Seamless Journeys to Work for Young Adults with Disabilities:

Disability employment policy and program influences on the transition to work

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Our Research - Seamless Journey to Work for Young Adults with Physical/Neurological Disabilities.

**Aim:** To understand the journey to work for young adults (17 – 30 years of age) who have a physical disability (inc. neurological conditions) to better inform policy, program and service interventions.

- taking a systems approach

**Participants:** Young adults with physical neurological disabilities, service providers, peak organisations, disabled people's organisations (DPOs), government and employers.

**Stages of the Research:** 4 Stage, 3 year study.

- **Stage 1 2016** - Mapping the service landscape with service providers
- **Stage 2 2017** - Surveying all stakeholders to identify Enablers and Barriers
- **Stage 3 2017** - Capturing the lived experiences of Young Adults' Journey
- **Stage 4 2018** - Co-designing ideas to enhance service deliver (e.g. web based, face-to-face)
What we will cover

• **Why transition to work matters?** – Key principles – It’s why we are all here!

• **Lessons so far:** What international literature says about transition and employment success.

• **The system as is:** What we know from services and advocates about the status quo of transition and DES?

• **Solutions and Strategies** employed by orgs to circumvent or to bridge the gaps and barriers – “Creative Resistance”

• **Moving forward:** What we need? – Reimagining the journey to work as seamless – what would such a journey look like and need?
Transition to employment is critical for the economic futures of young adults with disabilities. Earlier the intervention the better.

“It's very important to get that culture of work at that age, culture of work and creating independence, because at that point, we can either make them dependent the rest of their life or make them independent. It's a very important stage for that, I think.”

– research participant # 05 – voc rehab professional
United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

Article 27 - Work and employment. 1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (six key policy priority areas)
- Employment (policy area three) and Learning - Education (policy area five).
- Important relationship between educational outcomes and economic contribution for people with disability
- Key Policy Strategy 5.5 - Identify and establish best practice for transition planning and support through all stages of learning and from education to employment.
Learnings so far: What the research and grey literature says helps make transition to work successful

| Providing schools and employers with specialist vocational and employment knowledge for various impairment types |
| Voluntary or part-time job while at school |
| Mandated transition planning |
| Permeable pathways to work this includes - tertiary transitions - employment pathways for people with more severe disability – e.g. dual physical and cognitive impairments. |
| Raised expectations – that work is a viable option |
| Viewed and supported differently in employment policy and programs to meet their developing aspirations and experience |
| Earlier the transition support the better! |
| Having various range of work experience is key |
| Building confidence and intrinsic motivation |

Specialist, supportive and realistic career advice - Building careers not just a job
The system - Transition to Work

• Transition — everyone agrees it’s critically important, but systems are still fragmented.

• DES policy’s change has restricted ESL engagement = negative impact.
• Bridging the gap in transition skills, resources and knowledge in schools, particularly in regional areas
• Prepping /setting them up for work
• Providing a seamless process from school to work

“It was a *definite bridging gap* and just even *doing the pre-work while they were still at school*. We'd send consultants in that where working in the classrooms with a group of eligible kids, and then starting to even transition them through to apprenticeship centres because we'd see a vocation that we could help support with. So it was really *setting up the transition out of school into a trade*. ...It was a *seamless process* and regionally it was just filling the gap. Because in the bigger centres obviously there's more supports around, but *definitely regionally it was a great program that we had huge success with.*”

- research participant #22 - Manager

“You could *get them work prepped* before you took them on traineeships and apprenticeships, et cetera, as well. ...It could just be getting some work experience or work trials just to get them the taste of working, get them used to working, because it's a whole different atmosphere, work to school. Kids don't get that.”

- research participant #17 - Manager
Transition to Work Support

Being able to experiment with work experience, try things, to develop a career focus

“I considered looking at their futures and where they wanted to do this. Yeah, the beauty of doing it in school is that they can stuff up a little, it's not like - so we do slowly, slowly, it depends on the individual. But some of that career development, looking at skills, and aspirations, and those sorts of things, then work experience...”
– Research participant #8 - Manager

“Sometimes quite thoughtful they would - okay well this industry's not going to give me any stability in my life, I need to look at something else”
- Research participant #8 – #Manager
From Positives to Restrictions... changes in eligibility criteria and timing affecting the effectiveness of transition support

“The hindrance is the criteria that the Federal Government sets for them to be deemed an eligible or early school leaver. We used to do fantastic work of working in with the schools while the kids were still at work even prior, before them coming on to DES. But I think from a cost perspective because those kids automatically defaulted in the policy system to a level two funded client with an eight hour benchmark, and from macroeconomics the government that was a way to save money. So they shut that eligibility down.”

- Research participant #10 - Manager

“...one of the big differences over the last few years is, they actually stopped people coming onboard from year 10 and 11. It's now only year 12s in DES....Yeah, the ESLs. That's made a huge difference, especially to us and the success of the kids because that made a huge difference when you could work with them in year 10, year 11 and progress them through proper apprenticeships and traineeships....Huge difference. That's affecting kids all over the place because of that.”

– Research participant #17 - Manager
Fragmented interface between DES and Education (Secondary)
The Difficult Transition to Work for Young Adults with Disabilities – Key Barriers

Psycho-Social
Low Expectations, Work Attitude and Confidence

Social-Cultural
Stigma and Negative Attitudes

Transition Support at School
Access to work experience, advice and preparedness

Service Restrictions and fragmentation
- Des interface with Schools and Tertiary providers
Psycho-Social
Low -
• Expectation to Work
• Work Attitude
• Confidence

Restricted pathways

“Yeah, I think that one of the biggest barriers to young people with a physical disability - or any disability obtaining work is the **low expectations** of their family and themselves….So if you asked me what is one of the significant barriers to young people with a disability successfully transitioning to work? I would say the expectations of their carers and families. I see it all the time.”
- Research participant #18 - CEO

“Yeah, the schools - I guess the **expectation, their attitude towards people with disability and life after school**. A lot of them, they pretty much tell their - the parents or whoever, teachers or parents, just go, oh my son or daughter can't do anything. or my student can't do anything when they leave school. So it's just easier to put them in a day program. So a lot of schools just go, oh we've just got all our students in a day program, you're wasting your time. I get a lot of that.” - Research participant #7 – Project/Policy/Advocacy Officer
We say that Australian businesses have negative attitudes towards people with disability. But business people are members of the community as well. I think it's such a complex issue to look at. You can do yourself a disservice by focusing in too much on one particular area of it.”
– research participant #01 - Project/Policy/Advocacy Officer

“I think in a workplace environment, or in any environment particularly workplace environment, it's attitudinal barriers which are of the greatest - by far the greatest. It's how not just the initial contact or the engagement with decision makers within employment - within an employing organisation that's just government or small business, it's also how those employment contracts or that employment is maintained.” — research participant #04 CEO/GM/Director
“...there's so many different avenues for careers now that's been quite a significant change in probably the last 20 years of being able to, you know, different pathways into tertiary educations or trades or other vocational training. I just don't think career teachers, and nor is it their role, that they can really have the finger on the pulse of everything that's happening out there. They're also housed within the school system; they're not actually working in the workforce as such, so their exposure is limited in that way, if that makes sense?”
- research participant #20 - CEO/GM/Director

“They might have been given work experience, but it wasn't adequate work experience. So they might have been told to staple papers all day, because they weren't able to access a computer or something like that. So those kinds of things.”
- Research participant #7 - Project/Policy/Advocacy Officer
Services Restrictions in DES Policy and Program

• DES ESL changes – restricting the rules on when can engage with school students
• Can’t engage when in tertiary courses – TAFE or University (can’t help with work placements and work experiences etc.) which is impacting employability
• No after-school job support.
• Work experience – Internships/voluntary restrictions to 4 weeks
• Lack of individualization and flexibility in program to cater for young adults.
Case of impact of Internship restrictions

“And three months of fulltime experience was what they were basically offering. If he couldn't come to work one day because his pain levels were too bad or if he was a bit stiff the night before and he had to come in late, they were like we don’t care, that’s fine. It's just this yeah, this amazing opportunity that he couldn’t take up, because of - and he even said look, if I leave your DES service, and basically exit and then go and take this up on my own, could I do that? But then because he wasn’t covered for insurance, he couldn't do that either. It was just so frustrating. So sometimes when people are really motivated, the employer is as accommodating as they could possibly be. It’s all of the stuff around the guidelines that sometimes still get in the way, and especially that unpaid work experience. I think that’s probably one of the worst decisions that department ever made.

The consequence:
Yeah, and he ended with some pretty significant depression after that, just thinking well, really, why would I even bother doing this, I may as well just stay on the dole.”

– research participant # 05 –voc rehab professional
Work capacity Assessment – interface with Centrelink
- intake and assessment for post-school leavers is very difficult
- assessors unsuitability
- inappropriate referrals
- Work hours?
- Face to face disappearing, worse in regional areas.

NO CPI, YET INCREASE COMPLIANCE impacting on service delivery “we're finding that it's taking away from the business of the day and the grassroots stuff,..” – Research participant#11 – CEO/GM/Director

PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK – IS NOT ABOUT QUALITY.

Complex intersection with social-spatial factors:
Geography - Fringe areas - outer suburbs & regional areas - job availability
Transport – Without access to transport employment becomes difficult
Housing – affordability of housing, location and homelessness

Choice and Control in a Compliance Based Program?
- the Stick not carrot approach
- choice is not an ethos supported under the current des model.
- Provider choice/voluntary engagement

Changing clientele
- increase in people with mental illness.
- persons with significant impairments are designed out “the system will let people down - or potentially won't even let them in.”
Solutions /Strategies – Creative resistances from organisations
What’s making transition to work more successful for young adults with disabilities

- Building work attitude and expectation with schools, individuals and families - Employment first focus.
- Having quality and various work experiences and paid after-school job while at school
- Flexible tailored programs- customized jobs - building a career not just a job
- Building localized partnerships to enable school-based traineeships and work immersion etc.
- Peer group support and success stories
- Specialist knowledge of affordances/modifications (building, jobs, technology)
Changing expectations by showing there are work options

“One of the things I do is I do some voluntary work, and I run sessions for parents about school to work transition, and often the parents are saying well this is the first time anyone's mentioned employment as an option for my son or daughter. A lot of the schools will say - the parents don't have - they want them safe and secure, but if you don't know what the options are then how do you make those…

Yeah, so just that change in culture. That school did quite a bit of work, but it wasn't just about X, it was about - we're making a decision that this is what we're going to do and we're going to be promoting an employment pathway. But just that change in their thinking and culture, we're able to - and we were a small part of that - they were able to quite dramatically change their outcomes.

They've got kids in year seven and eight seeing the older kids going out, and the parents are seeing those kids going out and going into normal employment, so they're changing their aspirations about what that young person does.”

- Research participant #08 - Manager
Employment First Focus

Yeah, we're very much about open employment rather than that ADE model. We're not to say that some of our kids might not end up in ADEs but some of that thinking from overseas - the employment first, that we look at the first option. Doesn't matter what the disability is, is open employment, and that's what we're aiming for, and then we can move to other things I think is a good model rather than - let's go into we've got to

- Research Participant #8 - Manager

Permeable Pathway Options “...so that no matter what kid comes in, they've got an avenue to get to work - whether that's an ADE, whether it's a transition to work program, whether that's DES, but some kind of route to employment, because that should be the same for anyone. It doesn't matter...Yeah, people having options with what support they need. It shouldn't be what program fits them.”

- Research Participant #17 - Manager
Rethinking what employment is.  
**Case of social enterprises**

“...I think that's got some real potential - if government will accept that as an outcome, because it can provide a shit load of [**self esteem**](#) for the people that are involved with it. I mean you're actually [**running your own business**](#) and as I pointed out earlier, to get some economic, some serious economic advantages out of employment you've got to be getting up above that base level anyway. So if you're stuck in and around there with people, I think the [**social enterprise**](#) is possibly a better option.”

- research participant #3 - CEO/GM/Director

Being Individualized and Tailored  
**Case of career focused traineeships**

“It should be what their support needs are. If you're doing it individualised and tailored, doing it right, that's the way it should be, because our biggest success rate has always been the traineeships...with school kids, yeah, because we don't go for the trying to place five kids into a McDonald's so that we can get the level 2 funding. That's okay. Some kids want that. **But generally you're looking for the high end traineeships to try and get kids careers.** That's your ultimate... That's what I was saying. You're kind of picking the route. You're wanting to help them career development, not just there's a job.”

- research participant #17 - Manager
Customized Roles
“So the whole idea for us is to - why we call them job development officers is they **actually create roles**, because a lot of the time our guys couldn't go in and do the full aspects of the role. They just cannot - just physically not able or cognitively can't do it.”
- Research Participant #17 - Manager

Peer support
“So I actually got them working together and working through that as a group and it worked. …they were able to challenge one another a bit too I think, in ways that I couldn't.”
- Research Participant #3 – CEO/GM/Director

Schools need support
“Well the feedback is that it's just so hard for them that they want to be doing it earlier, but they can't fit it into their schedule and that's why they're trying to get different providers in to do that kind of work. It's really things around interview skills, how to dress for interviews, how to put your resume together.”
- Research Participant #9 - Manager

Working earlier, helps build relationships
“I think because when you start working earlier you also are building a relationship with the family and the carers. You're not doing that when you're not working with them.”
- Research Participant #18 – CEO/GM/Director
Specialist knowledge showing what is possible

“That will be a big part of our agenda, is giving DES providers tools to understand what it is that people with physical disabilities can achieve, if they're given the right support and access to the resources that they need.”

- research participant #5 - voc rehab professional

Modifications, Assistive Technology and Willingness on part of employer = success

“Technology is wonderful. So I've made sure that now all the leaders have educated their staff around workplace modifications. Job in Jeopardy. You know, I use my own lived experience of what I've done. Like I got a dude a carbon fibre leg - he always said, I'd like a leg like the Olympians. So I got him one. Got the trucks modified. I've got a guy who broke his spine, he was an apprentice and he was doing a diesel fitting mechanics apprenticeship. I got hoists, I got a forklift and I got special flooring. The employer did have to pay towards the forklift, because obviously he wasn't going to keep the forklift as his personal thing. But he came to the party with $1800 towards the forklift. But the actual, you know, he carried on and indeed has finished his apprenticeship…. I love workplace modifications. The opportunities are endless.”

- research participant #14 - Manager
“let's look at an individual and have a range of different supports, it's not about choosing one or the other. That will take a thinking shift as well as a policy shift, but it's been done overseas, it's not as if this is completely new”

– research participant#8 - Manager
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