



# **ENHANCING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITY**

March 2017

# Enhancing employment opportunities for young people with significant disability

## NDS and Ticket to Work

**National Disability Services (NDS)** is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. Its purpose is to promote and advance services for people with disability. Its Australia-wide membership includes more than 1080 non-government organisations that support people with all forms of disability. NDS's members collectively provide the full range of disability services—from accommodation support, respite and therapy to community access and employment. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Federal Governments.

**Ticket to Work** is an initiative of NDS that aims to improve open employment participation in Australia by galvanising local resolve, advocating for systemic change, and providing an architecture for optimal employment and career achievement for young people with disability. This paper has been informed by the experience, research and evaluations of Ticket to Work.

March 2017

# Summary

This paper outlines gaps in policy and practice in Australia that affect the capacity of a young person with disability to take an open employment pathway. The paper also highlights the Ticket to Work model and its success in improving school to work transition for young people with significant disability.

Currently Australia's policy and practice that does not encourages young people to take an education, training or employment pathway. This is evident in:

- High level of early school leaving (double that of young people without disability).
- young people assessed at having a low work capacity which excluding them from disability employment support, and also
- exempts them from policies to keep them engaged in education, employment and training, and directs them to
- sub-minimal wage or non-vocational activities post school; which have little chance of leading to open employment. (under 5% pathway to open employment).
- limited opportunities for students with disabilities to develop work readiness – such as after-school job and work experience.
- there is a lack of connectedness between education, training and employment for people with disability, causing duplication and gaps in supports.

Many nations have recognised to increase employment participation for people with disability you need to ensure resources and policies to improve school to work transition. <sup>1 2 3 4 5</sup>

Indeed the second implementation plan of the National Disability Strategy identifies the need for high quality program designed to create smooth transition from education and employment <sup>6</sup> As well does the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. It highlights:

“That Learners with disabilities receive the support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education, and finally to work.”<sup>7</sup>

Poor school to work support will have effect on

- The viability of the NDIS
- Overall employment participation rate of people with disability.

There is great evidence that school to work transition is an important way to improve the employment participation of people with disability, and connecting a young person with the world of work before they leave school greatly improves their chances of securing ongoing employment. Indeed it has been found that if a young people with significant disability does not engage in open employment by age 21, it is unlikely that they ever will. <sup>8</sup>

Ticket to Work pilot has shown great results with over 800 jobs created for young people with disability; with 86% sustaining their employment for over 3 years.

# Recommendations

## Immediate

- Fund the National Ticket to Work at NDS so we can continue to build our understanding of policy and practice that can improve school to work transition including an independent evaluation of the long term effect of Ticket to Work.
- Implement pilot where DES providers can build employment pathways and support school to work transition including after-school work and work experience.

## From 2018

From our experience, research and evaluation of the transition from school to employment, we have developed a list of priority solutions to improve the economic participation of people with disability:

1. Implement 'Employment First' policies in Australia; that is employment is the first priority and preferred outcome of people with disabilities, and all young people with disability have the assumption they have capacity to work and are supported to build their employability and explore an open employment pathway.
2. Through the NDIS, fund local intermediaries to implement the learnings and success from Ticket to Work, in building the capacity of mainstream services and supporting collaboration between sectors. This will ensure all young Australians with disability are able to explore open employment pathways.
3. Facilitate early connection to disability employment counsellors so that DES can work in partnership with schools to improve a student's employability, encourage school completion and ensure young people with disability gain access to early experiences that positively influence their views of themselves as workers.
4. Collaboration between State and Commonwealth to improve school to work transition, including implement greater access to, participation in and outcomes from vocational education and training (VET) for people with disability including apprenticeships and traineeships, build capacity of Secondary schools to implement international benchmarked practice in Transition Programming.

# Enhancing employment opportunities for young people with significant disability

## Priority issues

During adolescents is when a person develops their 'career identity' and currently many Australian students with disability receive prolonged exposure to "horizon-limiting views and experiences which can see these beliefs become internalised and the person's capacity to recognise their potential diminished."<sup>9</sup>

This, in effect, means that adolescents with disability are less likely to identify as 'workers' or 'active citizens,' which in turn creates pathways to non-vocational alternatives or sub-minimal wages with poor open employment prospects.<sup>10</sup>

Many countries are implementing policies and practices to ensure, earlier, timely, and more seamless access to experiences that guide students with disabilities to open employment, and that builds their employability so they can be successful in the labour market.

To counteract disadvantage in Australia, Deloitte Access Economics found that, "It is crucial that young people with disability receive the support required to participate in the workforce as early as possible to drive effective long-term employment outcomes and maximise the benefits of improved standards of living and social inclusion that come with employment."<sup>11</sup>

'The aspiration for young disabled Australians to have the same opportunities and freedoms as their non-disabled peers appears even further out of reach. Indeed, the gap between their life conditions and those of their non-disabled peers markedly widened on half of the twelve headline indicators' from 2001 to 2012 included :

- Being employed
- Being fully engaged in work or education
- Not having low economic resources and financial stress
- Having someone to turn to in times of crisis
- Having a voice in the community
- Not experiencing multiple disadvantage<sup>12</sup>

What is most disappointing is that on no indicator did the gap narrow.

Below outlines a range of issues in Australia for young people with disabilities.

## Early school leaving

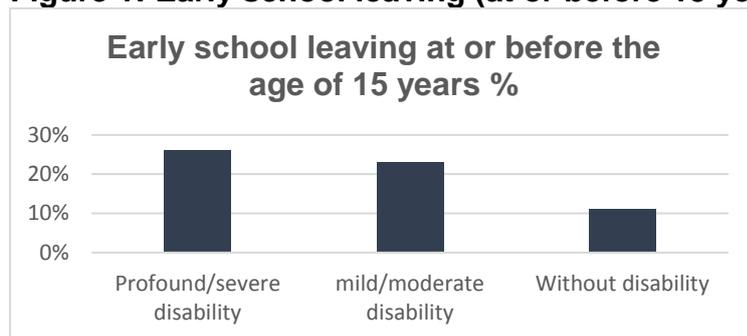
In Australia, government policies encourage young people to stay at school for its full duration, to participate in either vocational or higher education and to enter the workforce equipped with relevant skills. As stated recently by Minister for Employment Michaelia Cash, “There is strong evidence that young people who disengage from education or the labour market are at risk of long term unemployment.”<sup>13</sup>

The number of years that a person is engaged in formal education is one of the best predictors of positive social and economic outcomes for students with and without disability.<sup>14</sup> Young people with disability are exempt from policies to support students to stay engaged in education and the labour market, however.

Young people with disability are more than twice as likely to leave school early compared to young people without disability. A quarter of young people with disability leave school before the minimum school leaving age. (See Figure 1.)

Also of particular significance is that many of these young people leave school even though they do not have severe forms of disability.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 1: Early school leaving (at or before 15 years of age)**



Source: ABS survey of Education and Training 2009

Why young people leave school early is interesting. For young people without disability, the main reason for leaving school is that they ‘got (or wanted) a job or apprenticeship’. ABS data from 2011, however, shows that only 16 per cent of young people with mild/moderate disability left school for this reason.<sup>16</sup>

A significant number of young people with disability are leaving school early without an employment goal or pathway and are exempt from government policy (such as earn and learn policies or Disability Support Pension under 35 participation requirements) to keep them engaged in the labour market.

Research has found that engaging students in work focus opportunities increases post-school employment outcomes. Students with disability who participate have been shown to have significantly lower absenteeism from school as well as a lower probability of dropping out of school.<sup>17 18</sup> It does not, as the Department of Social Services argued in a 2016 Disability Employment Services (DES) discussion paper, “[provide] incentives to students to transition to work before they have completed their schooling.”<sup>19</sup>

## Assessment

Students with disability can apply for Disability Support Pension (DSP) at 15 years of age. As part of the application process, they have a Job Capacity Assessment (JCA).

Many young people with disability are given an assessment of capacity to work at 0-7 hours by the JCA. This exempts them from Disability Employment Support and activities to maximise their work capacity for those aged under 35 on DSP.

One reason for this low assessment of work capacity is that the JCA and the Employment Services Assessment (ESAt) is not an age specific assessment. A person aged 45 will have the same assessment as the 15 year old. A 15 year old student, however, has limited opportunities to develop work readiness and independent skills. This skews the JCA to give a low capacity to work which in turn excludes the young person from accessing open employment support.

This in effect puts young people on the trajectory of government-funded programs during vital transition years. Many young people with disability - even those with mild disabilities - are transitioning from school into Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) or day services/community supports.<sup>20</sup> With less than 2 per cent of people transitioning from these services into open employment; the assessment is committing the government to a lifetime of disability supports, and young people are unlikely to achieve economic and social participation. Though ADEs and day services may be appropriate supports in some cases, we believe that every young person should explore an open employment pathway before accessing them.

This assessment occurs at a time when young people develop a coherent and realistic occupational identity which supports successful transition into adulthood.<sup>21</sup>  
<sup>22</sup> The current arrangement for young people with disability encourages dependent pathways and means that young people are less likely to realise their potential. This can have lifelong implications for the individual and their family as well as the wider society and economy.

Evidence shows that standardised assessment does not necessarily take into account the individual and their capacity for work in the right employment setting or with job customisation. Interestingly, it is not the person's disability that affects employment success, but personality traits including a strong sense of self efficacy, a positive attitude and commitment to the industry and/or the job.<sup>23</sup>

With the right support and the right job, young people with significant disability have been able to work above their assessed level.<sup>24</sup>

Other regions around the world have taken an 'employment first' approach. This supports the value that, "Open employment should be the first and preferred option when exploring goals and a life path for young citizens with disabilities."<sup>25</sup> Employment-first policies ensure that young people with disability are engaged in the labour market, which includes "access to employment, education, job-driven training and support services that give them the chance to advance their careers and secure the good jobs of the future" as well as restricting non-vocational pathways unless they first try employment services.<sup>26</sup>

## Duplication

In Australia, there is duplication in planning and assessment that students and their families are often likely to encounter. As indicated below:

Plan and/or assessment	How often
Individual learning plan (ILP) (Education)	Quarterly
Pathways plan and assessment (Education)	Annually from Year 8
Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) (Centrelink)	Usually every two years
Employment Services Assessment (ESAt) (Centrelink)	To access DES support
Job plan (DES)	Quarterly
NDIS plan and assessment (NDIS)	Usually annually
Service plan with each NDIS provider (NDIS)	As required

Multiple assessment and planning processes in such a short period of time can lead to disengagement of the family and wasted resources because of duplication and fragmented processes. Families and young people are often left with the task of trying to connect and coordinate multiple planning processes.

## After-school jobs and work experience

The strong relationship between the experience of work during secondary school and higher post-school employment for youth with disabilities is well-documented.<sup>27</sup>

Frequent exposure to real work environments throughout the secondary school years shapes a young person's image of themselves as 'worker' and provides the skills, experience and confidence to successfully take an employment pathway.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, early exposure to employment and/or integrated work experiences during high school is the top predictor of post-school employment success for youth with intellectual and other significant disabilities.<sup>29 30 31 32 33</sup>

Currently, however, DES providers are not able to support students with disability into an after school job or work experience.

In Australia, the Standing Committee on Education and Training (2009) found, "There is a general consensus that young people's participation in some form of work while at school holds an inherent value," including:

- Enhancing a student's confidence and self-esteem
- Contributing to their financial well-being
- Facilitating the development of social networks
- Allowing students to gain useful knowledge and independence and exercise greater responsibility and self-reliance
- Instilling a work ethic and positive attitude
- Enabling students to develop work and organisational skills, including time management skills<sup>34</sup>

A 2012 Canadian review of USA and UK school to work policies for students with disability found that the UK (similar to Australia) had difficulty finding ways to

integrate youth with disabilities into the labour market. It identified that for many young people, this is due to weaknesses in the UK system in not providing opportunities for pre-employment work experience or part-time employment while at school.<sup>35</sup>

“While experience of work [is] beneficial to all youth, it has been found they are particularly valuable for young people with disabilities.”<sup>36</sup> We believe that activities such as the after-school job are rites of passage that should be available to young people with significant disability.

## **Vocational Education and Training (VET)**

Completing a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification not only strongly improves the chances of getting a job for a person with disability, but also the chances of keeping it.

People with disability are underrepresented in the VET sector (6.8 per cent in 2013), however, and they generally have lower levels of education. This has been identified as one of the factors contributing to their lower rate of labour force participation.<sup>37</sup>

Unemployed people with disability that complete a training course at Cert III level and above are 20 per cent more likely to be employed after the training. For unemployed people without disability, the figure is 10 per cent. This means that VET training provides twice the impact for people with disability looking for employment. Completion of a VET qualification also provides assurance to employers that a job candidate’s disability does not hinder their ability to perform tasks that are relevant to their prospective job.

It is a concern, however, that half of VET students with disability are participating in courses with little employment value (for example, a Certificate I) and are not progressing to higher qualifications that have proven employment benefits.<sup>38</sup>

Many other jurisdictions have focused on ‘job-driven training.’<sup>39</sup> This includes VET with practical workplace experience, which results in higher workforce participation rates and income, post-training.

A longitudinal study of apprentices and trainees with disability in Australia found that a year after graduation, 87 per cent of participants were in paid work.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, participation of people with disability in apprenticeships and traineeships remains very low, at 2 per cent.

## **Early intervention**

Local and international evidence indicates that connecting a young person with the world of work before they leave school greatly improves their chances of securing ongoing employment.

A 2016 report by the United States Department of Labor found that, “Earlier, timely, and more seamless access to disability employment services plays an important

intervention role of guiding students with significant disabilities to open employment, and that early connection to disability counsellors is the most important change in practice that has improved employment outcomes.”<sup>41</sup>

The USA has mandated that disability employment service providers dedicate at least 15 per cent of their federal funding to help people with disability transition from school to work. This is because it has been identified that most people with significant disability who are employed had their first job before turning 21.<sup>42</sup>

An important outcome of a successful transition to employment from school is significant savings to government funds, as young people with disability who exit school with a job are more likely to ‘maintain a positive career trajectory.’<sup>43</sup>

Associate Professor Umesh Sharma of Monash University's Education Faculty stated that, “The final three years of school were vital for students in setting them up for life after school.”<sup>44</sup> International benchmarking on transition education states that “transition-focused planning begins no later than age 14 for students with disability.”<sup>45</sup> Though this is not just the work of just one program or sector, to create success we must ensure system’s integration.

Though there are pockets of good practice, there is no understanding in the Australia secondary education system of good career development and transition from school for students with disability. This is often overlaid with low expectations. There is great opportunity to build education capacity to support transition from school.

Other countries and states have benchmarked their education practice against the internationally-recognised *Taxonomy for transition programming* for students with disability.<sup>46</sup> Griffith University has completed work to adapt the Taxonomy to an Australian context and has been working with the Catholic education sector to implement good practice in this regard.

## **Interconnection**

An Evaluation of Disability Employment Policy in the United States found that bringing services across institutional and funding sources together significantly improved school transition and employment outcomes for young people with disability.<sup>47</sup>

In Australia, programs have been ‘siloes’ either in schools or adult disability services, with early intervention often being the main responsibility of allied health professionals such as speech therapists and physiotherapists. In general terms, this has created a dichotomous model. In part, this division of services reflects traditional funding arrangements by governments.<sup>48</sup>

As disability exists on a continuum, however, there needs to be continuum of services. Post-school services need to connect with individuals while at school and pre-employment skills training needs to be initiated before a student reaches the legal age to leave school.<sup>49</sup>

The transition from school to adulthood is identified as a time of particular

vulnerability. Intervention should be directed at preventive, collaborative approaches which address the multiple causes of exclusion.<sup>50</sup>

More work needs to be done on the connections between the NDIS, employment and the Education and Training sectors to improve school to work transition.

Currently, it is reported that only 2 per cent of NDIS plans have open employment as a goal. Only 13 per cent state that the NDIS supports them in their work goal.<sup>51</sup>

The NDIS choice philosophy works on the basis that an individual is aware what their personal care and community needs are, and can therefore can adequately decide where their funding should be used. In employment, however, the individual is not an expert in the labour market or career development, and they often have difficulty identifying their strengths and needs within the labour market. Employment is a complex specialist area, and it requires a specialist to help navigate opportunities for a young person and their family.

### **A demand-led approach to employer engagement**

The demand-led approach in employment is driven by the clear and highly-responsive sense of employers' needs.

Proposed in a DSS paper on disability employment, the focus of this approach is awareness-raising for people with disability as potential employees as 'the untapped market.'<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, many of the proposed techniques have been found to be ineffective and sometimes counter-intuitive.<sup>53</sup>

The DSS found that, of the 52 per cent of employers who were aware of DES, only 3 per cent had used their services in the previous 12 months.<sup>54</sup> This demonstrates a lack of engagement by employers as opposed to a lack of awareness about people with disability as potential employees.

The most persuasive recruitment strategy is indeed demonstrating how applicants with disability address the 'bottom lines' of businesses. An Australian study found that more than 80 per cent of respondent employers endorsed this approach as the most valuable.<sup>55</sup>

A 2016 review of disability employer engagement by Deakin University found that, "Small to medium organisations who together employ the largest number of people in Australia, are not engaging with current strategies to address the needs of employers" in employing more people with disabilities.<sup>56</sup>

Research and experience have shown there are two key factors in engaging employers:

1. Partners or 'trusted brokers' who can help them address a particular workforce or operational need of the company; and
2. Competent help from disability employment services that addresses their needs<sup>57 58</sup>

Employers must have a stake in the success of programs that connect them with young people with disability. “Employers must consider both the costs and the benefits associated with having youth with disability in their workplaces. Thus, it is essential for educators, transition specialists, workforce development professionals, family members and youth to understand employers’ needs, circumstances, and perspectives as they establish work experiences.”<sup>59</sup>

## **Ticket to Work Model**

Ticket to Work is an initiative of NDS that supports young people with disability to transition from school to open employment and to have as typical a transition from school as their peers without disability.

We are an evidence-based initiative that leverages the power of cross-sectoral collaborative partnerships to improve employment outcomes for these young people with disability. It builds the capacity of mainstream services and system to address the need of young people with disability through a collective impact framework.

The Ticket to Work model is based on extensive research into what works. Specifically, Ticket to Work:

- Brings together disability-specific and mainstream representatives from a variety of sectors to work strategically and collaboratively
- Supports young people to gain access to early experiences that positively influence their views of themselves as workers
- Prepares young people with disability for the workplace and gives them an employment pathway that is typical of other young adults
- Increases opportunities for meaningful work experience and learning prior to exiting school

## **Ticket to Work Outcomes**

### **Who are Ticket to Work Participants?**

- 76 per cent have an Intellectual disability and/or Autism
- 71 per cent attend/ed a special school

### **Data**

- 1,977 young people commenced in work experience and work preparation activities
- 807 young people have started an apprenticeship or traineeship
- 86% per cent of the trainees are still in their traineeship or have successfully completed
- 701 employers across a diverse range of sectors have supported young people in their workplaces.

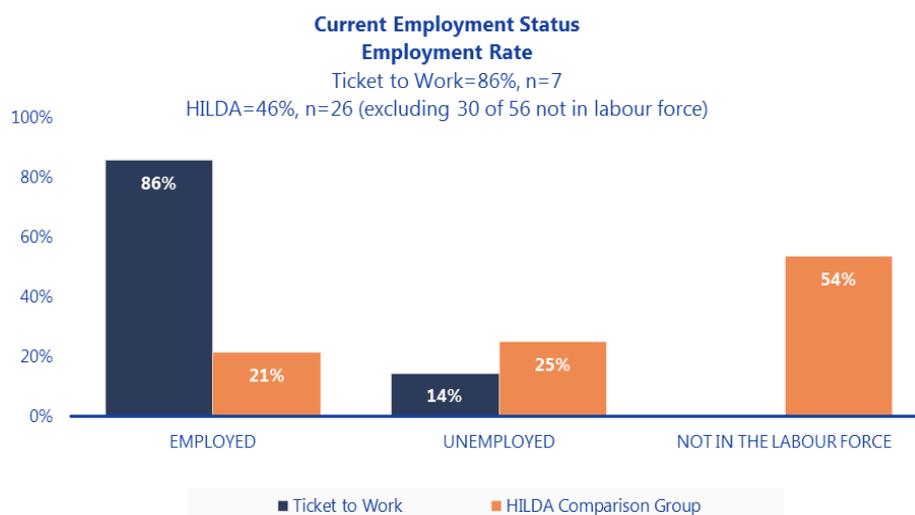
## Evaluation

In 2016, an independent Ticket to Work pilot outcome study on long term outcomes (post-school) found that Ticket to Work participants:

- have higher levels of social participation, quality of life and well-being than the comparison group
- 1 to 3 years after finishing school, 86 per cent were in open employment
- Are four times more likely to be in work than other young people with disability
- Are almost twice as likely to have completed Year 12
- Receive Award or above Award rates of pay (not supported wage)
- 71 per cent felt that their level of independence was 'just right' compared with 32 per cent of NDIS participants

Though the sample was small, it found some encouraging results.

**Figure 2**



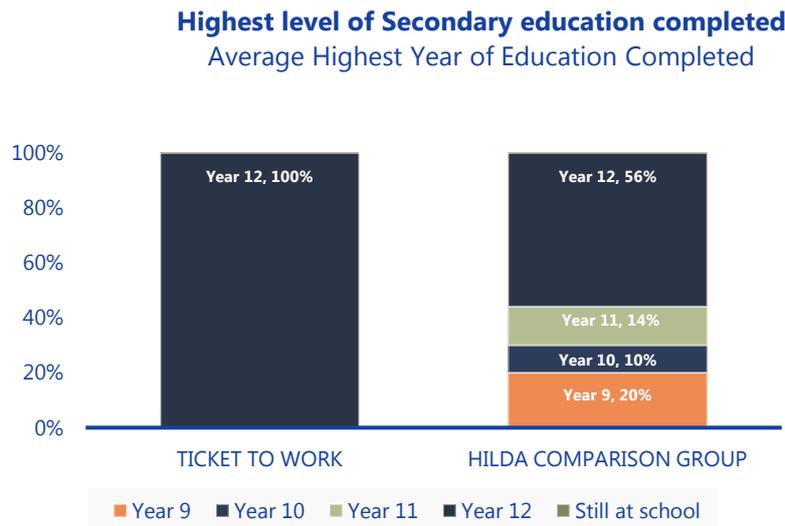
“Ticket to Work has given our kids the work ethic and experience they need; in essence it teaches them how to work. We have more students involved in paid employment than we’ve ever had, and that’s really impressive. The whole attitude of our students is now about having a career; it is just discussed as a natural thing whereas the word career was never used with our students before. I think we’ve changed the perception of this amongst the students.”

- A special school teacher

## Early school leaving

It was found that Ticket to Work participants are almost 50 per cent more likely to complete year 12 than young people with similar disabilities that have not participated in Ticket to Work.<sup>60</sup> (See Figure 3 below.) This is particularly significant as many participants were referred to Ticket to Work because they were disengaging from school.

**Figure 3: Highest level of secondary education completed**



Parents have acknowledged that participation in Ticket to Work has kept their child engaged in education.<sup>61</sup>

“Ticket to Work has been a very positive move. My son wasn’t enjoying school like he used to. It is helping him gain more knowledge and experience in the workforce.”

My son loves his school based traineeship and knows he can only do it if he is still going to school, which has made him more motivated to go to school.”

[www.tickettowork.org.au/testimonials/](http://www.tickettowork.org.au/testimonials/)

## Assessment

Even though many Ticket to Work participants are given a low job capacity assessment (under 8 hours) by JCA, we have supported over 700 young people with significant disability into work mainly through school-based traineeships.

In the young person’s school based traineeships, they are participating in 13 hours of work, three days of secondary school, a vocational qualification. Currently, retention is 90 per cent over a two-year period. This is a positive outcome for any young person.

## Duplication

Evaluation of Ticket to Work partnership found that 91 per cent of members felt that the network does not duplicate existing processes. Through working together, the members identified that they could create real value and that dovetailing (support) was very effective. **100 per cent** of Ticket to Work members felt that similar practices that exist amongst the partner agencies are coordinated.<sup>62</sup>

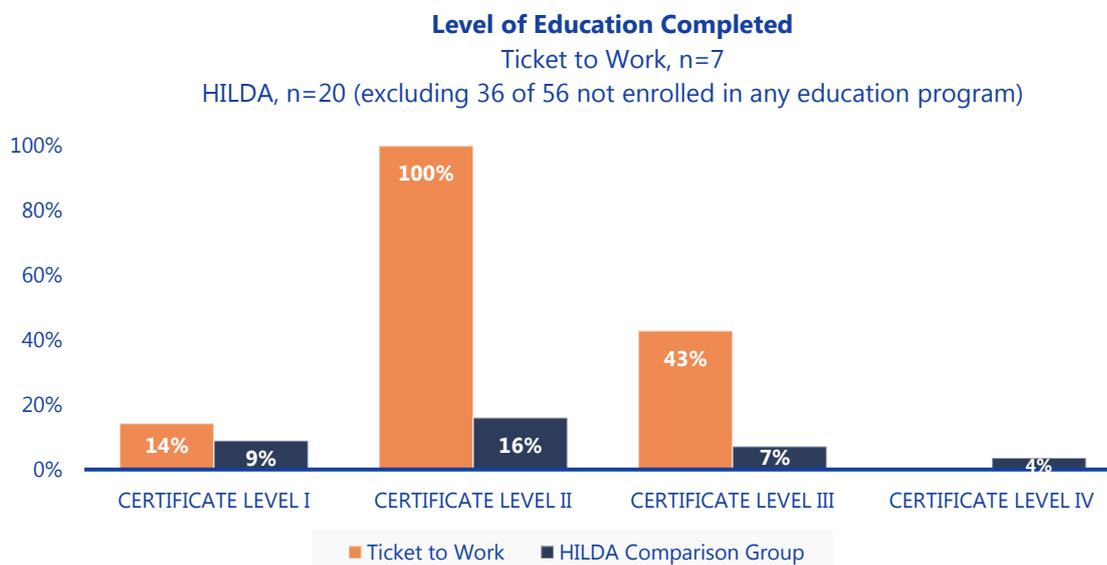
“Within the field of education and employment, there are many organisations and people out there looking to achieve the same thing. By having a partnership approach to achieving goals, this adds weight to ideas, processes and initiatives. Partnerships are also a great way to bring a broad range of expertise around one table.” - *Ticket to Work member*

## Vocational Education and Training (VET)

A Ticket to Work key strategy to improve participation in employment is engagement in school-based traineeships, particularly in regards to good evidence-based practice. The results for post-school open employment has been significant compared to other young people with similar disabilities.<sup>63</sup>

Ticket to Work participants are over three times more likely to complete additional qualifications.

**Figure 4 Qualification Level, Ticket to Work vs. Comparison group**



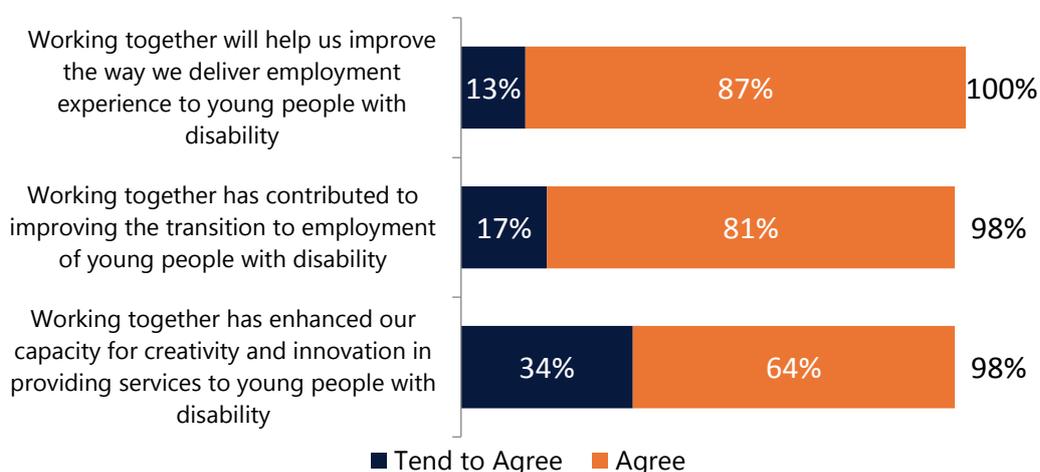
Due to changes in funding, few registered training organisations are willing to support vocational training for young people with disability. However, in Queensland the state government has developed a plan for inclusive training and provides skilled support for people with disability to access, participate in and achieve outcomes through vocational education and training.<sup>64</sup> As a result, the majority of Ticket to Work participants are in Queensland as we have been able to ensure training support.

## Ticket to Work network approach and interconnection

Ticket to Work is based on the concept of collaborative and locally based multi sectorial partnerships that improve outcomes for young people, rather than working programmatically or discretely.

The Ticket to Work partnership approach has been independently evaluated and found that Ticket to Work Network organisational members felt they achieved better outcomes for young people with disability together than they could on their own. They noted that the network does not duplicate existing processes. Practices are coordinated and build on the expertise of network participants, supporting smooth transition from school to work for young people with disability.<sup>65</sup> (See Figure 5.)

**Figure 5 Positive responses to the Impact of the Ticket to Work Partnership, n=47**



## Employer Engagement

Ticket to Work takes a demand-led approach to employer engagement.

This approach works well within Ticket to Work's collaborative framework. Ticket to Work has demonstrated a strong capacity to engage with employers to date, with over 600 employers of different sizes and industries.

In the evaluation of Ticket to Work, it was found that employers observed benefits to their business by taking on the young employees, and that 94 per cent said they would recommend Ticket to Work to other employers.<sup>66</sup>

It has benefited the business because the trainees have been so productive. They are enthusiastic about their training and the work they do, so it brings a level of greater productivity to the whole team. - *Ticket to work employer.*

## Conclusion

Ticket to Work has shown that an early intervention collaborative approach can create open employment opportunities for young people with significant disability. Early results have shown that employment is sustained.

[www.tickettowork.org.au/](http://www.tickettowork.org.au/)

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