

National Disability Services – Response YNOT Youth Transitions Action Plan Discussion Paper

November 2023

About National Disability Services

National Disability Services (NDS) is Tasmania's and Australia's peak body for non-government disability service organisations, representing more than 1100 non-government service providers. Collectively, NDS members operate several thousand services for Australians with all types of disability. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Commonwealth governments. We have a diverse and vibrant membership, comprised of small, medium and larger service providers, supporting thousands of people with disability. Our members collectively provide a full range of disability services, from supported independent living and specialist disability accommodation, respite and therapy, to community access and employment. NDS is committed to improving the disability service system to ensure it better supports people with disability, their families and carers, and contributes to building a more inclusive community.

NDS' vision is for an inclusive Australia where all people with disability live safely and equitably. To achieve this people with disability need to access the right supports, at the right time, from the right people, services and systems.

About this submission

NDS welcomes this opportunity to respond to the September 2023 Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper.

NDS leads and participates in a range of state-based projects through our Tasmanian branch. Relevant recent NDS projects in Tasmania include:

- The *Pathways from School to Work* project (the Pathways project), which aims to codesign a new pathway from school to work with young people with disability in Tasmania,
- The *Workforce Coordination* project, which is seeking to strengthen the Tasmanian community services workforce across a number of sectors by increasing overall workforce size, skill and diversity, and
- The *Diversifying Disability Employment* project, which investigated expanding the capacity of Tasmanian employers to employ people with disability.

NDS offers a unique perspective on the issue of youth employment, as a peak body to disability service providers – who are currently experiencing a workforce crisis and as a project manager, simultaneously operating projects which centre the voices of young people with disability.

NDS acknowledges and pays respect to the Aboriginal people of lutruwita/Tasmania, and acknowledges their continuing custodianship and connection to land, sea, sky and waterways; NDS also notes the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among people with disability, the rate of which becomes even more significant in youth demographics. It is vital that Aboriginal young people are heard and included as we build strategies for the future of Tasmania.

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Consultation Questions

Question #1: What are some innovative ways that can support young adults to transition out of the family home into independent living?

While all young people benefit from some level of support to transition to living independently, young people with disability often have more specialised support needs that cannot be met through mainstream service systems. Only a small proportion of young people with disability are eligible for supports funded through the NDIS, with the significant majority who would benefit from life-stage transition support having no way to access it. State-based funding, which could potentially be made available under a new Disability Inclusion and Safeguarding Act, would allow young people with disability who are not able to access the NDIS to receive disability support services and build their capacity for a successful transition to independent living.

Recently, NDS undertook consultations with young people with disability as part of the Pathways project. A clear outcome from consultations to date has been that

young people with disability perceive stable employment as the foundation to their independence. As well as limiting financial stability, difficulty finding a “real job” was a barrier to making the psychological life-stage transition from dependent youth to independent adult. Investment in evidence-based good practice supports for the pathway between school and work will support successful transitions into independent living generally; principles of universal design indicate that such supports designed to meet the needs of young people with disability would be beneficial for young people of all backgrounds.

Where young people with disability have intensive transition support needs, support models such as the STEPS Pathways College could be implemented in the Tasmanian setting. The Pathways College based in Caloundra, Queensland has boarding, online, day class and employment support programs which provide individually-tailored capacity building for independence. Further information about the STEPS Pathways College is available at <https://www.stepspathways.com.au/>. Other Tasmanian examples of capacity-building for independent living include the L’Arche Beni-Abbes community model, wherein non-disabled young people live in shared housing with housemates with disability, providing a degree of social and practical support in exchange for the benefits provided by living in the community. Implementations of the community model where young people, both with and without disability, are supported to transition to fully independent living over time should be further explored.

Question #2: What is needed to assist young adults to become financially independent and to manage their financial affairs well?

Consultations with young people through the Pathways project indicate that young people with disability feel like the Tasmanian education system does not prepare them for financial independence or support development of practical money management skills, with participants stating that they wished it were part of the core school curriculum.

In terms of achieving financial independence, the young people consulted indicated that limited availability of truly “entry level” employment opportunities was a barrier. They reported that the overwhelming majority of jobs advertised as entry level still required prior experience, and suggested that subsidised job readiness courses to bridge the skills gap for school leavers should be made available to support access to employment and financial independence.

From a service provider perspective, consultations undertaken with disability sector organisations in late 2022 through the Workforce Coordination Project identified increasing workforce skills shortages, with providers reporting difficulty recruiting enough skilled staff to meet demand for capacity-building supports. It is critical that workforce shortages are addressed systemically to ensure appropriate support is

available to help young people with disability develop independent living skills, including for financial management.

Question #3: How can young adults be better equipped to move from school to work?

As part of the Pathways project's scoping phase, a report on evidence-based best practices for school-to-work transition for young people with disability was completed, including a framework of principles for best practice transition support. A copy of this report is attached, and will form part of our submission..

Question #4: How can workplaces better support young adults?

Across 2022-23, the NDS Diversifying Disability Employment project surveyed employers regarding their attitudes towards employing people with disability and awareness of available supports. The project's results, combined with consultations of young people with disability in the Pathways project, indicate that the primary barrier to mainstream employers employing young people with disability is attitudinal, with employers perceiving much greater barriers than actually existed in practice. While employers in general have reported being positively disposed to employing young people with disability, they state that they do not have adequate resources available to support young people (especially young people with disability) who are entering the workforce for the first time. Employers consulted under these NDS projects stated that dedicated funding would be required before they could afford to provide support to young people, particularly young people with disability, to develop employment skills on the job.

There are some unique, significant barriers to youth employment pathways within the Tasmanian disability sector. In addition to the inability to fund adequate supervision or on-the-job training for young people under NDIS pricing models, recent policy changes which restrict public school-based work experience programs and traineeships in the disability sector are extremely concerning. While NDS recognises there are risks associated with frontline disability support work which must be managed for trainees aged under 18, we recommend the development of an appropriately risk-managed framework to facilitate work experience placements and traineeships within the disability sector. The current approach of a broad-spectrum exclusion will exacerbate the accelerating skills shortages in this area as young people choose to pursue work in industries with fewer access barriers. We note that, if they can be supported to enter it, some young people with disability could be particularly well suited to roles in the disability sector. It is likely that many will have increased empathy for, and understanding of, the support needs of other individuals with disability through their own lived experience.

Question #5: What would help smooth the transition from the youth and adolescent service system (up to age 18) to a service system designed for adults? *and* Question #9: How can young adults be better supported to navigate the adult service system? *and* Question #12: How can government and the services sector better integrate and coordinate service development and delivery for young adults?

NDS member organisations have often expressed frustration with NDIS pricing models and service interfaces, as they historically do not permit any overlap between service systems, deeming it to be duplication of support. However, a degree of overlap is necessary to provide adequate continuity of support during service transitions and to prevent clients, particularly young people, from “falling through the gaps”.

Evidence-based research, explored as part of the Pathways project’s best practices report, recommends the creation of a “service navigator” role. The service navigator would be a skilled individual who would support a young person with disability to “braid” together supports from various systems to ensure continuity. This skilled role for supporting young people transitioning between youth and adult service systems would also benefit individuals experiencing other forms of disadvantage. It could potentially provide a safety net at vital points in a young person’s life path, such as interactions with Justice, where inadequate support for young people with disability has been identified as a critical factor for incarceration and recidivism.

Outside of funded services, the Pathways project’s best practices report indicated that parents and carers provide essential support for young people with disability to navigate service system transitions, but that these parents and carers do not currently feel like they have the information or resources they need to do so effectively. Investment in codesigned resources for parents and carers to support their young people through life stage transitions is likely to offer significant benefits. Evidence-based good practice discussed in the report recommends these supports should begin as early as possible, suggesting that starting transition supports from age 14 would be appropriate.

Question #6 What can be done to improve transport options for young adults in urban and rural areas?

There are possibilities for addressing accessible transport issues by investigating underutilised assets that already exist; for example, engaging vehicles used by disability day services for transport that may be used at the start and end of a day and remain unused for many hours in between, subsidising taxi leases to use vehicles for multiple purposes, or providing extra training for drivers of existing vehicles so they may be used in other ways. NDS recommends a place-based approach to identifying innovative transport solutions.

Question #7: How, and in what ways, can the service system and policy settings be more responsive to the needs of young adults? *and* Question #8: How can services be better designed to acknowledge and meet the needs of young adults?

Universal design is the concept that designing a system to be accessible for diverse needs improves that service for **all** users, regardless of their access needs.

Universal design is a fundamental condition of good design.

With higher rates of diagnosed psychosocial disability and neurodivergence in youth populations than ever before, it is essential that universal design principles are embedded in mainstream service systems and policy settings. In particular, embedding disability accessibility in mainstream settings will counter the “identity crisis” effect noted in the Pathways project’s best practices report, wherein young people with disability lose their social role upon leaving the school system, and risk being funnelled into a disengaged “disability person” role as a service recipient. Embedding disability access needs in mainstream services and policy will support young people with disability to build a social identity as independent, valued members of the community and economy.

Question #13 Do these elements capture what’s needed for a comprehensive approach to the transition to adulthood?

The proposed elements broadly align with the best practices framework outlined in the Pathways project’s report, which states that quality support for transition from school to work should:

- **Begin early:** active planning and capacity building for post-school transition should begin by year 9, and support should ideally continue on until well after entry into employment
- **Be flexible, person-centred and user-led:** work holistically with individual young people to identify and understand their unique priorities, foundational needs and life contexts, including exploring and building identity and social roles beyond being a “disability person”
- **Model and encourage high expectations:** support young people and their families to build positive narratives together about what social roles and employment can look like post-school, including the expectation that meaningful employment will happen
- **Closely involve families and carers:** family support is a critical factor for stability through life stage transition and a key predictor of employment success
- **Emphasise participation:** all young people should partake in a variety of meaningful and preferably paid work experiences during their school years, allowing experimentation/exploration and the development of a range of professional contacts

- **Take a collaborative community approach, facilitated by an intermediary:** foster ongoing collaboration between family, schools, services and employers, with a designated skilled role to simplify communication between parties and to support the young person to navigate service systems and interfaces (e.g. “support braiding”)
- **Be skilled and skill-building:** everyone involved in post-school transition needs expertise and regular professional development, while skill development for young people should be embedded in all processes

Please see the attached report for the evidence base for, and development of, this framework.

