



Inclusion Australia

acting locally - representing nationally - connecting globally

Choosing Employment

The key to economic participation for people with intellectual disability

Part 2 - National forums of people with intellectual disability and families



Version 1.0

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Inclusion Australia (NCID) has over 5,000 members representing all 8 states and territories. In addition to having people with intellectual disability on our Board, Inclusion Australia receives policy advice from Our Voice. Our Voice is a committee of NCID's Board, the membership of which is exclusively people with intellectual disability representing all states and territories.

Inclusion Australia is the recognised national peak body with the single focus on intellectual disability, ie, our actions and priorities centre on issues that affect the lives of people with intellectual disability and their families.

Inclusion Australia's mission is to work to make the Australian community one in which people with intellectual disability are involved and accepted as equal participating members. We do this by:

- listening to people with intellectual disability and their families
- promoting and upholding the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- developing and promoting creative policies and practices
- speaking to politicians, public servants, business and community leaders about the lives of people with intellectual disability and their right to have equality of opportunity

Inclusion Australia is a social profit organisation. Inclusion Australia (NCID) was created in 1971 by parents and friends in an endeavour to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disability and to fill the need for national unity and information.

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Statement of Principles

- ☀ All people have inherent dignity and worth and equal and inalienable rights.
- ☀ All people are valued members of the Australian Community.
- ☀ People with intellectual disability as equal participating members of the Australian Community have the same rights:
 - ☀ to respect for their individual autonomy and independence
 - ☀ to make their own choices
 - ☀ to participate in decisions which affect their lives
 - ☀ to pursue any grievance which affects their lives
 - ☀ to diversity of choice for housing, education, work, recreation and leisure
 - ☀ to equity and justice
 - ☀ to be empowered to take their full place in the Australian Community
 - ☀ to dignity and privacy in all aspects of their lives

Inclusion Australia will:

- ✓ work to make the Australian Community one in which people with intellectual disability have full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and are involved and accepted as equal participating members.
- ✓ promote and protect the human rights of all persons with intellectual disability, including those who require more intensive support.

Consultation Statement

Inclusion Australia consults people with intellectual disability and family members through our State and Territory Agency Members. In particular we:

- ➔ conduct an annual survey of members and stakeholders
- ➔ hold two meetings a year, rotating through all States and Territories
- ➔ present at the Having a Say Conference each year, attended by over a 1,000 delegates the majority of whom have a disability
- ➔ hold forums on specific issues
- ➔ sponsor actions and representations on issues of importance to people with disability

'This publication has been prepared by the National Council on Intellectual Disability Inc. for the Australian Government, represented by the Department of Social Services. The views expressed in this publication are those of the National Council on Intellectual Disability Inc. and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government.'

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Preamble

In 2014 Inclusion Australia (NCID) undertook a number of activities to promote people with intellectual disability 'choosing employment'. Employment increases the incomes of people with disability, increases their superannuation, fulfils their citizenship responsibilities through the payment of tax and enables their participation in the social life of their communities.

The importance of employment for people with intellectual disability cannot be underestimated, and it also has the benefit of reducing their reliance on the Disability Support Pension (DSP) which enables revenue to be re-directed to the NDIS and other social programs of the Commonwealth Government.

We have combined our reports to the Department of Social Services (DSS) into 3 parts:

Part 1. Survey of the employment experiences of people with disability and their families

Part 2. Three (3) national forums of families and people with intellectual disability

Part 3. Six (6) NSW forums exploring the experiences of people with intellectual disability and families of the NSW Transition to Work (TTW) program

Introduction

Inclusion Australia held a series of three forums about youth with intellectual disability and open employment in April and May 2014.

The first forum was hosted in partnership with the NSW Council on Intellectual Disability at Little Bay, Sydney, New South Wales on 29 April 2014.

The second forum was hosted in partnership with Speak Out Tasmanian at Burnie, Tasmania on 1 May 2014.

The third forum was hosted in partnership with Down Syndrome Queensland at Chermside, Brisbane, Queensland on 7th May 2014.

Purpose

Inclusion Australia conducted to forums to provide feedback on the experience of individuals with intellectual disability and families with Disability Employment Services (DES), and advice on how DES could be improved in the future; these forums were developed following an analysis of Inclusion Australia's 2014 employment survey (www.inclusionaustralia.org.au)

Inclusion Australia would like to thank Arahni Asont, for organising the Sydney forum.

Design

Each forum included;

- Presentations from individuals with intellectual disability and families on their experience in seeking to participate in the workforce.
- An open general discussion inviting individuals and families to share their experiences with DES services and other work support services.
- Presentation of the history and research of school-to-work and open employment assistance for youth with intellectual disability.
- Presentation of the provider outcome data available to individuals and families when choosing either transition-to-work or open employment service providers.

Attendance

Approximately 100 participants attended all three forums. Participants included a mix of individuals with disability, parents and family members, and a small number of educators and specialist employment service providers.

Feedback

A number of common themes emerged from the forums. We have presented below a list of the themes together with a set of recommendations.

Positive stories of individuals with intellectual disability in open employment

The forums invited individuals and families to present examples of successful participation in open employment to demonstrate that this goal can be achieved when an individual receives skilled support.

Families commented that it was important to hear from people with intellectual disability and their families about their experience in open employment to help change community attitudes and perceptions about the capacity of people with intellectual disability to work in the open labour market.

Positive impact of open employment

Some young people with intellectual disability spoke about the positive impact of working in the open labour market and earning a wage.

One participant who presented to the Burnie forum, in response to being asked about what open employment meant to him, said;

Very ... like my own two feet sort of thing, like I have a life, that it is my own. I don't have to ask permission for, can I please have money for a drink. I can say I actually have money to buy my own things. I can go out and buy what I actually want. I'm also very generous with my money, like in the family when there's things I can help like the vet bill, I say here I can help, use some of my money.

We heard from a 15 year old boy, whose brother with Down Syndrome was unable to attend the forum because he was at work, saying;

Anyone who says people with a disability have an inability to work or be successful are wrong and need to expand their view on the argument. My brother is a perfect example of someone who contributes a lot to the community, generates income and is accepted by many people whether they are past school mates, work mates or my friends, he is accepted.

We also heard from a young woman with Down Syndrome who spoke about her experience with transition-to-work and open employment support and subsequent employment with Officeworks. She said;

They employed me part-time for 15 hours a week. Now they have become my second family. Now I have been with Officeworks for four years. I enjoy being there, and feel like I have more friends than before.

Negative impact of unemployment

Some young people with intellectual disability spoke about the personal impact of years of unemployment. They told about experiencing low esteem, depression, and feeling as if the community just didn't care.

These young people believed they had the capacity to work and much to contribute to the community, but felt that this belief was not shared by the community and the service support system.

Variable Quality and Service Gaps

Some families expressed dissatisfaction with DES services.

This dissatisfaction included experience with services that didn't provide any job opportunities or employment outcome.

There was acknowledgement in Sydney of the high performance of services for people with moderate intellectual disability (IQ ≤ 60), but concern that services for people with mild intellectual disability (IQ 60 to 70) were variable in quality from creditable to poor.

Families in Brisbane and Hobart were concerned by the lack of a specialist DES provider to assist people with moderate levels of intellectual disability obtain work in the open labour market.

Families in Brisbane and Hobart were also concerned about the lack of a transition-to-work program and provider sector dedicated to assist school leavers with intellectual disability gain work experience and confidence before entering DES.

Simple and clear information

Individuals and families expressed great frustration in obtaining simple and clear information about the Commonwealth Disability Employment Services program, and State funded transition-to-work and post school option programs.

For many families there was no clarity in the information provided and this made it difficult for them to make choices.

Families noted that they are "time poor" and need access to simple and clear information about programs and services in order to make decisions when assisting their sons/daughters pursue a pathway from school to work.

Employment outcomes of providers by intellectual disability

NCID used these forums to trial providing people with disability and their families employment outcomes by service providers by disability type.

Individuals and families are very pleased that the Commonwealth provides information on employment outcomes by service providers by disability type. Many commented that this information would help them when choosing a service provider rather than relying on the marketing "tricks" they are confronted with at "expos" where they are lured by cups, pens, lollies, plants, and celebrity endorsements to register with providers.

Job Capacity Assessment

Families expressed concern at the use of the Job Capacity Assessment to predict the future work capacity of their son/daughter when they are just beginning to consider work participation as young people moving from school to adulthood.

Families believe that future work capacity cannot be known until an opportunity to work with on-the-job training and support is provided. The use of work capacity assessments which restrict future employment assistance was considered to be a major barrier.

This issue was discussed at some length at the Burnie forum where the NDIS trial targeting youth between 15 and 24 years of age is underway.

Families are concerned that separating eligibility to NDIS transition-to-work funding from DES open employment funding was a substantial barrier for individuals who require both transition-to-work support and DES open employment support to participate in the open labour market.

TTW and DES are not working together to achieve the right outcome

Individuals and families are very concerned about the DES policy guideline restricting transition-to-work participants from concurrently registering in the DES program.

Changing this policy is particularly important to families in NSW. Many individuals move from school to the NSW Transition to Work program before entering DES. This pathway requires a cross-over period of time when individuals are receiving transition support but also require DES support to find a paid job.

Families expressed concern that the Commonwealth policy does not support the needs of individuals with intellectual disability who need this seamless crossover period to maintain their confidence and skill when entering the DES program.

DES Funding Indexation

Families expressed concern that DES funding has not been indexed since 2006 and there are no indexation plans in the future Commonwealth budget.

This conversation was discussed in the Sydney forum following questions as to why some DES providers were increasingly involved in fundraising in addition to DES funding.

Ongoing Support

Many families commented on the importance of ongoing support for people with intellectual disability when in a job.

We heard from a number of families tell about the loss of a job due to the lack of ongoing support.

One family member commented about her son, who had been working in open employment for twenty-one years, had his job put in jeopardy because a new provider had not provided any ongoing support over a 12 month period.

These comments highlight the importance of ongoing support to ensure that an individual with intellectual disability is able to maintain their employment long term.

Pension and Wages

The forum provided a brief overview of how wages from work affected the disability support pension.

Individuals and families were generally unaware of how earning wages affected the disability support pension via the income test.

Recommendations

Resource regular face-to-face meetings with individuals and families at the local community level to discuss employment, outcomes and options.

Individuals and families are rarely given the opportunity to hear about employment and employment programs from independent non-government sources. Many families expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their experiences, learn from other families, and hear about employment options and provider outcomes without the razzle and dazzle of marketing they receive from many providers.

Families also found the presentations of individuals with intellectual disability and families who have had positive experiences in open employment provided them with a concrete vision of what is possible and the kind of support they need to achieve such an outcome.

Resource the development of simple and clear information about employment and employment options for school leavers

It was clear that families had a relatively poor understanding of both Commonwealth and State programs related to employment.

Individuals and families did acknowledge the efforts of the system to provide information about services and outcomes, but indicated that greater efforts were needed to make this information simple, clear, and easy to obtain.

There is clearly a need to produce plain and simple information about how work and wages impacts upon the disability support pension.

Establish specialist transition-to-work services in all labour market regions by replicating the NSW Transition to Work program

Individuals and families repeatedly acknowledge that many people with intellectual disability are not ready to enter DES immediately after school.

Transition-to-work services which offer an opportunity for work experience to address barriers and build confidence have been shown to be most successful in achieving open employment outcomes.

As the NDIS is responsible for transition-to-work funding it is important that the Commonwealth/NDIA develop the capacity of the NDIS to deliver this type of support to people with intellectual disability.

Many states in Australia currently do not have a transition-to-work program or service sector with the skill to provide transition-to-work services. The NSW Transition to Work program, its eligibility assessment, funding, and policy framework, together with the lessons gained from its evaluation, provides a model that could be replicated throughout Australia by the NDIS to address this service sector gap.

Establish DES specialist moderate intellectual disability services in all labour market regions

The DES program is experiencing substantial difficulties in responding to the employment service needs of school leavers with moderate intellectual disability. Just one DES provider is targeting and achieving high employment outcome rates for people with moderate intellectual disability.

Individual and family feedback from consultation forums indicate an urgent need for the DES program to establish specialist service contracts for people with moderate intellectual disability in locations without this expertise. This is consistent with the recommendation of the DES evaluation of the moderate intellectual disability loading evaluation.

The Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) does not adequately determine future work capacity so it must not be used to determine eligibility to Transition to Work or Open employment programs

The JCA is out of step with vocational research and the employment needs of people with intellectual disability and their families.

The research states that the initial assessment of work capacity has little relationship with the capacity achieved following job placement and training.

The JCA, however, predicts the future work capacity of individuals before individuals have had the opportunity to try work and receive training and support.

The impact on such an assessment is to generally place low expectations on people with intellectual disability and to restrict them from obtaining the support they need to achieve open employment.

Instead we propose that the Commonwealth/NDIA use the Functional Assessment used by the NSW-TTW. Whereas this is also a work capacity assessment, it determines who is unable to immediately enter an employment program and would benefit from transition to work support.

This assessment is not predicting future hours of work, or denying the possibility of achieving open employment. Rather it identifies which individuals need the additional assistance of TTW, due to higher support need, to achieve employment participation.

Transition to Work programs and DES must work together

Best practice transition to work programs provide people with intellectual disability with the opportunity of work experience to address low self-esteem and barriers preventing them from working in the open labour market.

The highest level of open outcomes has been achieved when an individual is able to continue their transition to work support, whilst getting help from a DES provider to find them a job. This allows the individual to seamlessly move from TTW to open employment without a break in ongoing support.

The current prohibition on this practice means that individuals must exit the TTW program in order to get help from a DES program to find a paid job in open employment. This means that the individual must sit at home for the time it takes to find a job. During this time the individual is at great risk of losing the skills and confidence gained from the TTW program.

Allowing participants to register in both TTW and DES for a cross over period prevents a break in support and achieves the highest open employment outcomes. It is not an additional cost - merely an overlapping of costs. It is however the most efficient use of TTW and DES services for people with intellectual disability.