# International Day of People with Disability: How workplaces can build an inclusive environment for everyone

People with disabilities have so much to offer, but too often they are sidelined or excluded at work. We have the power to change that.

Today, on [International Day of People with Disability](https://www.idpwd.com.au/), I want to shine a light on the importance of inclusion and how we can all play a part in creating safer, more welcoming workplaces.

This year’s theme is: *Amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future.*

As [Operations Director](https://fare.org.au/about/staff/) at the Foundation of Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), I’m writing today not just as a leader who is passionate about creating professional environments that are safe and inclusive, but as someone who lives with a disability.

But first, I want to acknowledge the tireless advocacy of people in the disability community and our allies in passionately championing change in the way organisations create supportive, inclusive workplaces.

One in five Australians live with a disability, yet often they excluded by design from workplaces. Only about half of all people with a disability are currently participating in the workforce.

If we unpack why, it’s clear that the traditional work environment is not designed to support people with a disability, and “conventional” ways of working can unintentionally create barriers.

Whether it’s physical access barriers, a lack of flexibility in job design, unconscious biases and discrimination, or rigid recruitment practices, people with a disability often face invisible barriers.

At FARE, we work with people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), a neurodevelopmental disability caused by prenatal alcohol exposure.

We know that people living with FASD are at particular risk of underemployment, and this is a huge loss of potential.

With the right support, people with disabilities can thrive at work and be an asset to employers and the broader community.

One thing that makes me really proud to work at FARE is our respect for diversity. We understand that each staff member brings their own unique capabilities, experiences, and characteristics to their work. We value our differences, and know that practicing inclusivity benefits our organisation, our people, and the community we serve.

At FARE, we are committed to:

* Creating an inclusive, accessible, safe, supportive and diverse workplace, that provides equitable opportunities for people with disability to reach their potential.
* Supporting the rights of people with disabilities to work safely and productively, and to be free from discrimination.
* Treating people with a disability with respect and dignity, and ensuring they feel valued, heard and supported.

**But how do we do this in practice? Great question!**

We achieve this by:

* Equipping our leaders and our people with the education and tools they need to support individuals who live with disabilities.
* Implementing polices that state FARE’s values and set expectations for our leaders and our people to follow.
* We ask questions and we go into work each day curious about ourselves and our people.
* We ask for feedback, and when something isn’t working, we change it.
* We review our processes and policies to ensure that they aren’t unintentionally creating barriers, and then we review them again.

Like many workplaces, we don’t always get it right, and we’re always learning and improving.

Next year, we will launch our first Disability Inclusion Plan at FARE. And while we will mark these milestones proudly, we know there is always work to do.

Our commitment to inclusion is in the way we work, communicate, and the activities we undertake every day.

***Ayla Chorley is FARE's Operations Director and Company Secretary***