



NDS Position Paper:

Improving school-to-work transition through the NDIS



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Summary

Employment is desirable for people with disability. It has beneficial outcomes such as increased confidence, better standards of living, greater financial independence, broader social networks and career development prospects.

Young Australians with disability, however, are not successfully transitioning from school into further training or employment, which results in long-term - often lifelong - disadvantage. They are more likely to leave school early, be excluded from the workforce and experience poverty and social isolation.

The gap between young people with disability and those without disability has widened, and there has been a decrease in the rate of economic and social participation for young people with disability.¹

It is imperative that these trends are reversed. NDS welcomes the NDIA's focus on school-to-work support, particularly as it has been found that if young people with significant disability do not engage in mainstream employment by age 21, it is unlikely that they ever will.²

We need to move towards an inclusive approach to improve transition outcomes for young people with disability.

In line with international research and practice, NDS believes that:

- An early intervention 'employment first' approach is essential;
- NDIS supports need to work together with mainstream supports; and
- We should create typical transitions for young people with disability similar to other young people (though we recognise the importance for safety nets like School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES)).

Key recommendations

- NDIA supports the Intermediaries in each region to implement networks similar to the Ticket to Work network to ensure that we work together with mainstream support to create successful pathways to employment for students with disability.
- Ensure 'employment first' supports for all eligible students with disability (from age 14) in line with the NDIA Transition to Employment pilot in Western Australia.³
- Ensure SLES is evidence-based and supports effective transition to employment.

NDS and our work in school-to-work transition

NDS has synthesised research on successful pathways to determine an approach to improving effective school-to-work transition. These are:

- Building the capacity of key stakeholders;
- Sector collaboration with mainstream supports; and
- Provide opportunities to improve employability, including career development.

We believe the above three recommendations will support this approach.

Under each of the three areas, we have four elements that improve school-to-work outcomes. See the diagram below:



NDS has been trialling effective school-to-work transition initiatives through Ticket to Work and the WA Transition to Employment pilot, supported by the NDIA.

NDS wants to work with the NDIA to ensure that young Australians with disability are provided with effective evidenced-based supports, as we believe this is vital for:

- The financial sustainability of the NDIS; and
- The overall employment participation rate of people with disability in Australia.

Related research

NDS and its research arm, the Centre for Applied Disability Research (CADR), have been involved in the following papers examining school-to-work transition for students with disability:

- Centre for Applied Disability Research (2017) Research to Action: The journey to employment for young people with disability National Disability Services NSW.
- National Disability Services (NDS Vic) (2017) An inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools: Submission 69 to the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee. https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/eejsc/Career_Advice_Activities/Submission_69_-_National_Disability_Services_15122017.pdf
- National Disability Services (NDS) (2017) Policy Paper: Enhancing employment opportunities for young people with significant disability. http://www.tickettowork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Ticket_to_work_policy_summary.pdf
- National Disability Services (NDS ACT) (2017) Inquiry into school to work transition: Submission to the Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training Submission 22. www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/School_to_WorkTransition/Submissions
- ARTD Consultants (2016). Ticket to work pilot outcomes study. National Disability Services, NSW. <http://www.tickettowork.org.au/wpcontent/uploads/2016/06/Ticket-to-work-pilot-outcomes-study-2016.pdf>
- ARTD Consultants (2017). Ticket to Work Network Analysis. National Disability Services, NSW.
- Ticket to Work and NDS (2016) School to work transition and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS): The NDIS and the interface with other service systems in school to work transition. Parkville. <http://www.tickettowork.org.au/school-work-transition-national-disability-insurance-scheme-ndis/>
- Miles Morgan (2015) Rapid review of literature on pathway to employment for young people with disability. Centre for Applied Disability Research, National Disability Services (NDS).
- Wakeford, M, Waugh, F (2014), Transitions to employment of Australian young people with disability and the Ticket to Work initiative, Ticket to Work (Melbourne). www.tickettowork.org.au/research/transitions-employment-australian-young-people-disability-ticket-work-initiative/

Discussion

Supports should start in middle school, in line with good practice

Early intervention is key. Evidence demonstrates that it is crucial for young people with disability to 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.⁴

Kohler's Taxonomy of Transition (a scientifically-validated benchmarking of effective transition practice) outlines the importance of early intervention, with transition planning beginning no later than age 14 - particularly as adolescence is when a person develops their 'career identity', which influences their transition into adulthood.^{5,6,7}

There are three basic aims in effective transition for all young people with disability:

- Engagement in employment, ongoing learning and/or training;
- Living and participating in your local community in ways similar to peers; and
- Having active social networks with family and friends.⁸

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."⁹ The earlier young people gain access to experiences and to support networks that positively influence their views of themselves as workers and active citizens, the better the long-term outcomes will be.

Longitudinal studies and research on employment success for youth with disability have identified two key factors associated with employment success after school:

- a. Hands-on, authentic work experiences during school*; and
- b. High parent expectations.¹⁰

Data has revealed that only 56 per cent of young people with cognitive disability complete Year 12 or its equivalent. Early engagement with work positively effects school completion, with 50 per cent of students with disability being more likely to complete their education.¹¹

Currently, SLES is only available to Year 12 leavers. This is concerning, given that nearly half of young people with cognitive disability leave school early. NDIS employment supports should be offered to eligible young people that have left the school system early.

Ticket to Work participants are almost 50 per cent more likely to complete Year 12. This indicates that support to create pathways while in school actually assists with secondary school completion.

***Note:** Work experiences created jointly by schools and adult disability providers show success in helping youth gain employment and make smooth transitions into adulthood (Certo & Luecking, 2006).

Employment first supports that are individualised

Young people (aged 14) accessing NDIS supports should have an 'employment first' approach. Employment should be the priority support option for young people with disability, no matter the severity of the disability. 'Employment first' is the preeminent vocational disability practice in many overseas countries.

School-to-work transition supports should be offered on an automatic basis, with an 'opt-out' clause dependent on the individual's circumstances. This approach will result in:

- Increased vocational and work-related supports in participants' plans focused on economic participation
- Better employment outcomes for participants
- Increase employment supports in NDIS plans (currently at only 2.5 per cent¹²)
- A decrease in community participation supports that are likely to become an ongoing annualised cost. (Currently, less than 5 per cent transition to open employment from community supports and supported employment.)
- A more financially sustainable NDIS
- Increased independence and employment outcomes, and the commensurate benefit of stronger natural supports for participants

Any school-to-work supports should be based on individualised support; not group support - in line with evidence-based practice. 'Train and place' techniques have long been found ineffective, particularly for people with cognitive disability.¹³

Building the capacity of the mainstream, and coordinated approach

In Australia, there is a pervasive culture of low expectation, resulting in a lack of opportunities for students with disability - particularly in relation to genuine, sustainable employment. This view is sometimes held by the young people themselves, as well as parents, employers, disability providers, educators and government. To make a significant difference in employment for people with disability, we need to build the capacity of key stakeholders and mainstream services.

In Australia, programs have been 'siloes', either in schools or adult disability services, pre-employment and employment services. Early intervention has often been the main responsibility of allied health professionals. In general terms, this has created a dichotomous model whose division of services reflects traditional funding arrangements by governments.¹⁴

Disability exists on a continuum, however, and there needs to be a continuum of services. Post-school services need to connect with individuals while at school, and career development and pre-employment skills training need to be initiated before a student reaches school-leaving age.^{15,16}

The transition from school to adulthood is identified as a time of particular vulnerability. Intervention should be directed at preventive, collaborative approaches that address the multiple causes of exclusion.¹⁷

To achieve this, other jurisdictions have implemented 'intermediaries' as a mechanism to create

more effective linkages between the supply and demand sides of workforce development. It has been identified that, by aligning and brokering multiple services across institutional and funding sources, intermediary organisations can play an important role in improving employment outcomes for youth with disability.¹⁸

This coordination is essential as no single system or agency is responsible or able to provide all the necessary supports required. Rather, as youth move from the classroom into the workplace and adulthood, they often need to access services from several different agencies at one time in order to have their needs met.¹⁹ Therefore, we require cross-agency coordination and collaboration in order to effectively meet the diverse and complex needs of transitioning youth with disability.

NDS has been trialling a network approach to school-to-work transition using collective impact. This approach is called Ticket to Work. It uses intermediaries to support school transition.

Ticket to Work has been independently evaluated. The evaluation found that 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 built on the expertise of network members, supporting smooth transition from school-to-work for young people with disability.^{20,21}

The intermediaries in Ticket to Work have a significant role in building the capacity of key stakeholders in the local region, including local schools, employers, employment and training services, parents and families.

We believe that the NDIA should support organisations to take on the role of Ticket to Work intermediaries in creating more effective outcomes for young people with disability, which will lead to significant cost benefits for the NDIA.

We recommend investigation of the NDIA pilot in Tasmania of joint planning meeting between LACs and schools (if the young person chooses). This will stop duplication, as, currently, students and their families are likely to go through three to five different planning process in a 12-month period.²²

Multiple assessment and planning processes 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 the plans.

Ensure evidence-based supports for school-to-work transition

There has been significant evidence - including longitudinal studies - gathered over several decades of successful school-to-work transition projects in other countries.

The Ticket to Work approach was developed through the synthesis of evidence-based practice from abroad (mainly the USA). The Ticket to Work initiative is managed by NDS, funded through philanthropic trusts and good will.

The outcomes from the Transition to Employment pilot - also supported by NDS and funded through the NDIA - should also be examined and the findings incorporated into school-to-work

supports. This model places a strong emphasis on customising employment for participants through a heavily-individualised focus, including developing a 'Discovery Record' that showcases competencies and interests and utilises circles of support.

SLES is based on the NSW Transition to Work (TTW) program. A recent evaluation²³ found that the NSW TTW had not been a successful model in gaining employment outcomes for participants: 21.8 per cent of all providers never obtained an open employment outcome.

NDS's Ticket to Work initiative currently places more young people in open employment (317 open employment placements in 2016) than TTW (who made 245 open employment placements in 2016).

It is vital that any initiative or supports are evidence-based. As many NDIS providers have limited experience in supporting employment for young people with significant disability, we suggest looking at training in customised employment supports to ensure evidenced-based supports.

Incentives for normalised school-to-work pathways

It is important that the NDIS supports effective and timely employment placement for young people with disability that is typical of other young people.

NDS members have highlighted the current lack of incentive for NDIS providers to place people in work in a timely fashion. SLES, for example, is a two-year annual funding model in which funding ceases when a job is obtained. NDS identifies a need to incentivise the right kind of market responses and recognise outcomes and supports provided.

We are also concerned about the developing perception by key stakeholders - including schools and the disability sector - that school-to-work transition should be delayed until after school through School Leaver Employment Supports. All the available evidence shows that school-to-work transition must start earlier to be effective. We believe that the NDIS's incentivisation of post-school interventions is making NDIS providers reluctant to support effective school-to-work transition for young people in school.

Members have informed us that young people are not receiving NDIS support during school to assist transition because of misunderstandings regarding the role of education in school transition. NDS has developed a resource to support understanding of the interface of the NDIS with education and Disability Employment Services (DES) when looking at school-to-work transition to support good decision-making. You can read more about this on the Ticket to Work website.

Assessment

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.²⁴

With the right support and the right job, young people with significant disability have been able to work above their assessed level.²⁵ The Functional Capacity Assessment should not be conducted as it can be a ‘blunt instrument’ that our members believe is not effective in determining employment capacity or appropriate supports.

We would encourage the use of the employment first approach and the discovery process used in customised employment models for school-to-work employment supports. Customised employment is a process-driven concept with four essential components. See Note 2 in footnotes.* This model has been successfully utilised in NDIS plans in the Transition to Employment project in WA.

Conclusion

In the transition from school, young people and their families often encounter great uncertainties and tremendous developmental challenges. These issues may be made more stressful by the presence of disability, increasing the risk of social exclusion among those young people who are transitioning and have disability.^{26,27}

This complexity of school transition requires a multifaceted approach that is coordinated with early intervention.²⁸ We know that a ‘one size fits all’ approach does not work for any young person, let alone a young person with disability.

We are encouraged that the NDIA is investing in support for transition for young people with disability. The impact of young people with disability making a successful transition from education to work is critical and can greatly improve their long-term economic future, wellbeing and inclusion in society. Those who do not make a successful transition are at greater risk of labour force and social exclusion, as well physical and mental health risks.

Through continued attention to establishing effective transition services flexible enough to meet individual students’ needs, we can arm young people with information and opportunities with which they can build their futures. Indeed, effective transition of young people with disability will have a long-term impact on the financial sustainability of the NDIS.

NDS is keen to work with the NDIA to ensure that NDIS supports are effective in supporting young people with disability to navigate this vital transition point.

***Note:** Customised Employment is a flexible process designed to personalise the employment relationship between a job candidate or employee and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. It is based on identifying the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job seeker through a process of discovery. Discovery is a process of gathering information from the job seeker to determine the job seeker’s interests, skills, and preferences related to potential employment that guide the development of a customized job. See www.dol.gov/odep/topics/CustomizedEmployment.htm

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National Disability Services is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. It represents service providers across Australia in their work to deliver high-quality supports and life opportunities for people with disability. Its Australia-wide membership includes around 1000 non-government organisations which support people with all forms of disability. Its 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.

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