



# Parent engagement in school to work transition for their child with disability

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**Note:** We use the term 'parent' throughout this paper as a generic term. However, we acknowledge and respect that young people may be supported by parents, grandparents, carer, guardian, other family members, friends or other supporters. The term 'family' is used in the widest sense to include significant people in the young person's life.

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“I’m writing this as a very proud mother who has watched her son battle adversity for years and seen him come out on top, a “winner”. Jayden would say his biggest achievement was being offered a commercial cookery traineeship through his school’s involvement in Ticket to Work.

After 18 months Jayden was then offered an apprenticeship in commercial cookery... The transition to full time employment is hard for any young person leaving school and for Jayden it has meant learning to cope with change (working shift work), reading social cues and working as part of a team in a pressured environment ...

The journey for Jayden has not been without its ups and downs but thanks to the dedication of his school and others, Jayden now has a fabulous support network.”

– Tracey Christian<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tracey Christian, the mother of Jayden (participant of Ticket to Work), wrote an article in 2014 for The Association of Children with Disability published in their Notice Board Magazine (p.6).39

# Introduction and Ticket to Work

This paper has two key objectives:

1. To explore the literature regarding parents' experience of their child with a disability's transition from school.
2. To explore the experience of parents involved in Ticket to Work, as well as the experience of the Ticket to Work network members with whom parents engage.<sup>2,3</sup>

Currently, many young Australians with disability are not successfully transitioning from school into further training or employment: an indicator of long-term, often lifelong, disadvantage.

It has been consistently identified that 'it is crucial that young people with a 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>4</sup>

Ticket to Work aims to raise the employment aspirations of young people with disability. Participants commence transition to employment whilst they are in school and have the dedicated support of a range of organisations. Ticket to Work is preparing young people with disability for the workplace and giving them an employment pathway that will support them to move into a successful life beyond school.

The Ticket to Work model was developed by combining various 'success factors' from research literature. Ticket to Work aims to redress the poor employment and social and economic exclusion rates currently experienced by young people with disability using evidence-based interventions.

Ticket to Work takes a 'collaborative' approach and combines 'typical' pathways planning, transition activities and employment experiences to help young people find the best path for them. Many Ticket to Work participants partake in career development, work experience and Australian School based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (ASbAT) but also develop development of their own micro-business with the support of Ticket to Work's partnership networks made up of both mainstream and disability-specific supports.

The Ticket to Work model:

1. Brings together disability-specific and mainstream representatives from a variety of sectors to work strategically to improve employment outcomes
2. Supports young people in gaining access to early experiences and to supports that positively influence their views of themselves as workers
3. Prepares young people with disability for the workplace and gives them an employment pathway that is typical of other young adults

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<sup>2</sup> Wakeford, M. and Waugh, F (2014)

<sup>3</sup> Siperstein, G. N., Parker, R. C., & Drascher, M. (2013)

<sup>4</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2011)

4. Increases opportunities for on-the-job learning experience before leaving school
5. Challenges the culture of low expectations and increases aspirations and opportunities.

Before looking at the Ticket to Work research into the experience of parents whom sons/daughter have participated in Ticket to Work, it is important to consider the existing research literature by way of context.

## Parent influence on school to work transition for young people with disability

Having supportive family and social relationships is one of the main factors associated with a successful transition from school or vocational programmes to employment for individuals with a disability.<sup>5,6</sup> A longitudinal study found high parent expectations, along with hands-on authentic work experience are key factors associated with employment two years post high school.<sup>7</sup>

A review of the literature compiled for NDS<sup>8</sup> found: there is evidence to support the view that family-centered transition planning processes help to increase student and parent expectations for the future, self-determination, and vocational decision-making.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup> Family involvement in discussions about future careers, active participation in networking and in making links with employers in the local community all have a positive influence on work-related outcomes for young people with disabilities.<sup>13,14</sup>

As post-school pathways for students with disability are typically complex and constrained, family involvement continues to be an essential component of the transition process.<sup>15,16</sup> Students with a disability, and their parents, encounter a range of problems when they are leaving school and many give up hope of achieving meaningful and competitive employment in a post-school work environment.<sup>17</sup>

Feedback from parents indicates that they feel like they ‘have been dropped off a cliff’ once their children leave school.<sup>18,19</sup> A study compared two sets of parents’ experiences as their children with and without disability prepared to leave high school. It examined parents’ comfort with the transition to post-school, their vision for the child’s future and their response to the schooling process. The results indicate parents of young people with disability experience greater levels of

5 Beavis, A. (2006)

6 Gilson, C. B., Carter, E. W., Bumble, J. L., & McMillan, E. D. (2018)

7 Carter, E., Austin, D., & Trainor, A. (2012)

8 Sheppard, L., Harrington, R. & Howard, K. (2017).

9 Kohler, P.D., (1996),

10 Kohler, P.D., et al., (2016)

11 Miles Morgan Australia, (2012)

12 Meadows, D., (2009)

13 Hagner, D., et al., (2012)

14 Strnadova, I., Cumming, T. M., & Danker, J. (2016).

15 Kohler, P. and Field, S. (2003).

16 Davies, M and Beamish, W. (2009)

17 Stephen Winn & Ian Hay (2009)

18 South East Local Learning and Employment Network (2014),

19 Stewart D, Freeman M, Law M, Healy H, Burke-Gaffney J, Forhan M, Young N, Guenther S. (2010)

discomfort and pessimism than parents of young people without disability.<sup>20</sup> It has also been found parents feel more comfortable making future plans for their children without disability than for those with disability.<sup>21</sup>

Many parents are anxious about what the future will hold for their child with a disability, with some starting to give up hope for their child's future.<sup>22,23,24</sup> They report their views on the transition process are often not listened to or valued.<sup>25</sup> For many parents, there is no road map or clear pathway; and there are few examples or role models for positive school-to-work transition.

Parents often encounter overwhelming obstacles<sup>26</sup> created through a lack of coordination and consistency among transition service providers. A lack of information regarding the availability of services, different application procedures, a lack of systematic organisation of transition services, create variable and ad hoc school to work transitions processes for young people with disability and their families.<sup>27</sup>

Australian students with disability face a pervasive culture of low expectations resulting in a lack of opportunities for genuine sustainable employment. These low expectations are sometimes held by the young people themselves as well as parents, employers, educators and government.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> Parents also lose the ability to see their child's potential and, consequently, the ability to support them reach that potential.

Expectations of parents are critical to the success of transition from school to work for young people with disability.<sup>30,31,32</sup> Gilson, Carter, Bumble, and McMillan (2018) identified a range of factors that influenced the expectations of family members regarding open employment for young people with disability, they found 'helping families formulate a cohesive vision for integrated employment (open employment) remains a critical step in efforts to elevate adult outcomes.

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20 Whitney-Thomas, J. and Hanley-Maxwell, C. (1996).

21 Turnbull, A. P., Summers, J. A. & Brotherson, M. J. (1986)

22 Hatton, C., and C. Emerson. (2003)

23 HM Treasury. (2007).

24 Stephen Winn & Ian Hay (2009)

25 DeFur, S, Todd-Allen, M. and Getzel, E. (2001),

26 Johnson, F. R., Bruininks, R. H., & Thurlow, M. L. (1987).

27 Children with Disability Australia (2015)

28 Wakeford, M. and Waugh, F. (2014).

29 PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2011)

30 Carter, E., Austin, D., & Trainor, A. (2012)

31 Gilson, Carter, Bumble, & McMillan, (2018)

32 Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, & Zane, (2007)

Two key parental factors identified that affect this vision being realised.

1. For many parents, there is a concern the transition to adulthood challenges the consistency that the education system has provided, creating worry around their child's safety and security. As a result, many parents may prefer to maintain the status quo and resist options that make their child potentially vulnerable to the outside world.<sup>33</sup> This means that parents look for post-school settings that look and feel like school, such as day services, rather than looking at what suits their child's aspirations and capacity.
2. Conversely, many parents indicate their vision or aspirations for their child were not being met post-school, due to a lack of coordination, vocational opportunities and pathways in the transition from school. This leads people with disability into non-vocational alternatives, such as day services, with poor open employment prospects.<sup>34</sup>

At the South East Local Learning and Employment Network parent forum, many parents explained that the decision to place their children in supported employment with an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) or a day service had reduced their child's future options. They felt their son or daughter's skills were not being utilised and they could be doing more, but once in a service they found it is difficult to transition them to mainstream employment.<sup>35</sup>

In one of the few Australian longitudinal studies of young people with disability, a survey of parents about their experience of school transition was conducted. One parent expressed concern about the lack of employment opportunities for their child in the following manner.



**“He is stagnating and I can see him spending his life as a blimp in front of the computer or TV, from this point on there are very, very few employment opportunities these days for our special young adults. Very, very distressing!!”**

Another parent similarly outlined her child's day, saying, ‘every day our son gets up and says ‘what video today?’<sup>36</sup>

Ferguson and Ferguson (1986) describe the perceptions of parents of students with severe disability regarding the period of transition from school to post-school services. Their perceptions bring the issues of parental involvement in the transition planning process and parent-professional relationships into sharp focus.

A central theme was the inevitability that the school program would cease and the whole post-school program, services and general environment was unclear. While some parents accepted this, others reported ‘feeling abandoned and powerless in their relationships with the post-school environment.’<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Ferguson, D. & Ferguson, P. (1986).

<sup>34</sup> Cocks, Errol and Thoresen, Stian H. (2013).

<sup>35</sup> South East Local Learning and Employment Network (2014),

<sup>36</sup> Davies, M and Beamish, W. (2009).

<sup>37</sup> Ferguson, P., Ferguson, D. L., & Jones, D. (1998).

Parents are also face social and economic disadvantage if their child has an unsuccessful transition.<sup>38</sup> As an unsuccessful post-school transition can result in considerable family adjustments when expected post-school outcomes related to employment, community participation and social networks are not realised.<sup>39</sup>

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38 Anderson, L., S.A. Larson, K.C. Lakin, and N. Kwak. (2002).

39 Davies, M and Beamish, W. (2009).

## Ticket to Work and Parents

We asked the young people who participated in Ticket to Work while at school about key supports in their transition from school. Of those participants who were in the labour force several years after completing school, family was indicated as the key support in their transition from school.

Who has been a positive support in your move from school? n=53* (Source Atkinson, et al.,2019)	Per cent
Family/carers	80%
Disability Employment Services staff	56%
Staff at my school	37%
Friends	22%
Supervisor/manger	11%
Co workers	7%
Staff from NDIS provider	7%
Group Training Organisation staff	7%
Other	17%

**Table:** Who has been a positive support in your move from school?

\*Respondents could select up to three types of people.

During the course of developing Ticket to Work, we have frequently heard that many parents are discouraged from having high workplace expectations for their children. As one parent stated, after learning about Ticket to Work, “this is the first time someone has talked about employment in the context of my child”.

### Parent’s involvement in Ticket to Work: comments from schools and network coordinators

School staff have witnessed the outcomes and positive effects that student participation in Ticket to Work activities are having on parents and carers.

The vast majority of school staff interviewed used words such as ‘letting go’, ‘feeling confident’ and ‘gaining support’ when discussing the impact that student participation in Ticket to Work is having on parents. One teacher said, ‘Parents are letting go and feeling more confident. We’ve had positive feedback from them to date. Parents are feeling more confident about their children and seeing great changes within them. One mum told us that her child had saved money from his wages to buy a gift for her and this is great as the child had never engaged that way before’.

Some parents are feeling a sense of relief and some of their own worries are being assuaged

because they are seeing their child holding down open employment. One teacher said, ‘parents are very happy with Ticket to Work as they don’t have to seek employment for their kids and it’s a relief for them’.

However, some schools noted some parents are still struggling to overcome the over-protectiveness that has been a feature of their life as the parent of a child with disability. Research shows some children with disability feel smothered by their parents; they can feel over-protected, unable to make choices and not being permitted to fail.<sup>40</sup> One principal related an example of ‘a student whose mother withdrew him from his school based traineeship (outdoor horticulture) due to weather conditions in winter. That was the parent’s perspective and it showed the parent was really treating the disability like an illness. We need to help parents to move away from that perspective’.

Some schools stated ‘some parents had difficulty in letting their children self-determine their futures and felt they (the parents) were better placed to be making choices about what they wish to do and achieve when they leave school’.

Other schools indicated ‘placing students in demonstrated employment, accompanied with targeted support, a wage and vocational training is promoting the idea that employment is and should be the norm for their students with disability.’

“Participation in a school based traineeship has really promoted the idea that they need to be working and doing something rather than receiving pension benefits only. This is something that has been evolving over the last four years since Ticket to Work’s inception, and I really can now see an immense shift in parental perceptions.”

– Principal, special school

“It is changing the culture. Parents of year 7 children are seeing the older students going out to work. We highlight it in newsletters, assemblies, every way we can. The parents are seeing that employment is possible and I am sure it is changing the conversations with their son or daughter around the family dinner table.”

– Principal, special school

We used a realistic approach in interviewing the intermediaries (the coordinators) of the Ticket to Work networks. We asked, from their perspective, what seems to determine, or is most important to ensure, a student who participates in Ticket to Work is able to obtain useful work experience or an apprenticeship that sets them up for future employment success? When asked if it was

<sup>40</sup> Mitchell, B. (1988). Who chooses? In National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps (Ed.), Transition Summary (No. 5, pp.4-5). Washington, DC: National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps.

something about their parents or carers, coordinators responded:

- Parents got behind Ticket to Work and supported their young people at home, for example, reinforcing some of the learning through their participation in Ticket to Work such as talking about wages, saving and their future.
- It is important that the parents are supportive and encouraging of confidence and positivity.
- Parents need to be able to see the gains that a student can make through experiencing difficulties.
- It is important that parents provide practical support.
- Parents need to be mindful of letting their kids explore and not being overbearing.
- Parents need to want more for, and have expectations of, a child with disability.
- Parents need to understand that the benefit of their child participating in work experience outweighs their fears.
- If parents are positive about the experience/opportunity, it can help the young person to prepare.
- When parents encourage the experience as a positive thing that can filter down to the young person.

Many Ticket to Work members struggle with parents who had low expectations and were not engaged in the Ticket to Work process. Some Disability Employment Service (DES) staff expressed it is not the role of the DES to support, encourage or engage with parents.

Despite this, for success, it has been found that professionals and agencies need to encourage and support parents in allowing their child with disability to make choices and decisions about their lives. Schools and service agencies also need to promote the right of the child with a disability to have an input into the decisions being made about his or her life.<sup>41</sup> The earlier this can begin in the child's life, the more capable that child will be in making decisions about the future and the more comfortable parents will be in advocating for their child's rights.

While the importance of parents' engagement is evident, the question remains as to how to ensure parents are engaged in the transition of their child. It is a matter for further investigation. Professionals need to help parents work through and resolve these issues. Pleet-Odle, A., et al., (2016) asked Parent advocates for students with disabilities across the nation for their ideas, seven strategies for professionals were developed to use in partnership with families to promote high expectations for post-school success for young adults with disabilities.

1. Engage parents in training opportunities and information sessions at school about post-school and community-based services.
  - a) Include transition information and introductions to employment services
  - b) Include families in visits to adult service agencies
2. Partner with families to explore role models who can provide a vision to the young person and their family of what adult life might be like
  - a) Connect the young person and their family to successful adults with disabilities

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<sup>41</sup> Wehman, P. (1990).

- b) Set up family support groups focused on transition to adulthood issues, including seeking and finding employment
3. Interact respectfully with families taking into account unique cultural or social values and perspectives
4. Begin planning for post-school activities early, and engage families in the planning process through Individual Education Plans
5. Partner with families to support the young person's independence. Young people who are independent in daily living skills and mobile within the community are more likely to be employed post school
6. Partner with families to build networks in the community
7. Work with families to support students in domains of life beyond work such as recreation and leisure, continued education and community participation<sup>42</sup>

The NDS Ticket to Work team have developed workshops materials and videos aimed at parents and are developing material to support network members engage effectively with parents.

### Parent views on Ticket to Work

As part of the evaluation of Ticket to Work, parents or carers of a child participating in Ticket to Work participated in a telephone interview to gather their perspective on the initiative. The majority of respondents were parents of children with an intellectual disability.<sup>43</sup>

We asked the Parents: Do you think that your child's participation in Ticket to Work has had any of the following effects / benefits?

Effect or Benefit of participating in Ticket to Work on:	Improvement	No change	Decline	Unsure	Total
Understanding the world of work	96% 31	6% 2	0% 0	0% 0	32
Increased confidence	93% 30	6% 2	0% 0	0% 0	32
Getting on better with co-workers/ others in the workplace	90% 28	6% 2	0% 0	3% 1	31
Taking instructions in the workplace	83% 26	16% 5	0% 0	0% 0	31
Managing time better	56% 18	31% 10	0% 0	0% 0	32

**Table:** Parents, effects and benefits of Ticket to Work on child

<sup>42</sup> Pleet-Odle, A., et al., (2016)

<sup>43</sup> Wakeford, M. and Waugh, F. (2014).

Overall, the responses indicate that a significant number of parents noticed improvements in their child's awareness of work, confidence, ability to work with others and understanding workplace instructions.

An increased understanding of the workplace was articulated by one parent who said 'he now understands how the fortnightly pay works - we've tried explaining it to him but actually receiving his pay means he now gets it'.

In reflecting on the confidence-raising aspect of a school based traineeship, one parent said that 'his confidence has made him outgoing while he is at work – he really enjoys being with a team and he is enjoying the job there more and more'.

An increased ability to work with others and understand instructions is well summarised in the comment by one parent who said that 'I thought he'd be really scared about doing work but surprised he got on so well with others in the workplace as he usually freaks out in large crowds. He was always willing to do the work and his instruction taking is very good'.

While just over two-thirds noticed improvements in their child's ability to manage time, the remainder did not notice any change in this regard. However, many comments do indicate that being in a consistent workplace environment is contributing to improved time management skills, with one parent highlighting that 'his time management is better as he has more independence. He is coping well with being at work for a whole day, which is longer than a school day'.

Parents who took part in the survey interviews welcomed the opportunity to share specific highlights experienced by their child. The comments below illustrate just how valuable participation in workplace transition activities can be in terms of assisting young people with disability to develop technical and generic employability skills, build personal confidence, model work ethic, foster friendships and relationships and learn about potential career pathways. The value of work experience and the experiential highlights of these workplace learning activities were shared in a significant number of comments made by parents:

When asked whether their child experienced any challenges during their experience of Ticket to Work, only a few parents responded to the question indicating that workplace-related challenges were not a significant issue for the child and/or their care giver. Of those that did respond, the key challenges or issues included: their child being tired as a result of working a full work day, experiencing difficulties with understanding and fulfilling instructions, struggling to feel 'part of the team' and learning to adapt to constructive criticism in the workplace and from supervisors.

Some parents also saw a challenge as a learning opportunity for their child. One such parent said 'my son had some trouble at work when he did something wrong and got criticised about it from his supervisor (something he is not used to), but he has learned that when you do things wrong in the workplace advice from your supervisor is normal'.

## **Parents' views of their children's future employment and life goals**

Parent respondents were asked to consider whether their child's participation in Ticket to Work was likely to have an effect or benefit on their child's future employment opportunities and whether Ticket to Work has made them feel more positive about their child's future post-school.

“He’s made great relationships with people at work and with others in class too. He is a role model for his own family and peers. Other siblings in the family don’t work and most would think he wouldn’t either but since he started working he is setting an example to them.

“It’s made him more confident and social, and it’s motivated him to go to work. He’s willing to learn about the products that he is working with and he is taking it upon himself to learn about the products, of his own volition. They are also offering him extra hours to work (outside of the school-based traineeship) so that has given his self-esteem a boost.

“It’s given him confidence, it’s skill building, the confidence to participate as part of a team, show up on time, not call in sick, developing some work ethic ... Also, he obviously enjoys work a lot more than school so he’s motivated to go.

“He is very happy with using the meat slicer at work! Up until now the most he has ever done for himself is making a sandwich. He’s been really scared of doing it (cooking) so it’s giving him that confidence. It’s inspired him to help out at home even with cooking.

“He did his work experience at a plumbing company and he totally loved it. He’s now keen to head in that direction.”

Effect or Benefit of participating in Ticket to Work on:	Improvement	No change	Decline	Unsure	Total
Improved his/her employment opportunities in the future	94% 30	3% 1	0% 0	3% 1	100% 32
Made you feel more positive about him/her finishing school	100% 31	0% 0	0% 0		100% 31
Made you feel more confident about his/her personal independence	91% 28	4.5% 1	4.5% 1		100% 31

**Table:** Parents, future employment opportunities for child

All respondents indicated that their feelings regarding the likelihood of their child entering into the labour force and completing school had improved. One parent saw significant employability skill development in her child, saying that ‘I’m sure the school-based traineeship will help in the future. We were quite concerned whether he would fit in at work as he withdraws quite a bit and internalises everything, but we are seeing this change because he is being supported to be more open at work’. The connection between school based traineeship and school participation was

noted by one parent who said that “he loves his 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”.

Parental confidence regarding their children’s personal independence had also largely improved, however, five per cent did indicate that their child’s participation in Ticket to Work made no difference or had reduced confidence in their child’s independence. One parent who felt more confidence about her child’s personal independence as a direct result of participation in a school-based traineeship said “I do think it’s helping with his motivation and it’s due to the fact he knows that if he works he can get money and he can do more things with money, so it’s good for his independence”.

The parent of one child undertaking a traineeship did express concern about her child’s future independence, largely because he is still struggling to separate the institution of school from the institution of work and needed prompts to attend work each week. Critically, her child’s participation in a school-based traineeship has brought these issues to her attention for the first time and is now allowing the parent, school, DES and workplace to address the needs and issues of this young man. However, this parent did identify hope for her child in saying that ‘although he needs to be dragged to work, once he is there he enjoys it, so it has given me some optimism that there is light at the end of the tunnel but it’s unfortunate that he still sees it as an extension of school’.

## Parents on the benefits of Ticket to Work

When asked the open-ended question: Do you believe that participation in Ticket to Work is beneficial for students with disability? Respondent parents presented an array of reasons as to why they believe this model of workplace transition is useful.

These can be broadly categorised as relating to:

- Building self-confidence and independence
- Gaining workplace knowledge and improving employability
- Collaboration and Building connections to employment organisation
- Reducing parental fear, pressure and increasing optimism for their child’s future

‘Building their child’s self-confidence and independence’ was highlighted as being a critical aspect of participation Ticket to Work by many parent interviewees.

Notably, one parent said, “It gives them (the students with disability) more of a chance, as it gives them an opportunity to get up to the level of other students (without disability) and give them an extra boost, their confidence benefits. By doing this (Ticket to Work) it makes them feel better and shows the other students in the school that they are not just students with disability but they can do something”.

Another said that “Sometimes those with disability are overlooked in the workforce so it’s good for students to have this option. It’s important that they learn that even though they have a disability they cannot sit back and wait for things to happen – you get no confidence or independence if it’s always done for you”.

‘Gaining workplace knowledge and improving employability’ was also identified by parents as

being a critical outcome of the workplace learning delivered via Ticket to Work.

One parent said that “I think it’s given her some insight into the world of work that’s out there”.

Another parent said, “For my child it’s been a very positive move as he wasn’t enjoying school like he used to so the traineeship is helping him to gain more skills and knowledge in the workforce”.

‘Collaboration and Building connections to employment organisations’ was seen as something that has not only been beneficial during a child’s participation in Ticket to Work, but also means relationships with supportive organisations are now established prior to children leaving school.

One parent recognised the integrated aspect of supports in Ticket to Work networks saying that “they all supply a piece to the puzzle”.

DES providers were particularly singled out by a number of parents. One parent said, “I can’t see how he would have got a job independently without the additional assistance (of the DES), however, now he’s got a job he could go and get one more easily”.

Another reflected on the ubiquity of school based traineeships and the support around it in saying that “because all students can do a school based traineeship it allows students with disability to have that opportunity without them feeling that they are only employed because they have a disability. The support team around the traineeship is great, positive, and given by qualified people. I’m so impressed with the DES and their staff and I can ask them anything anytime and they check on her regularly”.

Another parent commented on the collaborative nature of Ticket to Work when she said that “I got to know other people involved in the Ticket to Work process so there is a great partnership approach to the whole program”.

‘Reducing parental fear, pressure and increasing optimism for their child’s future’ was highlighted as a beneficial aspect of the model by many interviewed parents.

In many ways this benefit is summarised succinctly by one parent’s comment: “It’s also good for parents because you have some time to yourself and you feel relieved that you know they can do certain things on their own.”

## **Overall feedback from parents on Ticket to Work**

When asked about the overall role that Ticket to Work, its related activities and partner organisations have played, parents were overwhelmingly grateful that such an initiative is available to their child.

In some cases, parents noted Ticket to Work should be made available to students at a younger age. Others note, without it students would not receive access to support specifically devised to create pathways to work and a life of independence. A couple of other parents also noted if Ticket to Work had been made available to their other children with disability they would not be out of employment and despondent now.

In essence, parents see and appreciate the contribution that Ticket to Work is making to the life of their child and their own family wellbeing and a handful of comments regarding this are presented below:

‘Thank you for working with our son. It has given us hope for his future.’

‘I wouldn’t know what to do without this program (Ticket to Work) because it’s helped my son a lot. I was worried he won’t get a job in the future or be independent but with this program I now feel more confident he will.’

‘I’m really happy with the Ticket to Work process and how it’s handled. The way the school has worked with the DES and I haven’t been left out of it – a real partnership approach. My daughter wasn’t just popped into any old work – there was the lead up, the work trial, the learning process throughout and the paperwork.’

‘Very excited to have this opportunity and it’s a real privilege. It feels like it’s a whole package being delivered, not just the traineeship but the support with transport use, addressing literacy and numeracy deficits and the support from the DES.’

‘I do really think Ticket to Work is a wonderful, and I wish my other two boys had done it if it was around back then.’

‘I would start this program a lot earlier. At least in preparation for work and/or the traineeship in younger year levels.’

‘All students with disabilities should get a chance to do this Ticket to Work program. They can work, should be able to work and the community and government need to be behind it.’

## Conclusion

Parental expectations (having high expectations for their children) and parental involvement (having parents as active and knowledgeable participants in transition planning) have been identified as evidence-based predictors of improved post-school outcomes for students with disabilities<sup>44</sup>.

Parents are often the only constant in the life of a child with disability, yet often there is no support or consideration of their role in school to work transition; at worst, there is contempt and mistrust. Transition into adulthood is a stressful time for parents of young people with disability, which can affect a successful transition to employment and adult life. Schools, employment and community services need to be conscious of these fears and take measures to support parents to be positive and active in the transition from school.

The pressure and fear parents of a young person with disability often experience significantly reduces through their child's participation in Ticket to Work.<sup>45</sup> Parents have been very positive about their children's achievements and experiences in Ticket to Work.

The reasons they believe this model of school to work transition support is useful can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Building the self-confidence and independence of their children
- Their children gaining workplace knowledge and improving employability
- Building connections to post school organisations such as Employment Service
- Reducing parental fear and increasing optimism for their children's future

By starting the transition to employment during school, Ticket to Work eliminates many concerns of parents. It supports students to take an employment pathway. Schools identify by having a number of students participating in school-based traineeships, they are promoting the idea within their school communities that employment is and should be the norm for students with disability.

Parents play an integral part in the lives of their children. Success in the transition from school to work is less likely without their participation and support. Parents must receive the necessary support, training and advice required to support their child in transitioning successfully to adult life and employment pathways.

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44 Pleet-Odle, A., et al., (2016)

45 Wakeford, M. and Waugh, F. (2014).

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