

Challenge Community Services submission to Disability Employment Strategy

This submission focuses on employment strategy for people with intellectual disability and people with psychosocial disability.

This submission provides a description of Start Up which is a program designed and developed by Challenge Community Services (CCS) that has been successful in increasing meaningful and mainstream employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability. CCS is currently adapting this model for First Nations people with disability and is seeking to adapt the model for people with psychosocial disability.

Mainstream employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability

- Supported employment is often offered as the only opportunity for employment for people with intellectual disability
- People with mild to moderate intellectual disability are seeking employment opportunities that utilise their strengths and skills and provide an opportunity for mainstream employment
- A lack of understanding of intellectual disability by business owners and employers is a significant barrier to mainstream employment
- People with intellectual disability have an unemployment rate over 20% compared with 5% of the general population

Low labour force participation of people with psychosocial disability

- People with psychosocial disability have one of the lowest rates of labour force participation with 33.5% compared to 62.3% of people with other disability (<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/psychosocial-disability>)
- People with psychosocial disability were more likely to experience discrimination because of their disability than those with other disability
- A strategy to for people with psychosocial disability to return to the labour force is required as well as a strategy for employment
- Low rates of NDIS participation are also a factor in low labour force participation
 - Approximately 1 in 8 people with psychosocial disability have an NDIS package (<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/psychosocial-disability>)

Entrepreneurship as a facilitator of meaningful employment, including self-employment, for people with intellectual disability

As identified in the consultation paper, people with disability are often highly innovative and possess skills, driven by disability or inaccessibility that people without disability do not have: *“people with disability often demonstrate strengths such as problem-solving skills, agility, persistence, forethought and a willingness to experiment—all of which are essential for innovation”*

Start Up, designed and developed by CCS, is based on this premise.

Start Up

Start Up is a self-employment program which utilises entrepreneurship as a facilitator for creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability.

Start Up assist people with disability to identify the skills and strengths that are unique to them and assists them to turn these skills into a microbusiness or self-employment opportunity.

Start Up was initially designed for people with intellectual disability. Start Up has been run in Newcastle and Tamworth and has also included people with: Cerebral Palsy; Autism; acquired brain injury; psychosocial disability and; acquired physical disability.

Start Up outcomes that relate to this strategy

1. Increased employability and self-efficacy of people with disability
2. Increased employer understanding of the valuable skills and ideas that people with disability have
3. Increased willingness of employers to employ a person with disability
4. Increased opportunity for people with disability to undertake meaningful employment based on their skills and strengths
5. Increased expectations of people with disability by families, friends and support providers

Key components of Start Up

- Start Up is peer led and delivered by people with disability for people with disability
- Start Up is strengths based on focuses on the skills and strengths that a person has which facilitates a positive environment and improved confidence and self-esteem
- Start Up focuses on the strengths and skills that are unique to each participant due to their disability
- Start Up encourages participants to take pride in their disability and in the skills they have developed through disability
- Start Up generates local business and employer support and facilitates networking between participants and the local business community. This breaks down communication barriers and reduces stigma
- Start Up coordinates events for participants, mentors, business leaders, employers and service providers to showcase the skills and ideas of people with disability
- Start Up generates very positive media attention for the program and for individual participants
 - <https://lighthouse.mq.edu.au/article/october-2020/Start-Up-program-unleashes-the-entrepreneur-in-people-with-disabilities>
 - <https://www.nbnnews.com.au/2020/11/04/ndis-funded-program-helping-people-run-a-successful-business/>

Program delivery

Start Up was initially funded by Information, Linkages and Capacity (ILC) Building grants however CCS has now modelled Start Up so that it can be provided to NDIS participants through their individual funding packages.

CCS is seeking to adapt Start Up for people with psychosocial disability to increase labour force participation and increase the opportunities for meaningful employment for people with psychosocial disability.

Start Up utilises non-standard employment platforms such as the gig economy (eBay, MadPaws) to build meaningful self-employment opportunities.

Opportunity to transfer and scale Start Up

Challenge Community Services is working with other NDIS providers to roll Start Up out in new locations and to different participants. Challenge Community Services provides the course content and model for free to providers who agree to keep it peer led.

Challenge Community Services recently provided the model to Fighting Chance who have begun delivering Start Up in Sydney.

Challenge Community Services is also working with Down Syndrome Australia to develop Start Up resources specifically for people with Down Syndrome.

Disability Employment Strategy

Challenge Community Services encourages Department of Social Services to include entrepreneurship and self-employment in the Disability Employment Strategy.

Challenge Community Services encourages DSS to consider models, like Start Up, to facilitate meaningful employment for people with intellectual disability and people with psychosocial disability.