

National Disability Services – Response Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper

October 2023

About National Disability Services

National Disability Services (NDS) is 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, and

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.

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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Summary questions – proposed by Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPaC)

Embedding universal design

NDS is pleased to note that many of the principles and elements outlined in the discussion paper are consistent with evidence-based best practice models for post-school transition for young people with disability, such as those outlined in Children and Young People with Disability Australia's (CYDA) 2015 report *Post School Transition: the experiences of students with disability*¹ (the CYDA report) and the Centre for Applied Disability Research's guide *Research to Action: Bridging the gap between what we know and what we do*² (the CADR Guide). However, these models include additional elements which could be added to the Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy.

For young people with disability, additional principles for quality support for transition from school to work include:

- **Begin early:** active planning and capacity building for post-school transition should commence by year 9, and support should ideally continue, until well after entry into employment. While career conversations do currently occur in this age demographic in mainstream schools, young people consulted in the *Pathways* project indicated that these are poorly implemented; they are perceived as irrelevant and do not support young people to meaningfully develop their own goals or plan towards them.
- **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

¹ Children with Disability Australia (2015), *Post School Transition: The experiences of students with disability*, p. 49, <https://www.cyda.org.au/resources/details/85/post-school-transition-the-experiences-of-students-with-disability>

² Sheppard, L.*, Harrington, R. & Howard, K. (2017). *Effective school to employment transitions. Research to Action Guide, Rapid Review*. NDS Centre for Applied Disability Research. Available at www.cadr.org.au

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.

Key demographic differences between mainstream youth and young people with disability

While universal design principles mean that services and supports which are designed inclusively to meet the needs of young people with disability will also be beneficial to the broader youth population, consultations with young people with disability also highlight important points of difference. Workshop sessions and interviews carried out as part of the *Pathways* project corroborate and extend findings from codesigned lived-experience studies such as *Young people with intellectual disability speak out about life after school* (2023)³. While all individuals’ values and priorities are unique, generalised differences between mainstream and disability youth demographics included:

Differences in priorities about what constitutes a “good job”

The *Tasmanian Youth Forum 2020 Report: Building a better Tasmania for young people*⁴ indicates that for mainstream youth a “good job” means “...something that is enjoyable and motivates you to want to keep working, that is beneficial to everyone, and pays well. It should not be boring.” However the young people with disability consulted in the *Pathways* project indicated that to them, a “good job” was one that was secure. Meaningful or interesting work was not seen as a very high priority so long as the work was not expressly counter to their values; it was more important to young people with disability that they had job security and that they could earn enough money to gain, or maintain, their independence.

Differences in concepts of “job security” between mainstream youth and youth with disability.

Emerging cultural changes, particularly since COVID-19, mean that “job security” for the mainstream youth population increasingly means knowing they will be able to move between employers easily and find new work whenever required through having a transferable skill set. However, consultations from the *Pathways* project indicate that “job security” among disability cohorts retains a meaning closer to the traditional interpretation. Young people with disability involved in project consultations understood job security as having a single ongoing employer, a job role that is sustainable, and a workplace where they can feel respected. It was important to young people with disability to know they could stay in a workplace long term. This

³ L. L. Mogensen, G. Drake, J. McDonald & N. Sharp (2023) Young people with intellectual disability speak out about life after school: “I want to do more in life than just...be a disability person”, *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, <https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2023.2245276>

⁴ <https://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021-02/TYF2020-Report-electronic.pdf>

indicates a potential advantage to employers in hiring youth with disability: while many young people with disability require only minimal workplace adjustments, employers may be able to gain employees with significantly higher organisational loyalty and rate of retention, than would be the case for the broader youth population.

Other Discussion Questions:

“What is the one thing that you believe could have the most positive impact on a young person’s transition pathway from school to further study, training or employment?” and “What does it take to be ‘job-ready’?” and “How could your business or industry be better supported to provide opportunities for young people?”

“Entry level” jobs aren’t entry level for youth, especially with disability

Young people with disability in the *Pathways* Project consultation group, described experiences of spending hours on jobsearch websites looking for any work that might be considered “entry level”, but finding nothing they could apply for. Participants explained that even for roles that would ordinarily be considered entry level (such as frontline retail, hospitality, or cleaning) the overwhelming majority were advertised with requirements for prior experience- often asking for multiple years’ work history. They felt the expectations of employers were unfair, saying that there was no way for young people to bridge the gap between the skills and experience they held by the end of school and the level expected to qualify for “entry level” employment. While some young people in the group had accessed school-based work experience placements, these were generally considered unhelpful or irrelevant to actual employment.

In comparison, as part of the *Workforce Coordination* project, employers were consulted in late 2022 about what was required for an employee to be considered “job ready”. Disability sector respondents indicated a mix of:

- personal attributes (e.g. resilience, “common sense”, attitude)
- soft skills (e.g. relationship building, communication)
- hard skills (e.g. IT literacy, report and case note writing)
- formal qualifications, and
- prior experience for the role.

Employers in the disability sector have both a strict obligation to ensure staff provide safe, high-quality care and support to service users, as well as being subject to a high burden of mandatory auditing and compliance requirements from safeguarding authorities which impacts on all aspects of the work. It is clear why employers in the disability sector would have a relatively high bar of entry for new employees, and preferentially seek candidates with prior experience.

However, it is equally clear that most young people leaving school (especially those with disability) have had no opportunity to develop many of the skills and attributes being asked for; even where they have, they cannot evidence those skills to the satisfaction of risk-conscious employers.

Pathways to “job ready”

During consultation sessions, young people with disability expressed enthusiasm for the idea of subsidised micro-qualifications; some young people had accessed subsidised Responsible Service of Alcohol and other similar courses through the Regional Jobs Hubs, and suggested there could be equivalents for things like workplace communication and other soft skills. Such micro-qualifications could potentially tie in with the proposed National Skills Passport and could provide evidence for the skills employers would otherwise infer from an applicant’s employment history, reducing the barrier of “you need experience to get experience”.

*Ticket To Work*⁵ (TTW) is an evidence-based transition-to-work model for young people with disability which emphasises workplace exposure as a key component of successful transition; many of the lessons specific to young people with disability generalise well to the broader youth population’s complex needs in the post-COVID-19 era. TTW also offers support for prospective employers, encouraging “Use of after school jobs, work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships to broaden employer knowledge. The temporary nature of work experience and work placements can flow on to ongoing work arrangements.”⁶

Barriers to school-based traineeships and on-the-job training for young people in the disability sector

Although employers under the TTW model provided positive feedback on the impact of work placements, school based traineeships, casual work and informational interviews, the *Workforce Coordination* project indicates there are significant barriers which are preventing Tasmanian disability service providers from providing these workplace experiences to young people.

Even if a young person is able to evidence they have the skills and attributes required, service providers report not having capacity to provide the level of supervision and “buddy shifts” required to support a young person through on-the-job traineeships and training. Many providers also report that they simply do not have enough skilled staff to spare to provide on-the-job training or supervision to students undertaking work experience while still meeting client needs. Additionally, NDIS funding models include strict limitations in regard to the level of staffing that can be claimed from an NDIS Plan; disability service providers report that they often simply

⁵ <https://tickettowork.org.au/>

⁶ *The Employer Experience: hiring young people with intellectual disability*, Kellock P. on behalf of: Ticket to Work (2020)

https://tickettowork.org.au/media/submissions_researches_buttons/The_Employer_Experience_hiring_young_people_with_intellectual.pdf

cannot afford to pay staff for activities other than directly billable client services. The inadequacy of NDIS pricing models to support activities such as traineeships, work experience or even adequate professional development is a well known issue; external funding would be required to support youth workforce development programs in the disability sector.

Additionally, many types of disability support work can present complex risks for young people aged under 18 (such as would commonly be the case for young people completing school-based apprenticeships or VET qualifications to transition into the workforce). For example, some clients with disability who are receiving support may engage in behaviours of concern that are violent or sexual in nature. It is obviously unacceptable to place a legal minor in an employment situation where they might be exposed to sexual or violent behaviours. While it would theoretically be possible to create customized or limited roles in disability support for young employees that would mitigate these risks, no framework currently exists to support this, and individual disability service providers do not have capacity to develop it. There is a clear opportunity for government to create policy guidance that would support the disability sector to provide appropriately risk-managed traineeships to young people transitioning into employment. Such a framework has the potential to improve outcomes for youth employment whilst simultaneously helping to address the increasing workforce crisis in the disability sector.

[“How can we improve access to services and support for young people in our regions?”](#)

Access to services for young people in rural and regional areas could be improved by increasing the inclusivity of mainstream information available online. For example, while there is significant flexibility possible in Australian school-based apprenticeship (ASbA) programs to accommodate disability access needs, this information is not easily identified when searching online, and so the programs appear to be inaccessible or inappropriate when in reality, adjustments are possible.

While a service or support may technically be available to a young person in a regional area, it is often necessary for the young person or their parent/carer to know that it is an option and advocate for access. Young people with disability and their parents and carers consulted during the *Pathways* project indicated that they were heavily reliant on having a skilled and knowledgeable key person in their lives to help them identify options for supports and services. In the absence of a key person, they were heavily reliant on information that was readily accessible online. In rural and regional areas, it is less likely that a young person will have access to an appropriately skilled and knowledgeable key person in their lives, increasing the importance of inclusive, accessible online information.

When information about accessibility and flexibility in supports and services such as ASbA programs is made prominent, it supports access not just to young people with disability, but all young people- any of whom may experience additional barriers due

to isolation, financial stress, mental ill health, caring duties, or any number of other factors.

“What type of support do our young people outside larger metro areas need to succeed?” and “Where do young people currently get information from to support them to make decisions or connect to employment and training opportunities?”

Research such as the CYDA Report and the CADR Guide indicates that high expectations that a young person with disability will achieve employment, especially from parents and carers, is a critical factor for a successful transition between school and work. However, lived experience studies and consultations with young people with disability have indicated that the way those expectations are communicated can negatively affect a young person’s critical support relationships. This finding is supported by young people with disability involved in the *Pathways* project, a number of whom described maladaptive relationships where parents would expect them to get a job, but did not have understanding of what that actually entails in the current context or the challenges involved. In contrast, the consultation group also identified a “champion parent” who assisted several young people constructively to seek employment, building expectations in a healthy and supportive way.

NDS recommends investment in capacity building for parents and carers around fostering healthy expectations and support for young people seeking employment, as well as improved access to up-to-date, inclusive information about supports and services for parents and carers. This would likely be highly beneficial for families living in rural and regional areas, given that, anecdotally, they may face similar cultural and attitudinal challenges around expectations of youth employment.

NDS notes that availability of accessible transport remains a key barrier to both support and employment for young people with disabilities, especially those living outside larger metro areas.

“How can the service systems better connect and respond to the complex needs of young people?”

As cited above, best-practices research for transition between school and work by young people with disability indicates that young people with complex support needs would benefit significantly from the existence of a skilled intermediary role which could act as a service navigator. While many services and supports exist that might benefit a young person, that information is often not readily available or accessible, and young people with complex needs and their carers, rarely have capacity to actively search for it or understand the many different eligibility criteria it may contain. A skilled intermediary or navigator role that could support individuals over time would improve uptake and effectiveness of already-existing supports and services.

“What would unlock the ability for young Tasmanians with different needs to participate in work, education and training?” and “What can employers do to build those work readiness skills? Can you share any examples of best practice?”

Universal design principles should be applied to all programs to support mainstream access by young people who face a range of different barriers, including but not limited to young people with disability. Consultations undertaken during the *Diversifying Disability Employment* project indicated that the greatest barrier to people with disability in Tasmania gaining employment, is employer attitudes; NDS encourages greater investment in employer education on inclusivity and flexibility, including building awareness of job customisation or job-carving approaches (where a job role is tailored to match the strengths, and accommodate the needs, of a specific individual) and the availability of existing supports and subsidies (for example, funding for workplace adjustments through JobAccess). A successful Tasmanian example of a job-customisation approach can be seen in Possability’s Community Based Supported Employment program.

If employers can be encouraged to increase engagement with existing resources, TTW’s online resources contain many examples of good practice for employers and guides to supporting young people with disability to develop workplace skills; meanwhile, lessons from inclusivity education such as NDS’ *Let’s Talk Disability* programs can provide tailored education to employers on how to support young people with disability in the workplace.

“What are some innovative approaches to address transport issues for young people that keep safety as the highest priority?”

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.

“What do (or should) quality work exposure activities look like for young people? What are some examples of this being done well?” and “How do we balance and support work and learning for young people?”

TTW’s post school outcomes evaluation undertaken by ARTD Consultants suggests that the most important aspect of work exposure for young people with disabilities is

the **variety** of types of work exposure experiences a young person undertakes⁷, rather than the content of any individual experience. TTW's program evaluations also indicated that, rather than work and learning having to be balanced in a zero-sum equation, the more work experiences a young person undertook, the higher their likelihood of completing year 12. **It is notable that the young people with disability participating in multiple workplace experiences through TTW's program had higher rates of year 12 completion than their mainstream non-disabled peers.**

TTW has previously attempted a pilot program in Tasmania, which had limited success and did not receive ongoing funding. TTW representatives attribute the limited success of the Tasmanian pilot to difficulties in building collaborative capacity across the service network; Tasmanian disability employment support services at the time may have lacked the capacity to properly engage in the collaborative network model required for effectiveness. NDS recommends that the Tasmanian government revisit the TTW model with a view to determining whether the limitations of the original pilot could be addressed in a new implementation in Tasmania's rapidly maturing disability sector.

Final observations

While the principles and elements included in the Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper are broadly sound, NDS believes they could be strengthened by the addition of elements from models of evidence-based best practice for post-school transition for young people with disability. Universal design principles state that by making a system or service more accessible for individuals with additional barriers (such as disability), that system or service is improved for all users. By making the Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy inclusive of the needs of young people with disability, it will be improved for all young people, and a significant body of best-practices research is already available in this space. However, NDS also cautions that employers in industries such as disability services will require significant support from government in both policy and financial contexts in order to make proposed best-practice solutions such as school based work placements and traineeships economically and practically viable.

⁷ ARTD Consultants (2019), 'Ticket to Work Post School Outcomes: Report for National Disability Services', https://tackettowork.org.au/media/submissions_researches_buttons/Ticket_to_Work_Post_School_Outcomes_final_2019.pdf

