



Beneficial for all

The After School Jobs project



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Introduction

Ticket to Work aims to support young people with disability successfully transition from school to work. One key method of ensuring such outcomes is giving these young people early exposure to employment while they are in secondary school through work experience, part time employment or after school jobs.

In July 2017, Ticket to Work began a three year project with the aim of creating opportunities for secondary school students with a disability to participate in after school jobs. This is an evaluation of the project which provides an overview of the broad policy context, details the Ticket to Work model, the rationale for the project, and lists the project outcomes. It gives an outline of the methodology used to evaluate the project based on the experiences of parents, teachers, employment service staff and employers.

Finally, this evaluation presents the findings which highlight the significance of strong collaboration amongst key stakeholders such as school and employment service staff, families and employers. Collaboration maybe a worthwhile strategy for policy makers to consider as Australia embarks on its post Covid-19 economic recovery. Several direct and indirect benefits for employers involved in the project were identified along with the need for just the right amount of parental support to ensure successful outcomes. Another finding was that stakeholders chose to focus on the preferences and capabilities of the young people despite their label of having a “significant disability”. Focusing on their strengths rather than their limitations is essential to ensuring the success of these young people in the workforce. To succeed they require additional assistance from disability employment services.

Policy Context

In July 2008, the Australian Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRDP). According to Article 4 of the Convention,

Parties are obliged to ensure and promote recognition of the fact that people with disability are entitled to all human rights and fundamental freedoms, without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability.

Amongst the range of areas parties are obliged to eliminate discrimination in include Education, Article 24 and Employment, Article 27. In 2016, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which oversees the implementation of the Convention formally expressed concerns that both children and adults were being denied equal access to education. Amongst the Committee’s recommendations, it clarified the core features of inclusive education, which includes the need for successful transitions:

- g) Effective transitions: Learners with disabilities receive the support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education, and finally to work (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016).

Therefore, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has outlined that effective transitions from school to work or further education is an essential component of inclusive education.

In 2010, the Australian Council of Australian Governments (COAG) released the National Disability Strategy (NDS). It identifies the need to increase the economic participation of people with disability through employment and to ensure best practice for transition planning and support through all stages of learning and from education to employment (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, Policy Directions 3.1 & 5.5).

Despite this range of high level strategic policy directions regarding the need to support the economic participation of people with disability and specifically to ensure successful transitions from school to work, Australia, is failing to achieve these aims. The empirical data indicates a decline in successful outcomes for young people with disability transitioning from school to work in recent years (Davy et al., 2019; Emerson & Llewellyn, 2014)

The data on the participation of people with intellectual disability who make up the majority of people with significant disability as defined by the Department of Social Services (2020) is complex, and multifaceted. There is no singular definition of disability in Australia (Thoresen, Cocks, & Parsons, 2019).

Data on NDIS participants aged 15-24 indicates of a sample of 35,265, only 9.3% were in open employment (on full or less minimal wages) as per Table 1.

Paid Employment Overall		
NDIS participants 15–24		
Number of respondents surveyed: 35,265	Number	Percentage*
Number of respondents Type of employment survey:	6,090	16.48
Open employment on full wages	2,619	7
Open employment on less award wages	853	2.3
Supported employment (ADE)	2,010	5.4
Apprenticeship/traineeships	122	0.3
Self employed	61	0.17
other employment	425	1.2

Table 1. Type of Employment of NDIS Participants aged 15-24, Baseline data

Source: NDIA (2019, Appendix F.1.7 - Work, p.25)

*Estimates due to possible rounding errors

Ticket to Work

Ticket to Work was established in response to poor and falling school to work transition rates for young Australians with disability. Unsuccessful transition from school holds lifelong economic and social implications for an individual, their families and society.

While not underestimating the challenges, Ticket to Work has demonstrated in significant numbers that young people can thrive in open employment when prepared and supported while at school through a coordinated approach. Ticket to Work ensures effective pathways from school into open employment, or further education and training. The model was developed by scoping ‘what works’ in other countries. That is:

Connecting a student with disability to the world of work before they leave school through a coordinated approach greatly improves the likelihood of securing ongoing open employment and creates better economic and social outcomes.

What happens in school is key to the long term economic and social participation of people with disability. Early intervention and career development make a difference. Deloitte Access Economics (2018) identified that it is ‘crucial that young people with disability receive the support required to participate in the workforce as early as possible. Doing so will drive effective long-term employment and maximise the benefits of improved standards of living and social inclusion that come with employment’.

Australian students with disability often face a pervasive culture of low expectations resulting in a lack of opportunities for genuinely sustainable employment. Prolonged exposure to ‘horizon-limiting views and experiences’ may see these beliefs become internalised and the young person’s capacity to recognise their potential diminishes (PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia, 2011). Along with the young person not being able to identify their potential, parents also lose the ability to see their child’s potential and, consequently, cannot support them to achieve their goals. Expectations of parents are critical in the success of the transition from school to work for young people with disability (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Gilson, Carter, Bumble, & McMillan, 2018).

The aim of Ticket to Work is to prepare young people for the world of work. This is done by providing them with an open employment pathway in their transition from school through a combination of vocational/career development and contact with work environments. Community networks are developed to leverage the power of cross-sectoral partnerships to provide individualised support, blending existing resources, coordinating, scaffolding all relevant supports for young people with significant disability.

The networks are coordinated by an intermediary, which supports development of a local community partnership, which includes schools, employment services, training organisations, post school providers and employers.

Objectives of 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
- meets the needs of employers, providing enhanced retention and profitability.

The significance of after school jobs

The strong relationship between the experience of work during secondary school and post school employment for youth with disabilities is well documented (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Gramlich & Luecking, 2003; Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010). Frequent exposure to real work environments throughout the secondary school years shapes a young person's image of themselves as a 'worker' and provides the skills, experience and confidence to successfully take an employment pathway (Wakeford & Waugh, 2014).

Early exposure to employment and/or integrated work experiences during high school is the key predictor of post school employment success for youth with intellectual and other significant disabilities (Carter et al., 2012; Carter et al., 2009; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Test et al., 2009). Currently in Australia, Disability Employment Service organisations (DES) receive minimal funding to support students with disability into after school jobs or work experience while at school. These organisations only receive full funding for the placement of students in 8 hours of paid work each week which is unlikely when students are still at school (Department of Social Services, 2020).

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2009) report into school to work transitions found:

There is a general consensus that young people's participation in some form of work while at school holds an inherent value.

These include:

- 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 (Para 3.12).

This Parliamentary Report also notes “...students with a disability... are more likely to face multiple disadvantages with regard to accessing part-time work (Para 7.2).”

Australia has difficulties finding ways to integrate youth with disabilities into the labour market. For many young people, this is due to the lack of opportunities to participate in pre-employment work experience or part-time employment while at school (Carter et al., 2012; Crawford, 2013). Larson (2011) argues, “While experiences of work whilst at school [is] beneficial to all youth, it has been found they are particularly valuable for young people with disabilities.”

Thiele, Bigby, and Tideman (2018) completed an examination of peer reviewed literature on after school jobs for young people with intellectual disability on behalf of National Disability Services. Their conclusion was,

There is a very small body of research about after school jobs, which does suggest that experiencing work, in particular paid work, during school is likely to contribute to positive emotional, social and employment outcomes for young people with intellectual disabilities.

The findings of the current review suggest that paid employment during school has a more positive impact on post school employment than unpaid school supervised/sponsored work.

After School Jobs Project

The After School Jobs Project occurred over a three year period to support students with disability to experience work after school, like their peers. Ticket to Work obtained philanthropic and Victorian State government funding to develop an action learning project. This evaluation used a qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of key stakeholders.

Between July 2017 and June 2020 Ticket to Work undertook a project to create opportunities for secondary school students with a disability to engage in after school jobs.

The Project Objectives were:

1. Young people with significant disability will have the opportunity to experience work while at school.
2. Explore, demonstrate and document a model of after school jobs that supports both young people with disability and employers of student labour.
3. Explore the benefits to students with disability in participation in after school jobs.
4. Explore the long term effect of participating in after school jobs for students with disability.
5. Identify good practice through models of after school jobs and develop tools to support others to implement (scalability/transferability)

The Project Model

Ticket to Work networks volunteered to participate in the After School Jobs Project. They utilised the collaborative approach, identified interested students and developed their work readiness skills. Networks and employment support services also leveraged their existing relationships with employers and connected with new employers to place the students in after school jobs.

The project utilised an action learning approach to develop replicable models which are scalable and transferable, along with a range of instructional tools such as a 'How to Guide' (<https://tickettowork.org.au/resource/137/>). Students were supported through the Ticket to Work networks to participate in after school jobs.

Project Outcomes

The following tables outline the outcomes of the project, the number of students supported to obtain after school jobs, their type of disability, the type of school they attended, the level of education they completed and what they were doing once they had done so.

Disability Type	Number	Percentage
Amputation – Other	1	1
Anxiety	1	1
Aspergers	9	12
Autism	18	24
Downs Syndrome	2	3
Intellectual disability	36	48
Learning disability	3	4
Physical	1	1
Speech Disorder - other	2	3
Vision Impairment	2	3
Total	75	100

Table 2. Disability type of students

School Type	Number	Percentage
Mainstream school	15	20
Special education unit in mainstream school	43	57
Special school	16	21
Special development school	0	0
School of air /distance learning	1	2
Total	75	100

Table 3. School type students attended

Year of completion	Number	Percentage
Year 11	2	4.5
Year 12	40	91
Year 13	2	4.5
Total	44	100

Table 4. Year level completed for those who had finished school

Type of activity	Number	percentage
In open employment	28	80
Left school - Looking for work including SLES	6	17
Left school traineeship/apprenticeship	1	3
Supported employment	0	0
Total	35	100

Table 5. Type of activity students engaged in upon school completion

Summary of methods

This assessment is one of two evaluations conducted on the project. Researchers from the Living with Disability Research Centre (LiDS) at La Trobe University are undertaking an evaluation which focuses on the experiences of the students with disability. It involves a longitudinal analysis involving initial interviews with students during the time they commenced work around December 2018 and follow up interviews in the last half of 2020.

The basis of this evaluation is on the experiences of the broader set of stakeholders, namely parents, teachers, employment agency staff and employers. Ticket to Work staff interviewed these stakeholders and transcripts of their interviews are the primary source of data for this evaluation. The other source of data was a range of existing case studies developed during the project.

The interview transcripts and the existing case studies were entered into NVIVO 11 to enable the analysis of the data. The qualitative methods of content and thematic analysis were utilised to interpret the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

Strong collaboration

The clearest finding from this evaluation was collaboration between stakeholders is critical to successful outcomes. With Australia now facing economic uncertainty because of Covid-19, young people with disability are now even more disadvantaged in gaining access to employment. The collaborative approach in the Ticket to Work model is an effective method to address the difficulties facing this group of young people.

Collaboration is a crucial component of the Ticket to Work model, and the findings of this evaluation demonstrate that collaboration between stakeholders is essential to ensuring successful outcomes for students to obtain after school jobs. Employers participating in the project found they were not only recruiting young students with disability; they recruited a network of supporters who worked closely together to resolve issues and make the entire process easy for employers. Sam who employed Paul, as a kitchen hand, describes his network of supporters, in the following way.

I know from an employer's point of view, if things weren't working out with Paul, there would be a network of people to suggest alternative strategies, but thankfully they haven't been needed.

From the outset, each local Ticket to Work network facilitated a collaborative approach between stakeholders. The intermediary coordinating the local Ticket to Work network was strategic in introducing people who became partners in creating the after school jobs. The collaborative approach facilitated recruitment processes tailored to the needs of each student. Anne, a staff member, working at the school where Paul and Jessica, both students participating in the project were attending, had the specific role of improving the pathways of students with a disability from school to work. She was also identifying students who are work ready.

The intermediary's role, according to the Ticket to Work model, is to bring multiple stakeholders from different sectors together for the common purpose of supporting young people into work. For the benefit of these students, the network intermediary brought Anne from the school, together with Jo from one of the local disability employment support services. While Anne knew the strengths, interests and preferences of the students, Jo knew about the staffing needs of businesses in the local area. The network intermediary purposely sat them together in the network meetings so they would become familiar with each other, as Jo from one employment support service explains.

I worked closely with Anne from the school, and I sat next to her most of the times in the meetings hence, again, why the intermediary is very good at recognising – you know, setting things up.

An example of this collaborative approach was demonstrated by the intermediary's work with the local TAFE, National Disability Coordination Officer, and many other Ticket to Work network members. Together a Passport to Employment (P2E) program was run at the local TAFE for students with a disability attending local secondary schools was delivered. The program supported the students' career development and employability skills and included participation in mock job interviews. Consequently, Paul was interviewed by Sam the manager of the pub leading to him obtain his kitchen hand job. Jessica likewise participated in the mock interviews and was introduced to Jo from the local employment support service, who later identified a suitable employer for her.

The catalyst for Paul's job at the pub was the Business Inclusion and Diversity Services (BIDS) delivered by the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO). BIDS is part of the Ticket to Work network and is a demand led approach supporting practical strategies for small and medium sized businesses to improve accessibility, remove barriers to employ and retain people who have a disability. Its focus is to build the disability confidence of small and medium-sized businesses to become more welcoming, confident, and accessible for people with disability enabling businesses to tap into the benefits of doing so. Sam received advice and support from BIDS and became aware that the pub's workforce was already diverse; consequently, the task of employing additional people with disability became less onerous.

Jane, from a local employment support service, acting as another intermediary in the After School Jobs Project, spoke about her approach to collaboration. Like the P2E program, her approach involved contacting one of the local special schools in her area. Staff from the school identified five suitable students for the project. Jane then met with them at school, assessed their willingness to undertake work experience and met with their parents. Jane also organised for the group to visit her office and prepare a resume.

In conjunction with each student, she organised for them to participate in work experience at the local Big W department store. Work experience enabled Jane to assess further the work readiness of each student. She was able to assess their ability to be punctual, dress appropriately, have the right attitude and willingness to follow directions. These requirements were tangible ways of measuring the work readiness of each student. Jane explained several students failed to meet these requirements. Interestingly, she reported it was several of the

more confident students who failed to meet the requirements to be deemed work ready. Rather than seeing their actions as failure, in conjunction with their work supervisor, Jane met with each student and spoke about the need for them to improve their performance. Once each student met the requirements, she identified suitable employer for them, they attended an interview and were successful in obtaining an after school job.

The P2E program run in conjunction with the first intermediary and work experience program run by the employment support service exemplify the nature of collaboration that is critical to the Ticket to Work model. In both cases, students undertook work preparation activities to ensure they were work ready. Each young person, their parents, teachers, and the employment support service worked together to obtain and then maintain a part time after school job.

Direct and indirect benefits for employers

A review of the data collected from the stakeholders involved in After School Jobs Project, highlighted a range of important benefits for employers. The direct benefits were the recruitment of staff who were assessed as being work ready by critical stakeholders in the Ticket to Work networks. Consequently, these young students made direct contributions to the businesses of their employers. The students also made indirect contributions to these businesses. One employer spoke about it being a health check for her business, while another spoke about the need to recruit from a diverse range of people to fulfil their staffing needs.

Direct Benefits

Various employers gave feedback about the direct benefits of employing students in the After School Jobs Project. Employers reported being able to recruit students who were enthusiastic hard workers. They also commented that students were making positive contributions toward the operation of their businesses. This is demonstrated in that some have retained their jobs during the initial stages of the Covid-19 restrictions and others are expected to return to work as soon as businesses resume trading. This indicates some of the students have become valued employees. The other direct benefit of recruiting through the project was that employers received upfront communication about each student's strengths and limitations. Consequently, they could support each student to be an effective employee.

Enthusiastic hard workers

The manager of the surf shop where Jessica works described her as having an upbeat attitude to work which is infectious on those around her.

...we have her involved on all team levels, so she is interacting with clients, the team, she plays a very important role in cleaning and tidying the store, and leaving her section, as we call it, in better condition than what she has found it.

She is amazing, and she is super fun, she has got a great vibe about her. She is always pottering around in the store, singing a song, which just bleeds off onto the rest of the crew, so she is awesome to have around.

Similarly, Sam was initially drawn to Paul and continues to be impressed due to his level of

enthusiasm for his work,

You can't mistake Paul's enthusiasm, and it's quite infectious, and quite frankly, in a kitchen it's really hard work. They're notoriously hot pots, in more ways than one, and having somebody who was just so passionate, and just so determined, "This is what I'm going to do, and I love food, and I've loved cooking, and I'm going to be a chef," you sort of think, well, fantastic, so, yeah, I just looked at him and thought, "Well, he's got the enthusiasm for a pretty hard career," so we'd give him a go.

Upfront communication

Another direct benefit for employers who recruited students in the After School Jobs Project was the transparent sharing of information. The key stakeholders developed working relationships which involved trusting each other and having a willingness to share information. Parents readily provided consent to the school staff who worked seamlessly with employment support staff who in turn worked readily with employers to share needed information.

One of the benefits of the collaborative approach of the Ticket to Work members for Sam was she knew upfront about Paul's strengths and limitations. As a result, she could proactively support him, and she had the backup of the other stakeholders. She had been made fully aware of Paul's communication difficulties which enabled her to ensure her kitchen staff adjusted their means of communication to ensure his understanding,

The main thing bringing Paul on board was just making sure that the communication was very clear, and the avenues if he was confused about anything or was having difficulty that he knew exactly who to go to and how to go about it. Sometimes what we think is a very straightforward thing because you're a chef who's been doing it for five years and you don't realise that your quick little explanation is very confusing to anyone who hasn't done it before, or it could be somebody's just not grasping something. So really for Paul it was just really analysing and making sure that we had constant checks from a communication point of view that we wouldn't normally undertake.

In comparison, Sam spoke about previously employing another apprentice with dyslexia, not being aware of the difficulties the young women faced and subsequently not being able to support her appropriately.

I had an apprentice a few years ago, and her work was beautiful, but frequently she would be stuffing things up or taking too long, or I would find out that she had thrown a batch in the bin. Eventually, I pulled her aside, and we sort of had a hug, and I said, "What is going on?" She burst into tears and confided that she had dyslexia and could not do maths. As long as I was just giving her the standard recipe, she could create beautiful stuff, but as soon as I said I wanted only a third of the quantity, she had no idea how to scale down the quantities and would stuff it up.

The hope is that in 2021, once Paul finishes school, he will be able to begin an apprenticeship at the pub. Sam anticipates this will be a challenge for Paul due to the related TAFE studies. However, she is confident of receiving the necessary support to address his needs, unlike her

experience with the other apprentice with dyslexia.

Obtaining an after school job for Jessica was less direct but just as effective. After participating in the mock interviews through the P2E program, Jo from the local employment support service went to the school, interviewed Jessica and found out about her preferences, strengths and limitations. She discovered her love of skating, her ability to catch public transport, and she also spoke to her grandmother, her primary carer. Jo and Anne from the school believed Jessica would be suited to a stock replenishment type of role in retail. Subsequently, Jo's aimed to connect Jessica with an employer with whom she had a specific interest in rather than just any retailer. Jo identified a potential employer for Jessica via a connection her colleagues had made to a local surf shop.

Basically, one of the girls from the office did some cold calling, and we got the name of the HR manager, and then it was just a matter of trying to ring and get through to her. We sent her emails about us and the After School Jobs Project, and Ticket to Work.

Once Jessica began working, the manager of the surf shop reported the employment support provider regularly called to check on Jessica's progress. She also spoke about the benefits of upfront communication

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 to know everything straight off the bat with Jessica, we were prepared for her stepping into her first shift.

Indirect benefits

The employers involved in the After School Jobs Project also spoke about the indirect benefits derived from employing a student with disability. These indirect benefits were not apparent when the student started work but became obvious soon afterwards.

Business evaluation

Sam, the manager of the pub who recruited Paul through the After School Jobs Project, spoke about being open to evaluating and improving her business overall. She saw improving the diversity of the business as a marketing approach, which in turn broadened her thinking around the diversity of her workforce.

I started to look at ways in which we could improve our diversity from a business point of view in total. We have quite a great network down here, and I had been to several seminars where people had been speaking about taking a good look at how to improve your general approachability as a business, just from your menus to your entrances, all the way through. It started as just an opportunity to work on marketing and tourism and led to other avenues.

She saw recruiting Paul as an opportunity to evaluate her business, which she described succinctly described as a health check.

...taking on something different to the norm of your everyday week is a great way to do a

health check on your business. It is a health check for your management style, so for our head chef, it is about, okay, how are you going to calmly and openly have conversations and work with people and help them through challenges...

Are our procedures okay? What are we doing right? What could we do better? And then it gives you the confidence to look at it and say, "Okay, we can take on all manner of people and skillsets, and we can train in-house," so it gives you confidence. It gives you the confidence to lead people, which I think is a great thing.

Although her initial thinking was around how they would support Paul, as he began working there, the process broadened her thinking about the wellbeing of all her staff.

It started as a business improvement initiative, looking at the business, and then you realise how much better off we all are when we are looking at everything. And it helped because it also started making me focus more on other staff, and suddenly I was thinking, "Gee, we do not address mental health well in this business." For me, it was about doing the right thing by the team, ultimately.

Sam also noticed Paul had a calming influence in the kitchen which are notorious for being busy and noisy. She describes his calming influence on the workplace,

You know, Paul has calmed down the team a little bit. I often notice on a Friday when he is here; it is not quite so manic. By virtue of who he is in his personality, perhaps, or maybe perhaps because they know he is coming from a place where he has felt a bit more challenged, it has changed their focus. The music gets turned down a little bit. I think there is just a general air of calm, and they are conscious of what they are saying and how they are saying it.

Another student, Chris, was one of the students Jane supported to obtain an after school job in a bakery. Joe, the owner of the bakery made a similar point to Sam in describing the impact Chris has on his other employees.

I have got an older baker who has a lot of patience with Chris, and it has helped him (the older baker) produce better quality bread because he is slowing down, taking his time

Diversifying Recruitment

Not only did Jessica's recruitment bring the direct benefits outlined above, but indirectly her recruitment created an opportunity for the business to consider diversifying their workforce. Before employing Jessica, they had put recruiting people with diverse needs in the "too hard pile", but her success made the management of the business reconsider their thinking.

We had quite a few resumes through from people in the same sort of situation as Jessica. Ticket to Work clearly spoke to HR, and it worked through that way, but to me, it was only a recent, definitely a possibility, as we had had a lot of people coming in with carers and things like that, with resumes asking to be given a chance. It was put in the too-hard pile, I am not sure how to approach the situation, but now that we have recruited Jessica we know the process, so that for the next resume that comes in, maybe we can give someone

else another opportunity.

The manager also explained that through managing Jessica she had developed new management skills.

Having Jessica onboard has been beneficial for me as a manager, I have developed a new skill set on how to approach and deal with a team member who has diverse needs.

Jo from the local employment support service involved in the After School Jobs Project had a broader perspective. She identified changes in thinking of the human resources manager of the surf shop as a result of Jessica's employment, as she explains.

Yes, it has definitely opened her up to be more inclusive. Like, I will often send her invites to things that we might be running, or things that come through on the internet, you know, some diversity, a field study or something just with some information, which she always responds and says thank you. So even if anything, it has just opened up her eyes to creating more of a diverse workforce, yes, it has achieved something.

I have been into the store, the girls there are young, and I do not think they are that fussed about who works there, and the staff do turn over a little bit. I think for the awareness of the HR manager, it has been a good experience for her. I think the next time we approach, or another employment support service approaches and says, "Hey, we have got this person," she is going to be a lot more open than probably she was two years ago.

In comparison, Sam from the pub had a different attitude to diversity. She learnt through AFDO that diversity was a strategy applicable to many aspects of her business, including the recruitment and retention of staff. She recognised management always consists of supporting staff with different needs, as she explains,

You have got to have that relationship with your staff, you know? The gorgeous bartender who has got the biggest smile in the world needs to know that she can phone you on the mornings that the mental health is so bad that she cannot get out of bed.

Both businesses face challenges in recruiting and retaining staff appropriate for their needs. Retention was a more pressing issue for Sam, recruiting kitchen staff as she explains

I will be honest and say that obviously kitchen staff is a very short-skilled area, so we are really keen to look everywhere for the people who have got a passion for it. There aren't a thousand popping up in your breakfast every morning.

Joe from the bakery provided another perspective in reporting he had experience managing young people with intellectual disability in the workplace, and he did not view employing Chris a risk at all.

I have been in retail for 35 years now, so I have managed people with learning difficulties before, I worked for Coles supermarkets, and they provided training on that sort of thing

His opinion, corresponded with all the other employers participating in the interviews, was to

give the young person with a disability a chance.

Just the right amount of parental support

Teachers, disability employment support staff and employers are reliant upon parents to support their son or daughter to be able to participate in the After School Jobs Project. The type of support parents provide includes encouragement, teaching fundamental work skills such as going to work on time and willingness to follow instructions, transportation when required and just simple things such as signing permission forms for schools. Without the support of parents, none of the students would have succeeded in their after school jobs. However, these stakeholders spoke about parents providing just the right amount of support; one Employment support provider said, Yeah, it is a little like Goldilocks, if parents do not allow their children to have a degree of independence when entering the workforce, they are unable to grow and develop the skills required.

Several of the staff from other employment support services spoke about the need for parents to be supportive of their child when embarking on their first job. They spoke about parents being on a continuum from overprotective and over involved to unsupportive. The consensus was that parents need to provide the right amount of support. The employment support service who spoke about Goldilocks spoke about ideal parental support in these terms.

An ideal parent is someone that obviously has a vested interest in their child going into employment. They are supportive when the child's behaviour or attitude may need parental encouragement or empowerment. But the parents also have the trust that we have set that child on a successful journey. They do not get involved too much. When I say "too much", you know, calling the store manager and, just getting too involved.

From a slightly different perspective, Anne from the school had met parents not willing to accept additional assistance for their son or daughter to obtain work. In comparison, she described Paul's mother's willingness to engage in the After School Jobs Project in the following manner.

His mum is really supportive; I spoke to her regularly to introduce the programs for him. This can be sensitive because sometimes parents do not recognise their child needs extra assistance.

She was open minded and saw it as an opportunity rather than something with stigma attached to it, and she has been good to work in that respect because she is already sold on the idea of him having extra support.

Any time I need a form signed, bang there she was.

Jessica, who was working part time in the surf shop, had her grandmother, Annie advocating and supporting her. Annie spoke about allowing Jessica to take risks. Despite her vision impairment, she rides skateboards, and pushbikes as she describes in the following manner,

She is borderline legally blind and sees everything in blobs, but she gets used to the shapes and then knows who and what is around her. If she is in new surroundings, she

needs to take it a bit easy for a while until she works out where things are, but it has not held her back.

She gets out on that skateboard, she had a Segway, but I could not stand it, she was doing all sorts of tricks, and I was petrified. The skateboard is bad enough; she really can't see that far at all. She loves to get on that skateboard, and she is just one of the skaters when she's on there.

Annie continued to describe her attitude to allowing Jessica to learn, grow and take risks.

I think the biggest thing that we can do is give, give our kids the opportunity to do things, and not let our fear hinder their progress.

Kids are much more capable than we believe everybody should be helped to reach their highest potential. I think what stops most of our young people is parents not being willing to support their dignity of risk. There is no such thing as failure; there is try, and then try again. It's us, really who hold them back.

Annie supports Jessica to travel to work by public transport; she has seen how her granddaughter has grown in confidence through working as she describes.

She is now confident enough to go into shops in the mall; whereas once upon a time you could not get her out of the house unless you went with her. She is happy to travel there by taxi or bus. She will wander around if she goes there early, or once she is finished, she'll go and do any shopping or anything she needs to do, she's grown so much.

Once people get the chance to do something like this, it opens the door for them to try so many more things, and I think that is the value, not just getting paid to do a little job, it is all the other stuff that comes from getting that job, being part of a team, feeling like you are really worthwhile.

Employers likewise spoke about parents supporting their son or daughter to have independence when starting work. Sam, the manager of the pub, referred to the topic as a mother, as well as a business manager when she spoke about parents taking calculated risks when they enable their son or daughter to start an after school job.

I think parents want their kids to not fall hard. We want our kids to find their way on their own, but not to have disasters along the way. That is how apprenticeships started; parents would find a mate who was a plumber and say, "Would you mind taking my son under your wing?" There's a time kids need to move on and have a different peer influence in their life, so parents cannot actually walk that path really with their kids. The kids need independence and need to make their own mistakes. So I think, really, if they can find any sort of assisted program or apprenticeship or experience that their kids can sort of put their toes in without them that is a bit supported, that's – you cannot ask for more than that.

Similarly, Joe from the bakery reported he had not met Chris' parents. He explained that Jane, from the employment support provider, was his parents' primary contact, and they had developed a relationship with her.

I have not met his parents. Jane has done all the work with his parents, she liaises with them all the time, nor have I had any contact with the school. I think not having contact with his parents is really good, he does not need the pressure his parents may place on him

Strengths based recruitment: A positive cycle

The stakeholders involved in the After School Jobs Project focused on the strengths of the students involved. Their focus was on the preferences of the students and their capabilities. All these students had a “significant disability” as defined by the Department of Social Services (2020).

The term “significant disability” refers to job seekers who have major barriers to employment and require ongoing support in employment. Job seekers with “significant disability” are those with severe physical or mental impairment which limits their functional capacity relating to mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance and work skills. Job seekers with this level of impairment require extensive assistance before they are ready to look for meaningful and sustainable open employment.

Despite this label, all the stakeholders deliberately chose to focus on each student’s preferences and capabilities. Their approach was analogous to elements of customised employment¹, but this was not precisely the approach they used. Instead, stakeholders, relied upon the knowledge of school and employment support staff of each student’s preferences and capabilities and matched them to employment accordingly.

For example, Anne from the school knew the interests, preferences and strengths of Paul and Jessica. She spoke about Paul’s interest in working as a cook. He had enrolled in the Cert II in Hospitality for his Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), used to bring her recipes and his participation in an industry visit to the Pier Restaurant cemented his interest in the hospitality industry, as she describes.

He enjoyed that tour; it was inspiring to learn that people with a range of abilities work in those environments without something exceptional having to be done, without stigma successfully. I believe one of the cooks is hearing impaired; he was brought up as a person that’s in an inclusive environment.

Based on her knowledge of Paul, Anne, in collaboration with Jo from the employment support service and the employer, they supported him to obtain another after school job.

Similarly, Jane from the other employment support service facilitated students to participate in work experience at Big W, which enabled her to assess their skills and capabilities further. She supported Chris to obtain a part time job at a local bakery, based on his strengths, rather than

¹ Customised Employment is a specific method from employing people with a disability. For a more in depth explanation please refer to Christian et al., (2019)

his limitations.

The impacts of these part time jobs are likely to be significant for these two young people, as the following quotes indicate both will be commencing apprenticeships in the future as their employers explain.

We were really delighted to keep Paul on, so he is still working with us with the view that when he does finish school, he might like to embark on an apprenticeship. I think when we move forward to potentially the academic side of the apprenticeship, we will probably make quite a few changes there.

Chris finished year 12 last year, so this year he is doing another course, and he does the four hours here a week, which we are looking at putting him on to eight hours, and then hopefully we can work out an apprenticeship for him as well.

Summary of findings

The findings of the evaluation of the After School Jobs Project demonstrate clearly that facilitating the early entry of students with disability into work, while still at school, has benefits not only for students but for employers as well. The collaborative approach between stakeholders enabled these students to enter the workforce successfully. School staff brought knowledge of the students, their preferences and strengths, as well as their limitations. The Ticket to Work network intermediaries sat school staff next to employment support service staff who possessed knowledge about the needs of local employers. Then finally, employers came with an understanding of their business needs and a willingness to give students with disability a chance.

Employers not only gained the direct benefit of young people keen to work and follow direction, but they also gained indirect benefits they did not anticipate. Amongst these was the network of supporters backing up the young people. Employers also gained an opportunity to evaluate their businesses to make them inclusive of diverse employees as well as considering how to cater to a more diverse customer base. The other intangible benefit for employers was upfront communication making the task of supporting young employees simple. Network members acted as a resource for employers to support their employees. The other key stakeholder were the parents of the students, without their ongoing support none of the after school jobs would have succeeded. The other stakeholders identified that parents need to provide the right type of support. Ultimately it is the students with a disability who need to demonstrate their ability to follow directions and add value to the businesses of employers and parents cannot make that happen; they can only provide support and guidance to their son or daughter.

The After Schools Jobs Project was based on a strengths based model. Students with disability, like their able bodied peers, can work and contribute to businesses. A strengths based model does not disregard limitations; instead, it considers them after a complete examination of the students' preferences and capabilities. The project also highlights the complexity of assessing the work readiness of young students with disability. Support services and their funding bodies need to improve the ways they adequately support this cohort to ensure successful outcomes.

Conclusions

This evaluation has examined the experiences of parents, school staff, employment support service staff and employers. Consequently, its primary focus has been on the experiences of these stakeholders. Although the evaluation also mentions the experiences and benefits for the students participating, their experiences will be considered in greater detail by the evaluation undertaken by researchers from La Trobe University's Living with Disability Research Centre.

Overall, the project demonstrates the significance of collaboration. The job readiness or otherwise of the students occurred due to the collaboration of stakeholders. Successful job creation and sustained placements occurred because stakeholders worked together.

The students received support through the collaboration of stakeholders to develop the skills necessary for employment. They grew in confidence and independence as they found themselves well supported in the workforce. It was the collaborative approach of the school and employment support staff, the young person and their parents and finally employers that facilitated successful employment outcomes. In 2020 when meetings are occurring online, the image of stakeholders coming together on the screen and pointing at each other as responsible for ensuring successful employment outcomes for these young people seems apt. Each stakeholder played an essential role to ensure that each student in the evaluation could be placed in an after school job.

This evaluation is consistent with previous research conducted by a range of authors on the topic of school to work transitions for young people with disability. For example, Simonsen, Luecking, and Fabian (2015) identified that many employers are risk adverse, particularly small to medium size business. They suggest a crucial motivator for employment was the employer's perception of the young person and their ability to perform on the job. Work placement gave employers opportunities to see the person 'in action'. The After Schools Jobs Project gave opportunities for all stakeholders, particularly employers, to see each young person in action in the workplace. Doing so enabled stakeholders to determine the young person's work capabilities as well as accommodate their limitations.

Kellock (2020) refers to employers' decision making being about weighing up the costs and benefits of having young people with disability in their workplaces. Employers will employ a young person with disability if they believe they will contribute to the business. Such decisions are made to meet operational needs rather than just on the relative merits of people with disability. During this evaluation of the After School Jobs Project employers were reporting they had recruited students who were enthusiastic hard workers who were making positive contributions toward the operation of their businesses. Subsequently, the point Kellock (2020) made regarding successful outcomes being dependent upon meeting the needs of employers as much as meeting the needs of young people with disability was reflected in the After School Jobs Project.

While Wakeford (2020, p. 12) found employment support staff reluctant to engage with the

parents of their participants, the findings of this study show these staff can play an essential role in mediating the concerns of parents. Amongst their roles, these staff can support parents in managing their concerns, enabling students to independently build relationships with their employers which is essential for their development and success in employment.

The other role employment support staff played in the project was providing employers with ongoing support. Multiple employers reported the ease with which they could contact the staff, the repeated line was, “they were just a phone call away”. Simonsen et al. (2015), in their study, reported that employers might view employing a person with intellectual disability a risk. Employers are more likely to do so when they are confident, they will be well supported and have confidence in the employment support staff person representing the person with a disability. It could be argued in this project the risk of employing a young person was mitigated through the collaborative approach of stakeholders. Although the staff from the employment support service acted as the primary interface with the employer, school staff and parents worked with the provider in mitigating any risks.

In 2020, unparalleled economic uncertainty has engulfed Australia, along with the rest of the world (Murphy, 23 July 2020). Record unemployment levels mean young people, particularly those with disability already disadvantaged in entering the workforce, will be further disadvantaged (Borland, 15 April 2020; D’Souza, 2020). Borland (April 20, 2020.), a labour economist has described the long term negative impacts upon young people not able to enter the workforce during economic downturns, which he and others describe as scarring.

Scarring is defined to happen when there is a long-term negative impact on a worker due to some adverse labour market experience early in their work life.

Borland’s examination of scarring does not explicitly consider the needs of young people with a disability; instead, the research is upon the experiences of mainstream secondary school leavers and university graduates.

If predictions about the problems facing young people, in general, entering the workforce in the next few years because of the Covid-19 are correct, the problems facing young people with disability could even be more fraught. Consequently, the After School Jobs Project and the collaborative approach in the Ticket to Work model overall should be considered by governments and their policymakers in these uncertain economic times to ensure higher participation rates of young people with intellectual disability in the labour market.

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