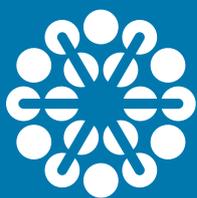


# RESEARCH TO ACTION

>> Bridging the  
gap between  
what we know  
and what we do



Centre for  
Applied Disability  
Research

An Initiative of National Disability Services

**NDS** National  
Disability  
Services

## Effective school to employment transitions for young people with disability

Guidance for practice leaders



## **THE CENTRE FOR APPLIED DISABILITY RESEARCH**

The Centre for Applied Disability Research (CADR) is an initiative of NDS. CADR aims to improve the wellbeing of people living with disability by gathering insights, building understanding and sharing knowledge. CADR's applied research agenda is helping to build the evidence base and support stakeholders to better understand what works, for whom, under what circumstances and at what cost.

## **RESEARCH TO ACTION GUIDES**

Our objective is to build a comprehensive online collection of disability research and translational resources for the Australian context. Our Research to Action Guides are based on the best available local and international evidence and put together by subject matter experts to support research end users to engage with the evidence. We gather and analyse evidence about what works, and package that information into efficient and practical resources.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This Guide was authored by Associate Professor Loretta Sheppard, Dr. Rosamund Harrington and Kelly Howard from the School of Allied Health, Occupational Therapy, at Australian Catholic University. This resource was developed with support of Australian governments through the Research and Data Working Group.

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## **SUGGESTED CITATION**

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## **ABOUT THIS GUIDE**

This Research to Action Guide articulates the key components of best practice values, or the “golden rules” of supporting the transition from school to employment for young adults with disability in Australia. For practice leaders in all of the relevant sectors, this Guide summarises the research evidence and provides checklists and a poster to support evidence based best practice in effective school to employment transitions.

The full Research to Action Guide suite of resources includes a rapid review of relevant research literature and three practice guidance resources, targeted at service users, service providers (frontline workers) and practice leaders. The Rapid Review provides a full listing of references informing this practice leaders guide. The entire Research to Action Guide is available at the CADR Clearing House, [www.cadr.org.au](http://www.cadr.org.au).

## **FEEDBACK**

Do you have feedback, or a suggestion for a Research to Action Guide? We welcome your thoughts and ideas. Please contact [info@cadr.org.au](mailto:info@cadr.org.au).

# EFFECTIVE SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY: GUIDANCE FOR PRACTICE LEADERS

## CONTENTS

- 1: Summary of the evidence
- 2: What does the evidence mean for practice leaders?
- 3: Checklists – the golden rules for effective school to work transitions
- 4: Factors increasing the likelihood of young people finding a job
- 5: Poster for your workplace

## 1: SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 and Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 recognise that all people with disability have the right to work “on an equal basis with others.” It states that “this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities”. Despite these visions, young people with disability continue to face significant barriers to employment in their transition from school in Australia.

In 2015, there were 2.1 million Australians of working age with disability. Of these, 1.0 million were employed and 114,900 were looking for work. Therefore, 53.4% of working age people with disability were in the labour force, compared to 83.2% of people with no disability.

The unemployment rate for people with disability was 10% compared to 5.3% for people with no reported disability. Only 25% of people with severe or profound core activity limitation were employed in 2015, compared to 58.9% of those with mild core activity limitation.

In 2015, employed people with disability were more likely to work part-time, compared with employed people without disability. 27.0% of people with disability were working full-time, compared with 53.8% of those without disability<sup>63, 64</sup>.

We reviewed the research evidence and it described six “golden rules” for evidence-based best practice in supporting school to employment transitions for young people with disability.

### 1. Expectation

Young people can work

### 2. Collaboration

Different sectors can work together

### 3. Participation

Young people should partake in meaningful work during their school years

### 4. Skills development

Everyone involved in school transitions needs expertise

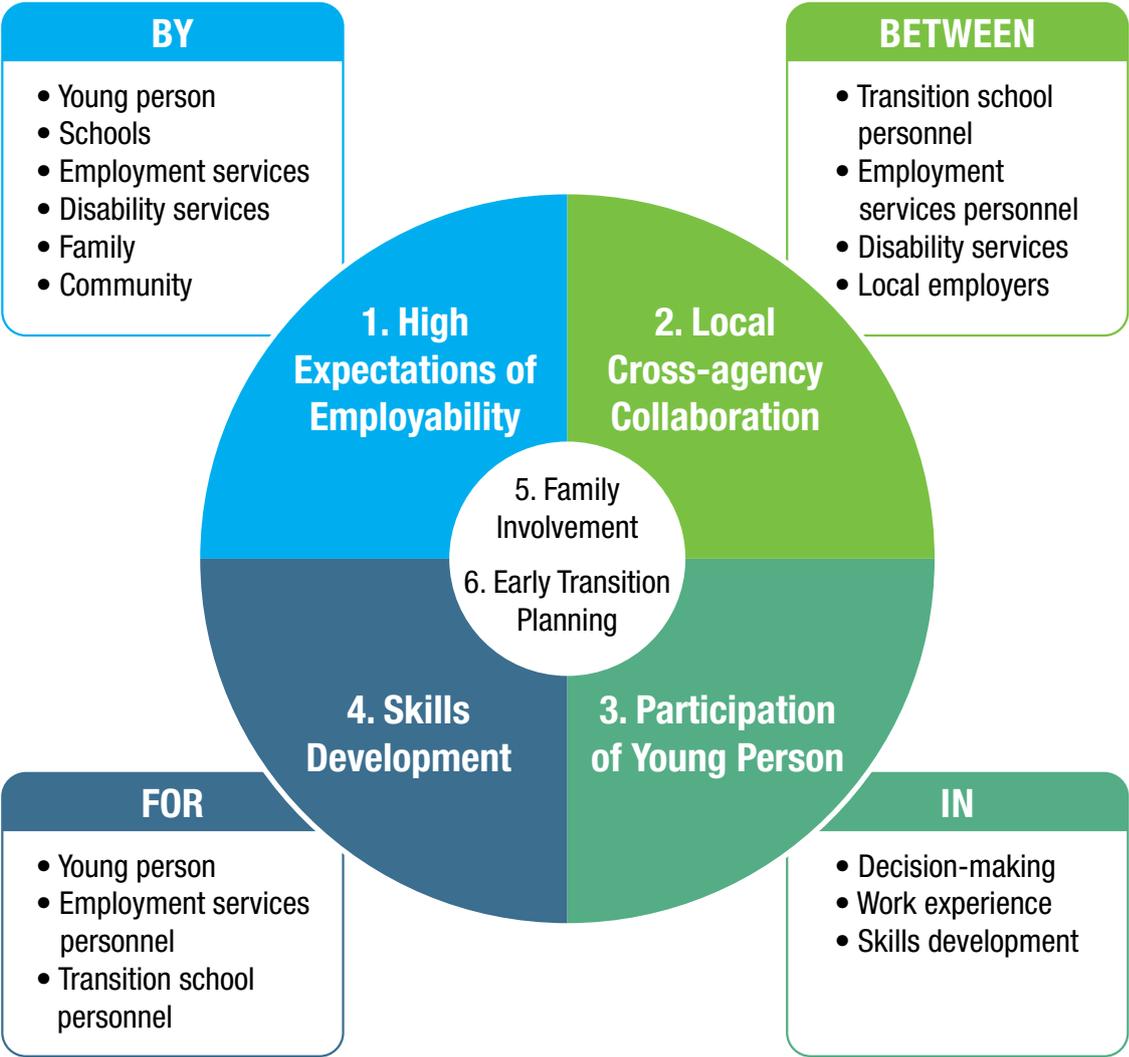
### 5. Family involvement

Family-centred transitions have better outcomes

### 6. Early transition planning

Early planning impacts outcomes

**Figure 1.** The shared vision: elements of effective school to employment transitions



## 2: WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE MEAN FOR PRACTICE LEADERS?

The “golden rules” are drawn from research over the last 20 years. They provide us with an understanding of the barriers and enablers to transitioning to employment for young people with disability.

### 1. EXPECTATION

- Schools, disability employment services and community agencies must have an expectation and belief that young people with disability can and will work when they leave school.
- Educators, health professionals and disability workers must convey a belief in the capacity of the young person for work and community contribution, and take active steps to foster this expectation in their colleagues and the young person’s family.
- One of four key attributes identified in a study of successful disability employment specialists was ‘principled optimism’. This means the workers believed in the capabilities of the young people they were working with and in their own capacity to support those young people into work.
- Belief and expectation as the forerunner to possibility has been supported by several studies and ‘high expectations and the assumption of employability for all young people with disabilities’ has been articulated elsewhere as a key element of quality transition services.

### 2. COLLABORATION

Interagency collaboration is one of the strongest predictors of employment<sup>6</sup> but also one of the least known about. It seems there is a lack of willingness within agencies to understand the role of other service providers leading to a culture of service siloes, blame-shifting and inefficiencies. Barriers to interagency collaboration can be caused by:

- Differences in ‘philosophies, language and procedures’ which might bias professional groups towards their own way of thinking
- Transition professionals having limited skills in collaboration with few opportunities to develop these skills
- A lack of optimism about whether collaborative practices can be improved.

One piece of research looked at community consultations, which indicated a desire in the community for positive collaborations such as:

- Working with local agencies to develop employment opportunities and educate, support and reward local employers who hire young people with disabilities
- Strengthen school and transition services to provide opportunities for young people with disability to learn ‘work skills, attitudes and experiences’
- Facilitate social and professional networking that can lead to employment
- Provide opportunities for ‘mock interviews’ before going on work experience or applying for jobs

- Encourage young people to seek work-related learning opportunities outside the school setting
- Encourage young people to link with existing networks, including vocational and employment services and civic and service clubs
- Hold a local 'jobs fair' where employers come to meet prospective employees
- Enhance and promote inclusive workplaces
- Support families in transition to actively participate in this process and to engage in networking and social connection.

### 3. PARTICIPATION

Participation in meaningful paid and unpaid work experiences during the last years of secondary school is consistently the most significant indicator of post school success

- Young people with disability who exit school with a job are more likely to maintain a positive career trajectory than those who do not.
- Having held a paid, community-based job while still in secondary school is strongly correlated with post-school employment success.
- Paid work at high school not only helped build skills in young people with disability but can also allay fears and concerns of employers.
- Parent and family participation in transition planning leads to a greater likelihood of getting a job.
- Participating in early work experiences, traineeship and apprenticeship are all associated with higher likelihood of employment.
- Participation by employers in supported employment programs that allow young people with disability to work in competitive work settings with ongoing supports.

Schools and service organisations must adopt a student-focused planning approach to transition

Young people with disability and their families must participate actively in any decision-making processes and in each of the following:

- Career development activities that assist with exploring vocational preferences and opportunities
- Decision-making meetings and processes, such as Individual Education Plan meetings
- Work experience
- Skills development
- Vocational training
- After school work

#### 4. SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENT AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

Skills development is required for the young person, their family, school transition staff, employment personnel and policy/department staff. The responsibility for enabling employment for young people with disability does not just reside with the young person!

- Vocational development while at school which provides students with real opportunities to acquire important work skills and values, inform their vocational decision-making and shape their career aspirations for the future, is crucial.
- Skills and knowledge to deliver high quality transition and employment preparation programs are required in both educators and employment specialists. Support to develop these may include:
  - Training in person-centred approaches to conducting transition and employment preparation meetings
  - Training and skills development in developing creative and responsive vocational-preparation activities and programs both at school and in the community
  - Training and development in the roles and responsibilities of each of the different service providers
- Desirable attributes and skills in employment specialists are noted as:
  - Principled optimism – high expectations and belief that young people with disability can work, and that they personally have the skills to facilitate this
  - Cultural competence – a broad understanding of the way values and norms influence how people act, and what this means when looking for a job
  - Business orientation approach that shows an understanding of business needs and the importance of customer service
  - Networking ability that is creative, strategic and responds to business needs.

#### 5. FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

- Family-centred transition planning processes help to increase student and parent expectations for the future, self-determination, and vocational decision making.
- Families that are involved in discussions about future careers, and are active in networking and making links with employers in the local community have a positive influence on work-related outcomes for young people with disabilities.
- Strategies suggested by a parent advocacy group include:
  - Engaging parents in training opportunities and information sessions about post-school and community-based services
  - Partner with families to explore role models who can provide a vision to the young person and their family of what adult life might be like
  - Interact respectfully with families taking into account unique cultural or social values and perspectives
  - Begin planning for post-school activities early, and engage families in the planning process through Individual Education Plans

- Partner with families to build networks in the community
- Work with families to support students in domains of life beyond work such as recreation and leisure, continued education and community participation
- Partner with families to support the young person’s independence.

Young people who are independent in daily living skills and mobile within the community are more likely to be employed post school.

Please refer to the full article for details of activities that align with the seven strategies

## 6. EARLY TRANSITION PLANNING, INCLUDING ATTENTION TO TRANSITION PROGRAM STRUCTURE

- Involvement of community-based employment organisations and transition services EARLY in the transition process is crucial to the successful post-school employment outcomes.
- Students who receive early transition services at age 14 years are more likely to achieve employment outcomes compared to those who start transition services at age 16.
- Student-identified transition goals and participation in employment-related activities lead to a higher likelihood of employment.

Transition programs should adopt Kohler’s Taxonomy of Transition Practices, first developed in 1996<sup>12</sup> and recently updated (2016). This states that ‘transition-focused planning begins no later than age 14’ (p. 4).

Kohler’s model includes five practice categories: family engagement; program structures; inter-agency collaboration; student development; and student-focused planning

In the journey to employment, early transition planning is crucial so that school-based programs can take into account the work aspirations and skill development requirements needed to enable young people with disability to achieve employment.

**The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 provides a ‘model for planning, organising and evaluating transition education services and programs’ which has remained relevant for more than 20 years.**

### 3: CHECKLISTS FOR PRACTICE LEADERS

#### WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR POLICY MAKERS, SERVICE MANAGERS AND SCHOOL PRINCIPALS?

Use the questions below to check where your organisation is at.

**For policy makers, the six values provide a checkpoint against which to ask:**

**Do existing policies 'hold up' against each of these values?**

YES     NO

**If the answer is 'no', what needs to be done to align policy with these values?**

- What training and experience do staff working in this policy area need to work collaboratively and effectively with service providers?

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**If the answer is 'yes':**

- What structures and systems can be put in place to enable service providers to act on these values?
- What structures and systems are barriers to services providers acting on these values?

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**For service managers, the six values provide a checkpoint to ask:**

**Does our organisation act on each of these values?**

YES     NO

**If the answer is 'no', there is work to be done at each level of the organisation to identify where and why these values are not abided by.**

- What training and service systems can be put in place to enable our service to act on these values?
- What are the barriers to our service acting on these values?
- What relationships does our organisation have with schools, other services and policy makers in the local area?

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**If the answer is 'yes':**

- What further actions does our service need to take to ensure ongoing collaborations with other services?
- What processes are in place to ensure continued connection with service users in the local area?
  - How does our service 'hear' the end-user voice?
- What processes are in place to ensure recruitment and retention of high quality staff to our service?
- What training is provided to existing staff to ensure continued personal and professional growth and development?
- What relationships does our organisation have with key employment stakeholders in the local area?

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**For school principals, the six values provide a checkpoint to ask:**

**Does our school act on each of these values?**

YES     NO

**If the answer is 'no',** identify where and why are these values not abided by.

- Are there structural or organisational impediments?
- What training can be put in place to enable our teaching and transition staff to act on these values?
- What other factors are barriers to our school acting on these values?
- What relationships does our school have with local service organisations and policy makers?
- Who is responsible for effective transition processes?
  - How does our school support the transition team to build effective skills and collaborations?

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**If the answer is 'yes':**

- What further actions does our school need to take to ensure ongoing collaborations with other services?
- What processes are in place to ensure continued connection with service users in the local area?
- How does our school 'hear the voice' of transitioning students and their families?
- What processes are in place to ensure recruitment and retention of high quality staff to the transition program in our school?
- What training is provided to existing staff to ensure continued personal and professional growth and development?
- What relationships does our organisation have with key employment stakeholders in the local area and how do we nurture that and involve employers in our school community?

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**For all practice leaders, we must ask:**

**Do my staff and I have an understanding of disability, diversity, rights and working inclusively?**

YES     NO

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**LEARNING ABOUT DISABILITY**

No matter which sector you work in, having an understanding of disability and human rights is important when providing support to young people to leave school and enter the workforce.

**Disability Aware** is a short, online course that will enhance your skills and knowledge about working inclusively whether you are an employer, teacher, community worker or other service provider. <https://www.nds.org.au/events-and-training/all-events-and-training/disability-aware-an-awareness-and-inclusion-program-2515>

**Disability and a good life: Thinking through disability** is a longer, free online course designed to address your understanding of disability, disability across the life course and other topics. <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/thinking-through-disability>

**Always ask: What is my organisation doing to enable an effective school to employment transition for young people with disability?**

#### **4: YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE MORE LIKELY TO GET AND KEEP A JOB IF THEY ...**

**Have had a paid job in the community while at school**

**Have done work experience (multiple times) while at school**

**Have responsibilities for household jobs at home**

**Participate in work preparation activities at school**

**Get on well with other people**

**Are as independent in self-care as they can be**

**Are independent in community travel**

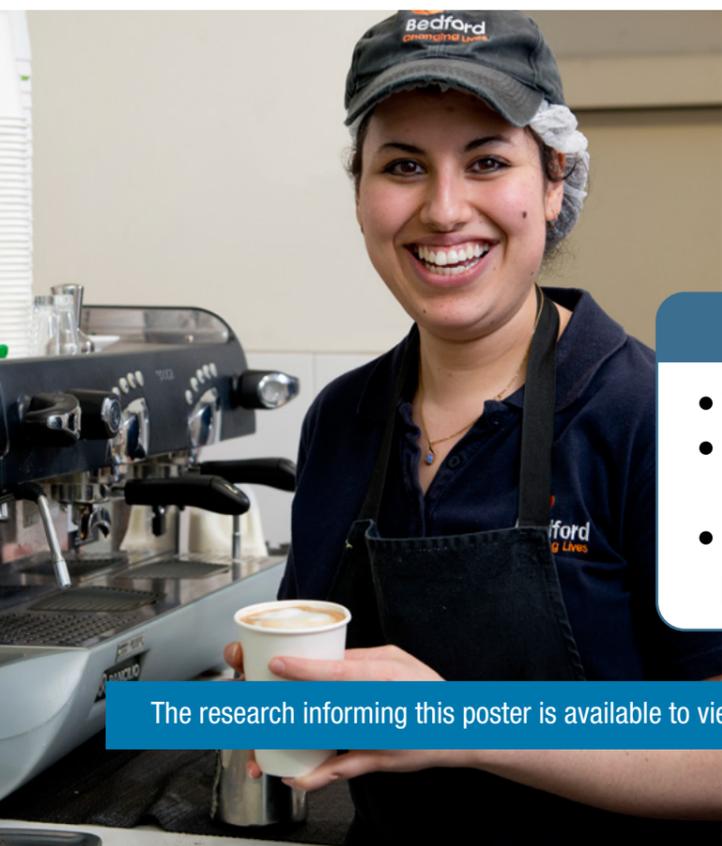
**Have people around them who believe they can work  
and will get a job when they leave school**

**Know people in the community and  
have good community networks**





# BEST PRACTICE FOR SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS



- 1** | Create an expectation at school, at home and in the community that young people with disability will seek and obtain employment as part of their adult life
- 2** | Collaborate locally with other service providers to form partnerships between schools, employment services and disability services
- 3** | Enable participation in work experience at multiple time points and provide opportunities for work experience in the same or different areas of work
- 4** | Provide collaborative cross-sector opportunities for scaffolded skill development and transfer of skills from one setting to another
- 5** | Involve families and local community supports at all levels of discussion about employment and post-school adult life roles
- 6** | Start transition planning early

**BY**

- Young person
- Schools
- Employment services
- Disability services
- Family
- Community

**BETWEEN**

- Transition school personnel
- Employment services personnel
- Disability services
- Local employers



**FOR**

- Young person
- Employment services personnel
- Transition school personnel

**IN**

- Decision-making
- Work experience
- Skills development

