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#### **OVERVIEW.**

Gilimbaa and The Social Deck worked with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide strategic communication services and communication support to support the development of a future supported employment policy for people with disability in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). This included:

- Development of a communication and consultation strategy to provide the framework for communicating and engaging with the identified target audiences to support development of a future supported employment policy.
- Consultation and engagement with stakeholders through a series of workshops around Australia.

To support the stakeholder consultation process and the public submission process that DSS has coordinated through a publicly-available Discussion Paper, available at www.engage.dss.gov.au/the-future-of-supported-employment/, Gilimbaa has facilitated a series of eight group discussions (with input from a total of 54 supported employees) and 18 individual interviews with supported employees.

This report provides a summary of the process used to organise this supported employee consultation, the methodology used for the groups discussions and interviews, and the feedback provided by supported employees.



### CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY.

This methodology was developed in consultation with key sector stakeholders. The discussion guide and interview questions (available at **Attachment A**) were also circulated to these stakeholders for input and their feedback was incorporated.

### This process included:

- Eight group discussions with a total of 54 supported employees in a range of locations (see more details below), including discussions hosted by Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs), self-advocacy groups and social clubs;
- 18 semi-structured interviews with supported employees to gather more information outside of the group discussion process.

Each group discussion was comprised of 3-11 supported employees, and lasted between 30 and 75 minutes. The documents used to inform participants about the process and to guide the group discussions are outlined below. These group discussions were semi-structured, allowing participants to generate questions and concepts, express opinions, and pursue their own priorities in their terms and using their words (Kitzinger and Barbour,1999: 5). By allowing group discussions to be flexible and fluid in nature, it was hoped that supported employees would be encouraged to express a wide range of attitudes, as well as developing shared values in a group setting (Waterton and Wynne, 1995: 141). Open and interactive discussion between participants was also encouraged as part of the group discussion process, allowing the development of collective notions shared and negotiated by members of the group (Gunter, 2000: 44).

A total of 18 semi-structured interviews of 15-30 minutes in length were conducted with supported employees who indicated they would be interested in providing more detail about their individual experiences and opinions. These interviews were fluid in nature, allowing interviewees to freely express their views about their current and potential future employment. This type of semi-structured interviewing allows clarification of points, extension of responses, and the ability to remind respondents of points they might not have mentioned (Gillham 2000).

Each of the supported employee group discussions and interviews was analysed based on themes and application of codes to data (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003: 26), resulting in the report below which summarises key outcomes and themes from this consultation with supported employees. Given the qualitative nature of this methodology, the content of this report is not intended as a statistical representation of the broader cohort of supported employees nationally. Numbers used in the report are included purely to give an indication of how many supported employees provided similar answers to questions or spoke about similar themes.



#### **GROUP DISCUSSION AND INTERVIEW PROCESS.**

In advance of each group discussion, the host organisation was contacted to discuss the communications and support needs of potential participants, and then contacted subsequently to confirm the specific format for the group discussion and interviews that would best suit their supported employees.

These host organisations (ADEs, self-advocacy groups and social clubs) were provided with the following documents to assist them and the supported employees, prepare for the consultation:

- A document (produced as an Easy Read document) providing organisations with an overview of the planned group discussions and information on the purpose and planned structure of the consultations (see **Attachment A**).
- A copy of the Discussion Guide and interview questions to be used in the consultations (produced as an Easy Read document) for review in advance of the consultations (see Attachment B).
- A copy of a Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form for review in advance of the consultations.

Interview participants were able to have a support person present, if required or desired, during the groups discussions and interviews.

At the beginning of each group discussion, the facilitator (with help from support workers where needed) outlined the key points of the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Forms and ensured all participants were able to provide informed consent to be part of the consultation process (including the audio recording of the discussion to allow subsequent note-taking).

Participants were provided with an additional printed copy of the discussion guide in an Easy Read format to refer to if needed during the group discussion and/or interview, and this document was used to guide the discussion.

Following the group discussion, the facilitator invited any additional questions or comments from all participants and noted that a summary copy of this report could be provided to them if they wished to be informed of the outcomes of this consultation process.

Group discussion participants who indicated a willingness to participate in a one-on-one interview were then interviewed in private. These interviews were based on the discussion guide used in the groups, with some additional questions added where needed to gather more detailed feedback on the individual opinions and experiences of each supported employee.



## SUMMARY OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION.

Group discussions were held in the following locations, with a total of 54 supported employees participating in these discussions.

Location	Date	Organisation Type
South-East Queensland	13 April 2018	ADE
Hobart, Tasmania	16 April 2018	ADE
Northern Tasmania	17 April 2018	Self-advocacy group
Melbourne, Victoria	18 April 2018	ADE
Sydney, New South Wales	19 April 2018	Social group
Wagga Wagga, New South Wales	23 April 2018	Self-advocacy group
Toowoomba, Queensland	24 April 2018	ADE
Melbourne, Victoria	30 April 2018	Self-advocacy group

A total of 18 supported employees also participated in one-one-one interviews to provide more details about their experiences in supported employment and potential support they could receive to improve their employment experience.



#### CONSULTATION OUTCOMES.

The following sections of this report provide a summary of the key outcomes of the consultation with supported employees through the group discussions and interviews.

It should be noted that the supported employees who were part of the consultation process are not statistically representative of the cohort, and that the numbers used in the report are done so to give some insight into the amount of supported employees who provided similar responses to qualitative questions.

#### REFLECTIONS ON CURRENT EXPERIENCES IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT.

# Types of jobs done by supported employees and length of time in their current workplace.

The **types of jobs** done by supported employees varied greatly across the consultation sites, and included the following jobs and core activities:

- · recycling of e-waste
- sorting/recycling and packing clothes
- making and packing laundry bags
- · driving forklifts
- · gardening
- · home maintenance
- cleaning (offices, homes and other workplaces)
- · recycling/shredding of paper
- training or supporting other supported employees
- nursery work (including potting, watering, weeding, cuttings, packing, loading and sales)
- factory work, including packing, wrapping, and working on machines
- · food weighing and packaging
- testing and tagging of electrical appliances
- furniture restoration, including sanding, staining, repairs, and painting
- office work, including receptionist roles
- retail of donated and second-hand goods.

The length of time supported employees have spent in their current workplace ranged from a few days to 30 years. A large number of supported employees (22) involved in the consultations had been in their current job for five years or more, with eight in their current workplace for 15 years or more. At the other end of the scale, many (14) supported employees had spent less than two years in their current workplace.



#### Hours of work of supported employees

There was a large variety of hours worked each week among the supported employees who were part of these consultations. In some locations, all or most supported employees were working 35-40 hours a week, while in other locations supported employees were working anything between one and four days each week and between 6 and 30 hours a week. This included a large number (24) who worked two or three days a week and some who worked a number of short shifts across two to four days.

When asked if they **would like to work more or less hours**, a majority of supported employees (34) indicated they were currently happy with the hours they were working. This included some who would like to increase their hours in the future, but were comfortable with their current hours because of the potential impacts of more hours on their benefits or pensions. Some supported employees also noted their hours suited their current lifestyles and abilities.

"I won't go back to five (days). Five is too much. Four would be about it..."

"I'm getting older. Three's about my limit now."

"I like working three days. I like having two days off."

A significant number of supported employees (18) noted they would like to work more hours each week. The main reason for this was seen to be the need for extra income due to the pressures of bills and living expenses and this was particularly the case for those living independently and/or supporting families.

"I want to get an extra day or get a Wednesday here. I think that's just the money. I'm trying to support my daughter. More hours."

A number of supported employees noted the importance of working more hours as part of a progression to a preferred future job in open employment.

"My goal, not now, but in the future, is to work three days a week at (current ADE) and two days in the open employment..."

"...Same for me, I'd like to work another two days in open employment, and the rest of the days here."

"Me, I'd like a few more hours sometimes. Not regularly, but sometimes. Because how am I going to adjust to open employment if I can't do it here? Most shifts in open employment could be six to eight hours a day. I'm doing four, sometimes less than that, sometimes. So, for me to adjust and actually get out on my own and feel confident to do so, I need to gradually increase the hours to do that."

Some supported employees noted they would like to do more hours to better cope with the pressures of fulfilling orders in their workplace, noting that currently their hours of employment were not adequate to deal with workplace deadlines.

"It would be a real big help, because we get absolutely smashed on Friday afternoons or Thursdays or all through the week."

"It would be better if they allowed supported employees to do overtime, we'd be able to get our orders out easier."



A small number of supported employees (2) indicated they would like to work less hours each week, mainly due to a desire to have more time for social interaction and because they felt their current working week was tiring or overly taxing.

"A bit less, because it gives me more time to communicate with my (disability social/advocacy) group more, and I do a cooking course through a company on a Monday night."

### Choice of current jobs and workplaces.

Many supported employees noted they had moved into supported employment directly from school, or via a gradual transition from school to an ADE.

"I did a bit of work experience here, but I got the job from school."

A significant number of supported employees (18) chose their current ADE based on a recommendation from a friend or family member, or due to a connection with an ADE in the form of a family staff member or a friend or family member who was working there.

"My Dad's daughter's boyfriend works here and he got the number off him and then I started, that's how I got the job here."

"My sister had a friend, and her sister worked up at (name of ADE) and that, so she suggested to my sister, gave the contact number and, yes, I went for an interview, they said yes, and I've been there ever since."

Referrals from employment agencies, disability advocacy and support services, and Disability Employment Services (DES) providers were also noted as common ways of finding current jobs in supported employment.

"I found this job through an employment service. I originally was hired as a volunteer."

"I had to go through an interview stage, through an employment agency. They had three vacancies and they asked me which one I'd like, and I went around the three places."

A number of those involved in the group discussions and interviews also noted they had done some volunteer work, work experience or a traineeship with their current ADE before taking on a supported employment role.

"I worked at (other workplace) before here, and I was out of work, and then I started volunteering here and they offered me a job. They accepted me as a volunteer, I went to heaps of places. After a while a job came up."

"I did a traineeship, and then a job trial, and then I came here to do full-time."

Many supported employees (11) noted that they had moved to supported employment after negative experiences in open employment, or because they had lost their jobs in open employment (more details on this are provided in the next section of this report).



Other ways supported employees indicated they had chosen their current workplace and job included:

- previous work for the ADE when it was a different entity
- knowledge of the ADE through other services it used to provide
- direct application for a job at an ADE once their disability was recognised
- referral from their local council.

"(I got this job) through (City name) Council. I tried to apply for different jobs and they asked me for a work trial and it wasn't successful, I didn't get successful in the job and I kept on losing the job, and I came here."

**Before working for their current ADE**, many supported employees had been at school. Many (11) had also moved into supported employment after negative experiences in open employment jobs such as laundry work, mowing jobs, working in a law firm, retail jobs, defence force roles, hospitality jobs, warehousing and construction industry jobs, horticulture work and working for supermarkets and department stores.

Some supported employees were previously doing traineeships, and some were also working in other ADEs.

"Before I was with another DES provider, I did gardening and maintenance with them for three or four months, and they wanted me to do cleaning, and it didn't work out... so they find me another DES provider like this in supported employment, so that's how I got transferred from one to another, and it worked out well in this one."

A number of supported employees (6) noted that before they started their current role in supported employment, they had been unemployed and had been experiencing boredom, depression and a poor quality of life with little social interaction.

"I was generally sitting at home, asleep for most of the day, getting up in the afternoon, playing my Xbox, doing some housework here and there if I felt like it, going back to bed about 10:30, and doing the whole thing the next day."

When asked about the **information needed when looking for a job**, a large number of supported employees (28) noted that they had not actively sought any information before commencing their current job, as they had been provided with limited options and saw their current ADE as the only possible job. This included some who had moved straight into supported employment from school and some who been linked to an ADE by family connections and had not been encouraged to, or themselves wanted to, seek any information in advance of starting work.

"I didn't really get to know, as I got the job straight from school and just started working here."

Some supported employees actively sought out roles with ADEs, including doing online research.



"I went online and did some research into disability places, and this one popped up, and it was sort of local."

The most important information needed by supported employees before commencing their current jobs related to wages, hours of work, the tasks they would do, and whether the workplace would provide them with a safe and supportive environment.

"How many hours a week it is, so am I able to cope with the hours? Start time, for me I function better of an afternoon than, say, with the morning. What are the workplace safety rules? What are the contracts and how do they work?"

"I think it's important to know the environment they're going to be working in, and the surrounds they're going to be working in, and because you've to be able to work quickly and efficiently, know your speed level and ability."

Other information supported employees noted was important to them before starting a new job included:

- the availability of options for training and learning new things
- · an understanding of the skills that will be required
- · how their experience will contribute to the workplace
- how they will travel to and from work.

When asked **if their current job is the kind of job they wanted**, most (33) of the supported employees involved in these consultations said yes. This included many supported employees who noted they were happy and secure in their current job and workplace and saw this as their ongoing and future job. There was also a small number of supported employees who indicated that while this was the kind of job they wanted for now, they may consider other options in terms of jobs and types of employment in the future.

However, a large number of supported employees (21) indicated their current job was not the kind of job they wanted. This included some supported employees who want to do something different now (including moving into open employment) and have a clear idea of how to get there, as well as many who know they would like to do something different, but are unsure if this is possible and are not currently taking any steps, or receiving any support, to do so.

In some locations, there was a strong divide between younger supported employees or those who had been in supported employment for a short period of time, and older employees or those who had been with the ADE for a long period. The first groups more strongly indicated that their current job was not one they wanted on an ongoing basis, while the older or more established ADE employees more strongly indicated they were comfortable with their current job and would not like this to change.

The most common things supported employees liked about their current jobs were their workplace friendships and the supportive environment of the workplace. Many comments here focused on the strong and positive social interactions and friendships that exist within ADEs, with these often described as being a 'family' or 'second family'.



"Some of the people I work with don't have parents, and I feel like the place they're working is part of their family."

"I have some of my friends from school here."

"Working with your workmates."

"I'd say workmates."

"You have friends and all that, and you get to talk to other people."

A large number of supported employees (21) noted their workplace was friendly and supportive, with helpful staff who understand how to work with and empower people with disability.

"If you make a mistake, you don't get let down or laid off, you learn from your mistakes."

Many supported employees also noted they like the training they were being provided with and the ability to learn new skills. For some, this was linked to the development of skills that would allow them to move into open employment roles in the future.

"Being challenged. You don't know your limitations. Especially in the position I'm in at work, I'm trying to better my leadership skills."

"We get a lot of training up at (name of ADE) and yes, we get to have our say and that, and we've got a committee and that, and yes, the staff are friendly."

"I get experience to work in the open employment, even if it's \$4 or \$5, and the class, I like cooking too, to have experience in the open employment to get the job."

Some supported employees noted they liked their jobs because they were able to make money. A number of supported employees also noted the importance of being able to contribute positively to the community (for those working in roles that involve broader community interaction), positive experiences of meeting new people, and the importance of doing a job where they felt they were helping and supporting their fellow employees.

"It's all about helping people and leaving something behind."

"In my position, I help others with their reading and writing, and that gives me a sense of accomplishment. I like to help the other guys."

A small number of positive comments about current jobs focused on the variety of tasks supported employees were performing (although lack of variety was more commonly noted as a negative, as outlined below).

Some supported employees noted that they like their current job mainly because the alternative to working there would involve boredom and social isolation.

"I would say the jobs, you're doing something during the day."

"It keeps me out of trouble."



The most common things supported employees disliked about their current jobs were low wages, lack of training and lack of variety.

A significant number of supported employees (18) noted dissatisfaction with their current wages (as outlined in the next section of this report). This was the most commonly expressed dislike among supported employees who were part of the consultation.

The second most commonly expressed dislike related to a lack of training and skills development and a perceived lack of assessment and progression in the workplace. This was often related to the issue of low wages, with training and assessment seen as important in terms of increasing wages for supported employees who wanted more money.

"There's not enough training here. We're not getting, really, any training."

"With the other system they used to have, they used to have an assessment for about a week or two. They only do an hour a week (now) and they probably should do more."

Related to this, many supported employees (11) also noted they dislike the lack of variety in their working life. Again, training and assessment was seen to be lacking here, leading to an inability to move on to or be rotated into other tasks in the ADE.

"We sort out paper, sort out white and coloured paper. I don't like that too much because it gets boring."

Some supported employees (7) also noted they dislike the pressure and stress of their current role, and that their work was often deadline driven and sometimes tiring and overly stressful.

"It is really stressful...

"We've got trucks that come between 3 and 3:30 to pick stuff up There's not enough time in the day to get it all done."

A small number of supported employees (4) also noted difficulties in their interactions with other employees, as well as ADE staff and supervisors.

"I just don't like people touching me half the time, I get people touching me at work."

"There's one particular person, he seems not to have respect for people with disabilities, because he questions my speed and things and I think that's not very nice."

"Bullying. Not being listened to and being belittled because of my intellectual disability. Not being acknowledged for the disability I have."



#### SUMMARY OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK ON CURRENT JOBS

# Types of jobs done by supported employees and length of time in their current workplace.

- The types of jobs done by supported employees varied greatly across the consultation sites.
- The length of time supported employees have spent in their current workplace ranged from a few days to 30 years.
- A large number of supported employees had been in their current job for 5 years or more, with many in their current workplace for 15 years or more.

#### Hours of work of supported employees.

- There was a large variety of hours worked each week among the supported employees who were part of these consultations.
- A majority of supported employees indicated they were currently happy with the hours they were working. This was often because of the potential impacts of more hours on their benefits or pensions, and/or because their current hours suited their lifestyles and abilities.
- A significant number of supported employees noted they would like to work more hours each week. The main reasons for this were to earn extra money, as well as to gain experience to move into future roles in open employment.

### Choice of current jobs and workplaces.

- Many supported employees noted they had moved into supported employment directly from school, or via a gradual transition from school to an ADE.
- A large number of supported employees chose their current ADE based on a recommendation from a friend or family member, or due to a family member or friend's connection with an ADE.
- Other common ways of choosing current jobs included referrals from employment agencies, disability services and DES providers, as well as traineeships, volunteering and work experience at the ADE.
- Many supported employees noted they had moved to supported employment after negative experiences in open employment, or because they had lost their iobs in open employment.

#### What supported employees were doing before their current job.

- Many supported employees were at school before beginning their current job.
- A large number had moved into supported employment after negative experiences in open employment.
- Some supported employees were previously doing traineeships, and some were also working in other ADEs.
- A significant number of supported employees noted that before they started their current role in supported employment they had been unemployed and had been experiencing boredom, depression and a poor quality of life with little social interaction.



#### Information needed by supported employees when looking for a job.

- A large number of supported employees noted they had not actively sought any information before commencing their current job, as they had been provided with limited options and saw their current ADE as the only possible job.
- Some supported employees actively sought out roles with ADEs, including doing online research.
- The most important information needed by supported employees before commencing their current jobs related to wages, hours of work, the tasks they would do, and whether the workplace would provide them with a safe and supportive environment.

## Current satisfaction with the type of jobs supported employees have.

- The majority of supported employees noted their current job was the one they wanted. This included many supported employees who noted they were happy and secure in their current job and workplace.
- A significant number of supported employees indicated their current job was not the kind of job they wanted, and that they would like to change roles in the near future.
- Younger employees, or those who had been in supported employment for less time, were more likely to be dissatisfied with their current job choice.

#### Common things supported employees liked about their current job.

- The most common things supported employees liked about their current jobs were their workplace friendships and the supportive environment of the workplace.
- Many supported employees also noted they liked the training they were being provided with and the ability to learn new skills.
- Some supported noted they like making money, meeting and interacting with others, helping others, and because the alternative to working would involve boredom and/or social isolation.

#### Common things supported employees disliked about their current job.

- A large number of supported employees noted dissatisfaction with their current wages.
- Related to this was dissatisfaction with the current training and assessment provided by ADEs, as well as lack of variety in the workplace.
- Some supported employees also noted they dislike the pressure and stress of their current role.
- A small number of supported employees also noted difficulties in their interactions with other employees, as well as ADE staff and supervisors.



#### **INSIGHTS INTO CURRENT SUPPORT NEEDS.**

#### Ideas for improving the current jobs of supported employees.

When asked about the support that could help to improve their current jobs, many supported employees (15) noted the importance of being provided with more training and greater options for variety in the workplace. These comments focused on a desire to learn new skills, as well as a perception among many supported employees that learning new skills and being assessed would enable them to take on new, different and more interesting or challenging roles.

"It's gets a bit boring doing the same thing..."

"We're here 40 hours a week doing the same thing."

"I wouldn't mind learning to do other jobs. They don't ask me. They do, and then they ask other people to do it. I like (current job), I just don't want to do it all day."

A number of supported employees (7) noted their workplace experience could be improved if there were more staff and supervisors, and/or if these staff were better qualified and more experienced in working with people with disability.

"Better qualified staff..."

"And more staff, so one staff member is not coping with all the employees in one room."

"More support for the newer fellas and some of the fellas that need more support."

Some supported employees noted they needed better equipment in the workplace, ranging from specific equipment to assist them to overcome challenges relating to their disability to better tools, machinery, uniforms and equipment, and more vehicles.

"Things so I can record things, because I can't read or spell properly."

"I even had to go and pay for my work jacket to be fixed, and it was all ripped. And I thought, no that was dangerous, because if it gets caught in the machine, it won't just rip your garment, but you can lose part of your body."

A number of supported employees noted again their desire for better wages and longer hours.

Other supported employees suggested the need for ADEs to provide more support to help supported employees deal with other facets of their life that were challenging, such as completing housing or Centrelink paperwork, as well as providing more support for employees who were wanting to achieve goals and/or progress into open employment.

"There's a few of us who live independently, like I live independently with two children, and it would be good if we got assistance with outside stuff, like Centrelink or housing stuff. That would be real helpful in a supported role if we could get help with that. It would be useful if we had someone we could go to."



"They tell you, what do you want to do in the future? What are your three or four of five goals you want to do? And you get back to it a year later and none of these goals are done..."

"You still haven't achieved it..."

"It's still sitting there. And I just look at them and I say, well, I haven't achieved any of that, you put it down there for last year's. It's been 12 months. What have I done? Nothing?"

## Current training and future training needs.

Many supported employees, across all locations, noted they were currently involved in some form of training or skills development within their ADE.

"I've been learning a lot about what types of plants, the varieties of plants we have at the nursery, so I learn the botanical names and the common names for a certain number of Australian native plants."

Many supported employees (15) indicated they wanted more training, or more regular and appropriate training. This included training that would enable them to do their current jobs better, as well as to get more variety in the workplace through being competent in other tasks.

"To learn new machines, and when you get assigned to new machines, to be able to do it."

"Learn how to use, for example, learn to use a whippersnapper. Learning to use different machinery. More training and more support."

Some supported employees expressed frustration with the lack of current training and assessment, with this seen to be a barrier to both personal income and to achieving collective workplace goals.

"I'm still sitting on the same pay rate that I was, like, four years ago. And it's frustrating because we're trying to get our money up. We just don't have time to get the training done. Once we learn a new machine, we're on that machine eight hours a day, five days a week. It would make a lot of sense to have a few of us trained up on different machines."

Some supported employees also noted that training and skills development was needed to help them to progress towards open employment (there is more detail on this in the next section of this report).

"To do more training, to expand my learning, I'd like to get another job, like in the grounds maintenance industry."



For these supported employees, there was a strong desire to learn very practical skills that would enable them to work in their preferred job, including literacy skills and work preparation and application skills (including preparing for and practicing interviews and writing resumes).

"I want to learn how to, say, do a 500-word essay, or a 1000-word essay. Because then when I actually go and do what I really want to do, I'm not in the dark. I'm not looking at it thinking 'what the hell am I supposed to do?'. And probably literacy, because my spelling is decent, but it could be better."

Supported employees also noted the importance of training being appropriate to the learning needs of people with disability, with many commenting on the importance of being shown how to do things as opposed to being told or provided with written instruction.

"I learn new things. It's visual for me. People need to have visual, but if someone shows me what to do, you do it. It gets stuck in your head all the time. But if someone gives you a piece of paper and doesn't show you, you get confused, completely."

Some employees also noted they would like to learn more life skills, including cooking, as well as computer and IT skills.

### Satisfaction with current wages.

The majority of supported employees (36) noted they were currently happy with the level of wages they were receiving. Many felt their pay was appropriate to the work they were doing and their abilities, while others were conscious that more pay from their supported employment would adversely affect their benefits or pensions. Others also noted that they would like more pay in the future, but that their current wages reflected where they were currently at in terms of needing more support.

"It's good for the moment, because I don't want to get off the pension yet, because I need more help at the moment. When I'm finished getting help, and I don't need it any more, I'll get off it."

However, a significant number of supported employees (18), and especially those working in difficult or challenging roles, noted their pay was either too low or far too low. For some, the primary motivation for receiving better wages was related to high costs of living and problems paying bills, especially for those living independently or supporting other family members.

"It's probably alright for some us that still live with our parents, but it's a little harder for people who are living on their own..."

"My childcare fees cost more than our wages. On school holidays I can't really justify coming to work."

"Whatever you're making in a week will not keep you surviving, especially with the taxes, the bills, everything is going up."

"Some people here are on, like, a dollar an hour. It's hard to survive."



Many supported employees were very aware that their hourly pay rates were significantly lower than others in similar roles or industries.

"You come to a place like this and people here don't get paid a lot. I think any worker should be put in a situation where you earn proper money. You should be happy with the work and know you're getting a full wage."

"Our government needs to really open their eyes to people like us. We need that help, we need the money to help ourselves, so we can do our jobs, go out, go to the movies, do all the things normal people, who don't have disabilities, do."

"Our pay rates haven't changed since this government came into power. We should get the same sort of pay rise when the other workers get some sort of pay rise."

Some supported employees noted that being paid less than others (people without disability) resulted in them feeling depressed or demoralised.

"I just want to get normal pay instead of getting government money most of the time. You can't afford bills, house bills, important things to pay to just lead a normal life. There's not much happiness in that."

"It's depressing. With the previous wages I had (in open employment) it's depressing that I don't get that much pay rate as I used to. It feels very depressing and just makes it a bit sad."



# SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK ON SUPPORT EMPLOYEES WANT IN THEIR CURRENT JOBS

### Things supported employees thought could improve their current job.

- Many supported employees noted the importance of being provided with more training and greater options for variety in the workplace.
- A number of supported employees noted their workplace experience could be improved if there were more staff and supervisors and/or if these staff were better qualified and more experienced in working with people with disability.
- Some supported employees wanted more support to help them with other facets of their life that were challenging, such as completing housing or Centrelink paperwork.
- Some employees wanted more support to achieve goals and/or progress into open employment.

## **Current training and future training needs.**

- Many supported employees noted they were currently involved in some form of training or skills development.
- A large number of supported employees want to do more training, focusing on training that would enable them to do their current jobs better, as well as to get more variety in the workplace.
- Some supported employees expressed frustration with the lack of current training and assessment, with this seen to be a barrier to both personal income and to achieving collective workplace goals.
- Some supported employees noted that training and skills development was needed to help them to progress towards open employment, including specific training to help them find, apply for and successfully begin a new job.

#### Satisfaction with current wages.

- The majority of supported employees noted they were currently happy with the level of wages they were receiving.
- A significant number of supported employees and especially those working in difficult or challenging roles, noted their pay was too low.
- The primary motivation for receiving better wages was related to high costs of living and problems paying bills, especially for those living independently or supporting other family members.
- A significant number of supported employees were aware their hourly pay rates were significantly lower than others in similar roles or industries. For some, this resulted in feelings of depression or being demoralised.



# REFLECTION ON OTHER EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS AND SUPPORT REQUIRED TO MOVE INTO THESE JOBS.

### Experiences of supported employees in open employment.

Across the consultation locations, a large number of supported employees (22) had some experience of working in open employment. This ranged from short-term to long-term jobs, and included jobs such as:

- working at Bunnings, Coles, Woolworths, IGA, Safeway, KFC or McDonalds
- · warehouse and factory work
- · gardening and cleaning jobs
- · retail and hospitality jobs
- · jobs in offices and law firms
- · defence force and security jobs
- · mechanic, carpenter and concreting jobs.

A number of supported employees had also done work experience and/or work trials in a range of jobs in open employment.

Almost all supported employees (20) who had worked in open employment reported negative experiences. The most common of these related to a lack of appropriate support and training, leading to the supported employee being unable to complete tasks at the speed or quality demanded by the employer.

"I went to McDonalds, and that was really full on. You'd be on your feet all day. Especially when it's really busy and you're running round trying to get orders out, and it was one of things that didn't really work out the way I wanted it. They didn't give you training. Here's different because they'll train you – it doesn't matter how long it takes, but they will support you. But you work in the open employment, and they'll just say 'right, this is your job, I want you to do this' and you don't know what's going on."

Many supported employees (11) noted they had been bullied, 'picked on', or treated poorly by managers, staff and/or customers.

"I found it demanding, very demanding. Very fast, I couldn't keep up. And I was picked on. You know: 'you're dumb, you're not worth anything, what are you doing here anyway? You obviously didn't go to school'. Just stupid things like that."

"I did work for about nine months in another business, but I couldn't get on with the boss for a while, because he kept swearing at me."



Many supported employees (9) also noted they had been given repetitive or menial tasks and felt they were not trusted or respected enough to take on more challenging or interesting tasks within workplaces.

"It was very disappointing. They didn't respect people with disability. They didn't understand people's rights. I went home one day and I said to my parents, I said I want to get out of that place and start looking at another employment agency."

"It was a bit boring, because all they wanted me to do was clean up after the lawyers."

"The other jobs don't really know how to handle us, so they see us a like, they gave us a job, but they won't give us anything harder to do or trust us. I was trying to be a mechanic, and they said 'just sweep the floor'."

A number of supported employees contrasted their negative experiences in open employment with the positives of their current role in supported employment, noting they felt more supported, safe and respected in their current workplaces. Some supported employees also noted they felt more of a sense of belonging or camaraderie at their ADE than they had in open employment.

"I used to work at IGA. One of the customers was quite rude. I prefer this job, as it's more experience and more training and it's easier."

"We've all got disabilities, so no one makes fun of each other. I spent 10 or 15 years working in the concreting industry, and I got made fun of all the time, even by the bosses. Here, we're more supportive of each other."

"They're not as supportive. They don't meet the people's needs. They more or less say, well, if you've got a disability, take a hike, we don't want you."

"I couldn't keep up. It was too hard for me to cope, so I prefer to be here because they actually look after me and it's slightly easier than working with people without disabilities."

Some supported employees also struggled with irregular working hours and pay, while others noted their hours and shifts had been cut back by employers to the point where the job was not longer viable for them.

"It's not set. It's like, next week you work and the week after work rings you up and you work, but the hours and times wasn't organised well and set well. And the pay wasn't on time, it's not set like (current ADE). It's like three weeks, or six weeks or two months later you get paid."

#### Awareness of other people with disability working in open employment.

Across all locations, there was strong awareness of other people with disability in the community who were working in open employment. This included people working in a range of supermarkets, retail outlets, cafes and restaurants, and factories and warehouses, as well as in offices, law firms and hotels. Other roles noted included cleaning and gardening jobs and home maintenance.



When asked if they **would like to try a job in open employment**, a large number of supported employees (23) expressed a desire to do so. Those who said no noted that they were happy or comfortable in their current jobs in supported employment, with some of these supported employees noting they felt they would be unable to take on other roles due to the limitations of their disability, or due to being older or in poor health.

A number of supported employees noted they felt they would be treated poorly open employment and would not like to move from supported employment for this reason. This included many supported employees who had negative experiences in open employment in the past.

"They don't treat people with respect with a disability in open employment. They think you are in a square box, for example. They don't treat people with respect."

"I don't want to be going back to open employment. I've been in open employment, and they don't treat people with disability, they think you're a piece of paper. I think (current ADE) does a better job."

For those supported employees who expressed a desire to work with people who do not have a disability, the primary motivation was increased income. Some supported employees also noted that working in open employment would allow them to achieve a personal goal or pursue a personal interest, as well as allowing them to develop new skills.

"It would give me more confidence and skills."

Some supported employees noted working in open employment would provide them with more experience and variety and the opportunity to meet and interact with new people.

"You get to sit down and talk to other employees who don't have a disability and they listen to you, you'll go into smoko at different times and they'll talk to you about your disability."

"You can get more freedom in open employment."

### Jobs supported employees would like to do.

Most supported employees (18) who indicated a desire to move into open employment had a clear idea of the kind of job they would like to do. The jobs supported employees noted they would like to do in the future covered a wide range of employment types, from factory and warehouse work to hospitality and retail roles to office jobs and defence force or police roles.

Often these jobs involved similar tasks to those they were doing in their current ADE (for example, moving from doing gardening work in supported employment to working as a gardener in open employment).

"I'd like to work in Coles or Woolworths on a check out."

"I always wanted to be either a nursery hand or a kitchen hand."



Other supported employees were interested in jobs which reflected their personal areas of interest or long-held employment aspirations. A number of supported employees also expressed a desire to work within the disability sector and to help other people with disability.

"Working with animals, maybe. Because I do voluntary work at the animal shelter. So that's something I'd like to take on later."

"Something to do with helping other people with disabilities like me."

Some supported employees focused on jobs which they felt suited their skills and abilities, such as becoming an archivist "because I'm good with numbers and have a good memory".

### Support needed to get a job in open employment.

Most supported employees (20) who indicated they would like to work in open employment noted they currently lacked adequate awareness of how to seek a job, what jobs might be available and how to apply. A large number of supported employees noted the need for support to help them identify appropriate jobs, with suggestions including stronger links between ADEs and potential employers, work visits and more options for work experience and work trials.

Some supported employees noted the need for support to overcome the barriers presented by employers who had fixed views about people with disability. A number of supported employees noted the need for more awareness among potential employees of the value of hiring people with disability and the many roles people with disability can fill within workplaces.

"I've tried to apply for a job, and they've just turned around and said to me 'oh, we'll put it on file'...

"It's like they don't give you any chance to do the work...

"Exactly, I was happy to do work experience, but it's like, 'oh, put it on file'."

"I think potential employers need more understanding and knowledge of people with disability, because there's always been that mentality, not just in employment but in social life as well, there's always been that kind of thing of 'they're a bit different, stay away from these people'. So I think there needs to be more understanding. Just because we have a certain barrier, it doesn't mean we can't do something."

Many supported employees (11) noted they would need support with preparing resumes, applying for jobs, and doing interviews.

"Apply the job on my behalf. I try to do it by myself and I wasn't (able to) succeed. I prefer if the NDIS or DES applies for jobs on my behalf and go with me to the job interview."



"Interview skills for me. I get really nervous when it comes to interviews. I get really anxious. Probably have to take a couple of pills to calm down before I even get into the stupid interviews."

Some supported employees focused on the need for job-specific training to help them to build confidence and skills around specific job types before moving into open employment.

"Maybe those cash registers are different because they're computerised, so I might need training on that before I start. I might need a lot of training on that one."

"Training so you know what you're doing, that way they're not putting you in jobs and going 'you go and do that' and you don't know what you're doing."

"We need a little bit more help with what we can and what we can't do and how much experience we've got to get into that role."

Many supported employees (12) noted they would need a large amount of support, training and appropriate instruction from employers to help them learn and settle into a new job. This included the need to make them comfortable with other staff and management, as well as providing someone to work alongside them and show them how to complete the tasks required by their job. It was noted that this on-the-job support needed to be provided by staff and managers who understood the needs and learning styles of people with disability.

"When I first learn the job I'd probably need someone to sort of help me with the job until I learn how to do the job, because it usually takes a few times for me to pick things up."

"Probably somebody to show me what to do for a couple of days, having them by your side so you know what you're doing."

"They (staff in open employment) don't understand the disability sector. People in sheltered workshops might have more certificates or understanding of working with disability than the person who works with you at Coles or Safeway. In my experience I was very troubled being told everything, never being shown. I found that terribly different. Why can't you do just this simple task? Because you're telling me, not showing me."

Supported employees noted the importance of having someone external to the employer who could help them settle into their new role.

"If I had a carer with me, because Mum and Dad can't be there."

"Somebody there just to make me feel comfortable with the job."



# Awareness of the support the Australian Government offers to help supported employees find a job in open employment.

Almost none of the supported employees who were part of these consultations had any awareness of the support provided by the Australian Government that could help them to find a job in open employment. As noted above, many employees with a strong desire to move into open employment felt they had access to little or no support to find and be successful in commencing a job of this kind.

"There's nothing outside of work."

"They don't tell us about how to get a job outside of here."

A small number of supported employees (3) were aware of the support they could access, however few were able to name any specific sources of support or provide any details of this support. In the cases where supported employees were aware of this support, their primary source of information was through their ADE.



# SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK ON OTHER EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS AND SUPPORT REQUIRED TO MOVE INTO THESE JOBS.

#### Experiences of supported employees in open employment.

- Across the consultation locations, a large number of supported employees had some experience of working in open employment. A number of supported employees had also done work experience and/or work trials in a range of jobs.
- Almost all supported employees who had worked in open employment reported negative experiences.
- The most common of these related to a lack of appropriate support and training.
- Many supported employees noted they had been bullied, picked on, or treated poorly by managers, staff and/or customers.
- Many supported employees noted they had been given repetitive or menial tasks, and felt they weren't trusted or respected.

## Desire of supported employees to move into open employment.

- A significant number of supported employees expressed a desire to move into open employment in the future.
- Reasons for not wanting to move into open employment included being comfortable and happy with their current job, feeling they would be unable to cope in other jobs, and having negative perceptions of open employment (including negative past experiences).
- The primary motivation for moving to open employment was increased income.
- Other reasons for wanting to move to open employment included pursuing personal goals, gaining more skills and confidence, and getting more variety in the workplace.

#### Support needed to move to open employment.

- The main forms of support employees said they would need to move to open employment focused around help to find and apply for jobs.
- Some supported employees noted the need for support to overcome the barriers presented by employers who had fixed views about people with disability.
- Some supported employees focused on the need for job-specific training to help them to build confidence and skills around specific job types before moving into open employment.
- Many supported employees noted they would need a large amount of support, training and appropriate instruction from employers to help them learn and settle into a new job.

#### Awareness of Australian Government support.

- There were very low levels of awareness of the support offered by the Australian Government to help supported employees find a job in open employment.
- Supported employees noted their ADE would be their expected source for information on this kind of support.



#### DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS.

# 1. Significant numbers of supported employees want more hours and higher wages.

While the majority of supported employees consulted with were happy with their current wages, a significant number felt their wages were too low. This was particularly the case for those who were living independently and/or supporting family members. In many cases, the very real pressures of living costs and paying bills resulted in a strong desire to earn more income.

Importantly, many supported employees felt that their wages were unfair and were aware that ADE staff and those performing similar roles in open employment were making much more money and had higher hourly pay rates. For some, this caused feelings of frustration, demoralisation and depression.

Linked to this, a large number of supported employees indicated they would like to work more hours and/or days each week. Improved income was the primary motivation for working more hours, but other factors here included a desire to be more productive, as well as a desire the gain the skills and experience that would enable them to move into open employment.

# 2. Significant numbers of supported employees want more training and assessment, and more variety in the workplace.

Many supported employees noted a desire to receive more training. This included many supported employees who felt their current training was inadequate or irregular. Supported employees noted that training was important to their personal development and self-confidence, as well as providing them with a sense of achievement in terms of progressing in the workplace and achieving goals they had set. Many supported employees also noted that training and assessment is closely linked to wage increases, and that their current lack of assessment and training was preventing them from moving to a higher pay rate.

Related to this, many supported employees noted they found their current job boring and lacking in variety. This included some supported employees who are doing repetitive tasks that they find boring, as well as many supported employees who are aware of other tasks within their ADE that they would like try in order to have more variety in their working day or week. Here again, lack of assessment was noted as an impediment to getting more variety in the workplace, with some supported employees noting that they have been doing the same task for a number of months and years despite workplace discussions about providing them with other task options and more variety.



# 3. Significant numbers of supported employees want to move into open employment, but lack the support they need to do so.

Across the consultation locations, there was a significant number of supported employees who articulated a clear desire to move into specific roles in open employment. However, most of these supported employees felt they currently were not being given the support they would need to find a job, apply and be accepted, and to successfully begin work. Many supported employees noted they currently lacked an understanding of what jobs were available for them and who could help them find these jobs. Many also noted that they were concerned about processes such as applications and interviews, and wanted more support to help them prepare for seeking employment.

For many supported employees, there was a very real sense that there are few or no services that can help them to move into open employment, and that they will 'fail' in some way if they begin a new job in open employment due to a lack of support and a lack of understanding of disability among employers. Many supported employees noted they felt they would not be provided with adequate support in the early days and weeks of beginning a new role and often due to previous negative experiences in open employment, were concerned about stepping away from supported employment to begin a new job.

Importantly, many supported employees, including many with a clear desire to move into open employment, had very low levels of awareness of the support provided by the Australian Government that could help them to do so. Only a handful of supported employees were able to articulate the support they could access, and only a small number were confident that they currently were progressing along an achievable pathway to their preferred job (or any job outside of supported employment).

# 4. The majority of supported employees are happy with their current jobs and working conditions.

Despite the comments noted above, the majority of supported employees who were part of this consultation process noted they were happy with their current job and workplace, as well as their pay rates, working hours, training and the work environment. For a large number of supported employees who were part of group discussions or interviews, their current ADE provides a positive environment where they feel safe and supported, and, in particular, have social interaction with people who are their friends and who they often consider 'family'. This includes many supported employees who have not worked in open employment and who have no desire to, as well as many who have had negative experiences in open employment and see their future as being in supported employment.



5. Some ADEs are providing strong support for employees to gain the skills, experience and confidence they need to move into open employment.

It should be noted that across the locations visited and the supported employees consulted with, there is evidence that some ADEs are providing high levels of individualised support to their employees. While the support employees feel they are receiving ranges from very little to a lot, it is clear that some ADEs are working in partnership with employees to provide them with the skills and experience they need to do their preferred jobs and are focused on helping some supported employees to progress confidently into future roles in open employment.



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# **ATTACHMENT A: INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS**

# Talking to supported employees

# Information for you

Easy Read version



This information is written in an easy to read way. We use pictures to explain some ideas.



This document has been written by Gilimbaa. When you see the word 'we', it means Gilimbaa.



You can ask for help to read this document. A friend, family member or support person may be able to help you.



# What are we asking you to do?



**Supported employees** are people who work in **Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs)**.



The Australian Government has asked us to talk to you.



We want to ask you about the job you have now.

We want to know:



• what you like about it



• how to make it better.

## You can talk to us:



• in a group with other employees



• in an interview with one other person.



Your ideas will help the Government do more to support people in jobs like yours.

# How will it work?



If you want to take part, someone will come and ask you some questions.



You can read the questions now so that you can think about them.



We want you to be honest about what you think.



We will respect your ideas.



We will write a report after we talk to everyone.



We won't put your name in the report.

#### What can I do now?



You can tell us if you want to take part.



We will give you the list of questions to take home.



You can think about the questions before we talk to you.



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# ATTACHMENT B: DISCUSSION GUIDE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

# Talking to supported employees

### **Questions for you**

Easy Read version

#### How to use this document



This information is written in an easy to read way. We use pictures to explain some ideas.



Some words are written in **bold**. We explain what these words mean. There is a list of these words on page 11.



You can ask for help to read this document. A friend, family member or support person may be able to help you.



We have given you some space on each page where you can write down your ideas.



#### What we want to know



More than just good business

Supported employees are people who work in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs).



We want to ask you about the job you have now.

We want to know:



• what you like about it, and



• how to make it better.



Your ideas will help the Government do more to support people in jobs like yours.

# **About your job**

## What kind of work do you do?

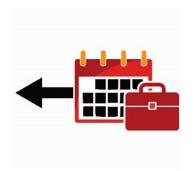


How long have you worked in this job?



How did you choose:

- this job?
- the place where you work?



What did you do before you started at this job?





What do you need to know when you're looking for a job?



Is this the kind of job you wanted?



Did you want a different kind of job?



### How much do you work?



How many days do you work each week?



How many hours do you work each day?



Would you like to work more or less hours?

## What do you like most about your job? Why?



What don't you like about your job? Why?



# Ideas for making jobs like yours better





Do you need help to make your job better?

Are you learning new things at your job?

Would you like to do more training or learn new things?



How would learning new things make your job better?

What do you think about your pay?

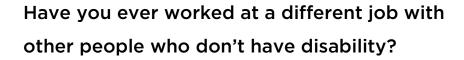
Is the amount you get paid:



- too low?
- enough?
- too high?



# Working with people who don't have disability





What was that like?

Why did you leave that job?

Do you know anyone who works in a job with people who don't have disability?

For example:



• at a supermarket



• at another business that is not an ADE.





What jobs do they do?



Would you like to try something like that?



What would be good about working with people who don't have disability?



Do you know what support you can get from the Government to help you find a job that is not at an ADE?



# If you could have any job you like, what would it be?



What help would you need to work in another job?

For example:



• at a café



• in a shop.



# **Anything else**



Do you have anything else you want to tell us?

Do you have any questions?



Would you like to know what other employees think about this?



#### **Word list**



#### More than just good business

#### **Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE)**

Australian Disability Enterprises are businesses that employ people with disability.



#### **Supported Employee**

A supported employee is a person with disability who is supported to do their job.



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