

**Response of [REDACTED] to Next steps in Supported
Employment: consultation on the way forward.**

Vision for the Future of Supported Employment

Our vision for the supported employment sector is one where human potential is realised—where people with disability, particularly those with high support needs, have access to meaningful, inclusive and sustainable employment. This vision is grounded in dignity, choice and the belief that everyone has the right to contribute to their community through work.

The below response outlines [REDACTED] vision for the future of Supported Employment, which is informed by and supported by current supported employees. Their voice has been included throughout the response and identified themes of:

- The value of a supportive environment
- Social connections and belonging
- Concerns about the impact of higher wages
- Fear of isolation and boredom without work
- The experience of discrimination and exclusion in open employment
- A desire for skill development and career progression
- Inclusive and meaningful work environments

Case Study

Innovation [REDACTED]

In response to feedback and the desire of many people with disability to work within their own communities, [REDACTED] This innovative approach addresses common barriers to inclusive open-employment by:

- Providing an on-site supervisor and rotating team structure
- Offering full back-up support to employers
- Ensuring that employees remain part of [REDACTED] preserving the social and developmental benefits of supported employment

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. It is now a cornerstone of [REDACTED] employment strategy, enabling people with disability to contribute meaningfully to their communities while gaining skills, confidence, and social connection.

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

A Hybrid, Flexible Employment Ecosystem

We propose a **hybrid model** that blends supported and open employment, offering people with disability a continuum of options that evolve with their needs and aspirations. This includes:

- **Model** is a proven example. It provides team-based, community-embedded employment with tailored support. Each crew includes a trained leader and two or more employees with disability, enabling peer support, skill development and social inclusion. **Model** work in the community within the workplace of host-employers completing specific tasks or roles. For example, a **Model** may be responsible for grounds care tasks, administrative functions, event management or a range of other roles that are needed within the host. These roles can be ongoing or short-term arrangements.
- **Training Centre Models:** Safe, structured environments where individuals can build skills, gain confidence and return to for ongoing support. People may attend a Training Centre regularly as part of a blended work arrangement, or intermittently to refresh skills. The Centre is also available to people if their needs change or if the role in **Model** community employment is not working as expected. This enables continuity when situations change, without the need to exit employment if an individual arrangement is not working.
- **Job Carving and Customised Roles:** Roles are designed around individual strengths and workplace needs, making employment more accessible and sustainable. By having a range of roles and workplaces available within the ecosystem, specific opportunities can be designed to meet individual needs.

Early Pathways and Community Engagement

To increase employment outcomes, we must start early with the **School-to-Work Transitions**. Support should begin in the teenage years, with clear pathways from school into employment. This includes engaging families and educators to shift expectations away from day programs and toward meaningful work.

Case Study

Supporting School Leavers with Disability

is a 12-week initiative supporting young people with disability as they transition from school into employment. Developed in response to feedback from families and educators, the program fills a gap left by traditional post-school options, offering meaningful work experience and personal development.

Participants gain hands-on experience across social enterprises—such as hospitality, administration, and warehousing—while learning essential workplace skills through nine structured modules. Delivered in small groups with tailored coaching, the program builds confidence, social connection, and readiness for employment.

Funded through NDIS Core Supports, the program also assists families in navigating the NDIS process. Importantly, it offers a direct pathway to employment helping school leavers move into paid work within a year of finishing school.

This model demonstrates how flexible, person-centred programs can empower young people with disability to explore their potential and take meaningful steps toward employment.

Embedding Supported Employment Benefits into Open Settings

We believe the benefits of supported employment—such as tailored support, peer networks and structured environments—can and should be reflected in open employment if there is adequate funding to provide the support needed to both the workplace and to individuals.

██████████ a mixed model that combines an open setting with the supported elements. On-the-job coaching and mentoring is key. Depending on the skills and needs of the individuals, and those of the workplace, the support model is designed to be tapered over time if suitable. For this to be successful the host employer will need to be supported to be more inclusive.

Community capacity building is essential and needs to be funded to ensure inclusive workplace design and adequate culture change support. Host employers and communities need support to become inclusive. This includes training, mentoring and co-designing roles with people with disability. This work needs to be included above and beyond the funding that is provided to support individuals to be successful within the workplace.

However, for some individuals with high support needs ██████████ ongoing support is still required to be provided and maintaining a strong link between working in ██████████ and access to the support and community of a Training Centre is vital.

Supported Employee Consultation Themes

Value of Supportive Work Environments

Participants consistently emphasised the importance of emotional, social, and practical support in their workplaces. Supported employment offers a sense of security, understanding and belonging that many feel is lacking in open employment.

- “I get support when I am upset, there is always someone to talk to” — N
- “Staff support me, you aren’t just left to do things alone you always have people to help” — J
- “You get communication and help; I can rely on the staff to help me not just with work but with everyday issues” — G
- “You have support staff, in open employment you would have supervisors but it’s not the same, they won’t look out for you they would only see you for your work.” — B

Social Connection and Belonging

Many participants highlighted the friendships and social interactions they experience through supported employment as a key benefit.

- “I get to see my friends, I met lots of new people” — N
- “Making friends, being social” — B
- “The comradery and friendship and working with others” — C

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

██████████ pay people with disability a full wage. However, the intention is not realistic under the current funding models without placing people with moderate to higher needs at extreme risk of job loss.

65% of ██████ supported employee workforce currently has an assessed capacity of completing 3 tasks or less. The level of support to complete tasks and/or support individual to remain engaged in workplace activities is high. For ██████ to increase the overall profitability of the business lines to generate profits to sustain higher wages would require the entry into more lucrative business lines that typically require higher levels of skill complexity.

As many people within ██████ current workforce supplement their income with a Disability Support Pension, and utilise other benefits such as Commonwealth Rental Assistance. These benefits could be considered as part of a total income support package that provides a living wage.

Supported Employee Consultation Themes

Concerns about the impacts of higher wages

While many support the idea of wage increases, some raised concerns about how it might affect their pensions or living costs.

- “If my wage gets increased too much, it impacts my pension and I’m losing money anyway...If my pay went up \$3 dollars, my rent would go up \$3, it does nothing for me” — A
- “If my pay goes up, I lose my pension so it’s lose-lose” — G

Fear of isolation and boredom without work

Participants expressed anxiety about what their lives would be like without supported employment, often linking it to isolation, boredom, and loss of independence.

- “I would’ve been bored and lonely, I would not see anyone” — N
- “I would be living off Centrelink forever... I would lose my independence” — C
- “My life would be worse, my parents would not be able to retire and I would be much less independent” — B

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

These workplaces play a vital role in the employment ecosystem by offering:

- **Safe and supportive environments** where individuals can build confidence, learn new skills, and work at their own pace.
- **Opportunities to build community and friendships**, which are often just as important as the job itself.
- **Tailored support** that may not be feasible in many open employment settings, including intensive coaching, communication support and structured routines.

the value of these environments. small, team-based units led by trained leaders, providing real work in community settings while offering the structure and support needed for success. This model has proven effective in reducing isolation, building workplace capacity, and supporting long-term employment outcomes.

We also support a **hybrid approach**, where specialised workplaces and Training Centres act as stepping stones to open employment for those who want it, while remaining a long-term option for those who need ongoing support. This flexibility ensures that employment is truly inclusive and person-centred.

Models like the provide essential spaces to train, return to, and grow from. These models should be recognised and funded as part of a broader, inclusive employment strategy.

Supported Employee Consultation Themes

Discrimination and exclusions experienced in Open Employment

Participants expressed concerns about discrimination, lack of accommodations and social exclusion in open employment settings.

- “I put my resumes out to open employment, and I am discriminated against, people don’t want people in wheelchairs working for them” — B
- “As soon as they find out you have a disability they treat you like shit” — G
- “Employers don’t give people a chance, I have applied to Big W and Target, and I have never gotten an interview” — C
- “Just knowing that I have somewhere to rely on, I know in open employment they can tell you they have no work and send you home.” “When I was in open employment I could not rely on them” — C

Desire for Skill Development and Career Progression

Several interviewees expressed a desire for more training, diverse work experiences and opportunities to grow.

- “More work experience opportunities” — N
- “I would like more training to learn more skills like my retail course” — D
- “We are able to have long term employment and training, and it is really good experience for my resume” — M

Inclusive and meaningful work environments

When asked about their ideal job, participants described inclusive, structured and meaningful work environments—often similar to their current supported roles.

- “I would be doing admin jobs... working with friends” — N
- “Doing food prep, serving, making coffees... with people with disabilities and the public together” — T
- “More different tasks, not doing repetitive jobs to keep it interesting” — M

Background:

long-standing Australian provider of supported employment for people with disability.

the organisation has evolved over decades to become a leader in inclusive employment, social enterprise, and community-based support.

paid employment to people with disability who have “Finding and Keeping a Job” in their NDIS plan. Employment opportunities span a wide range of industries, including:

- Packaging and mail-outs
- Decanting and labelling
- Administration and office support
- Lawn mowing and grounds maintenance
- Catering and barista services

accredited Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) and a certified Social Enterprise with Social Traders. It operates to international quality standards (ISO 9001:2015), ensuring a high level of service and accountability.
