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Hearing from supported employees about the future of their jobs and workplace

When considering next steps for supported employment, the experiences and wishes of the workers should be at the heart of the Australian Government's considerations. The decisions made – the reform direction set – will have a tremendous impact on the lives, livelihood, and wellbeing of over 16,000 supported employees and their families/carers.

Our Voice Australia (OVA) is privileged to share their story, their work, and their voice. Throughout our submission, we have included feedback and stories verbatim. This ensures the Australian Government hears directly from those impacted by the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations.

We also share feedback and concerns from respondents regarding wages and supports at disability enterprises. In doing so, we emphasise that a significant majority of respondents were extremely happy with their employee and workplace. It is vital that the Australian Government continues to support those organisations which are dedicated to evolving in line with the *Guiding principles for the future of supported employment*.

Like all industries, there are better and worse actors in the supported employment sector. Moving forward, the focus should be on ensuring consistent, high-quality roles and services for people with high employment support needs. Identified poor practices should be investigated further and addressed through capacity building, education and enforcement initiatives.

A family advocate says to the Australian Government, *"Supported employment workplaces are absolutely essential and it's important that these environments remain open and continue to thrive. Supported employment is more than just a job; it's a bridge to independence, empowerment, and dignity for individuals with disabilities. They are not just places of work but spaces where individuals can build self-confidence, connect with peers, and feel valued for their unique contributions. For many individuals with disabilities, supported employment provides the kind of tailored support and understanding that traditional workplaces often cannot. It's a setting where individuals receive the guidance and assistance they need to succeed—whether through job coaching, modified duties, or accessible workspaces. This level of support ensures that employees can thrive in an environment that meets them where they are, without unnecessary barriers and possible ridicule from general society."*

Survey respondents

We received feedback from over 400 supported employees across Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. Consistent with [OVA's first national survey](#), one-third of respondents filled out the survey independently and the remaining required assistance from a family member, friend or support worker.

Of those who responded to our latest survey, 80 percent are under the age of 55. 85 percent of respondents have an intellectual disability or learning disorder and 32 percent live with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This is a little higher than the national statistic showing that of the 16,000 supported employees employed in disability enterprises, around 70 percent have an intellectual or learning disability.

Key survey findings

If supported employment was perfect...

In line with the easy read discussion paper, respondents told us, in their own words, what supported employment would look like if it was perfect.

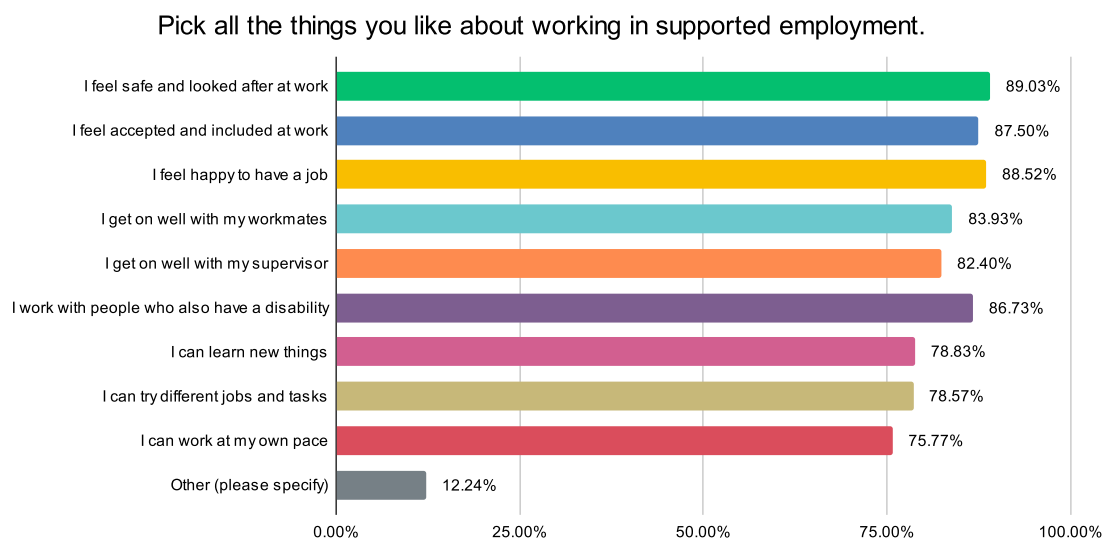
On where they would like to work, over half of respondents wished to explicitly stay with their current employer. A fifth shared the types of work, environment or location desired, without specifying whether that would be in an open or supported workplace. Nine percent identified mainstream employment or employers as their preference, including retail and supermarket franchises, schools, hospitals, local shires and government offices.

On what they would be doing, a quarter of respondents specifically said the same or a similar job as what they are doing now (24 percent). Over a third named work typically undertaken in disability enterprises; of these answers, 46 percent involved packaging, assembly, labelling or sorting. Ten percent noted the importance of task variety, skill development or specific job characteristics. Four percent sought mainstream roles or environments.

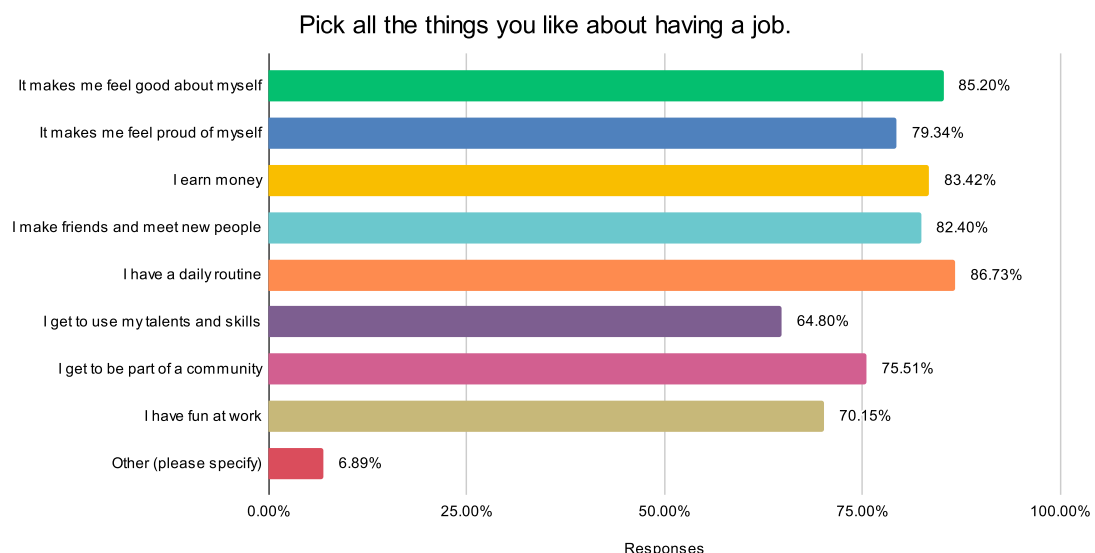
On whom they would be working with, 20 percent of respondents said the same people as now. Almost a third wished to work with friends, peers or others like them. Nine percent wanted a workplace with people who have disability, while two percent would have preferred to be around people without disability or a mix. Just over ten percent identified a specific disability enterprise, support staff/supervisors, or a desired type of colleagues/culture.

What supported employees like about their jobs and workplaces

Respondents selected what they liked about working in supported employment/ The top answers included feeling safe and looked after at work (89 percent), happy to have a job (88 percent) and accepted and included (87 percent), as well as working with people who also have a disability (87 percent). These were the same top four answers irrespective of whether the supported employee completed the survey independently or with assistance.



Respondents also picked out what having a job meant to them. The leading responses were having a daily routine (87 percent), feeling good about themselves (85 percent), earning money (83 percent), and making friends and meeting new people (83 percent). Where supported employees filled out the survey by themselves, there was a greater weighting on employment making them feel proud versus being part of their routine. The responses to these questions were consistent with OVA's first national survey, as well as previous consultation undertaken by the Department of Social Services.



Why I love working – what it does for me

"I like the routine of going to work"

"I love my job. I love working full time. I love going to work every day and see my friends there."

"Work has given me a lot of purpose, grown my self confidence and increased my social connections."

"It gives me like structure and purpose"

"It gives me a sense of purpose"

"I feel useful and important"

"I feel like  contribute to my goals"

"I've got a job, like my siblings have jobs."

"I love working"

"I come in every day with a smile"

"I can grow my skills"

"I love my job"

"I feel like I am contributing to life"

"I am not bored and I'm no longer depressed"

"I'm contributing to the community."

"I feel value in myself knowing I'm making a valuable contribution"

Why I love where I work

"I enjoy working at my workplace, I can learn a lot of new things and skills, everyone is nice to me here, we are a big family."

"I feel valued"

"I can be part of the team and have work that is purposeful and go to work in an environment which understands my needs and limitations and is the very best working place for me."

"My parents have confidence in my employer to keep me safe. This allows them to remain in the workforce. Also give parents confidence that i will be looked after once they are no longer living."

"I feel supported and accepted"

"I love my job"

"Everything is good. I really like doing headsets because it is an important job."

"I don't feel like I'm doing something wrong. I have tried working in a mainstream workplace and I felt lonely and like not confident"

"I like doing Powerade. I'm good at that."

"I learn new things at my own pace"

"They accept when I have a lot of medical appointments"

"I like the support I get so I don't want change. I would not be accepted in open employment, so leave me alone , I am happy"

"I am happy as long as my workplace stays for me to go to work. I don't want to go through another closure of workplace like my previous employer Activ Bentley."

"I don't want to be 'Special', but I do want to be part of the community. The only way for me to work and access the community is with a lot of support. I feel that I contribute to the community by doing my job the best way that I can. I feel proud wearing my yellow fluoro work shirt and tough boots - and I am proud when I see the results of my work."

"ADEs are not for everyone - but employment at an ADE is just right and very important for me and my workmates; and the support staff who enjoy working with me."

"Don't close ADEs - My son loves working at workpower. He gets lots of help and encouragement and feels included and valued. He looks forward to going to work and is very proud that he gets paid. He is also very proud that he does 'important' work and feels he contributes. The joy he gets from the friendships he has made and his sense of accomplishment at being a 'working man', must be paramount when choices about the future of ADEs are made."

"I am learning new skills that will assist me to one day enter the open employment market."

Why I love who I work with

"I feel like I belong"

My supervisor knows me and my disabilities and knows the best ways to motivate and upskill me.

"Am encouraged but not pushed or worried about being confused"

"I'm not excluded"

I spend time with my friends

"I catch up with people from work on weekends as they know and understand me"

"The staff recognise my performance and improvement. I got recognition when I performed well."

"It's one of my safe places"

"It is important that the staff supervise me constantly and know me very well."

"Supported employment staff treat me with respect and dignity - despite my disability."

"The staff help me with how to deal with conflict"

"We celebrate birthdays and special occasions in the workplace; for employees and staff."

"Support Staff are my friends too."

"The staff encourage me to try new tasks"

"staff have a detailed understanding of my disability and how best to support me"

"The staff understand me and my challenges"

"They are patient and accept me"

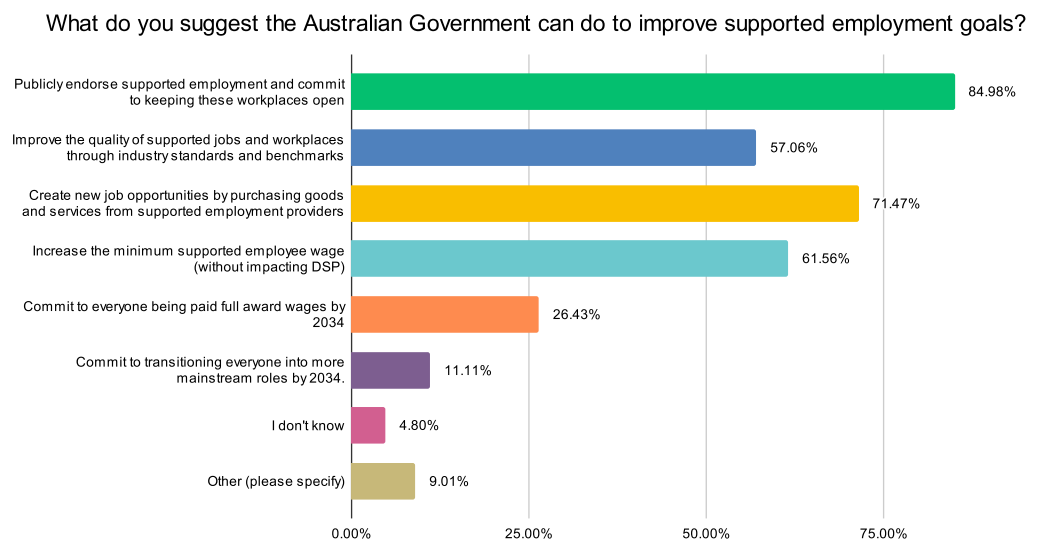
"I have worked in open employment in 2 positions and it was good until I turned 18 and I didn't get any faster and I still forgot things, I did not have any friends and I was not part of the social team as I did fit and didnt feel comfortable. In supported employment I work with my best friends. If supported employment is taken away then I will not be able to work"

"Dontake any changes it will impact greatly on those of us who benefit. We are accepted and take pride in what we do. Our colleagues are our friends"

Actions for the Australian Government

The top two answers were to publicly endorse supported employment and commit to keeping these workplaces open (85 percent) and to create new job opportunities for workers by purchasing goods and services from providers (71 percent). Over half of respondents wanted to see the minimum wage increased (without impacting DSP) (62 percent) and higher quality supported jobs through industry standards and benchmarks (56 percent).

A minority wished for the Australian Government to commit to everyone receiving full-award wages (26 percent) and working in mainstream employment by 2034 (11 percent), as recommended by Commissioners Bennett, Galbally, Mason and McEwin (rec 7.32).



Supported wages and rights at work

Pay levels and wage assessments

As the sector finalises its transition to the new wages structure under the *Supported Employment Services Award 2020* (SES Award), we sought feedback from supported employees and their advocates regarding current pay levels.

The majority of respondents said their wage had been assessed in the last year (64 percent), with around two thirds earning between \$5-\$10 an hour. Of these workers, 95 percent had received a pay rise in the last two years. As this group has presumably gone through the new grading and assessment methodology, it is notable that 30 percent wish to receive greater income from their employer and just over half would like to see the Australian Government increase the minimum supported wage (56 percent).

Around a third of respondents had not had a wage assessment in the last two years or longer, although half had received a pay rise. 75 percent earn between \$5-\$10, with

a similar proportion desiring higher income from their employer and a higher minimum wage.

A small group indicated they had never had a wage assessment (5 percent), with three quarters earning between \$5-\$10. Most people in this cohort have been in supported employment for less than a year, suggesting the reason is around the timing of the SWS assessment (i.e., up to six months post-commencement).

Role and future of supported wages

Consistent with OVA's first national survey, there were divergent views on the role and future of the supported wages. A quarter of respondents wished to be paid more because they were earning too little or saw the current system as unfair and discriminatory. There were also concerns shared about the SWS assessment process and the fact that disability enterprises utilise significant NDIS funding while paying low wages.

A fifth of respondents felt more content with supported wages because they were happy with how much they earned, either directly from work or in combination with the Disability Support Pension (22 percent). Another fifth placed greater importance on working in a safe, secure and accepting environment, with the benefits of supported employment outweighing the lower wage (19 percent).

Other feedback noted that the joy and pride of receiving a pay cheque was most important (rather than the wage itself) and that making money was not as much of a priority for them.

Rights at work

There was a concerning amount of uncertainty regarding wage rates and processes. Almost 10 percent of respondents didn't know how much they earned per hour, 18 percent were unaware if they had received a pay rise in the last two years, and 16 percent could not identify the last time they had a wage assessment. In addition, only 45 percent had been told how to get a pay rise by their employer. These findings indicate further work is needed to operationalize the rights at work clause within the SES Award¹.

Wage increases and assessments

In answering how supported employment providers could best meet their employment goals, a third of respondents said through paying higher wages. Of these individuals, over 50 percent said they hadn't been told how to receive a pay rise or weren't sure. This gap requires resolution between providers, workers and their families/advocates, especially as there are no current legal entitlements for supported employees around annual wage assessments.

¹ During the recent review of the *Supported Employment Services Award (2020)*, OVA successfully advocated for the inclusion of a rights at work clause for supported employees. These extra rules are contained in Clause 31 and confer special entitlements upon supported employees in respect of the provision of information, representation and consultation.

A snapshot of what supported employees and their family advocates said about wages...

"It's not about the money to me. It's about being with my friends and working at my own pace. Also my work is not hard and it doesn't stress me out. I enjoy working with my friends."

"Under paid for the work I do"

It's utterly incorrect for the work I do, I am not looked after nor do I need that support. The system needs to change and I speak for many supported workers for when I say the wage is absolutely ridiculous.

"I like to earn some extra money with my disability pension, but I don't want to lose my pension as it is my safety net if I cannot continue to work. I need it for my medical expenses."

"IT IS INADEQUATE FOR EFFORT"

"We should have review every 6 months, not 12 months. My wage is very low."

"My wage has gone up and I'm happy about that if it goes up more do I have to work harder or faster as this would make me stressed"

"I just want to have a job, I don't need a lot of money."

"It's good to receive a wage"

"I am happy about my wage, but do not agree with having to pay to be able to work there."

"My wages are adequate, along with my DSP, to manage my daily living and some extras. I pay minimum rent for my Unit (SDA/SIL) so I am very lucky. If I had to pay private rent or pay for the upkeep of my own home (owner/resident), along with my costly medical costs, I would struggle with my present total income: wages and DSP."

"Wage is low but I am happy I got a job and able to work without pressure and I gain the benefits to by self esteem being employed within supported work place. The gov needs to do more as the disability employment organisations are NOT good enough to find appropriate employment."

"While my wage might be low, there are other benefits to working in supported employment (eg social aspects; staff who understand my disability etc) which make up for it."

"I have all the money I need for everything I want and also quite a lot of superannuation"

"on DSP so wages not important"

"I want to be able to continue to work . The wage is not important .Going to work and doing something useful is important. I do not want to attend day options every day because my workplace has closed down due to high wages."

A snapshot of what supported employees and their family advocates said about wages (cont)...

"i like getting a wage .I can buy a coffee and a newspaper to read before I start work ,like a lot of other people do."

"I understand about the wages in my workplace, my family help me. I also understand that in order to have a work place like mine we need to have lower wages - I love my job and having tried several different "normal" work places that my mental health suffered and I felt bullied and not supported at all. I need my job and I am quite worried about this proposal."

"As a parent I realise his employer is in a difficult situation, his wage tops up DSP which is a bonus. He would be lost/depressed/bored/lonely without [disability enterprise]'s employment! No purpose in life - you have no indeed how much he loves going to [disability enterprise] and giving him some independence..."

"The low wage does make you realise your different from others who work in mainstream employment."

"I just want to have a job & routine. I enjoy working & if it wasn't there I would feel useless. It doesn't matter that I don't get paid much because I get the DSP which is more than enough to live on along with my wage."

"before the wage assessment it was bad at \$6 and no super"

"I do not care about earning a higher wage. I just like going to work at an environment where I am supported and valued. I gain a lot of self-esteem from working. It is too difficult to work in other places where I am not supported and valued."

"It's not about the wage, it's about the routine for most. Increasing the wage will cause some people to not have employment due to their capabilities, I am one of these people."

"i think i should be getting more as i work very hard on the trucks. i lift very heavy furniture and have big responsibility."

"It would be good if I could get more hourly rate as I've been working for 40 years in same company."

"It's not about money Proud to have a job"

"I don't work for the wage i work for the enjoyment"

"wage is ok but why no funding to them"

"Some of my colleagues with more severe disabilities simply could not compete in Open Employment. It is good that they can currently find some paid work in an ADE, even if they do not earn the minimum wage. At least they are in an environment with colleagues who will not judge them. The alternative would be to sit at home all day, every day."

Discussion questions

What is your ideal future state for the supported employment sector and employment of people with disability with high support needs?

Our vision for the future of supported employment is simple:

Firstly, everyone has the opportunity and support required to realise the unique employment outcome they desire.

Secondly, everyone has the right to declare what a meaningful job is to them and have that choice respected.

Thirdly, that no one is subject to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation during their working lives.

A worker says to the Australian Government, *“Supported employment is where i found my home and my career. Never have i worked in a place that exudes such amazing kindness, with so many incredible individuals. This is a place where people living with disability can truly feel at home. I have never worked in an environment where we have multiple people exceeding 50 years of service, or multiple marriages and long term friendships have been made. This to me is what true inclusion looks like, and where everyone can be made to feel like they belong.”*

The Royal Commission recommended the development of a Plan or Roadmap to guide further reform in the supported employment sector. What would you like to see included in such a plan?

Affirmation of the supported employment model

In the absence of a clear reform direction for disability enterprises, supported employees (and families/carers) continue to feel stressed and anxious about their job security and wellbeing. OVA and providers received distressed feedback from people who read about the possibility of supported worksites closing through our latest survey.

To alleviate these fears, we ask the Australian Government to acknowledge the valuable role disability enterprises play for people with high employment support needs and to provide certainty that these workplaces have an enduring future across all states and territories.

In response to ongoing uncertainty and broader commercial pressures, we have also observed several disability enterprises step back from certain contracts or cohorts due to the risks of recruiting and retaining staff. Those missing out are typically those with more significant disability, who have higher support needs and relatively more restricted work capacity. In these instances, the system is falling out of step with those it was designed to support – the most vulnerable in our community.

Supported employees and their family advocates said:

"Stop giving us stress, anxiety and uncertainty. All I need is a stable job. It makes me feel proud of myself. I have special needs so a supported employment environment is exactly what I need. I do not look forward to working in an open employment environment at all."

"DO NOT PHASE OUT OR CLOSE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT. IT WOULD HAVE A DEVASTATING AFFECT ON ME."

"No closing disability workplaces."

"Please do not stop facilitating places like [disability enterprise] otherwise people like us with disabilities would have no daily goals and no sense of capacity building within the community."

"i would like to know my workplace is stable and cant be wiped out with one stroke of a pen. i don't like how they closed everything in the UK and people are now depressed. some of us have been in open world employment and come back to supported employment because if you have ASD and weird interpersonal skills you are always the first to be sacked when there are cuts because your're a bit weird. supported employment gives stability and gives me an option when the world is not kind."

"We need places like [disability enterprise], etc as there are lots of people who want to work but cant in mainstream as their dissabilities dont allow them too . they dont understand and it will be extremly hard for people with full on dissabilities and the need to feel they are useful with in the work force, some of these people need to feel good about themselves by building their self esteem and self values .If you take this away from them a lot of these people will feel like a burdon on socity."

"Supported employment workplaces should be supported by the government to ensure the continuation of employment of disabled people who are not suitable for open employment, and who do not want to be forced into day options."

"do not close supported employment. there are lots of other good things besides work that people get from working there. friendship, social work, support to understand why they need to see doctors/dentists, support with family troubles, support when we are abused. the staff pick up on a lot of problems they fix without being rewarded or understood. supported employment is like a safety net for the most vulnerable people"

"It will be nice for the Australian government to keep these places opened. I'm nearly 59 years old. I have a cute anxiety and I cannot work in mainstream employment. The government needs to to keep these places opened for my colleagues because they have a long way to go until their retirement and many of them, including myself cannot work in mainstream employment."

Disability procurement and industry development frameworks

In line with Treasury's Employment White Paper and the *Guiding principles for the future of supported employment*, we advocate for the Australian Government to stimulate job creation and pathways for people with disability.

Disability procurement

A quarter of respondents wish to have more work, job variety, and training opportunities, either within supported employment or to help facilitate a mainstream transition. The Australian Government can back these ambitions through a disability procurement policy, modelled off Victoria's Social Procurement Framework (as recommended by the Disability Royal Commission).

By way of example, Victorian Government agencies create opportunities for people with disability by meeting the following social procurement requirements:

- Setting targets to require local and state Governments to procure a proportion of their goods and services via social procurement.
- Directly procuring from disability enterprises.
- Requiring suppliers to demonstrate their own inclusive employment practices.
- Unbundling service delivery for disability enterprises, to allow non-disability employers to partner with more inclusive and diverse employers.
- Establishing performance standards or set labour hours to be performed by people with disability, so that there is evidence of outcomes.

These procurement levers benefit all by stimulating direct job opportunities and inclusive workplaces in the open labour market, while strengthening the supported employment sector.

Critically, Victoria's Social Procurement Framework sets the foundation for disability enterprises to build long-term partnerships and commercially viable relationships, which are connections they can leverage to bring in business (creating new and diverse jobs) and develop tailored pathways into open or hybrid employment. Research undertaken by the Centre of Social Impact into disability enterprise reform highlights that procurement can be leveraged to such effect, supporting demand for business, contracts, and work for supported employees, on and off-site.

Industry development frameworks

Given supply chain diversification and the energy transition are national priorities, there is an opportunity to thread people with high support needs into the fabric of growing economies such as defence, critical minerals, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing. Many disability enterprises operate in adjacent and enabling areas, such as mining supplies and consumables, e-recycling, horticulture, environmental services, manufacturing and logistics.

We recommend the skills, interests and capability of the supported workforce are mapped against Australia's priority sectors and embedded into procurement and industry development frameworks. Noting the missed opportunity of the National

Reconstruction Fund², we recommend introducing job, training and diversity requirements into future industry development grants.

Given the pervasive labour and skills shortage in the building and construction industry, the Australian Government's ten-year, \$120 billion *Infrastructure Investment Program* also presents a unique opportunity to create jobs and training opportunities for people with disability through major government project. The *Commonwealth, State and Territory Supported Employment Plan* recognises the potential here, noting consultation on a potential disability procurement initiative that could meet the principles of the *National Infrastructure Investment Program* (where feasible).

In terms of including social requirements in government grants and loans, we recommend consideration of the approaches used by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Sustainability Victoria³.

On what the Australian Government could do to improve supported employment goals

"Try and have supported employment lead into defence industry and the Australian Defence Force to allow people with disabilities be able to help Defend Australia and It's National Interests."

"I believe there are many people on the DSP that could work in open employment. However, some of the jobs no longer exist as they have been outsourced to China. That being said the Australian Govt could mandate some products that could be partially manufactured or assembled by [disability enterprises] ... There has to be a supported employment system in the future but perhaps smaller than it is now."

² The National Reconstruction Fund (NRF) is a \$15 billion investment from the Australian Government into seven priority areas for the economy. The investment mandate invites the NRF board to consider particular policy priorities when making decisions, including achieving gender equality outcomes, developing opportunities for First Nations people in regional and remote communities, and creating secure, well-paid jobs. Disappointingly, there is no similar regard to the policy priorities under *Australia's Disability Strategy* such as increasing the employment and financial security of people with disability.

³ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has voluntarily embedded social procurement requirements within projects delivered on government land or through the Social Housing Growth Fund, given the magnitude of investment; Sustainability Victoria has chosen to view grants as part of its supply chain and actively seeks opportunities to deliver social outcomes through the third party spend on goods, services and construction that is undertaken by grant recipients.

Increasing supported wages

We strongly support further consideration of the Disability Royal Commission's recommendation to raise wages through a subsidy scheme, noting over half of respondents wished to see the Australian Government take action to increase minimum supported wages (60 percent).

We join Inclusion Australia in advocating for a Ministerial Implementation Working Group to progress Recommendation 7.31 but emphasise the importance of proceeding carefully under a principles-based approach that leaves no one worse off socially or economically. One family advocate shared they would like the Australian Government to *"change the way you complete the wage review process. Set up a steering group with people with disability and their carers that can help shape what supported employment looks like for us all in the future."*

In considering higher wages, we remain overly concerned about the risks to the job security and wellbeing of people with the highest support needs. As DSS knows, the Taylor Fry modelling commissioned by the Disability Royal Commission forecast significant job losses under the proposed wage reforms, estimating a 100 percent decrease in employment for supported workers who provider's pay under Grades A and Grades B of the SES Award. That is, the classifications specifically introduced by the Fair Work Commission to promote the social inclusion of people with more significant disability.

Any supported wage reform needs to be underpinned by strong governance and monitoring frameworks. If the Australian Government accepts Recommendation 7.31, a model and pathway should advance the following:

- **Ministerial Implementation Working Group.** Formation of a working group to conduct an option and implementation analysis. Representatives should include impacted workers, their families and carers, industry and advocacy peaks, unions, and providers.
- **Clear principles for reform.** Objectives should include job protection and genuine choice and control for impacted workers
- **Thresholds and triggers for transition.** Design of a model and pathway that is flexible and could be revisited if employment opportunities fall below certain thresholds for impacted workers and NDIS participants matching their profile.
- **Analysis of long-term impact on employment and wellbeing.** Ongoing analysis and long-term studies on employment and wellbeing outcomes of impacted workers.
- **Analysis of long-term impact on Government expenditure.** Support for independent academic research to assess the economic and financial costs incurred because impacted workers have sought day or community participation programs.

Culture and supports in the workplace

While a third of respondents were wholly satisfied with their supported workplace, some sought greater training and advancement opportunities, both within and beyond the disability enterprise (13 percent). Others highlighted cultural issues (14 percent), including the need for more support and job coaching in the workplace, greater understanding of individual impairments, and for staffing issues to be resolved (such a high turnover, poor communication processes, and compromised organisational values).

To help providers respond to these concerns, we believe there needs to be greater clarity and oversight regarding who providers can charge out as “NDIS supports” and what constitutes supervision and training in an assisted workplace. There is an ongoing grey area which sees some participants pay for a whole/partial day of employment supports simply because there are staff or supervisors without disability working in their general vicinity. However, these staff members/supervisors may spend most of the time in a separate office or worksite area, undertaking independent tasks and having minimal-to-no line of sight over supported employees.

We believe such behaviour constitutes both passive and developmental neglect, oftentimes resulting in supported employees working for whole or extended periods of time without direct supervision, ongoing monitoring and hands-on assistance. There are also implications on the validity of wages set under the SES Award and the ratio or pattern of support charged through NDIS plans (as detailed further below).

These sharp practices can be seen when “support workers” or “supervisors” are classified under Grades 2 or 3 of the SES Award. It could be argued that such staff members are not principally employed to provide disability care and support (otherwise they would be paid under the SCHADS Awards) or to supervise and train others (otherwise they would be classified at Grade 4 or higher under the SES Award). We recommend the NDIA add an additional data field to future supported employment surveys that captures the industry award and classification of support workers/supervisors at disability enterprises.

A family advocate says to the Australian Government, *“Recognise the ADEs that are doing well and providing outstanding support for people with disability, and continue to reward them in any way possible so they can thrive and continue their great work. For those that are not performing as well, work with them to improve their operations—these organisations still play a vital role in providing employment opportunities for people with disability, and they need support to continue delivering that service. We do not want them to fail. However, for those that are poorly run and appear to be driven by less genuine intentions, they should no longer be allowed to operate. It is because of these shady operations that a bad image is cast over those that are genuinely doing the right thing in the interest of people with disability. Why throw away the whole apple just because of one bad one?”*

What supported employees and their family advocates would like to see more of in their workplaces:

"There is not enough staff to help everyone"

"More support to help me stay on task. Acknowledgement of when jobs are completed well."

"More support and better pay"

"more training so I can learn more skills"

"Supervision and help to make good decisions"

"More support for solving floor issues between staff and employees in the area I work"

"Supervision to manage occasional aggressive behaviour."

"Training more work choices"

"Support"

"More help to transition into main stream employment"

"Continued support"

"following through on training that was promised"

"More support⁴"

"Support to help me with new skills and opportunities. Skills that may help me become more independent and make me feel valued."

"Smaller supervisor/worker ratios"

"More support for workers to improve themselves."

"More superviso"

"More support, on job training."

"MORE PROMPT 1-1 ASSISTANCE WITH PERSONAL CARE."

"more supervisors"

"Maybe some more support for me personally as I forget how to do things quite quickly."

"More job opportunities for the textiles] department and our own supervisor"

"More understanding or the needs of all the supported employees"

"There is not enough staff to help everyone"

"Better people."

⁴ "More support" was mentioned multiple times by different respondents, however we have not duplicated this response in the comment box.

Strengthening quality and safeguards

Regulatory oversight and reforms

The Australian Government should incorporate greater oversight of disability enterprises as part of its broader implementation of Disability Royal Commission recommendations, especially the proposed Associated Plan to promote accessible and inclusive communication and system-wide safeguarding reforms.

We recommend the Australian Government explore how to mitigate risks of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of supported employees through each state and territory's community visitor scheme and potential independent adult safeguarding and complaint functions.

As proposed by the Disability Royal Commission, we also advocate for the Associated Plan to include targeted actions that ensure all supported employees receive accessible and timely information on the safeguards and protections that exist within their jurisdiction and through the NDIS regulatory framework.

Quality assurance framework

Under the previous case-based funding model, disability enterprises had reporting requirements around individualised employment plans and the programs of support (such as training). However, these practices were discontinued under the NDIS and limited data exists regarding the performance of the supported employment sector. This gap becomes particularly problematic when commitment to sector reform varies from organisation to organisation⁵.

To drive consistency and evolution within the market, we recommend the Australian Government introduce a quality assurance and reporting framework, developed in consultation with supported employees and their families, carers, providers, and advocates. Consistent with old requirements, we believe formal training outcomes should also be monitored and reported on. The framework should also include minimum performance standards for disability enterprises tied to eligibility for government procurement processes and panels⁶.

As part of quality assurance initiatives, we also advocate for the sector-wide rollout of individualised employment plans. These plans should be structured around individual strengths, aspirations, and incorporate a clear goal setting system that builds capacity aligned to career interests. OVA invites consideration to how such

⁵ We are concerned by the NDIS' *Supported employment survey report* (2025). Despite a clear reform directive from the Australian Government, around 20 percent of respondents had no plans to identify employees suitable for mainstream employment and provide training and supports to help them transition.

⁶ We note the NDIA's *Participant Employment Strategy 2024-2026* includes various actions to improve and measure provider performance.

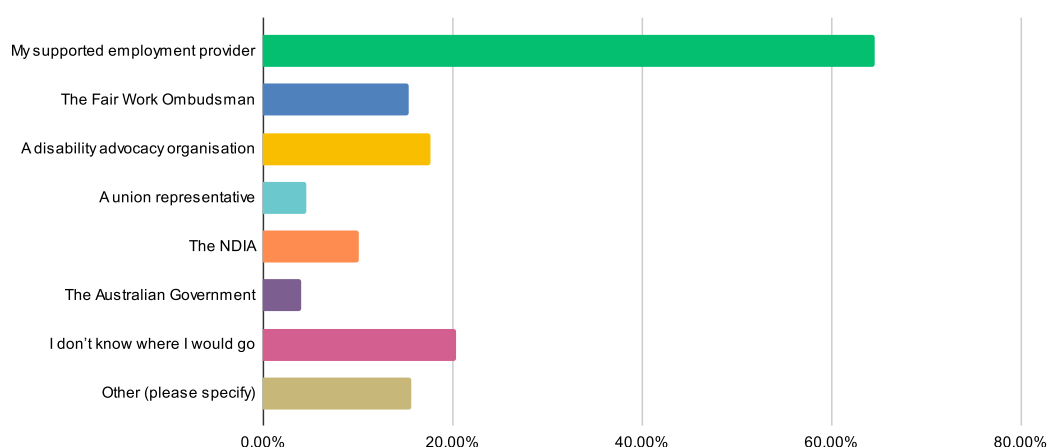
materials could incorporate elements from the Self-Determined Career Development model⁷ (SDCDM) or other evidence-based interventions.

Individual industrial relations support and advocacy

We commend the Australian Government's swift progression of Recommendation 7.28 and are open to supporting Inclusion Australia's delivery of the *Disability Employment Advocacy and Information Program*. Notwithstanding, OVA finds it deeply worrying that people with moderate-to-severe intellectual disability are provided no ongoing specialist union or advocacy service for industrial relations issues occurring within the very workplaces designed to employ them⁸.

Supported employees require significant assistance to exercise, and advocate for, their rights at work. They are inherently vulnerable to exploitation (irrespective of whether they are in an open or supportive workplace), possessing limited to nil literacy and numeracy skills and a highly suggestible and agreeable nature. Addressing this gap should be a priority when considering next steps for supported employees.

Where would you go if you were worried about the pay and conditions in your workplace?



We received an exceedingly small number of responses to our survey (<10) that indicated misapplication of the SES Award in relation to grading employees, arranging timely SWS assessments, and upholding the rights at work clause. There were also some concerning comments from supported employees about being assessed in obsolete or irrelevant roles and benchmarked against staff without disability who complete the same work using different, shorter processes.

Based on survey responses, there is a risk of Inclusion Australia's program alerting supported employees and families/carers to compliance issues, and there being no

⁷ The SDCDM is a practical tool used to help individuals with disabilities identify and achieve their employment goals. A facilitator supports the job seeker through three-phases – (1) identify a barrier to employment, (2) set a goal and create an action plan to address the barrier, and (3) evaluate progress and adjust as necessary.

⁸ As it stands, we understand that the national union membership for supported employees is between three and five percent.

pathway for impartial feedback and resolution. The complexity of the SES Award, Supported Wage System (SWS) and broader industrial relations landscape makes it extremely challenging to advance claims about award breaches or underpayment without direct assistance.

Most respondents to OVA's latest survey would go to their supported employment provider if concerned about the pay and conditions in their workplace (64 percent). Meanwhile, a fifth would be unsure where to go and around fifteen percent would go to a family member or disability advocacy organisation.

Progressing such a matter involves time, resources and a level of knowledge that is simply not tenable for families/carers (who are burnt out and exhausted). They lack the will and capacity to navigate yet another complex system on top of the NDIS and Centrelink. Moreover, as noted in Mary Walsh's submissions, many Commonwealth-funded DROs have a track-record acting outside the interests of supported employees or disregarding requests made for assistance on their behalf.

Separately, we wish to alert DSS of our concerns regarding some disability enterprises potentially classifying supported employees under Grades A and Grades B of the SES Award without providing the necessary level of monitoring to meet the requirements of the classification structure. This creates a risk of providers both underpaying and overcharging supported employees, who lack the capacity to identify these issues and self-advocate in response.

We believe SWS assessors should play a greater role in validating that employees are receiving the requisite level of monitoring and supervision (as determined by their classification under the SES Award). In line with the *Rights at work* clause in the SES Award, families, carers, and advocates should also be able to provide decision-making assistance with grading and wage assessment matters.

Supported decision-making and informed work choices

As recommended by the Disability Royal Commission, we advocate for supported decision-making principles and frameworks to be embedded within service provision.

There were a few responses to our latest survey where the supported employee appeared to have never considered their employment goals and aspirations, as well as a more significant cohort who were uncertain about what supported employment would look like if it were perfect (7 percent). When asked where they would work if supported employment was perfect, one respondent said, *"im sorry I cant answer that, as I have never thought beyond what I can do. I would give anything a go."*

OVA's first national survey highlighted similar themes. A detailed analysis of employee preferences showed a gap between those expressly interested in moving into open employment (8 percent) and those who were interested or uncertain (20 percent). That suggests there is a significant cohort requiring support to explore the career options available to them and make informed choices.

How could the sector best increase wages for people with disability while avoiding job losses?

Impact of current wage reforms

To be clear, we have no overall objection to pro-rata wages under the SES Award, so long as providers use these special provisions to recruit and retain people with significant disability. However, it becomes more challenging for OVA to reconcile a disability enterprise using the Grade A and B classifications if they are withdrawing from simple work or operating workplaces with minimal supervision and monitoring of supported employees.

After all, disability enterprises provided witness testimony and evidence during the recent review of the SES Award regarding the types of jobs and supervision levels within their workplaces. These views appeared to influence the final decision of the Fair Work Commission regarding the wage setting methodology, particularly the incorporation of pay rates lower than the national minimum wage.

Disability enterprises spoke about supervision that is about welfare, caring support, life skills and basic social interactions, rather than corporate rules and optimising output. They submitted staff help people with significant disability to complete tasks and remain safe in the workplace through recurring role modelling, verbal prompts and behavioural assistance and counselling.

Disability enterprises emphasised the simplicity of the work designed, as well as the role of visual aids and jigs in helping people meet production standards when they struggle with numeracy and counting. These jobs included sorting spoons, knives and forks into a cutlery box, placing a shaving brush in a box, feeding single pieces of paper into a shredder and packing a set number of items into a plastic bag⁹.

Disability enterprises shared onboarding and initial wage assessment processes indicating they accepted job applications from people with significant limitations on work capacity and productivity. Under the commonly used Greenacres tool, there was an entry point for people who may only be able to count to five or undertake very simple tasks due to highly impaired fine and gross motor skills¹⁰. At other enterprises, there was consideration of a person's eyesight and ability to read, stand and recognise/match colours.

We provide these examples to contextualise the new classification structure within the SES Award, as well as emphasise the cohort for whom supported workplaces and wages are intended for. Over the last two years, we have become increasingly worried about the overcommercialisation of disability enterprises and the rising

⁹ A specific example was the use of a custom jig with indents to help count the appropriate number of items. The jig would apparently be used like a scoop, with supported employees digging into a tub of caps and shaking it off so that one cap sits in each hole. They would then place it in the bag and turn it over, filling it with the appropriate number of caps.

¹⁰ Acceptable 'task skills' included the ability to pick up small objects, thread items, screw one item onto another, fold items, and place a limited number of small objectives into bags/containers (with help from a jig).

adoption of contractual and staffing practices that exclude those with the highest support needs.

While evolution of business and service models is welcome, the sector's core mission should remain the same: providing safe, supportive, and accessible roles for everyone. Perversely, it is the individuals with the most significant disabilities who are currently being excluded from the assisted workforce.

Before progressing wage growth initiatives for the sector, we advocate for greater understanding of current recruitment and retention practices, reinforced by data collection and sharing between DSS and the NDIA. Analysis should flag any sectoral shifts away from employment people with the highest support needs, with consideration to the number of people classified under Grade A and their level of function/productivity according to NDIS planners/SWS assessors.

If wage rates are indeed resulting in people with significant disability losing access to supported employment programs, we believe there needs to be an urgent and transparent conversation between government, providers, and the workers themselves (including their families, carers and advocates). Where disability enterprises are opaque about viability issues and involuntary exit planning, they deprive supported employees of informed choice and control over their employment, including the opportunity to make an application to the Fair Work Commission¹¹.

The extent to which NDIS pricing issues are contributing to cherry-picking behaviours also warrants further investigation. As the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) moves towards differentiated pricing, we advocate for the benefits and costs of supported employment services to be considered as part of these reforms. It should be emphasised that two thirds of respondents to OVA's latest survey wished for the NDIA to reduce the risk of worksite closures through pricing.

A respondent says to the Australian Government, *"Please don't close supported workplaces. They provide a sense of purpose and make people feel valued. They provide a place not just for work but a community. This spills over into non work activities which helps with social interaction. The world is harsh enough as it is and supported employment helps to level out the playing field. We have experience where we were „too intellectually impaired“ for another organisation they only wanted very mildly intellectual impairment so they could keep their funding and not have to provide support..."*

¹¹ When handing down its final decision regarding the SES Award, the Fair Work Commission proposed to carefully monitor the transition to the new wages structure because of the cost implications to the sector. The Fair Work Commission said, *"If there is evidence that the implementation of the new wages structure is endangering the viability of ADEs (generally or in a particular case), this should be brought to the attention of the Commission and the Commission will, on application or on its own initiative, consider appropriate variations to the transitional arrangements or any other relevant aspect of the SES Award pursuant to s 157 of the Fair Work Act (2009)."*

Compensation strategies in social enterprises

The Australian Government should exercise significant caution in interpreting the evidence of ADEs currently or committing to paying full minimum wages as an affirmative signal for the proposed social firm model; those with the highest support needs are typically excluded from such enterprises. We provide the following case studies from Australia, Canada and the United States to illustrate these risks.

Organisational strategies and hiring approaches should be carefully scrutinised. There is emerging cherry-picking of the most “able” workers within disability enterprises. We are extremely concerned by evolution of business models that would result in people with the highest support needs being denied jobs and workplace opportunities. The Commissioners proposed reform would, by explicit design, greatly promote these practices.

United States

Where disability employers proactively phased out pro-rata wages through service model transformation, large-scale job losses have ensued. A Wisconsin provider, ACHIEVA, previously employed 500 people with disability under the 14(c) program. After the transition, only 65 individuals retained employment (at minimum wage) and a fifth moved into competitive employment 40. Similarly, a reported move away from the 14(c) program by a Minnesota provider left about a thousand clients without employment.

Canada

In response to similar policy discourse and logic, Canadian disability enterprises are taking steps to evolve into competitive social firms. A case study of different providers highlights how different business and remuneration strategies connect to organisational philosophy and the productivity capacity of their workers.

The practice of paying pro-rata wages was observed by businesses employing less productive workers who were committed to holding a job. In contrast, those only paying minimum wages created alternative options for legacy workers who were not able or interested in meeting business standards. That decision saw large numbers of people with disability directed into day programs, leaving many with “diminished income, empty days, and a lack of productive engagement”.

On paying workers at least the minimum wage, the study concludes: *“This commitment comes with certain perils, as particularly in this sector, payment at minimum wage may threaten the very existence of the [social enterprise], or the upholding of [social enterprise] goals of employing people who are the most marginalized and vulnerable. While this tension shaped the nature and direction of growth, and threatened some of the core visions of the businesses involved due to the need to move some workers out of employment.”*

Australia

A similar crossroad is emerging for ADEs regarding pro-rata wages. Bezzina's thesis, *A Whole System Approach to a Living Wage for People with Disability*, involved interviews with eight ADE CEOs on funding arrangements and wage levels.

While some CEO's had adopted the position that a full-paying wage was the only option, and that their organisation had a plan to renegotiate commercial contracts to enable that (CEO#1, CEO#2, CEO#4), others supported mixed wages approaches or sought certainty on a path that protected current job volumes and organisational sustainability.

CEO#1 and CEO#2 were already paying full wages, which had been a strategic decision because of public perception and their organisational values. The CEOs appearing to employ individuals with lower productivity – by virtue of the contracts undertaken (CEO#3, CEO#5) and expressed workforce capabilities (CEO#5, CEO#6) – disfavoured unconditional support for a full wage, citing concerns regarding the volume of people with disability they could employ, especially those with the highest support needs.

Key reflections on wage setting in disability enterprises

"It was widely acknowledged among the interviewees that with an increase on wage expenditure would also come an increase on the mix of supported employees and non-supported employees to maintain competitiveness and productivity levels.

In addition, there would likely be a reduction in the overall volume of employment opportunities for those with more severe disabilities, and while this would be contentious in the public domain, the real issue of these organisations continuing to exist for those they supported is at the forefront of their minds.

The term 'cherry picking' was raised where interviewees had considered the ongoing employability and recruitment practices they'd once operated with and that the future constrained financial position may not allow for the greatest volume of opportunities for people with disabilities (CEO#3, CEO#5, CEO#6, CEO#7)."

Do you see a role for workplaces which provide specialised employment opportunities for people with disability in the future?

An overwhelming number of supported employees and family advocates like their job, the people they work with, and want to stay where they are now. They have made their employment preferences clear, repeatedly, across different consultation processes run by the Department of Social Services, Fair Work Commission and OVA¹².

We call on the Australian Government to acknowledge disability enterprises as a genuine employment pathway and the job of first choice for hundreds of workers with high support needs. Like all people with disability, supported employees have the right to determine what meaningful work means to them and make decisions which affect their lives and livelihood (with appropriate decision-making supports).

Rather than decreasing the employment avenues available to an already highly disadvantaged group, future policy should focus on ensuring everyone can move freely between these options depending on their career aspirations, individual choices, and support needs.

Inclusive workplaces

To reflect the experiences and aspirations of supported employees, we believe disability inclusion policy should emphasise feelings of belonging, value and acceptance and consider specialist settings as a legitimate vehicle to releasing these outcomes. As noted above, a third of survey respondents expressly wished to work with friends, peers, or others like them. We also received comments from several supported employees who wished to have *more* colleagues with a disability.

The Disability Royal Commission's evidence review into *Outcomes associated with 'inclusive', 'segregated' and 'integrated' settings for people with disability* identified that good inclusive practice includes "setting the scene for people being connected with others of their choosing in friendship, experiencing an affinity with their surroundings and feeling accepted and welcome for who they are and who they want to become".

"Setting the scene" for supported employees is an essential practice. When asked in OVA's latest survey how a disability enterprise could best support the respondent's

¹² When consulting on the future of supported employment in 2018, the Department of Social Services interviewed 54 workers and over fifty percent said their current job is the kind of job they want. Further consultations in October 2023 highlighted a strong view that disability enterprises should continue to be an employment option for people with disability with high support needs.

In reaching its decision on the four yearly review of modern awards *Supported Employment Services Award 2020 (PR749151)*, the Fair Work Commission considered over two hundred unchallenged statements/oral evidence from people with a disability and/or their guardians/carers, who emphasised their personal gratification and value they placed on working in supported employment.

OVA received over 650 responses from supported employees and their family advocates to our first national survey. Almost 90 percent of supported employees who took part in the survey said they liked their job, and over 50 percent said they liked everything about their job.

employment goal, one of the top answers was supporting communication and relationship building in the workplace (59 percent). In considering their staff and supervisors, 85 percent of respondents liked how they helped them feel included at work.

A study has shown that whether an environment fosters a sense of belonging, contribution and self-worth is one of the primary conditions for people with intellectual disability to experience inclusion at work, and that highly valued elements include social connection and kinship with colleagues. These findings are reflected by acknowledgement from both the Australian Government and Commissioners that many supported employees derive considerable satisfaction from their bonds with colleagues and the opportunity to work alongside peers.

There is also broader evidence into social inclusion as experienced by people with intellectual disability which emphasises that belonging comes from feeling a sense of community connectedness and communality. Multiple researchers have concluded that these outcomes are more likely to be achieved in groups of other people with intellectual disability, rather than physical integration¹³.

In defining and evaluating whether a disability enterprise is inclusive, our suggestion is to prioritise informed decision-making of supported employees and evaluate whether genuine options exist for them to work in community-facing or industry-integrated roles. OVA wishes to see providers adopt the “good inclusive practices” identified by the Disability Royal Commission’s research; particularly the provision of employment supports which are competent, customised, and tied to a developmental trajectory consistent with the person’s aspirations.

¹³ For example, Dr Edward Hall conducted a study on two “intellectual disability exclusive” spaces – a theatre company and an arts and craft organisation. These spaces were found to foster active belonging (and, in turn, social inclusion) because people had a sense of “‘insiderness’ and proximity to ‘majority’ people, activities, networks and spaces.” Being “‘intellectual disability exclusive’ was found to be a crucial element of this success. Professor Robert Cummin and Professor Anna Lau have made similar findings.

What we heard from supported employees and their family advocates about inclusion in the workplace:

"In mainstream employment people are nice, but they aren't really friends. You aren't part of the social get-togethers outside work. It can be lonely"

"Don't force me to work with the public as I get bullied and am not safe. I am non verbal so people bully me. I don't feel like I fit anywhere but with other disabled people"

"KEEP THE SYSTEM OPERATINGAS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES NEED A CHANCE TO THRIVE AND BE PART OF A COMMUNITY WHICH OPEN EMPLOYMENT DOES NOT PROVIDE, IT IS NOT A CASE OF ONE SIZE FITS ALL. PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY WHEN WORKING TOGETHER WILL NOT FEEL THE STIGMA OF BEING DIFFERENT WHERE IN MAINSTREAM THEY FEEL MARGINALISED AND SOMETIMES AT ODDS WITH THE SOCIAL INTEGRtion, we are talking from experience here and it is a very real fact,"

"Our experience of open and mainstream employment has been a disaster! It leads to isolation in the workspace."

"I have an intellectual disability and would not fit inti mainstream employment...I like working with people like me. We are happy at work. Noone makes fun of us."

"I was in open employment and wanted to hurt myself because of the bullying and harassment. I was lonely and had no friends or support.I feel safe and have friends in supported employment and can do my best work without worrying. I am proud of myself and where I work."

"I am 70 years old. I used to go on supported camps every January. I really looked forward to this. Some bright bunny decided that it was wrong to have segregated camps. The next year I went on an inclusive camp. I stood out like a shag on a rock. The net result, no more camps for me and the other disabled people I used to meet up with there."

What should specialist workplaces look like?

New standard for specialist workplaces

We recommend the Australian Government progress clear, consistent and practical operationalisation of the *Guiding principles for the future of supported employment*. The Centre of Social Impact's [WISE-Ability model](#) could serve as a blueprint for such reform, setting out the organisational design elements that maximise employment and wellbeing outcomes in disability enterprises. In line with feedback from OVA's survey and the evidence base for intellectual disability, we would also like to see greater on-site delivery of industry-linked training programs and systematic instruction programs¹⁴.

On what disability enterprises and the NDIA could do to assist supported employee meet their goals:

"Training that leads to nationally recognised certificates"

"A little more emphasis on skill training but the focus need not be increased wages, just personal development and satisfaction."

"More training on different jobs"

"Consider post schooling transition disability services that last for 12-24 months that is a mix of literacy, numeracy, practical skills, health, life skills and employment training, like a proper continuing uni style program that will keep supporting families and their children with disabilities as they learn the phase of navigating this part of the journey."

"Supported apprenticeship programs in supported employment."

"Mentoring and development of skills."

¹⁴ The Department of Social Services *Disability and Career Advice Survey* (2021) found that people with disability require greater confidence across basic tasks that carry across different industries and jobs. Compared to other cohorts, people with intellectual disability are more likely to lack confidence in learning new jobs and task requirements (34 percent); and following instructions (29 percent). Systematic Instruction addresses these challenges as an evidence-based teaching strategy for individuals who find it difficult to learn work tasks and complete them independently.

Noting reform risks

While their reality may cause ideological dissonance, the fact remains that some supported employees — who live with very significant impairments — will only ever be able to complete simple, repetitive and likely low-value tasks. They have the right to economic participation and attainment of employment goals in the environment of their choosing.

We seek caution from government, advocates and industry peaks in terms of reform signalling around “true” social enterprise models as these typically involve higher order business and service lines (especially when full-award wages are promoted). While diversification is necessary to meet government expectations, there still needs to be a subset of simple jobs for people with significant disability. Otherwise, they will become marginalised from the assisted workforce.

Where industrial worksites are wound down or closed, disability enterprises risk acting against the wishes and preferences of supported employees. Two thirds of respondents who do manufacturing and assembly work wished to continue doing the same or similar work. Around 90 percent said disability enterprises could best help them achieve their goals by providing a safe, supportive and inclusive environment. Based on these findings, some supported employees are best served by the continuation or expansion of current business lines.

To be clear, we are not advocating for the status quo. There were also numerous responses received from supported employees who were seeking more challenging and diverse jobs. Consistent with the Centre of Social Impact’s evidence, we believe supported employees should be provided the opportunity to work in a variety of employment settings and sectors. We would like to see providers respond to the Disability Royal Commission by strengthening job creation and matching practices across different industries, rather than exiting from packaging and assembly completely.

What supported employees said about wages and job continuity

“To be honest, I can’t think of anything more I would want from my workplace. I love my job and the opportunities and environment that [disability enterprise] provides. Money is secondary. It is the sense of community and purpose my employer gives me that makes me truly happy, and I can’t think of anything more I would ask from them.”

“The money doesn’t matter to me. I love working in supported employment. I definitely do not want it to be shut down or phased out. I have worked in regular workplaces and did not like it at all.”

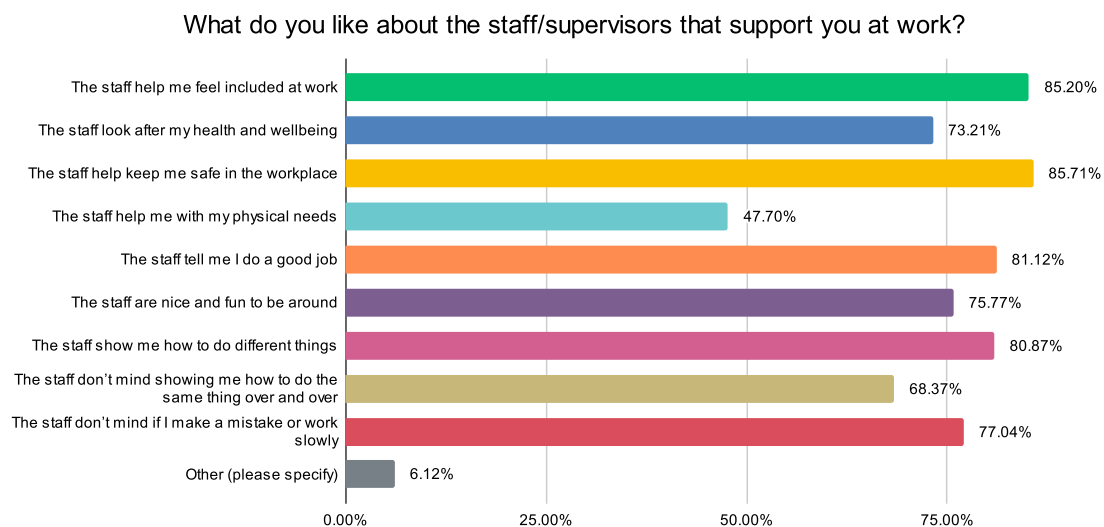
“do not care about earning a higher wage. I just like going to work at an environment where I am supported and valued. I gain a lot of self-esteem from working. It is too difficult to work in other places where I am not supported and valued.”

How could the benefits of supported employment settings be reflected in open employment settings?

Prior and during open employment placements, it is imperative to build the capacity of open employers. They lack certainty and knowledge in recruiting, managing, and supporting people with significant disability. Consistent with best practice, OVA recommends the Australian Government consider programs that provide for and promote the upskilling and training of mainstream employers¹⁵.

As every person has different needs, preferences and conditions for success in the workplace, both the supported employee and employer would require tailored and individualised assistance. Notwithstanding, we believe disability awareness training for mainstream line managers and supervisors is an important starting point. These programs should be specific to people with intellectual disability and provide practical advice on preferred leadership and working styles for this cohort.

In OVA's latest survey, respondents selected what they liked most about staff/supervisors at their disability enterprises, with the top answers being they help me feel included at work (85 percent), keep me safe in the workplace (86 percent), tell me I do a good job (81 percent), and show me how to do different things (81 percent). For sustainable transitions to occur, these characteristics need to be translated into open workplaces.



¹⁵ The Centre of Social Impact's emerging evidence for transitioning supported employees into mainstream roles highlights the imperative of proactively training and educating employers on workplaces adaptations and supports, as well as designing bespoke recruitment and onboarding processes to connect people with disability to matched job opportunities.

Given the importance of colleagues and culture to successful transitions¹⁶, we also summarise qualitative feedback on what supported employees and their family advocates identified as the perfect people and places to work with and for.

Key themes included:

- Co-workers who treat each other well and don't discriminate at others who are willing and able to do the work too.
- Happy, supportive and passionate workmates.
- An accepting and inclusive culture, where everyone is treated with respect.
- People who are "like them" and face similar challenges and issues.
- A supportive team who understands disability and works together to get the job done.
- Places that are safe and friendly, with trusted people.

¹⁶ A comparative study by UNSW of three employment support models for people with intellectual disability found that positive relationships involved in work were one of the most valued employment outcomes, but poor relationships in the workplace could also be a major source of frustration for many people. Working thus gives people with intellectual disability access to friends, peers, mentors and the community, which they emphasise as valuable, but there is also a need to monitor the relations enacted in the workplace to ensure that positive relationships and relational outcomes are fostered and maintained.

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