BUS STOP FILMS

INCLUSIVE FILMMAKING



DRIVING CHANGE
IMPACT REPORT 2025





INTRODUCTION INCLUSIVE FILMMAKING

The Driving Change: Disability Employment Summit was a sold out history making event, where industry professionals from across the commercial, film and television production sectors came together with the disability community to unpack a number of key themes around disability, the future of the industry and employment.

It was a two day hybrid event held at the iconic **Bondi Pavillion** and online, welcoming international guests alongside domestic disability advocates. The groundbreaking event demonstrated the appetite for this discussion and the desire from the industry to become more inclusive.

As part of the commitment to driving change, the summit sought to collate a **white paper** that the industry could utilise to **implement better practices and work collaboratively** to break down the barriers to employment for people with disability on both sides of the camera.

This impact report was completed via leading industry consultants, Creative + Business, and was conducted over several months comprising focus groups, deep dive conversations and surveys.

The impact report highlights a number of themes and barriers from both perspectives leading to recommendations and outcomes. Together inclusion in the screen sector is possible.

THE EVENT & STRATEGY IS SUPPORTED BY:

✓ Screen Australia

✓ Netflix

/ ABC

Department of Social Services

✓ Screen NSW

STYLE NOTE:

This report addresses disability employment issues in the film, TV and commercial production/advertising sector, which for brevity we have summarised as the "screen sector." In addition, some participant comments have been lightly edited for clarity or brevity.

Photos in the report showcase the Driving Change Summit in 2024 and are not necessarily images of individuals who participated in the surveys and focus groups.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

PARTICIPANT THEMES

Nearly **100 participants** across two surveys and two focus groups provided valuable insight into their experience as either people with disability seeking work in the screen sector (jobseekers), or screen sector representatives seeking to create more accessible productions (industry). **Common themes** emerged across both groups, notably:

Theme	Jobseekers	Industry
Income	The majority of jobseekers rely on work or financial support outside the screen sector to survive.	Industry seeks to better understand what funding is available to support the hiring of people with disability.
Access	Jobseekers do not always feel comfortable communicating their access needs to employers due to stigma, discrimination and the nature of invisible disabilities.	Industry wants better information about how to create more accessible productions, from recruitment through to post production.
Education	Jobseekers want to create a broad understanding of the social model of disability and the benefits of employing people with disability.	Industry expressed their desire for greater education for themselves and their peers about the benefits of employing people with disability.
Representation	Jobseekers call for their inclusion in key creative roles to ensure "nothing about us without us."	Industry wants to know how to be more authentic and representative in casting and storytelling.

industry
accessibility
difficult representation actor illness

covid PEOPIE wave
toldjob deaf ability fear move don't
time roles screen
post career career production training currentday
pandemic
ongoing
disability



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT IN THE SECTOR

Only 19% of jobseekers were registered with a **Disability Employment Service**, but of those, Bus Stop Films is the only provider that had successfully helped them find work in the screen sector.

Industry is broadly aware of disability support services, with 77% having heard of Bus Stop Films.

Of those who accessed support services, 91% chose to work with Bus Stop and had positive experiences.

Industry participants were eager to create genuinely inclusive productions, and most had already either hired a person with a disability or were looking to begin.

The survey shows 86% of respondents had knowingly employed a person with disability in the past, and 95% of those said it was a positive experience.

A further 92% of respondents are actively considering creating or have already created employment pathways for people with disability.

In the focus group, participants attributed this to Bus Stop's education, advocacy and consulting work.







SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Jobseekers and industry raised a range of solutions and ideas that can help inform future work, policy creation and advocacy. These include:

- ✓ Making it a requirement of receiving government screen funding that productions hire a given number of people with disability or supporting companies to create their own quotas.
- ✓ Promoting job share as an option, particularly when working with people who experience capability fluctuation, together with flexible schedules, remote work and shorter work hours.
- Leveraging the short duration of commercial sector productions as a training ground so people with disability can gain experience before transitioning into the long form sector.
- ✓ Including people with disability in the funding and accessibility advocacy process Creating better accessibility in recruitment and building discussions of barriers and access into the onboarding process.
- More funding to support accessibility accommodations in the workplace.

BARRIERS TO ENTRY

The survey asked respondents about the barriers they face when obtaining work in the screen sector, with the results shown in the table below.

Some of the issues highlighted in the table, such as stigma and access needs are further discussed in sections throughout the report, in line with issues raised in the forum.

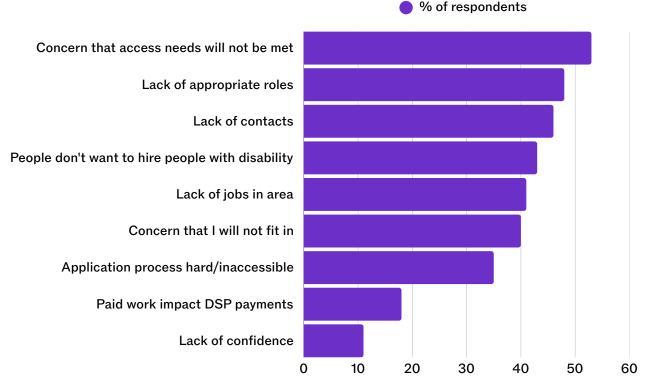


Image 1: issues jobseekers reported as barriers to entry in the screen sector

Expanding on survey results such as inaccessible application processes, one focus group participant noted:

"Many hiring processes aren't accessible, like online application systems that aren't screen reader friendly or interviews that don't accommodate different communication needs," while another said, "not everyone has the capacity to be able to do a video for applications and having the stuff prepared can be the first barrier."

BARRIERS TO ENTRY

Adding to the survey responses that access needs will not be met, a participant said:

"Even when I get a job, requesting accommodations can be frustrating. Some employers act like they're doing me a favour, rather than fulfilling a legal obligation."

Another participant spoke about contacts and networks, saying: " It's an industry where you have to often be able to work the room and network, it is very difficult to get that foot in the door."

For survey respondents, 19% are registered with a Disability Employment Service (DES), and of those, 90% are under 35 years old. Of the five DES providers named by respondents, while Bus Stop Films is NOT a DES provider, it was the only service that had been successful in supporting respondents to find work in the screen sector. This finding was replicated in the focus group, with one participant noting:

"Bus Stop Employment is the main place where I find (support in the screen sector) is a consideration.

When I go to other disability employment services, they do a water catchment, but they won't have the connections and the understanding on the level that I feel like organisations like Bus Stop Employment does."

An additional theme around barriers to entry that arose in the focus group was shifting capacity. One participant said:

"Different days, times of the days, accessibility and support levels change.

Many disabilities don't have baselines or linear challenges...and some days will vary in energy, which causes my anxiety leading up to workdays."

Another said:

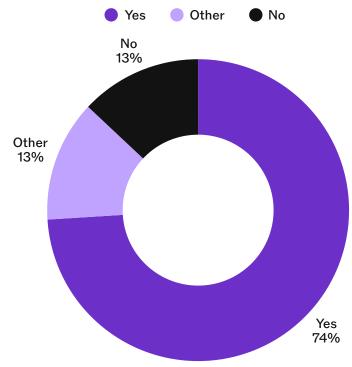
"If applying for a job well in advance, I have to factor in the unpredictability of my frequently fluctuating symptoms and whether my body and I can manage at the time of the job." The variability of some disabilities made even applying for a job difficult and anxiety-provoking."

INCOME AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Survey results showed that nearly 30% of respondents have had no work in the screen sector in the past year and 74% rely on work or financial support outside the screen sector to survive, as shown in the chart below.

Another 18% of respondents noted that the impact of paid work on Disability Support Payments (DSP) was a barrier that prevented them from entering the screen sector.

Participants were concerned that getting paid for even small screen roles while on the DSP created financial uncertainty as their payments might be reduced at any time.



They felt that the alternatives to the DSP, such as getting a consistent, well-paid job that would allow them to live independently, was not accessible for most people with disability.

As one focus group participant noted:

"I know I'm always curious (about) the statistics around those who are supported by the government because there is a lot of evidence that shows that once you start working your DSP does get impacted pretty fast.

"And it feels like the rug can get pulled out from under your feet because I've done the math on how much it would cost me to independently live and work and the amount of money, like the gap between losing DSP and living independently, it's actually rather large."

ACCESS NEEDS

When asked if they would feel comfortable sharing their access needs with potential employers, less that 60% of survey respondents said yes, as shown in the chart below.

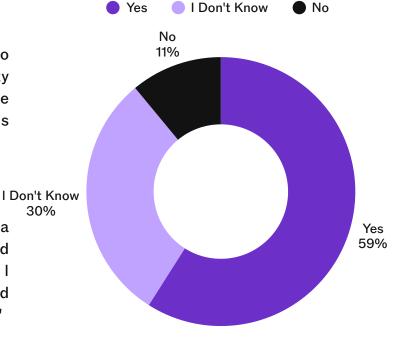
Throughout the survey and focus group, participants expressed apprehension and frustration around disclosing their access needs.

One said:

"I'm sick of having to give cookies to people that meet basic accessibility requirements as though they are doing something extraordinary. It's the bare freaking minimum."

Another noted:

"I don't want to be seen as being a pain when asking for support and sometimes won't ask for access as I worry about cost to the business and not being valuable enough for them."



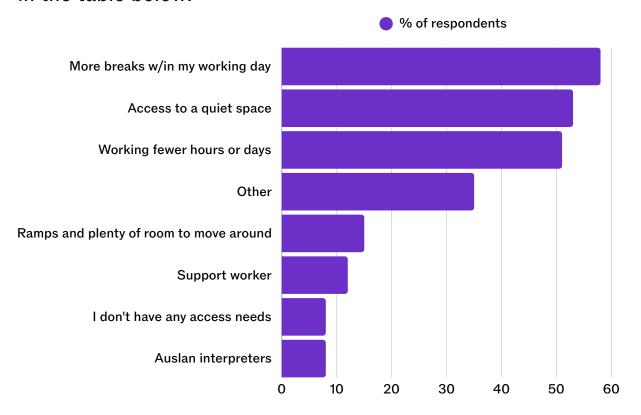
One participant noted that while they were able to have their support worker on set, they were told not to refer to them as a support worker.

"How they framed it as, oh, we have to explain if that conversation starts, then it's going to be hindering the production because we're talking about like dozens and dozens of people on a set."

Participants were clear that often, even when access needs are met, they still experience barriers to being able to fully use them or are made to feel bad for asking for basic accommodations.

ACCESS NEEDS

The survey also asked respondents about their access needs, as shown in the table below:



Expanding on these responses, one focus group participant said:

"For me, it's about having the right accommodations, things like flexible hours, assistive technology or remote work options. But it's also about an inclusive workplace culture where I don't have to fight for basic accessibility or feel like I'm being doubted just because I do things."

Respondents expanded on the "other" category, including issues such as lack of accessible bathrooms, Covid safe environments with recognition that Covid is not over – particularly for people with disability, ergonomic desk and computer equipment, multiple modes of communication such as written, verbal, and the ability for directions to be broken down into smaller steps, aids for visually impaired people including large print, accessible colours, note taking and additional support on night/low light shoots, and the ability to sit down when needed.

ACCESS NEEDS

In addition to DES providers, participants discussed the role of state and federal screen agencies in supporting people with disability.

Participants agreed that agencies should involve people with disability more, particularly in advocacy for funding and accessibility.

As one person said:

"Like you're doing (advocacy) for us, but you don't know us...You need to get disabled people involved because a lot of us actually are quite good at words.

We're seeing that in this (focus group), we're seeing it in the comments...I really wish from a state level and national level that these screen organizations would actually get us involved."









FEAR OF EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

Many participants across the survey and focus group said they faced some level of fear in applying for, or working in, a job in the screen sector. This includes fear of judgement, stigma, ridicule and embarrassment, based on how others treat them as people with disability.

These fears prompted a range of outcomes, such as non-disclosure, as one participant noted:

"I have fear of people judging me but I want to help. Someone in the industry told me not to disclose my neurodivergent mind on the audition forms, so I feel the stigma is still there. It is confusing."

Another said:

"I rarely disclose my disability due to it being highly stigmatised. Additionally, productions usually don't have an HR department that's not the producer."

Other participant comments suggest their fears are having negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing, with one saying,

"I'm worried about being judged," and another noting "there's so much pressure always wanting to show you can do better but constantly being faced with ridicule and embarrassment."

Another participant highlighted how the stigma of disability results in fewer opportunities:

"Then there's the stigma. People assume that because I have a disability, I'm less capable or need constant help, which affects opportunities for promotions or being taken seriously in the workplace."

Jobseeker participants expressed frustration and disappointment that employers and potential employers tended to view them in terms of what they can't do, rather than what they can.

FEAR OF EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

As one participant noted:

"I know my strengths and how to adapt. The real challenge is getting employers to see that my disability isn't a barrier, it's just a different way of working."

Similarly, another said:

"There are a lot of employers that still see disability as a limitation rather than considering the skills and the values that we bring to the table,"

While another said:

"The question wasn't can you do this, the question was will you be able to do this as you should if you were not the way you were." They further added that employers assume people with disability "really shouldn't be given the same equal opportunities as people who... are 'complete'."

It is clear to the jobseekers that barriers exist that prevent employers from seeing their skills and strengths, instead relying on outdated, deficit-model stereotypes and perceptions. Greater understanding of the social model of disability would be helpful in such cases.

As one participant said:

"Physical accessibility is one thing, but the biggest barriers are often attitudes, having to constantly explain or justify your needs, and feeling with assumptions about what you can or can't do or feeling like you're being overlooked for opportunities."





JOBSEEKER SURVEY GAPS AND FUTURE INCLUSIONS

Focus group participants were asked to identify any gaps in the survey data, to help identify areas for future engagement and further analysis. Two main issues were flagged by participants. First, examining the emotional and financial implications:

"If my disability isn't visible, there's pressure to prove that I need accommodations. It's exhausting having to advocate for myself constantly.""It could have gone deeper into the emotional and the financial toll of constant job rejection or underemployment. Many disabled people are forced into self-employment. Not necessarily by choice."

Second, gaining a better understanding of socioeconomic factors:

"I think the survey should have a question around low socioeconomic environments to see if respondents feel there is a class divide between them getting into the workplace.

Class divide could come down to they can't afford an accessible car, or they may be in a location where that might struggle with transport.

It also comes down to family connections...not having that parent or a relative support you in getting to work or getting to and from work or even uniforms and stuff."





JOBSEEKER SOLUTIONS

Both focus group and survey participants had a wealth of solutions and ideas for how to make screen sector employment more accessible and equitable for people with a disability. These include:

- Policies that hold companies accountable, such as disability quotas.
- Flexible schedules, remote work and shorter work hours within the screen sector
- · Inclusive hiring practices, such as:
 - Inclusive job descriptions that encourage applicants with disabilities to apply
 - Job ads that emphasise essential duties rather than physical requirements
 - Accessible online job applications, systems and assessments that accommodate candidates with disabilities





JOBSEEKER SOLUTIONS

- Educating employers to help shift their focus from whether someone can do the job to ensuring they have the right tools and support to thrive.
- Funding employers to provide necessary accommodations, such as assistive technology and physical modifications to buildings.
- Creating acceptance for broader pathways into the screen industry, rather than solely through traditional education which can be inaccessible.
- Encouraging employers to ask: "what do you need to make this role work for you?" which moves the focus from perceived limitations to practical solutions.
- With more international productions being made in Australia, creating a training program to educate those crews about our inclusivity standards.
- Including people with disability in the advocacy process.

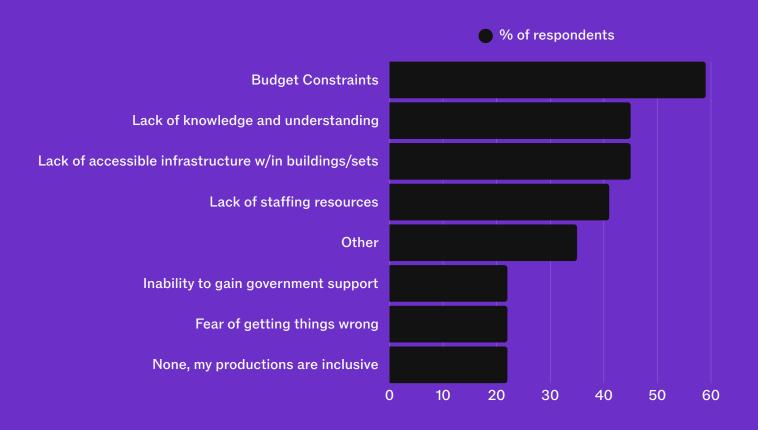




INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

The survey of industry respondents identified some key barriers that were preventing screen sector employers from creating inclusive productions.

These are summarised in the table below and further explored throughout this section of the report.



INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

BUDGET CONSTRAINTS AND FUNDING

Budget constraints were the highest-ranked barrier by survey respondents, at 59%. However, as one focus group participant noted, production budget constraints exist throughout the screen industry, and not only as a consideration when seeking to employ people with disability.

As they noted:

"I don't necessarily think that might encompass the reason not to individually employ a person with disability."

There was some confusion about support workers, with several focus group participants expressing how this would drive up costs:

"It depends on whether the person with disability needs a support worker with them or not...So, you've got to have two people on the crew rather than just one."

This suggests greater education is needed to help employers feel more confident about how support workers are funded, as well as the fact that not all people with disability require this type of support.

One participant noted that obtaining public sector funding to be able to "accommodate someone appropriately in the workplace" has become more complex and lengthier, with a process that took two days last year now taking more than six weeks.

These delays mean it's not always feasible to hire people with disability who require such accommodations.

INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

ACCESSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Nearly half of survey respondents (45%) said the lack of accessible infrastructure within buildings and sets was a barrier to creating inclusive infrastructure.

Focus group participants echoed this finding, with one sharing an example of an editor they want to work with but have to do so remotely because their building is not accessible:

"Our office is in an old warehouse, and it has a set of fairly steep stairs just to get up to the loading dock to get into the office. You know that obviously makes it pretty difficult in terms of its accessibility requirements."

Another noted:

"a lot of venues and locations are often (physically) inaccessible for some people. Or they're in spaces that are just problematic for some, where there's a lot of sensory overload stuff going on."

Participants also shared that the costs of overcoming physical barriers are generally "unachievable" without external financial support.

A vast majority of survey respondents said they would be more inclusive if they had more support and resources, as shown in the chart below.

However, 77% of respondents also said they wanted to gain a better understanding of such resources and supports, including for accessible infrastructure.

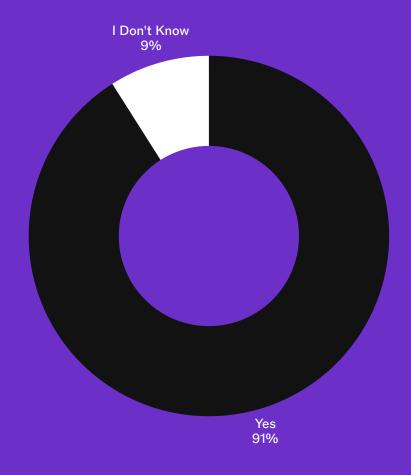
INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

ACCESSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Focus group participants expressed difficulty in knowing how to access resources.

Many participants were not aware of programs such as the Job Access Employee Assistance Fund that helps cover the costs of making changes in the workplace to support an employee with disability.

And one participant noted there is no comparable funding for the commercial sector with its shorter shoots and fast staff turnarounds, making it harder and more expensive to create inclusive commercial productions.



INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND SELLING THE BENEFITS

Focus group participants shared several examples of how colleagues can act as barriers to creating inclusive productions. In one case, the participant was unable to hire a person with disability due to being unable to convince their managers of the benefits it would bring to the production. They said:

"Even if you yourself feel like it's the right thing to do or there's a way to manage it that's beneficial for the production, it can be hard to convince other people who may have more sway than you...who may not have the same exposure that it's going to be beneficial."

Another participant agreed that a key barrier was lack of exposure to working with people with disability:

"The exposure and experience make it more real and make it more understandable and make the benefits of it clear. And the fear of it less."





INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND SELLING THE BENEFITS

In another case, the production management team had done accessibility training and were keen to hire people with disability, but this did not translate to broader acceptance and understanding by the crew:

"One of the challenges we had was...that (accessibility) information being shared with the entire crew that were already maxed out...one of the challenges once on the ground was getting that same understanding across the wider crew and exposure to all the (accessible) infrastructure that we have."

Another participant noted how accessibility differs depending on who they were working with:

"I've had mixed experiences with agencies. Some have been proactive in providing training and resources to support employees with disabilities, while others have lacked understanding and accommodations, creating barriers to employment."







INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

CASTING, REPRESENTATION AND STORYTELLING

Both survey and focus group participants were eager to learn how to create more authentic representation when telling stories, and to avoid tropes such as "inspiration porn." Focus group participants discussed the meaning of authenticity, with one arriving at a useful definition:

"Authentic representation of someone with a disability...is allowing someone from that community to be a key creative who has creative control over narrative."

Another participant noted that authenticity of character also means:

"Allowing that character to have conflicts that aren't revolving around their disability. And so, it not being a narrative where a person needs to "overcome" their disability... We do not need to overcome them; we live with them, and they are a part of us."

In storytelling, having a character whose disability is their main conflict is "a little bit too basic...that's just part of their character," and doesn't allow for the full expression and representation of that character's life.

INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

CASTING, REPRESENTATION AND STORYTELLING

Another participant spoke about historical misrepresentation of people with a disability and how that is slowly changing with more authentic casting and storytelling:

"I was really excited when Chloe Hayden was cast on Heartbreak High, and she was able to portray an autistic character as an autistic neurotype herself so she could give that portrayal some real authenticity with those subtleties and the nuances that come with having that neurotype, and not just about it being a stereotype or a generalization of what we have seen in the past."

Another participant noted another barrier for many disabled actors was the current trend of scripted productions in particular seeking to hire a high-profile person with a disability

"There's some people who might be famous for reasons other than their acting who are getting acting roles at the moment who are disabled individuals, and they might not actually be the best person for the role. However, their profile is really selling them into the production."





INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

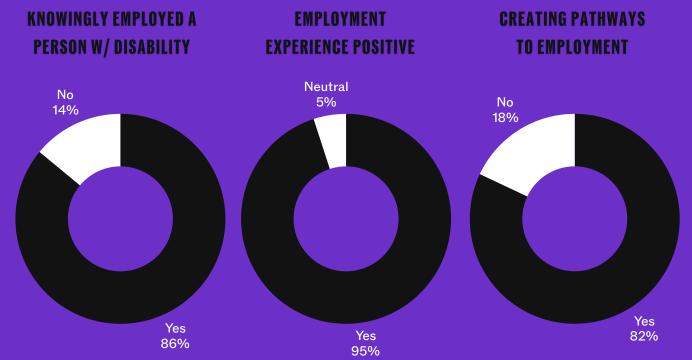
CASTING, REPRESENTATION AND STORYTELLING

This casting trend is not only making such roles scarcer for disabled actors, but if the high-profile person, who is not a trained actor, doesn't do a great job, it can create a broader perception that disabled actors can't really act and are therefore not worth hiring.

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT AND EXPERIENCES

There was a genuine desire amongst survey and focus group participants to create more inclusive productions. The vast majority of survey respondents (86%) said they had knowingly employed a person with disability and 95% of those said it was a positive experience.

Similarly, 82% said they were actively considering or had already created pathways of employment for people with disability These responses can be seen on the charts below.

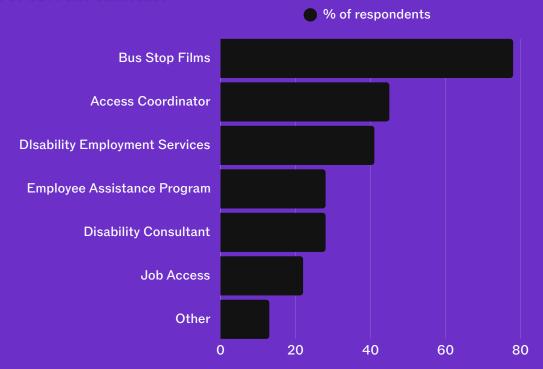


INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT AND EXPERIENCES

Survey responses also show broad awareness of services available to support people with disability, with Bus Stop Films being the most recognisable at 77%, followed by Access Coordinators and Disability Employment Services (DES). The full responses can be seen in the chart below.

AWARENESS OF SUPPORT SERVICES:



One-half of respondents had accessed support services, with Bus Stop Films again being the most accessed, at 91%.

Each of the other listed services were accessed by between 9% and 18% of respondents.

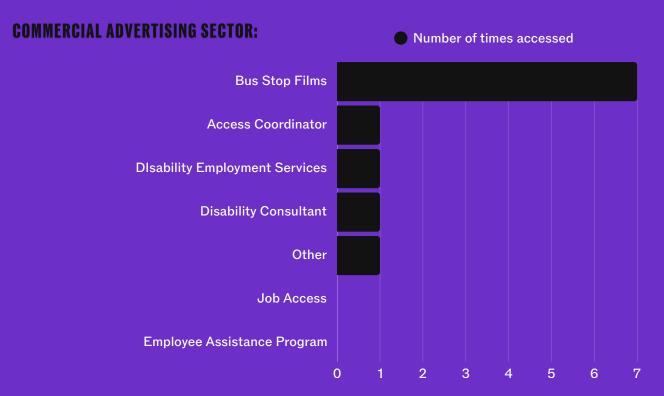
The industry that most accessed support services was Commercial, Advertising, with eight respondents having accessed a range of supports.

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INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT AND EXPERIENCES

The services accessed by this sector can be seen on the chart below. Respondents in the Television industry accessed support services once (Bus Stop), while those in the Feature Film industry did not access any support services.



The prevalence of supports accessed in Commercial Advertising is contextualised by the short production time and consistent work in the industry. More and shorter productions means there are more opportunities for people with disability, and thus the industry is more likely to access support services. Indeed, participants noted this makes the commercial sector ideal for training:

"It's great training ground for people to, you know, it's much easier for production to bring on a person with a disability for a two-day shoot rather than make that commitment for a five week shoot when you're not sure what you're up for so I think potentially there's a way of facilitating training within the commercial sector, more so than within the long form sector. Then potentially the experience gained in that sector can transition across to the long form sector."

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INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS

Focus group participants and survey respondents proposed a range of ideas to help make the screen sector more inclusive. These include:

- Making it a requirement of receiving government screen funding that productions hire a given number of people with disability.
- Creating an education program to promote the benefits that people with disability bring to productions.
- Promoting job share as an option, particularly when working with people experience capability fluctuation. As one participant noted:

"Often there's a misconception that it's a costly thing. It's not. In fact, the real benefit of it from a production's perspective, is the value that the production gets out of its creatives. For the price of one. So, you have two brains, two sets of ideas."

- Building a discussion of barriers and access needs into the onboarding process so the production can plan for them before they happen.
- Leveraging the short duration of the commercial sector productions as a training ground so people with disability can gain experience before transitioning into the long form sector.
- Building accessibility into job listings, including using simplified language and criteria. One participant shared the example of how unnecessary requirements in job listings can create a barrier:

"Inaccessible language can be used which can deter people with disability from applying. So, you know, it could be a runner position that states that you must be able to drive to do the role, which if you have a team of 10 runners isn't necessarily accurate."

INDUSTRY BARRIERS TO CREATING INCLUSIVE PRODUCTIONS

INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS

- There was a lengthy focus group discussion about the pros and cons of a database of cast and crew with disabilities. The convenience and benefits of having a trusted, credible and centralised source needs to be balanced against issues of privacy, data ownership, and the idea of people not wanting to be identified as employable, skilled or talented merely because of their disability.
- Accessibility should be built into education at all levels, so people
 who are studying acting or filmmaking are learning about it as a
 matter of course from the beginning of their training.
- When content involves characters with disability, at least some of the key creatives need to be people with disability, and not just attachments whose opinions can be disregarded.
- Access coordinators on sets should be as common as stunt or intimacy coordinators, driven by advocacy and/or policy.





JOIN US IN DRIVING CHANGE!

We invite you to get in touch to discuss our work and impact.

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