



HOTEL ETICO
BLUE MOUNTAINS

Hotel Etico Australia's submission to the National Disability Employment Strategy Consultation Paper

6 May 2021

Hotel Etico Australia applauds the Australian Government's decision to develop a National Disability Employment Strategy. We fully support both Vision and Priority Areas and acknowledge that employment is a significant component, if not the most important, of anyone's ability (and human right) to live an independent life and be a productive member of their community as well as a vehicle to changing community attitudes.

Hotel Etico is one of the newest disability-focussed social enterprises in Australia, a registered NDIS provider, adopting a methodology proven successful overseas as part of a social franchise model that sees employment and training in hospitality as a perfect approach to providing a context that is inclusive, positive and ground-breaking at the same time.

People with intellectual disabilities are employed and trained for a period of 12 months, supported while working alongside hospitality professionals as peers, shifting perceptions and attitudes of hotel guests and community.

The focus is all on abilities rather than barriers, on building the capacity of people with intellectual disability to live an independent life through the on-site Academy of Independence (where our trainees live while working at the hotel) as well as dramatically and permanently shifting community perceptions about people with intellectual disabilities in Australia.

Hotel guests experience the true value of every individual regardless of their physical or cognitive challenges, in a comfortable, inclusive and welcoming setting. Each guest becomes an immediate ambassador in the community, ready to share with others their change of attitudes towards people with disability.

We strongly believe that the social enterprise model offers a unique springboard opportunity to accelerate shifts in community attitudes. While Hotel Etico is a registered charity, one of its unique features is positioning itself as a business, with a commercial approach to its operations, which has the effect of not only allowing long term self-sustainability as an organisation, but also of immediately proving the value of integrating people with a disability in a business, providing a real example to be followed by other businesses.



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We see our approach as having a perfect alignment to the proposed National Disability Employment Strategy and believe that having the Strategy in place will stimulate further examples of sustainable businesses that integrate the employment of people with disability as a normal part of their business strategy.

The multiplying effect such businesses would have on community and business community attitudes is almost immeasurable but definitely very tangible and experienced at Hotel Etico on a daily basis.

We acknowledged that there is a huge amount of work to be done to lift employer engagement and capability “to confidently hire, support and develop more people with disability” but truly believe that the Vision and proposed priority areas of the Strategy will dramatically help in generating and sustain change.

We encourage the Australian Government to put in place strategies to further facilitate models like Hotel Etico and other social enterprises with an employment focus as this would harness that multiplying effect, proving to others what is possible, effectively “doing the hard work” on behalf of the business community, proving what can be done. Using these successful social enterprises as role models would catalyse momentum within local business communities through local chambers of commerce, business networks and peak bodies, providing real examples of best practice.

By investing directly into participants without limiting them to SLES or DES, NDIA can create more employment opportunity. One of the greatest barriers to organisations such as ours are people being funded for SLES and not being able to utilise these funds within our program or people not receiving enough funding to commit to the whole program. The consultation paper is promising in that it suggests a change in perspective, that perhaps strong, consistent, moderately termed investment in people with disability can yield a better long term socioeconomic result for the individual and society.

Social enterprises like Hotel Etico are in a perfect position to be such role models, facilitating growing communities of practice, normalising new approaches to doing business in an inclusive and supportive way as well as changing individuals’ attitudes in a non-challenging way.

Employment is the most direct and empowering path to sustainable independence and Hotel Etico believes the Australian Government should dedicate energy, policies and resources to ensure employment of people with disabilities is embedded in the Australian culture. The National Disability Employment Strategy definitely goes in the right direction.