



A guide to support young people with disability into After School Jobs

Lessons from the Ticket to Work 'After School Jobs' project





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The Ticket to Work approach

Gaining a first ‘paid’ job is often a big moment for young people as they approach transition to adulthood. Most of us can remember having our first job, and very often this was during school years. Today over 60% of secondary students have an after school job. Yet many students with disability miss out on this opportunity and are unable to get the support they need to participate in a job while at school.

Frequent exposure to ‘real work’ environments during secondary school years helps to shape a young person’s image of themselves as a ‘worker’ and provides the skills, experience and confidence needed to successfully follow an employment pathway after school.

We know that having a part time job while at school can enhance confidence and self-esteem. It contributes to financial wellbeing, expands social networks and builds work-related skills, increasing independence and resilience for the future. Indeed longitudinal studies have shown that gaining an after school job is a strong predictor of employment post school (Parmenter, 2011; Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012).

Ticket to Work is an initiative of National Disability Services (NDS). Ticket to Work develops models to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for young people with disability. NDS Ticket to Work embarked on a project to explore the effects of After School Jobs on young people with disability. We saw this project as an opportunity to explore good practice, engage stakeholders through co-design and increase understanding and awareness of the importance of after school jobs for students with disability. Throughout the project the Ticket to Work networks have supported 81 students, the majority with intellectual disability and/or autism into an after school job. We took an ‘action learning’ approach, where we wanted to learn what works, how well it works and why, with the aim to develop replicable models.

This guide has been developed to assist employment support organisations, schools, parents and carers, to support a young person with disability into their first after school job. It is part of a broader research project documenting the outcomes of participating in after school jobs for young people with disability. This guide will sit alongside an evaluation from La Trobe University and a study we conducted looking into what works for stakeholders.

Our lessons from the project will also be used to advocate and influence at a systemic level, with the aim to improve the policy and practice landscape to ensure access to after school jobs for students with disability.

1. It takes time

With all the best intentions, sometimes enthusiasm to move straight into a job without enough planning and time to build relationships with students, families and employers, can limit the chances of success in a job.

Although it can take more time to find after school job placements for young people with disability, taking time and having perseverance pays off. Ticket to Work networks who really got to know the young person they were working with and didn't rush into a job that wasn't going to be suitable, were better off in the long run.

Some of the best outcomes came from those who used a customised approach with every student, observing their strengths and abilities in different settings. They took time to consult with employers, schools and parents, as well as the young person, to make sure appropriate interventions were in place to maximise ongoing success. As one employment coach reported, 'the more you know about a person, the better you can focus on placement; it's easier to place a student when they know what they want to do, but it takes time.'¹

'Taking time might mean more time developing skills on the job, not just time preparing for work. We found that a 'place and train' approach worked best (Wakeford & Waugh 2016). Rather than spending a majority of time on 'pre-employment' activities, employment support organisations that could support through individualised and responsive training on the job, tended to be more effective. Allowing enough time to effectively address student and employer needs was important, helping to build relationships and improving the chances for participants to develop roles beyond the initial support stage. Rather than setting up an opportunity and then hoping it will continue, better outcomes were achieved when there was a gradual reduction in support. It is important to have mechanisms in place to review support needs of employee, employer and employment coach over time.

We found that employment support organisations that committed this time to follow through with the process beyond the initial placement achieved the best results for student participants and their employers.

Similarly, investing time to gain knowledge of employers and their businesses could open up opportunities based on mutual need. Building relationships over time with employers helped find some flexible options for students and supported employers to develop a role to best suit the strengths of students. Investing time with employers and getting to know what they needed was often time well spent; even if it didn't result in a job offer straight away, giving time for employers to consider some creative solutions meant opportunities further down the track.

¹ Further information on a customised approach see: [Initiatives | Customised Employment - Ticket to Work](#)

Time to make a difference

- Allow time to get to know the student, their strengths and interests
- Allow time to get know families/supporters and the business and recruitment needs of local employers
- On the job support and structured review is key; it might take time to find the right balance
- Individualise the process, learning to work and discovering interests can take time to develop over several experiences
- Small steps contribute to a longer journey, take time to contextualise work activities within broader career goals

Ethan was first placed in a trial at Big W with some other students, but found out that retail in a big store wasn't the right fit for him. So his employment coach, Debra, sought out some local small business opportunities and after a short work trial, Ethan gained employment at his local bakery. Since then, Ethan has built his confidence with customers and the team, and really 'come out of his shell' according to his manager, Jules. Ethan enjoys the routines and hard work out the back, is great at working with a smaller team and one-on-one individual support that a small team can offer. His consistency and good work ethic has been valuable for the bakery, and now he is looking at starting an apprenticeship next year. Jules attributes Ethan's success as having freedom and time to build a really good employer/employee relationship, and that Ethan and Debra were flexible to try a new approach. 'There were no guarantees,' says Jules, 'but I'd say to employers just give them a go. Ethan did everything I needed him to do, you can't ask more than that'.



2. Family involvement is key

Having an after school job can be an important extension of career development, helping to build work skills and confidence that contributes to future planning. To plan well, it is important to engage with the students' support networks (including families and schools), as these are hugely influential in shaping plans and bringing goals and aspirations to life.

Parents and carers have unique insight on experience, personality and specific needs that can assist in the employment process. Family support is vital in encouraging young people to explore their work opportunities. Across the project, we found that students who came from families who were very supportive and held high expectations that their child could and would work, were more likely to succeed in gaining a job.

Successful employment support organisations managed parent partnerships particularly well, making sure parents had access to information when they needed it to build confidence that their child's individual needs were being supported.

Ability to manage parent expectations creates a smoother employment process for the young person and employer. Employment support organisations did better when they were able to negotiate any road blocks between the parents' expectations and the views of the students or employer.

Without support of a good collaborative relationship with parents, employment outcomes sometimes fell through because parents did not always understand their role in the process.

For example, there was a case where a parent said they would be happy to drive their son to work for shifts, but in reality they could only do this sometimes and public transport would take too long. This put the young person in a difficult position, as the employer required consistency in work shifts, so the opportunity fell through.

At times parents became too directly involved with the employer and this hindered work progress between the employer and employee. One parent of a young person frequently contacted the employer with questions as she was worried about her daughter around a lot of things at work – in the end the employer got burnt out, the relationship was strained and the young person lost their job.

Again, taking the time to communicate with each partner in the process may have helped to alleviate any parent concerns, clarified roles and enabled a smoother entry into the workplace.

Top practices to build collaborative relationships with parents and families:

- Provide regular updates and use a central employment coach to manage supports and communication
- Minimise parent contact directly with the employer
- Keep parents informed on decision making and invite them to contribute to decisions
- Create processes where parents are encouraged to raise any concerns or requests with the employment coach, rather than the employer
- Make sure parents are fully aware of work expectations, practical issues such as time sheets, transport, uniforms, etc. from the start
- Any potential problems are worked through with the employment coach before becoming an issue at work

“I’m not going to get you a job – we’re going to get you a job” said Angela from Access Australia Group. Angela keeps the young person and their family as key and central to the process.



3. A flexible approach works best

Although a large benefit of having a first job is to learn and grow from that experience, having a sense of what the student likes/needs prior to approaching employers is very important for meaningful employment.

Employment support organisations that were rigid in the types of employment offered, e.g. only in one take away franchise, had difficulty addressing individual needs of the jobseeker and employer.

Flexibility from the student, coach and employer was a feature we noticed in successful job placements. Students who were willing to try a variety of experiences, whether different roles within a larger business such as Kmart or trying a couple of experiences in smaller settings, gave the employment coach an opportunity to see where their strengths were. This helped them find the right match for each student.

This approach involved willingness and ability to consult with employers, being upfront about how adjustments could be managed and developing a customised job role that benefitted everyone involved. Rather than giving up after one work trial, more successful employment coaches used observation, past experience and school/family information to find a better fit for further opportunities.

Taking a flexible approach

- Create opportunities for young people and families to talk about strengths, interests and previous experiences
- Talk to employers that have businesses suited to student interests and explore their business and recruiting needs
- Be willing to consult with a range of businesses and services
- Have a flexible approach that focusses on what the student can do, what they would like to do and areas that may need to learn
- Provide opportunities to engage and learn from a range of pre-placement activities in different work settings or roles
- Encourage a positive tone if plans change, each experience is valuable and becomes part of a cumulative career journey

Dana is a keen skater and her interests revolve around the skate scene. Her employment coach, Beth, worked with Dana using a customised approach, and discovered Dana's love of skateboarding and all things skate. Beth then strategically approached businesses that be a good fit with Dana's interests, and successfully placed Dana as a customer service assistant and stock controller at a surf/skate shop in her local area of Geelong. Since starting her part time job Dana has loved it and feels that she fits right in. The employer feels the same and she is already a big part of the team. Dana has now been in the role for over 6 months and wants to stay longer to continue her growth with the company. Investing time at the beginning of the process, using a customised approach has led to a great outcome for both Dana and the employer.

4. Working with employers

Listening to employers and keeping a focus on employer ‘partnering’ when developing opportunities for young people in the project was key. Ticket to Work research has shown that employers are most often motivated through commitment to social responsibility and a general consensus to ‘give someone a go’ (Kellock, 2020). Many employers in the After School Job project shared these values and were receptive to modifying and adapting practices to maximise success in the role. Communicating well with employers and actively inviting them to contribute ideas was fundamental in customising a work opportunity that both addressed the employee’s work goals and the employer’s expectations.

Employers were often willing and enthusiastic to work with employment coaches to provide tailored work opportunities. Capturing this positivity was important. Employers preferred to be actively involved in identifying areas where extra support was needed and expected to be consulted on the effectiveness of any supports over time.

Employment coaches who had the capacity to check-in with employers regularly and discuss progress tended to be more successful in placing students into a longer term work roles. Sometimes this process required structure and planning, with opportunity to trial students in a multiple roles before narrowing down options. Being able to observe some real work trials was a big determinate in offering a position for some employers, and a better way to recruit workers than traditional interview/resume process.

Promoting the idea of an after school job as a stepping stone to future employment was a positive approach for employers and encouraged flexibility and honest relationships to develop. It didn’t need to be the perfect job, or a forever job, but something to learn from and contribute towards a working future.

Employers appreciated receiving information of each individual and the option to get to know some of the participants in a work context before offering a regular paid job. They also appreciated that support was on hand from a central employment coach and that they could give feedback on when and how targeted supports would be used.

Employers liked:

- Having time to get to know the young person and what work suited them, observing on-the-job skills in the workplace
- Being informed and included in the planning, progress and work goals of young person from the start
- Being able to contact a central employment support person in an ongoing manner to address employer and employee needs as the role progressed
- Having responsive and supportive employment support service that was reliable and flexible with options, and could communicate well with families
- Being able to move ahead with an opportunity but not feeling like it had to be a longer term commitment
- Minimal contact with families, ability to develop worker independence without too much interference from home
- Giving a young person 'a go', providing a stepping stone to future work pathways
- Customising work roles to benefit their business and work culture, as well as helping a young person in work
- Positive and enthusiastic workers, where the right attitude and willingness to learn was highly valued

When you hire someone, you do not always know what you are going to get, and then something might come out later down the track. But working with Beth, (the employment coach) we knew everything straight off the bat with Jessica, we were prepared for her stepping into her first shift”.

5. Practicalities Matter

Supporting young people with a disability into their first job takes planning from a practical point of view. Clear messaging on employer expectations can help students and families make informed decisions about what they can manage in terms of meeting employer 'non-negotiables'. If there are clear 'rules' for the employment to proceed, it is essential that students and families are aware of what these are and have arrangements in place to meet any expectations.

A practical consideration might be around transport to and from work. Does the young person require a job they can travel independently to by walking or public transport, or are parents available to drive them to work? How much help will they need to get to work on time, and to be picked up on time at the end of the shift? Can they get to work on a regular basis or are there likely to be disruptions to the routine? Do they need any special equipment, such as protective wear, and do they need to wear a uniform?

These practical considerations can make a big difference in the workplace. Following work 'rules' often involves a combined commitment from both the young person and their family to get the balance right, especially when it comes to a first job. It is important to ensure that students and their families are aware and supported to address these practical issues and that commitment from all is established to ensure confidence when stepping into work. Being aware of these issues when looking at suitable workplaces and opportunities can avoid potential problems from occurring later on.

Making time for a job was essential. Sometimes we found students had too many structured activities, such as sports practice or drama group on weeknights or weekends. Students and families should consider if there is enough flexibility in their schedules to take up an after school job.

We found some job opportunities fell through because students/families had very narrow time availability for work. In general, employers like to hire young people who do not have too many restrictions in their schedule. Always clarify with families if the student is willing and able to adjust their schedules to meet the time commitments of the job. Consider reducing some activities and avoid having 'too much going on' when trying to move into a first job.

Think about some of the practical considerations that might impact on certain job roles. For example, if a student doesn't like a lot of social interaction, a role in a busy retail setting might not be the best place to start a job. Similarly, if someone dislikes working outdoors, a job with a garden maintenance crew might not be suitable.

Good communication between all involved is key and can help to resolve any issues before they put a job at risk.

Practical considerations:

- Does the young person have support from parents to undertake work?
- Are there specific requirements from the employer, such as uniforms, safety equipment or pre-requisite training to undertake the role?
- Is the student available to work at specified times and days, and can they get to work reliably?
- Are there too many competing activities that could impact on students' ability to work, and are they able to make adjustments?
- Keep a check list of any practical issues that may impact on success in a role, and discuss with employment coach to find solutions

"I don't like touching people's heads" discovered one participant in the project. This was discovered after the student really wanted to have a career in hairdressing and was placed in a part time after school job at a hairdresser. The job lasted a few months but was unsustainable due to this realisation and it no longer being a good, practical fit for the student. This is all part of the career process and it is better to find out early on and adjust career planning to incorporate what the student had learnt rather than continuing down a hairdressing career unsuited to them.



6. Reach out to your community networks

While some young people might be able to walk straight into a job without much planning, we found that most students really benefited from an approach that included a network of people and services rather than acting alone. It rings true that people don't work well in a vacuum and outcomes were strengthened at each stage by reaching out to others who could help. Strong network links helped to build authentic relationships with employers, schools and parents, and often resulted in students getting a job.

Employment support organisations that were well connected to their local community achieved better outcomes for the young people they worked with compared to providers that covered larger areas and had less time to work collaboratively. One provider had no time for community engagement due to other organisational priorities. This provider had no employment outcomes with the students they worked with.

Reaching out to community was often supported through the Ticket to Work network, connecting the young person's school, careers teachers or support staff, employers, employment services and disability services. In some cases the network made connections with employers through mock interviews, industry immersion days or career sessions, and this helped enormously in creating part time work opportunities for students.

For example, Gayle, a employment coach in Geelong, was able to connect Callum with an employer by inviting them to a mock interview session as part of the Ticket to Work network in the area. The employer got to know Callum and recognised his interest in cooking, and this connection helped create an initial work trial at the local bistro. Callum's initial trial soon

became a part time job, and he is now thinking of taking up an apprenticeship in 2021.

By reaching out to community through Ticket to Work, Gayle was able to connect with the school and employer to help create a great result for Callum.

Reaching out to Community:

- Create or join a network that supports young people in school to work transitions such as Ticket to Work
- Consult with a range of stakeholders to find more about students strengths, skills and interests
- Celebrate student success and invite employers to share positive stories with community
- Promote employment in school to work transition, and encourage businesses to participate in career development activities, that can lead to awareness and further opportunities
- Have conversations about work opportunities for young people; sometimes a random conversation can lead to a job being created

“My colleagues and I make it a priority to get out the office every day and to do the rounds in our local area, not only meeting new employers but also to just say ‘hi’ to the ones we already know. This approach comes naturally and makes sense to us and also pays off in the long run – recently there are 3 businesses in 5 minute walk from our office that have given employment opportunities to the young people we work with (that were a good match), which is fantastic – and really easy for us to manage and provide any ongoing support as it’s so local.”

7. Planning for success and using NDIS supports creatively

The After School Job project worked with both NDIS providers and Disability Employer Services (DES) to provide support in a job role. While this may be something a DES can choose to assist with in preparation for post-school work, DES at the time of publishing this paper, are not funded to work with students to support them into an after school job.

Not all students with a disability require support in a job, although for the majority of students in the project with a significant disability or intellectual disability, having additional employment support was important. We found many instances where planning was under-prepared from the perspective of utilising existing funding for employment goals, and that having access to support beyond the completion of this project was something we feel should be highlighted.

Students that are National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants who are interested in pursuing part time or after school work, can access supports available through the NDIS to help plan and implement their employment goals. NDIS participants can apply for funding in their NDIS plan for employment supports for students from about age 14. NDIS funding can also help with pre-work preparation, using Community Participation funding to help start the journey to employment, including travel training and building independence.

The [NDIS Price Guide 2020-21](#) outlines that transition and employment support can be 'supplied to any working-age participant (including students reaching working age) with an employment goal'. This may include supports to:

- Explore what work would mean for them (discovery);
- Build essential foundation skills for work;
- Manage complex barriers to obtaining and sustaining employment;
- Specialised job customisation;
- Develop a career plan; and
- Other capacity-building supports that are likely to lead to successful engagement in a Disability Employment Service.

Receiving individualised support from an employment support organisation was an essential element for participants, families and employers in the project, and especially important when young people are seeking their first connection with work.

We would encourage young people, their parents and carers to consider including Transition and Employment Support in their next NDIS plan. To find out more, see the NDIS resource, [Let's talk about work](#).



8. Further resources and information

Whether you are a teacher, a professional or a young person wanting an after school job, we hope that this guide supports you – all the best!

The Ticket to Work website has a raft of resources and research on effective school to work transition for students with disability, including:

[After school job page](#)

[Stories of students in after school jobs](#)

[Posters of young people in after school jobs](#)

[Research and evaluation paper on after school work and effective school to work transition](#)

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