

The Australian

Wages for disabled challenged - AAP

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The way the federal government sets the wages of workers with disabilities is designed to keep their pay rates low, a court has been told.

The Federal Court case for two intellectually disabled men, which began in Melbourne yesterday, is considered to be a test case for 20,000 disabled workers across Australia.

Gordon Prior and Liz Nojin, on behalf of her son Michael, are claiming that under a federal assessment tool introduced in 2004 disabled workers have been getting a raw deal.

Mr Prior, 58, of Ararat in Victoria, has a vision and intellectual impairment and worked as a gardener for \$3.82 an hour. Michael Nojin, 44, of Coffs Harbour, NSW, who has cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability, has swept floors and shredded documents for \$1.85 an hour. At issue is the Business Service Wage Assessment Tool, created for disabled people who work at Australian Disability Enterprises, or what used to be known as sheltered workshops.

Kristine Hanscombe SC, who is representing the pair, said the process discriminated against people with an intellectual disability. She said Mr Nojin was paid \$2.46 until BSWAT calculated his wage at \$1.79.

The trial before Justice Gray is expected to continue for the next two weeks.

LISA Comment: This may turn out to be a landmark case to set wage rates. It may also adversely set job rates, through production v remuneration factors.

Although no one wants to see people with a disability exploited. Compromise is often necessary for those who's remuneration is the quality of life and self esteem of a meaningful day at a work place.

There are many families who would pay for their family member to enjoy the self satisfaction of going to a work place each day.

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