

MOSTLY, WE SEE THE STIGMA AND DISABILITY FIRST, AND THE PERSON SECOND

There is still a lot to learn when it comes to disability awareness, writes Darcy Luscombe.



Darcy Luscombe is Client Executive at Carat.

When people think of disability, we tend to conjure imagery of wheelchairs, access ramps, or perhaps an experience we've had with mental illness. We remember the times we've felt uncomfortable not knowing how to help someone in a wheelchair get onto a bus or train, or help a blind person read a menu at a restaurant. Mostly, we see the stigma and disability first, and the person second.

Sensory disability and vision impairment (blindness or low vision) are the forms of disability that have impacted my family. My father, brother and aunt are all legally blind due to a condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa. I've had issues with the phrase "disability" itself for a long time, largely because I've never experienced my family's blindness as diminishing their ability to do anything.

REDEFINING DISABILITY AS 'DIFFERENTLY-ABLED'

To me, a more apt term would be "differently-abled". This means having different methods of dealing with the day-to-day challenges that present themselves. It means having to develop both a unique form of independence, as well as a stronger bond with your community and support networks.

My dad uses a cane for mobility and spatial awareness – this allows him to navigate the world. But he also relies heavily on his support networks – his family, his ex-colleagues at Vision Australia, technology that helps him view text on computer screens, and institutions like the NDIS. One of the main issues for people affected by visual impairment is a lack of understanding from the public, particularly in relation to how effective modern technology has become in removing the barriers that separate able-bodied individuals from those with different abilities. When I think of my family, I've never seen the disability first, but rather all the amazing things they have achieved despite it.

ENGAGE IN EDUCATION AND LEARNING TO INCREASE YOUR DISABILITY AWARENESS

Although we have made extraordinary progress around inclusivity and diversity in the workplace, it seems that disability is a final frontier of sorts. There is still a lot to learn when it comes to disability awareness, and engaging in things like the disability module of the SBS Core Inclusion course is an incredible first step in shifting your perception of disability and creating inclusivity of opportunity. I'd also suggest encouraging your agency to reach out to organisations such as Vision Australia for additional learning experiences to help improve awareness and accessibility in the workplace. Together, we can get past this hurdle.