications to employers who reject them -mostly without interview.

For disabled people the present system in Australia often becomes a keep busy scheme. It allows the government to feel good about making sure we look for work but offers nothing of substance to make suitable jobs available. It keeps us on a poverty income and requires us to waste our lives. It excludes us from our community and effectively punishes us for being disabled.

I believe a Universal Basic Income - with other systems in place to cover the extra costs of living with a disability - can turn that around. I believe a Universal Basic Income frees disabled people to make the most of the opportunities we have in life and participate in our community.

1. **With a Universal Basic Income, everyone, disabled or not, will have greater freedom to make our own choices about whether work is a realistic option we want to pursue, according to our circumstances.**

No one will be required to satisfy someone else they are poor enough or disabled enough to receive an income. We will have greater freedom to make our own decisions. When everyone has more choice about whether to work and when to work, it will reduce the stigma of not working.

1. **On a universal basic income, disabled people without sufficient paid employment will no longer be living in poverty**

Financial independence will have a huge positive impact on the physical and mental well-being of disabled people and our family and friends. We will have the funds to eat well, socialise with friends in cafes and bars, attend the theatre, go to community meetings, pursue hobbies, be included.

The money we spend is likely to be spent locally and contribute to the local economy, so regardless of whether we work, we will create the option for others to do so. If disabled people can afford to show up as customers, businesses and community groups will start to expect us to do so. They will have a profit motive to provide disability access and support. This will improve disability inclusion.

Australia is inn a jobs boom, unless you are disabled. The disability unemployment rate is about 3 times that of the wider community. Keeping so many disabled people in poverty works against our chances of employment, because fewer people encounter us and get to know us. If people meet us as part of their community, they can talk to us.  They can learn what we are actually capable of instead of making assumptions about us.  We can share our dreams and find common ground.

That contact improves the chances of workers imagining us being employed beside them and expecting it to happen. When poverty keeps us at home, none of that happens.  Employers and workers continue to hold the unchallenged assumption that we have nothing to offer – that we are unemployable.  After a while, that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.  Poverty keeps disabled people out of sight, out of mind and out of employment.

A UBI could change that.

1. **A UBI means having a good life is no longer dependent on the ability to earn an income**.

A UBI means the value of a human being is no longer determined by our value as a unit of production. This makes disabled people members of the community on a more equal footing with our non-disabled peers.We are no longer forced to compete for employment at a constant disadvantage. UBI makes it easier for human beings to be valued for the things we can't always put a dollar figure on like the emotional support we provide for each other and the satisfaction we find in developing skills and creativity.

A UBI means that if you enjoy creating art and you want to spend your time doing that, you can. You can enjoy it and share it with the people around you. You are not required to perform to a standard where your art is commercially viable to justify the time you spend on it. The emotional and social value it has is sufficient.

Given the opportunity to explore and develop their talents, some people may move from creating for fun to developing a creative business. How many new businesses never start because people don’t have the freedom to try? A UBI gives more people, including disabled people, that freedom.

A UBI also provides the freedom to fail. If you have money to live on, you can afford to experiment. Disabled people often need to use different strategies to achieve the same goals as other people – and sometimes we don’t know whether something will work until we try. A UBI means we can try, fail and try again.

1. **Disabled people who struggle to secure paid employment will no longer be compelled to seek it.**

Before COVID about 42% of Australians on unemployment payments had disabilities. Successive governments have required more disabled people to look for work but we haven’t seen increased success in finding it. The disability unemployment rate in Australia hasn't changed in 30 years. We are about three times as likely as others to be out of work. In line with the rest of the Australian community, employers tend to have low expectations when it comes to the contribution disabled people can make. Few are keen or confident to take on disabled workers.

Disabled people are required to look for work with little chance of success. This causes us damage. It reduces our ability to make a positive contribution to our community – economic or otherwise. At one stage, I sat in a doctor's office considering whether I needed support for depression. The rejection I was continually subject to in my unsuccessful job search was taking its toll. I knew that the problem was a direct result of unrealistic expectations imposed by government policy, rather than a failure within me, but I was running out of options. Soon after leaving the doctor’s office, I joined a progressive political party. The support I found there helped me avoid the need for medication. That doesn’t work for everyone. A UBI would remove the pressure to find employment.

1. **Disabled people who want to pursue employment will receive more effective assistance to do so**.

A UBI removes compulsion from the employment support system. Employment consultants will no longer be paid as compliance police. They will be people who focus on helping disabled job seekers identify and develop our employability skills as well as identifying and addressing any barriers to employment that we face. Disability employment support will be about considering the opportunities that we have and working with us to determine what kind of support could help us reach our employment goals. Disabled people who see employment as a realistic goal will be able to pursue it strategically, without being required to beat their heads against brick walls.

As more of us gain employment, more employers and disabled people will see our employment as a realistic option.

1. **Disabled people will be free to volunteer in a situation of their choice.**

Our lower employment rates mean disabled people have fewer opportunities to develop employability skills and yet, even now, most advertised job require “demonstrated skills” in something.

As a wheelchair user, a lot of the entry level jobs like sales assistant, waitress, or barista are not practical for me. For others, those jobs help people prove that they are employable. Those jobs can pay the bills on the way to something better and sometimes provide the chance to learn new skills, which can then be developed. When disabled people are unable to get those jobs, we also miss out on the better opportunities they can lead to. A UBI could allow us to volunteer or complete a traineeship as an alternative pathway to develop employability skills and improve our chances of securing employment or simply provide a place to contribute and be included.

1. **With a UBI, disabled people will be free to participate based on what we can do rather than focus on what we can't.**

We willhave more choices about how we use our time, giving us more options to enable us to reach our full potential.Some of us may choose to spend more time on activities that will improve our health and allow us to better manage our impairments. We could develop more interests and life skills, some of which may, in time, become employability skills. We could volunteer, participate in the arts and play an active part in our communities.

1. **A UBI gives disabled people the freedom to live with a partner (or leave a partner) knowing they have money to live on.**

With a Universal Basic Income, disabled people will not be a financial burden to families or partners. Australia’s present welfare system pays less depending on a partner's income as well as giving the welfare recipient a below poverty payment. The partner is expected to fill the gap. It costs to be the partner of a welfare recipient and denies welfare recipients financial independence.

The present system can create a situation where welfare recipients cannot choose to live with a partner because of the financial consequences. Disabled people often face many more barriers to finding a partner and maintaining an intimate relationship than non-disabled people. Removing this financial barrier gives disabled people more freedom to move in and out of relationships when they find them.

The rates of physical and sexual violence are much higher for disabled people than others. Leaving can be harder. It’s crucial that disabled people are not trapped in abusive situations due to lack of finance.

**Conclusion**

I believe a Universal Basic Income provides disabled people opportunities for equity, choice freedom and participation that would be a huge improvement on what we are offered through Australia’s welfare system.