

University of Wollongong

Research Online

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts -
Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities

1-1-2014

Ramp Up's shut-down robs us of a needed voice on disability issues

Shawn Burns

University of Wollongong, shawn@uow.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Law Commons](#)

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Ramp Up's shut-down robs us of a needed voice on disability issues

Abstract

The headlines said it all.

Back to work: Disability support pension on the scrapheap, screamed Melbourne's Herald Sun. Beating the bludgers will help the disabled was the lead on The Sunday Telegraph.

The mothballing of the ABC's Ramp Up website, announced earlier this month, could not have come at a worse time for people with disability.

Too often, media representation of people with disability is embedded within familiar models of "tragedy" and "hero" – but the weekend's coverage of potential changes to the disability support pension and the welfare system paint an equally distorted and harmful image.

The news media has the capacity to frame an issue, a story, and an angle. It has the power to present people with disability as "bludgers" and declare they should "get back to work". It also has the capacity to set the agenda by deciding whether to provide favourable or unfavourable commentary.

Keywords

up, voice, disability, issues, shut, down, robs, us, ramp, needed

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

Burns, S. (2014). Ramp Up's shut-down robs us of a needed voice on disability issues. *The Conversation*, (30 June), 1-4.

30 June 2014, 2.06pm AEST

Ramp Up's shut-down robs us of a needed voice on disability issues

Author



1.

Shawn Burns

Journalism lecturer at University of Wollongong

Disclosure Statement

Shawn Burns is affiliated with Save ABC Ramp Up.

UNIVERSITY OF
WOLLONGONG



Provides funding as a Member of The Conversation.

uow.edu.au



Media representation of people with a disability is often embedded within familiar models of “tragedy” and “hero”. Jonathan Kos-Read

The headlines said it all.

[Back to work: Disability support pension on the scrapheap](#), screamed Melbourne’s Herald Sun. [Beating the bludgers will help the disabled](#) was the lead on The Sunday Telegraph.

The mothballing of the [ABC’s Ramp Up website](#), announced earlier this month, could not have come at a worse time for people with disability.

Too often, media representation of people with disability is embedded within familiar models of “tragedy” and “hero” – but the weekend’s coverage of potential changes to the disability support pension and the welfare system paint an equally distorted and harmful image.

The news media has the capacity to frame an issue, a story, and an angle. It has the power to present people with disability as “bludgers” and declare they should “get back to work”. It also has the capacity to set the agenda by deciding whether to provide favourable or unfavourable commentary.

The end of the line for Ramp Up

On June 5, the Ramp Up editors, Stella Young and Karen Palenzuela, [delivered some bad news](#) to readers of the ABC's website dedicated to discussion of disability issues:

As many of you are aware, in 2010 the ABC received funding to establish an online destination to discuss disability in Australia. The funding came from the Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, which is now the Department of Social Services. Our current contract with DSS finishes on 30 June this year and has not been renewed.

The publication of ABC Ramp Up will cease on 30 June, however the website will remain online as a resource for the disability community. Current comments will remain while new comments on articles will be closed.

It wasn't a complete surprise. Cuts had been widely anticipated after the Federal Budget imposed a A\$43m "efficiency dividend" on the ABC and SBS in May.

The message from the Ramp Up editors included a sentence that served to reinforce the importance of the site – and to underline ongoing arguments for its continuation as more than a "resource" or archive.

We have seen a significant shift in coverage of disability issues in the media and a move towards more critical thinking within the movement.

Why we need Ramp Up

Unfortunately, the weekend's news headlines about predicted changes to the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and Australia's welfare system showed that there's a long way to go. Discussion spaces such as Ramp Up are more important than ever – and that there is still work to be done.

People With Disabilities Australia (PWDA) President Craig Wallace spoke with the Sydney Morning Herald and [cautioned](#) against careless classification of types of disability. In his words, "The reality is that it isn't as simple as that. I've got a permanent disability and I work."

Wallace also criticised media demonisation of people with disabilities and called for concrete evidence that the government needs to clamp down on the disability support pension. "We are not rorters, we are not slackers," he said.

Wallace is not alone in his concern about media representation of people with disability and coverage of disability issues. Dr George Taleporos is leading an online campaign to [Save ABC Ramp Up](#), with which I'm affiliated.

As Taleporos [wrote](#) in The Guardian last week, "Our discussion space will be gone. The voice of people with disabilities, a voice the ABC has nurtured for the past three and a half years, will be silenced".

Today, Taleporos and fellow disability activists will converge at ABC headquarters in Melbourne to protest the decision, and pressure ABC boss Mark Scott and his Board of

Directors to honour the [ABC Charter](#) that commits the broadcaster to provide “comprehensive” broadcasting, including

...programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community.

Ramp Up was providing space for people with disabilities and disability issues to be presented as a part of the greater fabric of society – with all diversity. The mothballing of Ramp Up is a retrograde step.

If the decision-makers at the ABC are looking for reasons to revise it, they need look no further than Sunday’s papers for motivation.