



**Australian Federation of
Disability Organisations**

Response to Disability Employment Support Model Consultation Paper

Submission by AFDO

January 2022

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About AFDO

Since 2003, the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) and Disability Representative Organisation (DRO), has been the recognised national peak organisation in the disability sector, along with its disability specific members, representing people with disability. AFDO's mission is to champion the rights of people with disability in Australia and support them to participate fully in Australian life.

Our member organisations represent disability specific communities with a total reach of over 3.8 million Australians.

AFDO continues to provide a strong, trusted, independent voice for the disability sector on national policy, inquiries, submissions, systemic advocacy and advisory on government initiatives with the Federal and State/Territory governments.

We work to develop a community where people with disability can participate in all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life. This includes genuine participation in mainstream community life, the development of respectful and valued relationships, social and economic participation, and the opportunity to contribute as valued citizens.

Our vision

That all people with disabilities must be involved equally in all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life.

Our mission

Using the strength of our membership-based organisations to harness the collective power of uniting people with disability to change society into a community where everyone is equal.

Our strategic objectives

To represent the united voice of our members and people with disability in national initiatives and policy debate.

To enhance the profile, respect and reputation for AFDO through our members.

To build the capacity and sustainability of AFDO and our members.

To foster strong collaboration and engagement between our members and stakeholders.

To enhance AFDO's connection and influence in international disability initiatives, particularly in the Asia Pacific region, through policy, advocacy and engagement.

Our members

Full members:

- Arts Access Australia
- Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia
- Blind Citizens Australia
- Brain Injury Australia
- Deaf Australia
- Deafblind Australia
- Deafness Forum of Australia
- Down Syndrome Australia
- Disability Advocacy Network Australia
- Disability Justice Australia
- Disability Resources Centre
- Enhanced Lifestyles
- National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF)
- People with Disability WA
- People with Disabilities ACT
- Polio Australia
- Physical Disability Australia
- Women with Disabilities Victoria
- Women with Disabilities ACT

Associate members:

- AED Legal Centre
- All Means All
- Amaze
- Aspergers Victoria
- Disability Advocacy and Complaints Service of South Australia (DACSSA)
- Disability Law Queensland
- Leadership Plus
- National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (NOFASD)
- Star Victoria
- TASC National Limited
- YDAS – Youth Disability Advocacy Service



Acknowledgements

AFDO acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we stand, recognizing their continuing connection to land, waters, and community. From our head office in Melbourne, we pay our respects to the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation and to their Elders past, present, and emerging. We also pay our respects to the traditional owners of all lands on which we operate or meet around the country.

AFDO acknowledges people with disability, particularly those individuals that have experienced or are continuing to experience violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. We also acknowledge their families, supporters, and representative organisations and express our thanks for the continuing work we all do in their support.

This Submission has been compiled by the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO). We would like to thank the organisations and individuals who have contributed information, personal stories, and case studies to assist in the writing of this Submission.

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Recommendations

1. Who should be able to access a specialist disability employment program?

AFDO recommends

- That any person with a disability should be able to access support to find employment appropriate to their goals, qualifications, and capacity;
- That the current parameters for access to DES that exclude people with disability be reconfigured to offer broader, more meaningful support to people with disability seeking employment;
- That this work be done in conjunction with people with disability and their representative organisations;
- That any changes to DES incorporate the reality of the contemporary job market by factoring in the gig economy, casual, part-time, and seasonal work;
- That DES be realigned to ensure that all persons with disability, irrespective of work hours they can commit, be eligible for placement;
- That relevant experience and expertise in work placement preparedness be embedded within the NDIA for NDIS participants to access; and
- That the NDIA work with all government departments to develop employment opportunities for Participants across the Public Service.

2. How can we simplify entry to the disability employment support model?

AFDO recommends

- That consideration be given to re-introducing specialist providers with disability-specific knowledge;
- That the DES funding arrangement be reconfigured to encourage an expectation of post-placement support for both the person with the disability and the employer over the first twelve months of any placement;
- That the largely unhelpful practice of 'benchmarking' be removed; and
- That DES recognise people with disability are as diverse as the general population in their needs, abilities, and capacity, and that adequate assessment mechanisms reflecting this reality be developed in conjunction with people with disability and their representative organisations.

5. What support do employers need to attract, employ, and retain people with disability?

AFDO recommends

- That strong and positive connections be formally fostered between employers and people with disability and disability support networks;

- That a trusted third-party brokerage service (like BIDS) be developed and maintained specifically to engage, encourage, train and support employers of the benefits of employing people with disability;
- That particular supports be developed for SMOs to build their disability confidence;
- That a substantial amount of time and funding be invested in developing and maintaining a robust business education and training program on inclusion and diversity led by experienced disability representative organisations;
- That Disability and Inclusion Networks be created to provide opportunity for networking and foster peer support amongst businesses; and
- That stronger interaction be supported between student transition programs, DES providers and business.

AFDO also endorses the following recommendations from the Family Advocacy Submission:¹

Recommendation 1: Recognise and support “family” as the agents of positive social change and as such, build their capacity to have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to have high expectations and a strong vision to create, facilitate and support employment for the person with disability in their life.

Recommendation 2: Provide for a suite of innovative, contemporary models such as the School to Work project, Customised employment, Microbusinesses, and the Rotary Employment Project. There is no one-size-fits all model. Flexibility is the key to success.

Recommendation 3: Put the person with disability at the centre of the new Disability Employment Support model instead of the job. Invest in a proper discovery process first, getting to know a person’s strengths and interests, their contributions and the conditions needed for success. Get to know the culture of the employer.

Recommendation 4: Involve people with lived experience of disability and/or their family representative in the co-design, implementation and monitoring of the new Disability Employment Support model.

Recommendation 5: Acknowledge the nexus between segregated education and poor employment outcomes and recommend the Department of Education adopt the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education’s *Driving change: A Roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia* to help realise equitable education outcomes for students with disability.

Recommendation 6: Commit to end segregated employment to ensure Australia meets its obligations under the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with

¹ Family Advocacy 2021, 3.

Disabilities with a phasing out of Australian Disability Enterprises and transitioning workers to regular employment settings which includes equal remuneration - real jobs for real pay.

Recommendation 7: Acknowledge and address the compounding disadvantage that comes with intersectional barriers that make it harder for people with disabilities from other marginalised groups to get a job and keep a job.

Recommendation 9: Commit to fund projects, research and innovative initiatives focused on promoting employment and improved community attitudes towards disability, which also includes an evaluation of good practices.

Recommendation 10: Set a 15% quota for public service employment of people with disabilities. No less than 5% of that 15 % be available for people with complex and significant disabilities.

Introduction

The current approach to disability employment in Australia does not reflect the reality of disability, nor that of the evolving, post-pandemic job market. This is demonstrated in the statistical evidence, which shows that people aged between 15 and 64 years with disability have lower rates of labour force participation (53.4%) and higher unemployment rates (10.3%) than people without disability (84.1% and 4.6% respectively).² In the past decade, the gap between employment rates for people with disability versus those without has widened, and over 30% of people with disability report that it is challenging to find paid employment.³ In comparison to other OECD countries, participation rates for people with disability in Australia have remained largely stagnant.⁴

Inequitable employment participation continues to be one of the most significant issues compromising the life outcomes of people with disability in Australia. AFDO acknowledges the commitment and investment of the Commonwealth to act; however, program outcomes generally remain low and are unlikely to address the employment participation needs of people with disability to the required level.

It is important to emphasise that these lower levels of participation are not an issue of insufficient motivation, but instead derive from systemic factors.

Research suggests that disability employment rates could be increased considerably, with only a 5% difference between employment levels observed between people with disability and those without after accounting for demographic factors.⁵ Another study attributed Australia's significant disparity in employment rates to what they termed "removeable barriers", namely limited capacity and systemic factors.⁶ This research is in line with the Productivity Commission's 2011 modelling, which predicted a greater change in employment levels for people with disability.⁷

To change the story of disability to one of employment participation and prosperity, we need a high performing support system that enables people with disability to gain meaningful and sustainable work. Current labour market programs targeted at people with disability looking for work are failing to deliver effective, lasting employment outcomes, with only approximately one in four people with disability reaching an outcome rate of 26 weeks or greater.⁸ Of employers who know about DES, only 3% use the services available.⁹

Changes to the eligibility rules for the Disability Support Pension (DSP) have forced some people with disability on to unemployment benefits with the stated aim of encouraging entry into paid employment. But without simultaneous investment in making the workplace structurally more accessible or increasing real job opportunities, these changes have only further contributed to the poverty and financial stress experienced by many people with disability. The focus of successive governments has been to treat the workforce

² D’Rosario & Lloyd-Cape 2021, 17.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jensen et al. 2005.

⁶ Deloitte Access Economics 2011.

⁷ D’Rosario & Lloyd-Cape 2021, 17

⁸ AFDO 2017.

⁹ Ibid.

participation of people with disability as a separate agenda to broader employment and workforce reform, rather than an essential component to redress skill shortages, increase productivity, contribute to economic growth, and lessen welfare dependency.

A much more rigorous and accountable employment support regime is desperately needed to promote greater opportunities for economic security for people with disability seeking paid work. With the unemployment rate almost double that of Australians without a disability (9.4% as compared to 4.9%) and Australia ranked 21 out of 29 as compared to other OECD countries, it is clear that current mechanisms are not working and that a new way forward is needed.¹⁰

There is also an expectation within the current system that people with disability will somehow “find their own way” through the complex and multilayered systems of welfare, education, vocational training, and disability employment programs into employment. While many people with disability have successfully navigated the system or have gained employment through their own efforts, the current system does not provide a continuum where all parts are intuitively connected.

AFDO is clear that any reform of the welfare system must be met with parallel systemic reforms which support real jobs for real wages in open employment. A reform to welfare without a focus on job creation and workforce participation disregards the intent of the NDIS and Australia’s Disability Strategy to enable people with disability to contribute as economic citizens.

¹⁰ AFDO 2017

1. Who should be able to access a specialist disability employment program?

1.1. Who should be able to access a disability employment support program?

Any person with a disability should be able to access a disability employment support program. The current parameters applied by disability employment services to potential applicants exclude many people with disability from support. In particular, the requirements around eligibility and capacity are restrictive and exclusionary.

In order to provide equity for Australians with disability seeking support to find and keep meaningful employment, a new set of eligibility parameters needs to be developed. Existing proof of disability (medical record, DSP, etc.) would be accepted as the key requirement to apply for employment support. The revised parameters would be developed in conjunction with people with disability and their representative organisations and support networks and would be based on the Customised Employment (CE) model, ensuring a person-centred approach and creating favourable conditions for successful employment placement and retention.

1.2. Should a future disability employment support program include employment pathways such as casual and part-time employment, community engagement, voluntary work, and short-term unpaid work experience?

AFDO believes that any future disability employment support program must function in line with the reality of the contemporary job market, in which casual, part-time, and seasonal work has become increasingly prevalent. There is now an opportunity for the DES program to align itself with modern employment outcomes and the gig economy. AFDO feels that the DES program is too rigid in its measurement and recognition of job outcomes, i.e., setting minimum hours and measuring success based on longevity with a specific employer.

Meaningful employment for people with disability should be more aligned to and defined by the hours an individual wants to work, not the hours they are told they can work. With that said, extreme care must be taken to prevent exploitation of people with disability in casualised and gig economy work and including them in a future disability employment support program would require further systemic work to reform this category of employment and reduce exploitation in general.

1.4. What is the role of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in supporting employment pathways, and how can this complement a future disability employment support program?

The NDIS has a significant role in ensuring that the goals and aspirations for participants in their plan development and subsequent reviews includes due consideration of the participants' views on employment, inclusive of training or development to allow for their right to economic participation. This should be a broad discussion in the planning process or review to encapsulate all aspects of the wider definition of employment with traineeships, work experience, skill development, tertiary or further education, mentoring, and related activities to assist them with achieving their employment goals. The process

would be aimed at taking place for those participants in mid-to-later years secondary education and include all those beyond school levels. There would need to be relevant expertise developed and embedded in the Agency and in particular with planners to ensure that the current options and systems for employment of people with disability are known, maintained, and fully explored in the planning and review process. This should include a focus on both disability employment pathways as well as mainstream employment pathways for consideration by the participant.

The Agency should also look at working with all government departments – including existing structures aimed at ensuring greater numbers of people with disability in the public service – to develop an option for employment and/or work experience for participants who have identified employment in their plans. The Agency should also be providing these opportunities within its own operations, allowing increased experience, training, mentoring, and ultimately opportunities for employment of participants in open employment organisations via DES or by direct engagement.

2. How can we simplify entry to the disability employment support model?

2.1. How can the assessment process be improved to connect people with disability to the right employment services?

Consider re-introducing specialist providers who have knowledge and understanding of specific disabilities. Development of any assessment process should be codesigned with people with disability.

2.2. What should be considered during the assessment process when determining support required to help a person reach their work potential?

AFDO is concerned about the short-sighted nature of the current DES system, wherein providers are largely concerned with pushing people with disability into any job, regardless of its suitability, for the required amount of time in order to meet their KPIs. The vast majority of DES providers no longer seem interested or able to offer post-placement support (PPS) to either their clients or employers. Due to the nature of the funding, there is a disincentive for DES providers to undertake PPS. The reason most commonly given is: “there is no money in the funding arrangement anymore”.

This lack of continuity of care is extremely detrimental to ongoing longer-term job success, as is reflected in the outcome statistics. Matching of candidates to the employer’s culture and any exploration or support of their understanding or awareness of people with disability is not a main priority for placements. Instead, they prioritise finding a previously participating organisation irrespective of previous outcomes, or a new one who agrees to participate, however they fail to provide the new organisation with any depth of understanding of the benefits of employing people with disability or how this needs to be handled and what supports are available.

2.3. How can the assessment process stream an individual with disability toward the right type of employment support, depending on need and goal?

AFDO believes that the assessment process could be improved by removing benchmarking, which is often a ‘guesstimate’ at best and restricts the options of the DES provider, the jobseeker, and the employer. An example of this limitation can be seen in those with fluctuating or episodic conditions, which includes many kinds of psychosocial disability. A jobseeker with such a condition may be assessed as being capable of working at least 23 hours per week, however this is impossible to confirm when their condition has by potential to vary dramatically week-by-week.

2.4. Are there different assessments needed at different stages of an individual’s work journey, as they prepare for work, find and maintain employment, and progress their career?

Yes. People with disability are not a homogenous, fixed group that remains the same over time. Just as with individuals in the general community, people with disability will experience a range of contexts and have changing needs throughout their work journey. As such, any Disability Employment Support Model must be flexible and responsive, with adequate mechanisms for assessment throughout an individual’s employment journey and life course.

5. What support do employers need to attract, employ, and retain people with disability?

At the national level, there is a broad economic imperative to support people with disability into employment, with greater workforce participation being a key driving factor for economic growth and increased productivity. For employers, the ‘business-case’ for recruiting and retaining people with disability emphasises multiple benefits, including access to an increased talent pool; enhanced creativity and innovation; reduced absenteeism and longer tenure; and the ability to market to a more diverse customer base.¹¹

Encouragingly, research has suggested that the single most important factor influencing an employer’s decision to hire people with disability are positive experiences and strong connections with people with disability and disability support networks.¹² Disability brokerage services like AFDO’s proven Business Inclusion & Diversity Services (BIDS), formerly named the Diversity Field Officer Service (DFOS) as outlined later in this submission, are one such avenue through which this contact should occur, enabling the transformation of community attitudes towards people with disability that is required to promote their full inclusion in all aspects of life.

Despite being an essential element in the disability employment equation, the voices of employers are conspicuously absent across the research literature, both in Australia and internationally.¹³ This lack of attention to demand-side forces is particularly evident in the case of small to medium employers (SMOs). While larger employers with dedicated human resources teams have made progress in developing disability employment initiatives, the voices of SMOs are largely missing from the conversation.¹⁴ Research suggests that in addition to lacking the HR capabilities of their larger cousins, SMOs are largely unaware of the supports available to them, and even if they are, lack the capacity to navigate the complex and ever-changing matrix of services available.¹⁵ Furthermore, SMOs harbour anxieties regarding perceived safety, legal, and cost issues, despite all available evidence to the contrary.¹⁶ This is particularly concerning given that SMOs employ over 90% of Australians.¹⁷ The Australian government acknowledged this precise phenomenon in its 2010-2013 review of Disability Employment Services (DES), conceding that while 75% of employers who accessed DES described the service as ‘good’ or ‘very good’, only 52% of employers sampled were previously aware of DES, and only 3% had used its services in the preceding 12 months.¹⁸

Further research has concluded that in place of formal disability awareness training, SMOs would prefer to build their disability confidence through working with “trusted brokers”.¹⁹ An

¹¹ Murfitt et al. 2018; Mor Barak 2014.

¹² Murfitt et al. 2018.

¹³ Murfitt et al. 2018, Waterhouse et al. 2010A.

¹⁴ Murfitt et al. 2018; Gustafsson et al. 2013; Waterhouse et al. 2010B.

¹⁵ Murfitt et al. 2018; Gustafsson et al. 2013; Waterhouse et al. 2010B.

¹⁶ Graffam et al. 2002; Australian Safety & Compensation Commission 2007; Hernandez & McDonald 2010.

¹⁷ Murfitt et al. 2021; Waterhouse et al. 2010A.

¹⁸ DSS 2014.

¹⁹ Murfitt et al. 2018; Waterhouse et al. 2010B.

example of this can again be seen in AFDO's BIDS model, detailed later in the Submission.

5.1. What are the most important things that can be done to build an employer's confidence to employ a person with disability?

Increasing knowledge and understanding of disability builds employer confidence. AFDO has observed and recorded this phenomenon in case studies and testimonials from businesses in the Geelong region who participated in the BIDS program. Many of these employers stated that fear of the unknown and concern about saying or doing the wrong thing is a primary reason why a business may be hesitant to hire a person with disability. This is demonstrated in the following testimony by Helen Gane of EGF Solutions, a DES Provider:

I feel that the services offered by AFDO's Diversity Field Officers [BIDS] had a really positive impact on the employers that I encountered in my Business Development role at a DES within the Geelong region. The information and advice they received enabled them to become more disability friendly and inclusive. One in particular was Deb Murray, from Queenscliff Brew House.

Deb attended one of the three-hour Disability Workforce [BIDS] workshops in 2019. This workshop provided her with practical support and advice to identify improvements in order to become more confident and accessible to employ a person or persons with disability. Part of this program was also a recommendation for Deb to consider becoming a part of the Passport 2 Employment Program, which supports students with disability to find paid work outside of school.

Deb agreed to be involved and subsequently attended a Mock Interview Day run by the program, where she met a student, Kyle Mitchell, who indicated during his interview that he was interested in pursuing a career in Hospitality. As a result of this meeting and her involvement in the Passport 2 Employment program, Deb agreed to take Kyle on as a Casual Kitchen Hand, where he has been working now for nearly 12 months.

Becoming involved in this program in addition to the service provided by the Diversity Field Officers gave her not only the tools necessary to create an inclusive workplace, but also increased her confidence to work with people with disability and understand the benefits this can bring to a business.²⁰

5.2. What services and supports does a disability employment support service need to offer employers to enable them to recruit people with disability, maintain their employment and promote career growth?

AFDO believes that much more time and investment should be devoted to a robust business education and training program on inclusion and diversity. AFDO provides business-oriented training on disability types and awareness, individual casual bias, working with people with disability, understanding the value and benefits of people with disability currently in or joining their organisation, etc., all designed and delivered by people with disability.

²⁰ Testimony of Helen Gane, EGF Solutions.

The importance of such training can be seen in the following case studies:²¹

Case study 1:

A medium-sized community-focused not-for-profit organisation working in the aged sector joined the DFOS as it was having difficulties recruiting within its food services division. The business was also motivated to give people an opportunity, a sense of worth, and independence.

One of the business' core values is cultural diversity, with the CEO drawing on the DFOS learnings to broaden the scope of this definition. Building capacity across the leadership team was critical to the CEO, who invited DFOS to present to 18 senior staff on two separate occasions at leadership days. The first presentation focused on building confidence through training in disability awareness and unconscious bias. The second session introduced the concept of job carving, with a break-out session identifying forty tasks across multiple business areas. Attendees shared that the session opened their minds to opportunities that had previously not been considered and valued roles that could be undertaken.

The CEO recognised that cultural change within the organisation could not happen overnight nor without the support of her leadership group:

“I want to challenge the leadership team to think about how friendly we really are and who would pose the barriers internally for us employing people with disability. I want them to think about their own unconscious bias. We focus on diversity; we celebrate diversity here. This flows in perfectly.”

“If we don't have buy-in from the leadership team, it won't flow through the organisation.”

The business initially worked with DFOS to assist with recruitment challenges in the food services area. DFOS assisted the business to change the wording on their job advertisements to be more disability friendly. As a result, one candidate with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) applied for the position. Prior to the interview, the manager accessed a JobAccess resource titled “How to interview a candidate with ASD”; with JobAccess having previously been unfamiliar to the business. While the candidate was unsuccessful, the manager found the experience to be invaluable, excitedly sharing that he had felt more confident and was pleased that welcoming wording had opened the door to new people. Based on his growing confidence, the manager approached DFOS to help the business identify candidates for two café attendant roles in 2017.

Two staff attended disability awareness training that was arranged by DFOS for participating businesses. The business intends to introduce disability awareness training as a compulsory element of the 2017/2018 education plan for staff. Unconscious bias has also been identified as important. The business is also preparing a Wellbeing Plan in 2017 that will include mental health resources.

²¹ See Appendix 1 for two additional case studies.

5.3. What are examples of good practice of employer engagement and employer-led initiatives that have been shown to improve employment outcomes for people with disability? How could these be scaled in the disability employment program?

It is crucial to prioritise time spent with the employer to educate and inform, thus building their disability confidence. The current DES program does not provide that incentive to providers, and possibly couldn't, as it involves specialist knowledge on disability, disability types, and the needs of people with disability in employment. This is further demonstrated in the following case study of AusPits:

A manufacturing business heard about the job carving concept from a fellow Diversity Field Officer Service (DFOS) business at the GROW report card in early 2017. The business saw the potential for synergy with their own business needs as a large-scale, high-speed concrete pourer of pits, with an ongoing need for a small team to support productivity by keeping work areas clean, keeping production tools stocked and stacked, tracking production inventory, and taking care of back-end issues.

The Diversity Field Officer and the DES consultant attended a 6am shift to observe and note all possible duties that could be undertaken across a shift. The General Manager - Operations, HR Manager, and Manufacturing Operations Training Facilitator then brainstormed a list of duties that could be undertaken between 10am – 3pm each day (as the 6am shift precluded some candidates with disability who do not have a drivers' license or may be taking medication). Both managers were 'fast-tracked', that is, given education about the definition of disability and unconscious bias and given tools to use to educate the manufacturing team once an applicant was found. The shortlisted applicant was interviewed, with employment commencing in June 2018. The role is permanent part-time at 30 hours per week.

Quote from DES provider:

*"I think they (managers interviewing) were just trying to keep the surprise and delight off their faces. He really impressed them. I don't know what they were thinking, but they were clearly delighted and relieved such a great candidate was sitting in front of them. **You can talk about disability all you like but it's only when you experience someone that challenges your pre-conceptions that real change and shifts in awareness happen.**"²²*

The successful candidate, Ryan, has now been in the role for five months. After three months, the impact areas of Ryan's efforts were:

- *Staff morale increased as materials are easily assessable.*
- *Building times of products have improved.*
- *Materials are organised and all in their correct place.*
- *Improved housekeeping of yard.*
- *Manufacturing materials are well-stocked.*
- *Safer workplace as materials are now located in all areas of the workplace, which cuts down on foot traffic in areas where machines operate.*
- *His positive attitude has "rubbed off" on staff.*

Quote from Manufacturing Operations Training Facilitator:

"It's been enjoyable working with Ryan. He has quickly grasped knowledge of our

²² Quote from DES provider 2018, emphasis added.

manufacturing and shown great enthusiasm to tackling any improvements within the yard.”

Ryan is still very much enjoying working at AusPits and has become a very valuable member of the Utility team, although he has had some recurring issues with his leg which Ryan has raised with his doctor. His doctor most recently advised him to have a week off. Ryan and the Operations trainer discussed a path forward for managing this, and they have agreed that Ryan will work one day less than what he has been doing up until now. AusPits have checked in with DFOS and Encompass to ensure all supports are in place.

Quote from HR Manager:

“Job carving is a worthwhile exercise for AusPits – we’ll be doing it again, once we get the resources to ensure we do it properly.”

5.4. What other information, services and supports do employers need to support employees with disability?

From our experience in managing the BIDS program, AFDO has developed a comprehensive understanding of the information, services, and supports required to build employer disability confidence. These include:

- Opportunities for business networking and peer support from other businesses and the Chamber of Commerce. This allows business owners to share experiences and offer advice to others thinking about employing people with disability, including such options as open recruitment, work experience, apprenticeships, traineeships, internships, and job carving.
- Formation of a Disability and Inclusion Network, allowing all interested parties to meet regularly to discuss issues and opportunities.
- Buy-in from leadership and management.
- Involvement with student transition programs, such as the Passport 2 Employment program which works with students transitioning out of high school and gets businesses involved in mock interviews, where they can witness firsthand the calibre and competency of the students.
- Education, training, and mentoring, including resources such as fact sheets and website links for further information.
- Exposure to positive case studies and real-life examples of success stories, particularly through video and testimonials.
- Provision of information, resources, and training to all employees of the business.

- Increased awareness of disability and the barriers faced by people with disability.
- Introduction of initiatives to improve mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, such as Employee Assistance Programs and Mental Health First Aid training – this can encourage employees to disclose their disability if they haven't previously.
- Implement initiatives and training at a leadership level to embed change within the organisation, such as amendments to their strategic plans (i.e., Accessibility and Inclusion Strategy, Disability Action Plan, etc.).
- In addition to generating employment pathways, participating businesses should consider making accessibility and customer-focused improvements.
- Once a business owner has developed a degree of disability confidence, they should share their ideas and experiences with others, demonstrating the potential benefits this can have for both their business and the community as a whole. This starts a conversation within the community and aids in reducing stigma.

AFDO's Business Inclusion and Diversity Service (BIDS)

One option that should be strongly considered in any disability employment strategy is the potential for employment brokerage services, such as AFDO's BIDS program, to serve as intermediaries between DES and employers. This is supported by the literature, where research has concluded that in place of formal disability awareness training, SMOs would prefer to build their disability confidence through working with these "trusted brokers".²³

AFDO has delivered its own such brokerage service, the Business Inclusion & Diversity Services (BIDS), formerly the Disability Field Officer (DFO) Service, since 2015, with the support of over 20 local, state, and national organisations, including WorkSafe Victoria, Geelong Chamber of Commerce, and our research partner Deakin University. The service focuses on understanding SMOs and assisting them in building their disability confidence to become more welcoming, inclusive, and accessible places of employment. It supports employers to make the most of the talents that people with disability can bring to their workplace, which in turn aids in improving attitudes towards people with disability in Australia. In addition, BIDS provides information and mentoring services that enable businesses to modify their premises, operations, and policies, allowing them to be more inclusive and supportive of all employees.

Employment brokerage services like BIDS have the capacity to engage with and support employers, as well as providing post-placement support to individuals with disability. While BIDS itself has no placement capacity, there is potential for it to work in a complementary fashion with DES, helping them to match individuals with appropriate and meaningful work through services such as job carving. In this sense, BIDS can act as a middleman and bridge some of the gaps in the current disability employment system. Furthermore, rather than meeting KPIs, BIDS focuses on creating successful employment experiences for both parties, resulting in better outcomes for people with disability.²⁴

Further Details on BIDS

In providing BIDS, we focus on four key areas to improve SMOs' internal policies, practices, and service delivery. These include:

1. Improving organisational disability awareness, including exploring unconscious bias, and breaking down barriers to create a more welcoming culture for staff and customers.
2. Managing and retaining existing staff through improving human resources policies and practices, including the issues of disclosure and providing reasonable adjustments.
3. Improving the accessibility of both SMOs' premises and the manner in which they conduct business through a disability-friendly premises review and information provision.

²³ Murfitt et al. 2018; Waterhouse et al. 2010B.

²⁴ See Case Study 3 in Appendix 1 for an example of how DES and BIDS can complement each other.

4. Increasing employer confidence to hire and retain people with disability who are a good fit for their particular business, enabling them to tap into the broadest talent pool when recruiting.

BIDS also provides a comprehensive recommendations document and access to an 'Employer Toolkit', which includes information and resources on a range of areas to continue to assist on their journey to gaining disability confidence. In addition, BIDS offers a series of targeted workshops delivered inhouse by an AFDO consultant with lived experience of disability, covering a range of topics including disability awareness, communication, language and social media, accessibility, and improving workforce practices.

To date, the BIDS program has worked closely with 112 businesses in the Greater Geelong region, and in its final evaluation was shown to have generated more than 127 employment pathways, including open employment, internships, traineeships, job carving, and work experience opportunities.²⁵ Key results of the final evaluation include:

- 63% of businesses in the pre-and post-surveys reported they were employing people with disability at the end of their DFO Service compared to 25% at the start of their DFO Service;
- 80% of these businesses also said there may be an opportunity to employ people with disability in the next 12 months compared to 50% at the start of the DFO Service;
- 75% of businesses reported they planned to implement or had implemented at least one DFO employment pathway intervention for the employment of people with disability.²⁶

Over time, we have identified factors that contribute to success with BIDS, as well as factors that may make implementing BIDS more challenging.

Success Factors:

- Businesses with more than 20 employees generally have better opportunities to create employment pathways.
- Engagement from leadership, in terms of both time and resources, is critical in driving cultural change and ensuring staff buy-in.
- BIDS Officers must have a good understanding of and connection with the region in which they were operating, alongside a strong business network. Preferably, they would be a local.

Challenges:

- Having a small staff team (mainly a lack of or limited resources), making it difficult to provide the support that may be required for a candidate, especially in the early stages of employment or work experience.
- Overly bureaucratic placement processes.

²⁵ Murfitt et al. 2020.

²⁶ Murfitt et al. 2020, p. 33.

- A lack of skilled candidates put forward for job or work experience opportunities due to vacancies not matching the skills of jobseekers via disability employment services.
- Inconsistent post-placement support by DES leading to a reduction in businesses' disability confidence.
- Lack of leadership support to implement change.

The success of BIDS demonstrates the effectiveness and potential of disability brokerage services in improving the disability confidence of SMOs and encouraging them to recruit and retain people with disability as employees. AFDO believes that brokerage services such as BIDS are a crucial element in any disability employment support model.

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Appendix 1: Additional case studies

Case Study 2:

A microbusiness that provides holiday accommodation and employs five people primarily on a seasonal basis joined the service in late 2016. Owner Tanya²⁷ has personal experience of disability, which motivated her to build three fully accessible townhouses as part of her accommodation portfolio. Tanya joined DFOS as she felt an obligation to consider the entire community, for recruitment opportunities, and to be introduced to like-minded people. Her personal experience of disability and passion were significant motivators. DFOS also aligned with her business strategy to make the Bellarine a leader in accessible tourism.

While working with DFOS, Tanya amended her website to make it more accessible to her customer base. Job advertisements and position descriptions were also amended to include disability-friendly wording. Wording on reasonable adjustments has also been added. The business implemented many recommendations from the accessibility checklist.

“The accessibility checklist was very useful. The small suggestions made a big difference.”

Tanya attended the second business breakfast organised by DFOS and was greatly inspired by the guest speaker who spoke of her challenges living with disability. Tanya attended disability awareness training organised by DFOS, sharing “I found that slightly confronting but in a good way.” Tanya attended mock interviews that were organised in conjunction with the Passport to Employment program (NDCO), providing interview experience to school students with disability, all other events, and reviewed all the recommended resources.

During the pilot phase, Tanya employed a part-time staff member with disability to attend to gardening and home maintenance as a result of her burgeoning confidence. She worked with a Disability Employment Service (DES) to find the right candidate and a government wage subsidy assisted Tanya with her recruitment costs. Tanya also took on a work experience student from the local school for a term and is hoping to offer a School Based Apprenticeship in 2017. A lack of support from the school has impacted Tanya’s motivation to retain the student, highlighting the need for holistic support to enable businesses to retain their confidence.

The business is a great example of the capacity for microbusinesses (without HR capacity) to become disability confident and effect change in the workplace. As Tanya’s confidence and networks have grown, she has built a reputation as an advocate in this area. The business won the Accessibility Award at the local business awards in 2016 and Tanya has now joined the board of the local tourism body.

²⁷ Names have been changed for purposes of deidentification.

“By using your service, we have cut through weeks or months of trying to find the right person, you have put us to the right person. It is good for small business in that respect.”

Case Study 3:

A not-for-profit business with ten staff joined the program in early 2017. The business became familiar with the DFOS pilot through its promotion of the pilot to its member organisations, seeing this as a value-add proposition. The business has expanded rapidly in recent years, with staff often being time-poor and in need of additional support.

During the pilot, a part-time administrative role in the office was identified and offered to a candidate with disability, recruited through a shortlisting process facilitated by DFOS. The role was distributed to participating Disability Employment Services (DES) and other local networks, with three applicants interviewed. The business provided information to their staff prior to the employee’s commencement to ensure the new employee was genuinely welcomed. The successful candidate has taken on front reception duties, event management, and desktop publishing tasks.

“Having the job carving support was the moment it started to become more realistic for us.”

After three months, the business contacted DFOS to seek guidance on how to best accommodate the needs of the employee during the delivery of training. Through DFOS follow up, the DES who placed the employee has offered to visit the workplace to work side-by-side with the employee in the form of post-placement support. Both the business and employee have reported satisfaction from the match, with new opportunities emerging as mutual confidence grows.

Organising many events each year, the business welcomed the resources provided on event accessibility, including the accessibility checklist, drawing on these to make changes to signage, table layouts, lighting, and stage access. The business noted that this opened their mind to broader accessibility considerations that had not previously been brought to their attention. Disability friendly wording has also been added to their job advertisement template.

In evaluation, the CEO shared that *“it [DFOS] raised our awareness more than I imagined...”*