



**Submission to the Consultation for the
Disability Employment
Centre of Excellence:**
Emphasizing the importance of microenterprises,
self-employment and entrepreneurship.

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Consultation for the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence

The main point that we would advocate for a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence is for micro-enterprise, self-employment and entrepreneurship to be recognised as a growing and important part of disability employment opportunities. Over the last 6 years we have examined the importance of this overlooked area of employment for people with disability in comparison to disability employment services, Australian disability enterprises and open employment. Yet, there exists a ready-made entrepreneurial ecosystem of providers who already have disability access and inclusion as part of their core operating procedures.

We would encourage the proposed centre to work with established University and community partners to provide a micro-enterprise, self-employment and entrepreneurial suite of business development programs that draw on the best available knowledge and made available in conjunction with tailored accessible and inclusive offerings. This would involve everything from one off seminars, short courses, micro-credentials, all levels of university offerings, accelerator, incubator and dedicated seed funding tailored to all disability types and levels of support needs whether they are individuals or part of founder teams. Our most recent project funded by DSS working with SSI on IgniteAbility Educate have some promising outcomes for a boot camp for people with disability interested in starting a business. The kicker is that like programs such as IgniteAbility and Remarkable, people with disability need to be supported with disability mentors.

We are not only passionate about this area but Prof Darcy spent 18 months on the disability employment reference group for DSS to help formulate recommendations to inform the sector. The current disability employment services, Australian disability enterprises and open employment almost totally overlooked the importance of micro-enterprise, self-employment and entrepreneurship for all disability types and level of support needs. As our public reports and subsequent articles outline, people with disability have a 43% higher rate of self-employment than that of the general population. However, the resources set aside for micro-enterprise, self-employment and entrepreneurship are minuscule in comparison to disability employment services, Australian disability enterprises and open employment.

Together with my colleague Prof Jock Collins we had received an Australian Research Council linkage grant and carried out the first study on entrepreneurs with disability Australia.

The hyperlink that has a copy of the 2 major reports on individual disability entrepreneurial experiences and organisational approaches together with 5 separate videos of entrepreneurs with disability talking about motivations, barriers, enablers, outcomes and benefits.

<https://www.uts.edu.au/about/uts-business-school/management-department/what-we-do/research/disability-entrepreneurship>

Summary of key findings from these reports include the following:

Darcy, S., Collins, J., & Stronach, M. (2020). Australia's disability entrepreneurial ecosystem: experiences of people with disability with microenterprises, self-employment and entrepreneurship. UTS Sydney with *Australian Research Council, Settlement Services International, National Disability Services and BreakThru People Solutions*.

People with disability have a 43% higher level of self-employment than the general population. The attraction of self-employment stems from a desire by PwD for economic and personal independence in a way that can accommodate an individual's intra-personal lifestyle needs. Pull factors related to the possibility of higher income, flexibility in the workplace in terms of hours and location, and reasonable recognition of support needs, as well as the ability to bring about social change, and the likelihood of increased work satisfaction. The primary motivation stems from their poor experiences of their time as employees working for organisations.

Darcy, S., Collins, J., & Stronach, M. (2021). *Entrepreneurs with Disability Australia: Experiences of People with Disability with Microenterprises, Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship-Report 2 Policy and Organisational Level Initiatives*. UTS Sydney with *Australian Research Council, Settlement Services International, National Disability Services and BreakThru People Solutions*.

- Lack of inclusion of disability in mainstream entrepreneurial programs
- Paradox of disability and entrepreneurship - despite a lack of targeted mainstream programs supports for entrepreneurs with disability, they STILL have a higher rate of entrepreneurship than nondisabled Australians
- Agency of EwD: the lived experience of 'blocked mobility', motivates EwD to focus on their abilities, draw on their resilience, professional strength and a mindset of doing it for themselves
- Government policy and available government supports - with respect to targeted programs to support EwD, there are relatively few, with most being available for well established businesses rather than start-ups and those still under development.
- The relatively short existence of self-employment, micro-enterprise and entrepreneurial programs that provide disability support are poorly geographically dispersed, focused mainly on micro-enterprise and require a coordinated communication strategy.
- One of the key barriers is that PwD risk losing their Disability Support Pension if they choose to start up their own business.
- EwD face unique problems based on their impairment and support needs.

We have also attached for your convenience a journal articles, a book chapter and reference to a forthcoming book in the area:

1. Darcy, S., Collins, J., & Stronach, M. (2023). Entrepreneurs With Disability: Australian Insights Through a Social Ecology Lens. *Small Enterprise Research*, 30(1) pp24-48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13215906.2022.2092888>
2. Darcy, S., Collins, J., & Stronach, M. (2022). Creating My Own Job: Australian Experiences of People with Disability with microenterprises, self-employment and entrepreneurship. In S. Yousafzai, T. Coogan, S. Sheikh & W. Ng (Eds.), *Research Handbook on Disability and Entrepreneurship* (pp. 35-58). London: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited <https://dx.doi.org/10.4337/9781789905649>
3. Bailey, S., Carnemolla, P., Loosemore, M., Darcy, S., & Sankaran, S. (2022). A Critical Scoping Review of Employment of People with Disability in the Construction Industry: Exploring pathways to more inclusive employment opportunity. *Buildings*, (12) 12, pp 2196 <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings12122196>
4. **Collins, Darcy, Norman et al. (2024 forthcoming) *Minority Entrepreneurship in Australia*, Routledge.**

Other relevant references include:

Darcy, S., Stronach, M., & Collins, J. (2019). *Where do micro-enterprises fit in the range of employment options for people with a disability*. Paper presented at the Disability at Work Summit: More than just a job, Hilton Hotel Adelaide. <https://www.nds.org.au/news/disability-at-work-summit-2019-program-released>

Darcy, S., Stronach, M., & Collins, J. (2018). *Disability entrepreneurship in Australia: Preliminary insights into the IgniteAbility program*. Paper presented at the DiverseAbility: NDIS Inclusion, Novotel Parramatta.

Stronach, M., Darcy, S., & Collins, J. (2017). *Disability entrepreneurship* Paper presented at the DISABILITY AT WORK 2017 UNLEASHING POTENTIAL, Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre https://www.nds.org.au/images/events/DW17_Reg_broch_v4.pdf

Alaslani, M., & Collins, J. (2017). The blocked mobility hypothesis and muslim immigrant entrepreneurship in Sydney, Australia. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, 6(3), 333-357. http://buscompress.com/uploads/3/4/9/8/34980536/riber_6-3_t_a17-067_333-357.pdf

Collins, J. (2017). From refugee to entrepreneur in Sydney in less than three years. In. Sydney: UTS Business School. http://www.ssi.org.au/images/stories/documents/Ignite/SSI_Ignite_evaluation_report_2017.pdf

Collins, J., Morrison, M., Basu, P. K., & Krivokapic-Skoko, B. (2017). Indigenous culture and entrepreneurship in small businesses in Australia. *Small Enterprise Research*, 24(1), 36-

48. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13215906.2017.1289855>

Darcy, S., Collins, J., & Stronach, M. (2016). Feature on Disability Entrepreneurship *Lines of Inquiry - Disability Knowledge Clearing House*, pp1-3.

Darcy, S., Taylor, T. & Green, J. (2016) 'But I can do the job': examining disability employment practice through human rights complaint cases, *Disability & Society*, 31:9, 1242-1274 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09687599.2016.1256807>

Lastly, we would like to introduce you to the **UTS Disability Research Network** Prof Simon Darcy and Prof Bronwyn Hemsley co-lead, which is a whole of university approach to disability research, engagement and scholarship. As you will see we have completed a series of projects for the NDIS, DSS & other disability organisations (NDS, Settlement Services International and Spinal Cord Injuries Australia). There are some other interesting projects by colleagues in the Network on school to higher education to employment transitions including:

- **STEPS to employment** which explores the employment experiences of young people with an intellectual disability. The project first draws on the perspectives of the young people (aged 15-25), their families, disability employment service providers and employers to identify the supports and barriers to gaining and maintaining employment. The second phase evaluates the Steps to Employment (STEP) program developed and delivered by Onemda, with a view to maximising its effectiveness and then expanding the program.
- **Employment Opportunities for People with Disability in the Construction Industry** which explores how the construction industry's growth can enable opportunities for more meaningful and sustainable employment for people with a disability.
- **Improving the Employment Outcomes for Students with Intellectual Disability** - applies program logic and co-designed evaluation to improve the school employment programs and employment outcomes for students with intellectual disability.

<https://www.uts.edu.au/partners-and-community/initiatives/social-justice-uts/centre-social-justice-inclusion/disability-research-network>

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