

Disability Employment Support Model Submission

Made by mail as the online portal does not accept size of this document.

I am providing this from my experience in supporting my adult sons with intellectual and genetic disability in attempting to engage with the disability employment market.

I have attempted this with him unsuccessfully on two occasions over the past 10 years. The most recent attempt ended earlier this year with no employment outcome or even any job placements or work experience opportunities.

I did a cost analysis of the process just to access the disability employment centre. This was just to make him job active and to be able to engage with a disability employment provider.

For my time, leave from work to attend job capacity assessment, meet with employment provider, the time of the assessor in conducting the assessment and writing report, the time taken for support worker to attend with my son to his employment provider appointment, where they asked him the same questions, and gave him a paper written job plan was over \$1500. There was no outcome for any party in employment or even linkage to employers. This process took over three months, many phone calls and appointments and organisation to get my son to attend a disability employment provider who did not even know information about my sons disability or skills and abilities that are well documented.

I have written responses to the questions from our experience but do not want them published with my name as I work for commonwealth agency.

I have contributed my own reflections of what worked and what didn't work in the current model and ideas for what could work better. I hope that it is useful and that there is a better system.

Disability Employment Support Model submission

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

People who have been identified as living with a diagnosed disability and or high level of barriers with long term conditions or multiple conditions.

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?

Yes any form of employment or move towards employment activities should be supported. Including self-employment and models of supported self-employment and micro employment models.

1.3. How can a future disability employment program better align with other programs such as the New Employment Services Model and the Community Development Program?

Simplification of systems and processes is needed. To support engagement there could be a process where prospective participants develop an application with their employment provider and then they are "chosen" to be successful participant to replicate employment market and to support a feeling of success by the successful participant. There could be a variety of community development programs that they can apply for, that best meet their needs and strengths if possible.

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?

This is a difficult area. The trouble is that the NDIS is fee for service and would be conflict of interest to be registered to assist participants to find employment. I would prefer if there is support for NDIS providers to be able to provide assistance with developing employment qualifications, skills, assist them to develop micro businesses, attend job interviews and assistance with writing and entering applications etc. It would also be good to see programs offered having real life skills and employment pathway activities and even some programs which they can receive payment for services. EG. Program that supports participants to gain skills in completing flat pack furniture. This is a micro business and is promoted at local businesses as an add on service. Participants gain skills in using tools, understanding instructions, and in invoicing and delivery as well as social skills. They then also receive small amount of funds for each project completed if financially feasible, or some sort of re-investment to the program to support purchase of tools etc.

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

No barriers. The current process is cumbersome and expensive. As a carer of son with disability the cost of linking him to a disability employment service was over \$1000. This included time away from

my workplace as I needed to attend Job Capacity assessment appointment, the cost of assessor in completing the assessment to enable him to be linked to the employment provider, the time for me to attend and or support worker to attend with my son once the appointment was made and the time of the employment provider to ask the jobseeker classification questions repeatedly. This actually gave us absolutely no outcome.

The process should be just ring up and make an appointment, or be able to ask for level of assistance required. Eg. To be able to have desk side support to write an application, or set up a seek profile and search for jobs, and or printing and computer assistance, or job interview preparation and role playing assistance etc.

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

If there is to be an assessment, then it should be focused on what the person with disability and or support carers etc request assistance with. It can focus on skills required to support employment pathway and strategy to move towards this that is achievable and what the service can support with this.

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

It should include their strengths, interests, abilities. Eg. Someone with autism who has strength in identifying patterns and or inconsistencies in data. This could support job opportunities with Dandelion and other programs which are developing to support employment of people who are neuro diverse and have aptitude for certain niche areas. It should also include areas of support required for areas that the person finds challenging. Eg. Social interaction and or planning skills. This would then be supportive of them not only gaining employment but building their capacity to maintain employment.

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 there could be further areas that are identified as they progress. As suggested above, there may be need for support regarding building resilience, social skills development, conflict management and or organisation skills support as they progress and encounter further learning opportunities.

3.1. What has been your experience of receiving employment support from a DES or other employment services provider?

As parent of son with disability we have had two attempts at DES support. Both of these have been unsuccessful and waste of money to the government.

The first attempt was with a provider called Epic, a number of years ago. When my son attended, his ideas regarding employment were laughed at. He felt very embarrassed and discouraged. As a result of this I worked with him and we set up and established our own business. He had no support and there were no programs to support him at the time that he was eligible for. We not only set up our own business, but partnered with another three businesses who assisted us to have cheaper kitchen

hire, and purchased our products for on- selling. We asked if there was any support with NEIS or assistance in paying for a support worker to assist my son but apparently there wasn't. We also asked if there was any assistance to support our set up costs and purchase of equipment for the business or even assistance with rent or training costs re food handling certificate and council registration. We managed to find a small business support person ourselves who helped us to develop a business plan, set up business ABN and bank account. They were funded from local mining industry and Westpac bank.

The business went well and we ended up selling it to a disability support organisation and they are still running it. We have then tried to access disability employment support again as my son wanted to get a job. The same hoops to jump through. The employment provider was marketing themselves as disability specific and lead agency re disability employment. However for the first appointment, they did not even know the disability that my son has, or had done any research regarding this, and or impacts or abilities and strengths. If they had googled, they would have found out that people with his genetic disorder can have strengths in visual learning, are good at learning through watching and doing, and are socially interested however need assistance with managing interactions and problem solving. We provided them with information and link to the national association as a resource however they never utilised this at all. All they did across the 18 months that we attended monthly appointments was re-run job plan, which they asked the same questions. Eg when did you leave school, etc. and print it out for him to sign, even though his literacy skills are low. On one occasion my son came back from an appointment excited that he had a job. When I investigated further it was that they employment provider said that they had given Pizza Hut his name and it was up to them to follow up if they wanted him further. He became very discouraged after this and was difficult to get him to appointments. At this time I suggested that perhaps they didn't let him know about job opportunities unless something was more concrete.

What was good about the support?

Nothing at all.

What improvements would you recommend?

As above.

They could be more skilled and educated about different disabilities and abilities, strengths and skills relevant to that disability. They could have skills and relationships with employers and be able to match skills and interests with employers. They could be strengths focused and focus on building capacity and identify and support strategies to move participants forward.

3.2. What type of services and support would best help a person with disability find and keep a suitable job, and progress their career? Who should provide this support?

This is a team effort and involves person with disability in identifying with his care network the goals and supports needed. This needs to be concrete and definable. Eg. We will help you set up a seek profile and search for jobs. We will attend with you to meet work experience employer. We will work with you to follow up different opportunities and communicate with carers and support network.

More programs and mentorships supporting people with disabilities to start their own businesses. Often they can then structure this around their capability and skills, and even though may not be full time employment, may create a pathway to further employment and support their quality of life. There could be hub and spoke models of business support that could support the person in their own business and provide assistance and services regarding accounts, invoices and bookings etc that perhaps may not be easy for them. Eg. lawn care service run by person with disability and they have access to support that books and plans the appointments, deals with accounts and payment etc.

It could be a multi business that is a group of many smaller businesses that operate under the one umbrella. Eg. the person doing the accounts, could also have disability and or person cleaning the lawn care equipment etc. so they are all interdependent on each other and in turn assist each other to become viable as one enterprise with shared costs with rent, staffing, insurance etc.

3.3. What education and training opportunities help people with disability overcome the entry barriers to employment?

It is not just education and training that is needed. It is mainly about relationship building and the skills to build relationships. In our experience, we cold called business that was suggested by local council as having a commercial kitchen. Initially the business owner was reluctant to give us a go. However as we met them, they had the opportunity to get to know my son and myself. We were able to listen to his reservations and work with him to ensure that he was satisfied that these concerns were met. We also kept communication door open for any issues that arose. From the initial concerns, these changed over time to a good relationship, where the business owner also felt comfortable enough to support my son to learn how to operate his equipment such as floor cleaner, ovens, deep fryer etc. He became a positive supporter for my sons business and built a positive mentor relationship as well. Unfortunately he sold the business and we were unable to continue at the same premises. However we still remain friends with the business owner 7 years later.

3.4. How can people receiving disability employment services also be supported to address other barriers to employment (e.g. health service or housing assistance)?

If there is a holistic plan in place with access to ongoing supports and assistance and strategies which can be added or reviewed over time when needs change. Eg. Someone may move house and have to learn a new bus route, or may need assistance with driving lessons, or may need assistance with life skills to manage budget etc from earnings.

3.5. What employment support do mature age people with disability need to successfully gain or retain employment, or transition into new employment or a new career?

It depends on the individual. They may have more complex issues that are part of their position in their life cycle, such as additional caring or health issues. They may have different capacity for employment depending on if they have medical conditions that are chronic or have exacerbations. They may have stigma that they face regarding gaining employment, or additional learning and retention needs depending on the disability and what their history has been. They may need psychological support in grief and loss and adjustment to support direction in career and or support

that is sustained over time as they are adjusting with recent disability and or additional costs of therapies, or aids etc.

4.1. What support do young people with disability need to successfully move out of education into suitable work?

Transition support straight from school to job support. This means commencing the transition before they leave school. They need to have support to establish income support and or all the financial and eligible programs before they leave school so that the pathway is smooth and unbroken. Eg. Commence traineeship or work experience program while at school that has capacity to continue with support post school.

4.2. What best practices from existing DES or other employment programs help young people with disability find and maintain a job?

I am not sure as haven't seen successful ones as such. However I do see some good indigenous traineeships and apprenticeship programs which are supported from school and enable young people to continue with scholarships mentor support post school.

4.3. Should there be assistance to prepare young people to think about work much earlier than after they leave school?

Yes as above.

4.4. How can disability employment services work better with the education system to enhance employment prospects for young people?

Perhaps they could employ teachers who are qualified in education strategies and learning. Or utilise career advisors at schools to take active role in relationship building and taking young people to be involved while they are still at school. They could also have clear pathways from school to employment. Eg. Hospitality have hospitality certificates and traineeships that are then continued and have even a small number of paid placements that people can be selected into, where they already are familiar with the environment and workplace and where the employers are aware of the person with disability skills and abilities. They could also focus on education courses at school that have direct pathways to employment- eg horticulture, hospitality, etc rather than focused on further education if this is not a pathway possible for the person with a disability.

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

It is relationship based. Letting the employer meet person with disability, connect with them, feel safe to ask any questions and raise any concerns they have. To keep this communication pathway open all the time. To be able to promote the win win opportunities. Eg. In our experience we presented the opportunity for the business owner to have reduced rent costs as we contributed

towards the rent. We negotiated what space we could use that fitted in with his business. We respected his business demands and processes and complied with these. We were open to change and working around him and his needs. We also bought him a product he could make profit from and also media and good will in the community. Some of these became apparent after relationship had started but initially it was a positive that he could save some rent costs.

Employers are people too. They have the same fears as many re disability and when they feel safe to explore these and have the communication channel to identify and resolve this creates trust and connection. They also need to feel supported. It was important that they also felt they had some avenues of support if needed. Eg. Support worker to assist the person with disability, and or carer or mother who was able to be there if issues to discuss.

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?

They need to have incentive programs which create a win win situation for the business or employer. Eg assistance with wage costs, support re training and or health and safety or aids etc. They need an open door to discuss and solve issues before they become problems. They need ongoing support, not just initially. They need access to information regarding disability and different strategies or what the person may need to feel supported. They need access to other success stories and ways forward so that it can inspire them and motivate them to take a risk. They need financial assistance or access to incentives to keep them employing people with a disability over time so that the relationship builds and or win wins are identified.

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?

One to one meetings where person with disability meets the employer to share their goals re employment. Small opportunities with no pressure to employ to test waters with work experience that maybe has a financial incentive for employer in some way if they are concerned re this to start with. This could then step up as it goes well and build on hours etc over time.

Advertising the person with disability in local media and their skills and motivation can also draw in employers. With my son, there was a newspaper article that promoted his business and his journey. A local business made contact and wanted to purchase his products. They wanted to be supportive of his journey and success.

Employers want to make a positive difference to others. Perhaps there could be linkages with likeminded businesses and they could list opportunities or what they are interested in contributing, eg mentoring, on the job opportunities etc. no matter how big or small.

Perhaps even tax incentives etc where the number of people with a disability that are supported could lead to further reductions etc.

Win win opportunities. Eg where they have financial gain, not at the expense of the person with disability, but that assists their running costs.

Opportunities for businesses to have free promotion of their business and or linkage with supporting people with disabilities

Hearing from other businesses about their experience and seeing the benefits. This could be done at business functions or gatherings, or in social media, conferences etc. There could be awards for businesses who support employees with disabilities.

We never got to utilise wage subsidies, or employment assistance funds etc as there were too many criteria and or steps to get it. Things need to be simple and available right at the beginning. There is no point in offering "a carrot" if it is high in a glass shelf locked with key and only accessible if multiple hoops to jump through first. (eg only get wage subsidy after 13 weeks, ongoing position etc)

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

Information about what are the benefits for them initially and in the longer term. Information about the risk and strategies to reduce risk or impacts. Eg something as simple as ensuring the worker and or support worker don't take up too much physical space at rush hour. Or that they will be at risk of burning themselves, or not complying with health and safety requirements etc.

Access to someone they can call on for advice and support at any time.

Education about the disability and or skills and capacities and also areas that they need to be aware of.

6.1. What specific assistance or flexibilities would better support people with disability to meet their mutual obligation requirements?

Be inclusive of work experience and all aspects progressing someone closer to pathway of employment. Eg. Assistance with planning, transport, budgeting, problem solving. Understanding importance of identity and confidence in gaining and seeking employment. Understanding and flexibility regarding impact of chronic or other conditions which may mean persons capacity fluctuates at times.

6.2. How should a future program consider other forms of participation and engagement, such as voluntary work or community engagement?

Yes definitely and understanding that this might be for months rather than weeks in order to progress. Eg. One of my sons is now doing work experience with meals on wheels. It is a learning process not only for him in learning to volunteer, turn up each week. Try new tasks but also for the volunteers re understanding what he can do and what his challenges are. Where this fits with the product they have to produce and how they can work together re this. eg. He likes cutting vegetables however was not cutting them to the same sizes. He was told that his cutting skills were not good enough. This impacted his confidence and he didn't want to go back. However with communication and perseverance they are now looking at peeling and cutting vegetables which will be mashed and it does not matter what size they are. It is little things like this that need to be uncovered, negotiated and resolved. This has taken a period of months. He has to try a number of jobs and tasks and then evaluate how this has been and then look at what else can be trialled. There

has also been a need for the volunteers to learn about the person with a disability, that they have also had to do their own learning in communication, understanding, compassion and creativity in resolving issues. This takes time and perseverance. The win for meals on wheels is that they have a volunteer to assist with some tasks. They have a person who is happy to see them and greets them and makes them smile. The person with a disability has a purposeful place to go and is using his skills in greeting and communicating with others, his skills in cutting vegetables and in talking about what he does at meals on wheels with others in his life.

7.1. How could the future funding arrangements ensure services across a continuum of work readiness, placement and retention are tailored to the needs of the participant?

Some funds could sit with the person with a disability and some could sit with the employer and or the service providers who assist in working with them both. I don't believe it is a successful model paying the employment provider to place person in employment. They are a business and only interested in financial gain for quick wins where they don't need to put much effort in. I also don't believe in too much structured support as this creates too many criteria for eligibility and is often too static or cumbersome to move someone in and out of additional support. Universal support and access is needed in a physical place that is available, accessible and that has relationships already with employers. I can see benefit of a hub where employers have a reason or feel comfortable attending and have the opportunity to meet with prospective employees in non-threatening way.

7.2. What are the right pricing and funding arrangements, balancing provider viability with the cost of delivering high quality services to participants and employers?

Scrap current model. Fund universal services that anyone can enter regardless of their jobseeker classification but have additional supports available that actually are skilled and knowledgeable in disability and ability. Fund businesses with incentives and add ons eg. Tax deductions, etc.

7.3. How could the future funding model be adapted to recognise changes in the labour market and types of employment available in the modern Australian economy?

Talk with employers more, so that they have a way of coming to employment supporters with their shortages and job roles they are finding challenging. It may not be whole jobs that are available but someone for certain tasks that will make their business flow better and or move towards bigger roles after time.

7.4. How can service quality and expertise be rewarded and balanced against quantity outcomes?

Keep it balanced between human and community outcomes as well as financial. There are more win wins than financial sometimes.

7.5. How could funding arrangements for ongoing support be improved to ensure supports and services are tailored to the needs of the participant and the employer?

Perhaps subscription or ongoing membership to schemes could work that provides ongoing benefits for employers and keeps them updated and able to access support and assistance with further

employees. Something that makes their jobs easier. Eg. That they could have easy access to recruitment processes, support. training. Latest technology to support people with disabilities at reduced cost etc.

7.6. What do good providers currently do to support people with disability into work?

Sadly I haven't had any.

8.1. How should an effective and efficient competitive provider market be structured and how should business be allocated?

This is the problem I think. I think this devalues the role and significance of what they are actually trying to do. If anything it should be businesses who want to enlist to provide this service because of the benefit it brings them in their business and to society. That perhaps they can be financially benefited for the more people they employ etc. but that it is not a model where businesses solely run on finding people jobs.

8.2. How can the future program settings encourage and reward innovation and continuous improvement? What works well in the current program?

Awards, recognition, platforms where they are able to be seen and celebrated and also spurred on to raise their game to improve and reach a higher level. Where collaboration and partnerships are celebrated and reciprocal win wins are shared and where they enable others to do the same.

8.3. What arrangements should be in place for market regulation and quality assurance of services?

Maybe something more like uber-ratings, which takes into account everyone's feedback on both sides and there is accountability re what is provided and expected.

8.4. What legal model would be most appropriate to manage the terms and conditions of the agreement between Government and disability employment services providers?

Not my skill or knowledge set. But would be highly despondent if you are keeping the same model as what there is now.

8.5. What is needed to lift workforce capability and the quality of the workforce delivering disability employment services and supports for both participants and employers?

The right qualifications, mindset and environment. Focused more on quality and giving person a more manageable case load to build relationship and or be there for both employer and employee. Eg. Social workers, occupational therapists, psychologists, business mentors.

And role models being people with disabilities too as mentors with other people with disabilities.

8.6. Is there a market need for specialist providers (disability/industry/age cohorts) that would increase employment opportunities?

Yes, specialists who are very aware of skill sets of different abilities of people with disabilities and market and relate to businesses that are best matched. Eg. People living with high functioning autism. There are great opportunities in IT, banking, technical and industrial areas that need the services that many of these people are highly skilled to do. They require advocacy and matching to specific tasks. They need different style of recruitment and on-boarding and chaperoning to get there to navigate the social interaction space perhaps. Eg. There are some that are building capacity in this space, eg dandelion and others. Perhaps it can also be germinated within certain industries and or business types to have specialist provider who they employ. Eg. Retail woolworths, coles that actually employ specialist consultant that acts as employment provider for people with disabilities that fits their needs. Eg. could have workforce that fits more casual hours, or evening hours when might be more beneficial for person who may like quieter environment. Or repetitive task work.

Or mining groups, that need certain roles eg. someone in health and safety that does all the visual checking of equipment etc. or cleaning of equipment to certain standards. Etc.

9.1. What will success look like for:

- a) people with disability
- b) the community
- c) employers
- d) service providers
- e) Government

Jobs where people with disability are employed to their level of ability. Community engagement and participation and acceptance of people regardless of ability and disability. Employers who are able to employ people with a disability and have support and understanding of the benefits and supports they need.

Service providers that are skilled and have capacity to engage with employers and people with disabilities.

Government that has the ability to connect across programs, departments simplify and be inclusive rather than creating too many fractured, restrictive and or exclusive programs that lock people out or are administration heavy.

9.2. What data do we need to know if the program has been effective?

Qualitative and quantitative

9.3. How can people with disability, employers and providers help to measure and report on the performance of the new program?

Everyone has to be involved all the way along

9.4. What do people with disability and employers need to make an informed choice to select the best provider for their needs and how should this information be made available?

To easily access services and supports. To easily be able to see the benefits and what they can do and will do with them.