



Ticket to Work – history

By Fiona Waugh (original Ticket to Work member)

Ticket to Work is a ground-breaking approach underpinned by a philosophy that “every young person has the right to seek employment” which drives its mission “to ensure that all students with disability are prepared and have opportunities to exercise that right.”

Ticket to Work celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 2022; an ideal time to reflect on its progress over the last decade as well as the planning that took place prior to its official launch.



The idea of Ticket to Work started way back in 2011 when Michelle Wakeford was employed by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education to explore pathways for students with disabilities. The resulting learnings recognised that young people with disability (particularly attending specialist schools) were missing out the opportunities to explore careers and engage in vocational pathways that peers living without disability were offered as a matter of course. Michelle realised that change was needed and stakeholders would be vital to lead reform. A seed was planted.

Michelle prioritised speaking with a range of stakeholders who could assist in advancing this goal and gained significant attention from the Bayside Glen Eira Kingston Local Learning & Employment Network (BGK LLEN) who shared a common opinion. As an independent not-for-profit organisation, the BGK LLEN convened the broad stakeholder-based ‘Youth Disability Pathways Network (Inner Melbourne)’ in 2012 to enable organisations discuss the issue and consider place-based achievable means of addressing it. The grass-roots Network grew to comprise representatives from local specialist schools, Registered Training Providers, TAFEs, Disability Employment Services, apprenticeship and traineeship providers, community organisations, local government and Inner East Local Learning Employment Network (IE LLEN). Collectively they agreed there was a critical need for change so that young people with disability be provided with pathway opportunities that would increase their likelihood of entering self-determined open employment.

The Network provided suggestions and drew upon the evidence-based scoping report, undertaken by Michelle and the BGK LLEN, which explored successful international approaches and strategies to galvanise collaborative decision-making regarding a new initiative. They also felt that the proposed pilot program deserved its own identity. After consultation with Berendale School students about potential names and logos, ‘Ticket to Work’ was born.

The objective of Ticket to Work was, and still is, that with person-centred collective community approach, all students with disability (no matter what their disability) can be supported to pursue an employment pathway. This was bolstered by a promise to gather data and social impact measures to propose policy and practice changes aimed at better



supporting young people with disability during their journey to adulthood. These goals and commitments are ones that still underpin Ticket to Work's mission and theory of change today.

In 2012 Ticket to Work supported 18 students from two specialist schools to participate in paid Australian School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (ASbAT), with a staggering 80 percent of those moving into sustainable open employment after completing their secondary education. The research, and student and employer success, proved that improving pathways was possible and plausible. So much so, in 2013 Ticket to Work won the competitive Department of Education ['Victorian Education and Excellence Award'](#) and three students, judged against mainstream peers, won ['Applied Learning Awards'](#). By the end of 2013 the BGK LLEN, which was managing Ticket to Work and national expansion in-kind, received funding from the Department of Social Services (DSS) to enable ongoing delivery and scale. BGK LLEN employed Michelle as National Manager, given her extensive knowledge and program initiation, to govern the work.

Within a year Ticket to Work advocated for national policy and guidelines shifts to better enable Disability Employment Services (DES) to support students with a disability to participate in ASbATs and to work collaboratively. DSS stated that "DES Providers are encouraged to work in partnership with schools, state and territory funded vocational training organisations and local Ticket to Work networks." The initiative scaled to 25 approved networks across Australia and formed a National Ticket to Work Network so that communities across the nation could meet and share their learnings.

During 2014 alone, over 300 young people participated in work experience or career development activities, 100 commenced in a paid ASbAT in various industries, 182 employers and 100 schools were engaged, and 136 organisations in networks and/or training delivery. In 2014 Michelle and the BGK LLEN undertook the detailed ['Transitions to Employment of Australian Young People with Disability and Ticket to Work Initiative'](#) report to identify outcomes and impact, and provide evidence-based best practice recommendations.

The BGK LLEN, as a small Melbourne-based organisation, received continual contact from communities, schools and community organisations genuinely interested in setting up a networks in regional, remote and metropolitan parts of Australia. Sadly, BGK LLEN realised that, even with Michelle leading Ticket to Work, the ever-increasing expansion was beyond its capacity and greater outcomes would be achieved by 'passing it on' to a larger national disability peak body. Gandel Foundation supported transition and Ticket to Work was shifted into the hands of National Disability Services in 2015; enabling even greater reach, impact, research activity and policy advocacy to achieve optimal employment outcomes.

Between 2015 and 2020, Ticket to Work received funding from Gandel Foundation, Barr Foundation, Mazda Foundation, Collier Charitable Fund, Eureka Foundation, Ian Potter Foundation, Lord Mayors Foundation, Paul Ramsay Foundation and the Jobs Victoria Innovation Fund. These investments enabled further expansion of National Networks, independent research, employment of additional staff and introduction of pioneering projects.

The 2016 the independent ['Ticket to Work pilot outcomes study'](#) measured the longer-term employment and social engagement outcomes of young people who participated in Ticket to Work approach, finding that participant effects across these domains far exceeded young



people in the sample group. By 2017 over 1,000 young people had found meaningful work due through Ticket to Work Networks. It celebrated this success through a '1,000 Jobs Creation' which attracted significant media attention and community interest. Ticket to Work continued to evolve across the nation.

Investment of three-years funding from Paul Ramsay Foundation in 2018, oriented towards sustaining Ticket to Work and effecting national policy and practice impacts, has been a game changer. After identifying that young people with disability often miss the opportunity to experience their 'after school job' rite of passage in the latter part of secondary schooling, Ticket to Work launched the ['After School Jobs Project'](#), Australia-first was enabled by commitment from the Ticket to Work networks and number of investors. Paul Ramsay Foundation investment also expedited support for Community Networks, employment of subject-matter experts, creation of evidence-based online employment transition resources, and career development training for parents, employers, schools and young people. Ticket to Work was remaining attentive and progressive!

Not surprisingly, Ticket to Work, like so many others, experienced challenges during COVID restrictions. But it, as well as the community Networks, responded with agile approaches to maintain delivery and scope. Networks began implementing online career development modes for young people with disability and continued ongoing place-based Ticket to Work group meetings.

In 2021 Ticket to Work itself engaged in more independent research activity to evaluate its outcomes. The Social Ventures Australia (SVA) ['Ticket to Work: Valuation of key outcomes'](#) socio-economic study revealed that the modest investment in Ticket to Work approach and network delivers substantial economic outcomes to society. Two assessments of the 'After Schools Job Project' in the ['Beneficial for All: The After School Jobs Project'](#) and ['After-school jobs for students with intellectual disability'](#) reports were also conducted. Collectively, these studies revealed that stakeholder collaboration was a key driver in success, work placement improves student and employer capacity and decision-making, and engagement ameliorates parents and young people's fears and challenges. Furthermore, it recommended that policymakers should view this approach as a method which can increase young people with intellectual disability's workforce participation rate and deliver personal and government economic benefits. A direct outcome of these studies led to additional investments. Gandel Foundation investment is now supporting schools to engage in evidence-based practice in career development.

Ticket to Work's continual expansion and progressive approach saw it, in 2022, transition from National Disability Services to the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL). While National Disability Services had been a change agent supporter for six years, movement to BSL was deemed a natural fit given shared value alignment with Ticket to Work's commitment to education, disability employment, disadvantage, research, policy and social equity. BSL was well positioned to use its social research and policy capabilities to effect systemic change aimed at improving employment pathways for young people with disability.

Ticket to Work is excited in new phase within the Brotherhood of St Laurence, to continue to partner and collaboratively harness employment and career development opportunities for young people with disability to ensure they have access to decent work. With further support from Paul Ramsay Foundation and Gandel Foundation we are about to start the next stage



of the work to ensure young people with disability have opportunity to transition to decent work and have rewarding careers. Watch this space.

After more than 10 years Ticket to Work has continued to be mission focused, and thank the communities, network members, investors, researchers and of course the young people and their families for making this possible. We look forward to remaining on the evolving Ticket to Work journey for many years to come.

Ticket to Work To-date:

- 1671 secondary students got their first job.
- Over 16 submissions to government urging policy to change to improved employment outcomes for young people with disability.
- 14 research or evaluations that look at element of practice and the [Ticket to Work approach](#) that found:
- 69% participants post school are in education, employment and training; 61% of that group are in open employment. (508 responses averaged over 4 years) (CSI 2022)
- Ticket to Work approach has number of social and fiscal benefits (Social Ventures Australia, 2019).
- Ticket to Work participants post-school are substantially more likely work in open employment, complete year 12, participate in the labour force, be involved in community and socially active (Atkinson, Christian, Cassidy, Rutherford & Hawkins, 2019)
- Ticket to Work's approach is working for key stakeholders (evaluation of employers, parents and network members) and is in line with international good practice and research (Atkinson et al., 2019; Kellock, 2019; Wakeford, 2019).
- That there is a need to focus on how to get different sectors working in concert to improve employment outcomes and raises expectations (Meadows, 2019) and that Ticket to Work supports effective integration of mainstream and disability supports, and reduces duplication (Atkinson et al., 2019)