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Evaluating the barriers people with intellectual disability face in gaining and maintaining employment in Australia

This report has been written for The Future of Work Lab by

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ABOUT THE INTERNSHIP

The Future of Work Lab hosts talented Master's student interns who lead projects across a range of future of work issues. The interns produce policy reports covering pressing and timely topics in this area. Our interns are trained in advanced analytical, research and report-writing skills as well as collaboration, teamwork and interpersonal skills.

Rachel Taylor is an Intern at the Future of Work Lab. Rachel is currently completing her Master of Development Studies from the University of Melbourne, and is interested in disability, gender, international community development, and humanitarian aid. Prior to beginning her studies, she worked in publishing in New York. Rachel's project at the Future of Work Lab seeks to review the challenges people with intellectual disabilities face in gaining employment in Australia and explore potential solutions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....4
- INTRODUCTION.....6
 - Framework for Analysis*
 - Methods and Scope*
- I. THREE MODELS OF EMPLOYMENT.....9
 - Open Employment*
 - Australian Disability Enterprises (Sheltered Employment)*
 - Social Enterprise Frameworks*
- II. BARRIERS TO GAINING AND MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT.....13
 - Community Attitudes: Misconceptions and Discrimination*
 - Systemic Barriers*
- III. CASE STUDY: AUTISM AND AGRICULTURE.....15
 - Overview of the Program*
 - Benefits of the Program*
 - Limitations of the Program*
 - Takeaway Lessons*
- IV. RECOMMENDATIONS.....19
- CONCLUSION.....23
- APPENDIX.....24
- REFERENCES.....25

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People with intellectual disability face myriad barriers in gaining and maintaining employment in Australia. The exclusion from the labour market they experience is a human rights issue that has yet to be appropriately addressed by the Australian Department of Social Services nor the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). This report argues that the value of this demographic's participation and contributions to Australian society is considerable. It is for these reasons that this issue is worthy of close consideration.

Open employment, Australian Disability Enterprises, and social enterprise frameworks are three current employment models which have countless limitations that inhibit people with intellectual disability from complete social and economic integration in the labour force. This report breaks down these employment models, and highlights overarching themes of disadvantage that inhibit people with intellectual disability from assimilation.

This report will then examine an alternative model of employment that is currently emerging into prominence in Australia called customised employment. Originally established in the United States by Griffin-Hammis Associates, customised employment is a framework for sustainably integrating people with intellectual disability into the labour force. This unique approach uses a method called 'discovering personal genius' (or 'discovery' for short) in which an organisation invests time in collecting data about an individual with intellectual disability to understand their unique interests and skillset. This person-centred, individualised strategy has been proven successful across the United States and has since been adapted in Australia by the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice. This report identifies this customised employment method as a tool for sustainably integrating people with intellectual disability in the labour force.

An alternative example of customised employment presents itself in the widely successful Autism and Agriculture program at Sunpork farms. This case study demonstrates how person-centred, customised employment solutions are not only possible and effective but also crucial in sustainably incorporating people with intellectual disability in the labour market. Customised employment is different from

open employment, Australian Disability Enterprises, and social enterprise frameworks because it is a more individualised employment strategy wherein an organisation invests time in determining the interests and strengths of an individual with disability in order to place them in employment that is suited to their skillset.

This report recommends that the Department of Social Services and the NDIA: (1) expand employment choice and sustainably employ more people with intellectual disability by investing in customised approaches to employment, such as Work First; (2) implement policies and strategies to shift community attitudes about people with intellectual disability; and (3) fund research and programming that promotes successful employment strategies that is co-designed and led by people with disabilities. The development of these recommendations has been informed and supported by the work of leaders in the field of intellectual disability, and therefore call for the reader's serious consideration.

Finally, this report acknowledges that people with intellectual disability are not a homogenous group, but rather each individual has unique desires and capabilities. Furthermore, there are wide variabilities even within each disability. However, the scope of the report limits the capacity to which the intricacies of each disability could be explored.

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘intellectual disability’ includes a range of disorders that affect an individual’s mental abilities. Such disorders result from a number of conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, premature birth, and Fragile X syndrome (Inclusion Australia, 2022). A person with an intellectual disability specifically will have reduced intellectual and adaptive functions such as learning, communication, problem solving, and judgment (L. Smith et al., 2021; APA, 2021).

Article 27 of the international human rights convention written by the United Nations General Assembly known as the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), states: “State 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” (UN General Assembly, 2006, p. 19). The Convention directs its signatories to protect the right to work by implementing legislation which serves to:

“(b) Protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and the redress of grievances;

(e) Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment.”

(UN General Assembly, 2006, p. 19-20)

Australia was one of the first signatories to the Convention, which is why this report is informed by the principles stated above. In particular, this paper asserts that persons with disabilities must be protected with equal rights and opportunities in the workplace, and that their country of residence—in this case, Australia—must provide assistance in their efforts to gain and retain employment.

Despite Australia's adoption of the Convention in 2007, people with intellectual disability continue to face unprecedentedly high levels of exclusion from the local work-

force (ABS, 2012). Figure A below demonstrates the labour force statistics for people with intellectual disability as compared to people with another disability or no disability. It indicates that in 2012, only 39% of people with intellectual disability were included in the labour force—meaning they were either employed or seeking employment—as opposed to 83% of people without disability or 55% with other disabilities (ABS, 2012). These statistics are important in demonstrating that the exclusion of people with intellectual disability from the workforce is an ongoing issue that must be addressed by the Australian Government.

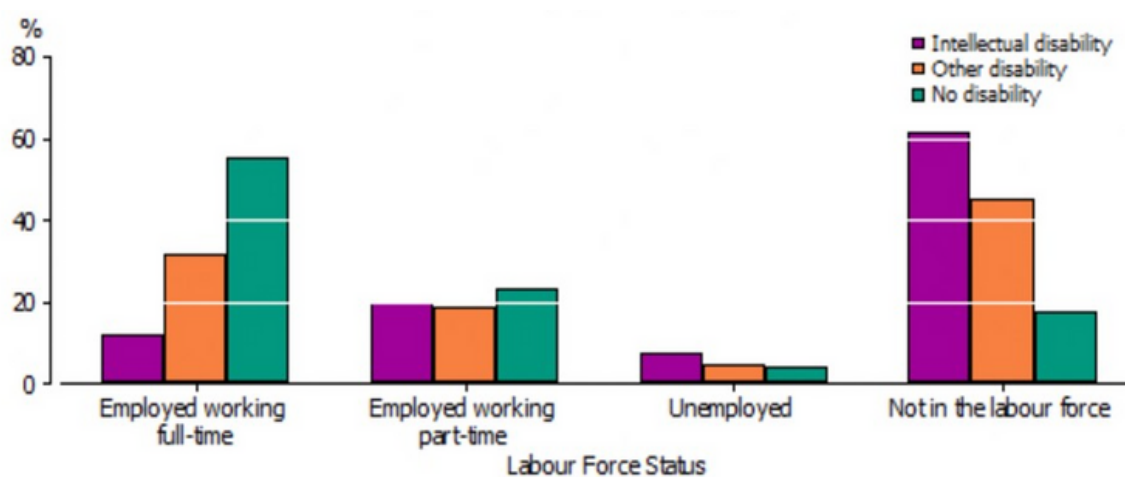


Figure A: People in Households Aged 15-64 Years, by Disability Type and Labour Force Status—2012

Employment is not only a human right but also gives people with intellectual disability social and economic integration in society and independence (Thies et al., 2021; Meltzer et al., 2019). A recent study conducted by the University of Melbourne interviewed people with disabilities (primarily intellectual) on their motives for wanting to find work. The top reasons concluded as integral to those interviewed included: contributing to household costs, making decisions about money independent from their carers, and doing something for themselves (Dimov et al., 2019). It is a fact that people with disabilities have a human right to meaningful and fulfilling employment and lives. It is obvious that this right to independence and livelihood is not upheld given that so many within this demographic continue to face difficulties in accessing the labour market, gaining, and maintaining employment in Australia (Thies et al., 2021). It is integral for the governing bodies to provide equitable social and economic inclusion in society, not only to meet the deliverables of the CRPD signed in 2007, but also to do justice by their citizens, no matter whether they are disabled or not.

Framework for Analysis

The medical model of disability claims that people are disabled *because* of their impairments and has been widely contested by disability advocates (Oliver, 1990; Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, 2022; Inclusion Australia, 2022). In response, Michael Oliver, a contemporary theorist on disability who is disabled, introduced the social model of disability, which distinguishes the terms *impairment* and *disability* as they relate to the individual (Thies et al., 2021). In this model, *impairment* is used to explain the medical condition that is affecting a person, such as the inability to hear or see, whereas *disability* refers to the limitations created by society which inhibits a person with disability from living to their full capacity, such as a building that is inaccessible because it does not contain ambulant toilets or wheelchair ramps (Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, 2022). In short, a person with disability is impaired as a result of externally imposed restrictions. The social model along with the CRPD created a significant paradigm shift in disability advocacy. While this model has been criticised for not entirely reflecting the lives of people with disabilities, it has not yet been replaced by a more encompassing model (Oliver, 2013). As such, this paper will use the social model of disability as a framework for its method of disability advocacy.

Methods and Scope

This report will only be focusing on the barriers people with intellectual disability face in gaining and retaining employment in Australia because this group is particularly marginalised even within the disability community and faces high levels of unemployment and exclusion from the workforce (ABS, 2012). Additionally, this report acknowledges that people with intellectual disability are not a homogenous group, rather each individual has unique desires and capabilities and there are wide variabilities even within each disability. However, because the research typically identifies people with disability as one group due to the similar challenges they face, this report will address their needs as a whole.

This report has been written using the most recent literature where possible. Unfortunately, there are very few studies that have been conducted directly addressing the barriers people with intellectual disabilities face in gaining and retaining each model of employment in Australia (Robertson et al., 2019). As such, the need for more research and funding on this subject is addressed in Section IV.

I. THREE MODELS OF EMPLOYMENT

In order to understand the barriers people with intellectual disability face in gaining and maintaining employment, it is critical to understand the different models of employment for people with disabilities in Australia. Generally the three predominant models of employment are: open, sheltered, and in the form of social enterprises. Below, Figure B provides an overview of the comparative research findings of the aforementioned three models for people with intellectual disability, and their associated strengths and weaknesses. This section refers to the work of Dr Ariella Meltzer, a leader in the field of intellectual disability studies from The University of New South Wales, Sydney.

Area for comparison	Open employment	Sheltered employment	Social enterprise employment
Choosing, finding, maintaining a job	↓	↑	→
Changing and progressing in roles	↓	↑	–
Community connections and inclusivity	↑	↓	↑
Support (encouragement, understanding and accommodation of needs)	↓	↑	↑
Skill development	–	–	↑
Remuneration (rate and critiques)	→	↓	→
Rights, respect and equity and/or self-determination	↑	–	–

Notes: Key: ↑ Good comparative performance; ↓ Poorer comparative performance; → Good and poorer aspects to the comparative performance; – Not mentioned in this employment type

Figure B: Comparative Research Findings

Open Employment

Also described as mainstream employment, open employment is a term used to describe a role that may be filled by a person with or without a disability and every employee receives equal wages and work conditions (L. Smith et al., 2021; Meltzer et al., 2018). Oftentimes, these employers have specialist services to provide ongoing support to employees with disabilities (Meltzer et al., 2019). There are several benefits to open employment for people with intellectual disability, including full integration in the workplace, which provides good connections with the community and full award wages equal to that of non-disabled employees (Meltzer et al., 2019). Additionally, open employment allows for the self-determination that comes with the ability to apply for

any job opportunity which leads to meaningful, fulfilling work (Meltzer et al, 2018). Research has shown that people with intellectual disability who work in open employment have “better outcomes on measures of self-determination, autonomy, empowerment...well-being and self-esteem, and in skills for daily life [such as] independent living, literacy, and communication” (Meltzer et al., 2019, p. 90). Consequently, open employment is thought to be the best employment option, of the three, for economic and social inclusion for people with disabilities (Thies et al., 2021). However, it is certainly not without flaws.

Because open employers are not specialised to nor particularly knowledgeable about people with disabilities, finding and retaining a position is challenging because people with intellectual disability require an understanding of needs in order to be fully supported. This difficulty is reflected in the data, with people with intellectual disability being the least likely to participate in open employment on full award wages—8% of people with intellectual disability, 13% with Down syndrome, and 35.1% on the autism spectrum (L. Smith, 2021).

Additionally, when open employers lack understanding of the needs of people with disability, this can lead to discrimination, as demonstrated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Disability and Labour Force Participation*, “an estimated 45.2% (or 40,300) of employed people with disability reported experiencing unfair treatment or discrimination due to their disability from their employer. An estimated two in five employed people with disability (42.0% or 37,400 people) reported that they experienced unfair treatment or discrimination due to their disability from their work colleagues” (2015). Discrimination and misconceptions about disability makes maintaining a job or even progressing in a role particularly challenging (Meltzer et al., 2019). In summation, open employment provides better pay and connections with the community but people with intellectual disability have reported it is more difficult to find and maintain employment due to structural inadequacies such as misconceptions by employers and experienced more discrimination (Meltzer et al., 2016).

Australian Disability Enterprises (Sheltered Employment)

Sheltered employment, known in Australia as Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs), are not-for-profit organisations which exclusively hire people with disabilities to do rudimentary work such as retail, manual labour, or administrative duties (L. Smith, 2021). Because ADEs solely hire people with disabilities, they are able to offer more support,

understanding, and encouragement than open employment and as such, people with intellectual disability have reported fewer instances of discrimination (Meltzer et al., 2018). Another primary benefit of ADEs is how much easier it is to gain and maintain employment, with people with intellectual disability frequently able to maintain employment for as long as they wish (Meltzer et al., 2018). As such, sheltered employment can provide job stability and flexibility where open employment does not (Meltzer et al., 2018).

On the other hand, Australian Disability Enterprises have been widely criticised by disability advocates for paying people with disabilities extraordinarily low wages which amount to exploitation and segregation (Henriques-Gomes, 2022). In April 2022, the Australian Royal Commission Into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability held a three-day long hearing into ADEs. Evidence was provided that the lowest wage at one large service provider was merely \$2.37 per hour (Royal Commission, 2022). This is legally possible because people with disabilities who are supported by ADEs are also receiving a Disability Support Pension of \$987 per fortnight from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) (Henriques-Gomes, 2022). Among other issues, the Royal Commission sought to use the public hearing to determine whether the way in which ADEs operate has allowed for oversight in providing choice and control for people with disabilities to access employment, and whether there are opportunities for training and growth to allow for transition into other forms of employment (Royal Commission, 2022). Considering the hearing was only just held earlier this year, the Royal Commission has yet to take proper action to address this issue. Additionally, it is rare that participation in ADEs leads to community-integrated open employment, so people who choose this option are often stuck in this segregated option (Kregel et al., 2020).

In essence, as we can see in Figure B, ADEs make it easier to find and maintain employment and employers are more understanding and less discriminatory but people with intellectual disability are often paid extremely low wages and there are fewer connections to the community (Meltzer et al., 2016).

Social Enterprise Frameworks

In 2018, Peter Smith et al., published an article on utilising social enterprise frameworks for including people with intellectual disability in the workforce, which explains that social enterprises are organisations that serve to address an identified issue in society, where marginalised groups actively contribute to the mission of the business alongside mainstream society (P. Smith et al., 2018). As such, there is not a discrepancy in pay

between employees who are service recipients and the mainstream community (P. Smith et al., 2018).

Social enterprises offer a unique alternative to open and sheltered employment for people with intellectual disability. Social enterprises are known for being much more encouraging and understanding of the needs of people with disabilities than ADEs. They help connect and support people with disabilities to the community more than open or sheltered employment (Meltzer et al., 2018). They provide: “strengths-based assessment guides initial employment, placement, task allocation, and subsequent in-service training...customisation of work activities and production requirements, and the training needed to achieve in these activities” (P. Smith et al., 2018, p. 65). Social enterprises are a unique form of employment that focuses more on the individual with disability and empowers them to achieve employment outcomes (P. Smith et al., 2018). They provide a chance to grow and move into more skilled work, and economic security “including stability of employment and the payment of a living wage (which can in turn contribute to opportunities for better health promotion, educational opportunities, and social opportunities)” (P. Smith et al., 2018, p. 69).

Accordingly, Figure B demonstrates how social enterprises that support people with disabilities in the labour market provide good connections to the community and provide much encouragement and understanding, yet people with intellectual disability have a challenging time finding a job in this model of employment because there are simply not enough paid positions in Australia (Meltzer et al., 2016).

II. BARRIERS TO GAINING AND MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT

Community Attitudes: Misconceptions and Discrimination

One of the most prominent barriers to employment reported by people with intellectual disabilities is the poor attitudes of employers and their lack of knowledge around people with disabilities (Ruhindwa et al., 2016). The misconception about the capabilities and capacities of people with disabilities in the workplace frequently results in discrimination and a lack of enthusiasm for helping people with intellectual disabilities fill roles and build their knowledge (Ruhindwa et al., 2016; Meltzer et al., 2019). In many cases, people with intellectual disabilities have reported they feel worried they will be stigmatised and discriminated against if they inform their boss of their disability in open employment settings (L. Smith, 2021). Research has shown this is in fact common. Two in five people with disability who were employed reported they received unfair treatment or discrimination because of their disability from their co-workers (ABS, 2015). However, discrimination is not always so apparent—subtle discrimination commonly occurs against people with intellectual disability in open employment. For instance, people with intellectual disability are often the first to be let go, particularly in gig economy positions in open employment (Meltzer et al., 2019). This is an enormous barrier to maintaining employment and must be addressed.

Systemic Barriers

Open and sheltered employment, as well as social enterprises can each be beneficial in theory, but in practice there are myriad systemic barriers which make gaining and maintaining employment extraordinarily difficult for people with intellectual disability; resulting in exclusion from the labour market and consequentially, social and economic exclusion. For instance, Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) are often presented to people with intellectual disability as the only fitting option for accessing support in finding employment (L. Smith, 2021). As previously stated, ADEs are legally able to provide extremely low hourly wages because the NDIS provides disability support pensions (Henrique-Gomes, 2022). As a result, this forces people with intellectual disability to have

to choose between using ADEs with low wages so they can continue to rely on their pension, or risk losing their pension by earning 'enough' money in open employment (L. Smith, 2021). This is a systemic issue because it bars people with intellectual disability from true social and economic integration because ADEs have been associated with fewer opportunities for growth and lead to people with intellectual disability having worse outcomes regarding overall satisfaction with their life (Meltzer et al., 2018).

Another aspect of the systemic barriers which hinder people with intellectual disability from accessing employment which is best suited to their desires and needs is the difficulty in finding work that is appropriate to their skillset (Dimov et al., 2019). This results in being placed in entry-level roles without room for growth where they feel undervalued or that does not provide meaningful work nor new skills to help them progress their careers (Meltzer et al., 2019). Only 7% of people with intellectual disability use Disability Employment Services in Australia to help them access open employment opportunities—half of whom actually find a job in open employment and merely one third of those who retain employment for more than 26 weeks (Inclusion Australia, 2015). Additionally, it has been reported that specialist employment services frequently only serve to direct individuals to job listings rather than providing the needed assistance with the application or even skills training such as interview preparation (Meltzer et al., 2019). These structural barriers caused by narrow understandings of the process of job seeking have hindered people with intellectual disability from accessing open employment and in turn push them into seeking more straightforward services such as ADEs, despite the low wages and segregation issues (Meltzer et al., 2019).

Finally, while social enterprises offer a good alternative to ADEs whilst providing support that is often lacking in open employment, people with intellectual disability have reported difficulty finding and maintaining a position at a social enterprise (Meltzer et al., 2016; Meltzer et al., 2018). Social enterprises are specifically perceived by people with intellectual disability as having good community connections, more encouragement, and less discrimination, but because there are so few available it is challenging to find a position at a social enterprise (Meltzer et al., 2016). As such, it is recommended in Section IV that the Department of Social Services and the NDIA provide funding and support to support more diverse models of employment. A diversity of employment options from which people with intellectual disability provides crucial agency in their lives (Sen, 1999). Whereas as the Australian labour market stands, the 'choice' between 2-3 imperfect models is systemically limiting people with intellectual disability from true agency (Sen, 1999).

III. CASE STUDY: AUTISM AND AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

This case study will be examined to exemplify an emerging model of employment in Australia called customised employment. The Autism and Agriculture program demonstrates how customised, person-centred approaches to employment can benefit both employees with disabilities and employers. Investing in additional models of employment could help the Australian Government diversify employment options for people with intellectual disability.

Overview of the Program

Autism and Agriculture is a trailblazing program developed in 2017 by Autism CRC and SunPork Farms. The program aimed to recruit, employ, and retain people with autism at two SunPork Farms piggeries and successfully did so with 16 people on the spectrum—nine in South Australia and seven in Queensland—in fully integrated employment (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017; van Barneveld, 2017). An evaluation of the program conducted by Dr. Olivia Gatfield and Dr. Martia Falkmer from the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism identified the objectives of the pilot program:

- “to adapt existing recruitment, employment, workplace, and follow-up methods to the piggery context;
- to use the methods to align known attributes of some adults on the spectrum with employment opportunities within SunPork Farms;
- to recruit, assess and prepare a minimum of eight trainees for entry into paid animal care roles at SunPork Farms and to retain them in employment thereafter;
- to evaluate the pilot Program;
- and to facilitate future opportunities to extend a successful autistic employment and animal welfare strategy across Australia and internationally” (2017, p. 10).

The program identified that people with autism have a unique skillset that makes them particularly well-suited for working with animals, including: “empathy with animals; exceptional ability to focus and pay attention to detail; finding comfort in repetitive activities; performing well on solitary tasks; and capacity to innovate” (Gatfield & Falkmer,

2017, p. 10). It is important to note that the planning and preparation of the program involved the autistic community and collaborated with Specialisterne Australia in order to implement current guiding principles for employing autistic adults. See Section V, Recommendation 3 for further explanation of inclusive disability advocacy.

In an effort to adapt to the needs of people with autism, the program scrapped the standard interview process of submitting a CV and cover letter followed by an in-person interview as this is often a barrier to people with autism entering the workforce (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017). Instead, candidates applied online before attending a two-day trial where their skills were assessed in a safe and comfortable environment. Candidates were then invited to the piggeries for an orientation week, where current employees demonstrated various roles and tasks in the piggery. At the end of the two weeks, candidates were offered a role in placement which was determined based on their individual skillset and interests. Subsequently, the employees with autism were connected with mentors who provided on-the-job instructions and support in managing tasks (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017).

Benefits of the Program

A comprehensive evaluation of the program was facilitated using data collected from 18 autistic employees, 8 families/carers of the autistic employees, 37 co-workers, 41 mentors and supervisors of autistic employees, and 4 unsuccessful candidates using a mixture of in-depth interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017). Autistic employees from the program had generally positive things to say about their experience. For example, a number of them reported that circumventing the traditional interview process was advantageous; the exposure to work-related elements (such as equipment, uniform, and noise) during orientation week was beneficial and allowed them to assess the suitability of the position; and their mentors were helpful (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017; van Barneveld, 2017). Additionally, participants and their parents/carers generally had very good experiences with the program staff, saying that “everyone treats you like family” (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017, p. 28).

Furthermore, the program was also advantageous for the piggeries. In particular, there was a noticeable benefit in the production at the piggery as a result of the abilities of the participants with autism, specifically their attention to detail and consistency, with one staff member noting:

“He/she actually sets the standards for the other staff members to match in consistency, attention to detail, being on the job on time, completing the job on time. That is a benefit to me and a benefit to the business.” (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017, p. 36).

Finally, the evaluation of the program concluded that workplace modifications were few, if any. Employees who initially said they did not adapt their work, actually realised once prompted that they had indeed shifted the way they communicate with the autistic employees (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017). The evaluation concluded that employees were largely unaware of their successful implementation of adaptive strategies and as such, this skillset has proven to be significantly intuitive, contrary to common misconception (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017).

Limitations of the Program

There were several limitations with this program, but the most glaring issue cited was the inadequacy of the training session about what to expect when working with people with autism. Several mentors stated that they left the training feeling ‘concerned,’ ‘fearful,’ ‘scared,’ and ‘nervous’ because of the worrying depictions of autism which primarily focused on the negative traits people with autism may have; saying they were prone to meltdowns (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017, p. 34). Some of these mentors further explained the training was so broad and inadequate that it left them feeling unprepared for their role in assisting their autistic mentees (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017). Yet, it should be noted that despite these concerns, most mentors said they felt much more at ease once they met and got to know the autistic candidates (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017).

The evaluation of the program suggests that insufficient training actually negatively impacted the program. For instance, while co-workers generally had more positive attitudes after working alongside employees with autism, the data collected from mentors and supervisors indicated “no statistically significant increased positivity in attitude” towards their employees with a disability (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017, p. 33). In fact, this group voiced concern about independently managing the employees with autism even after the training (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017). For this reason, it is essential to have ongoing training which doesn’t invoke fear but rather appropriately explains what is to be expected and how to adequately support employees with disabilities. Teaching staff appropriately is crucial in avoiding misunderstandings. Proper education can enable staff to adapt their communication and therefore increase social inclusion. Employees

must be taught “practical strategies for effective support, defusing stressful situations, and problem solving” in order to increase social inclusion in the workplace (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017, p. 45). A comprehensive summary of the enabling and limiting aspects as reported by co-workers, mentors, and supervisors/managers can be seen in Figure D in the Appendix.

Takeaway Lessons

The Autism and Agriculture Program has been mutually beneficial for SunPork farms—who were able to identify a new source of labour and diversified their company—and for people with autism who were able to access work that had previously been inaccessible to them. This program demonstrates three main lessons:

1. Diversity and inclusion of people with intellectual disability in the workplace is crucial and can help both employees and businesses in terms of productivity, efficiency, and profitability (van Barneveld, 2017)
2. Workplaces which electively provide ongoing support for employees with intellectual disability such as mentorship programs support them to flourish and be more integrated in society. Mentors and supervisors also benefit from ongoing support and diversity training to allow them to better understand the capabilities of their mentees (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017; van Barneveld, 2017)
3. Workplaces that value critical feedback and remain open to adapting their methods will succeed (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017; van Barneveld, 2017)

While there were several limitations of the approach this case study advocates for, the Autism and Agriculture program can serve as a blueprint for other organisations to create more inclusive, customised employment strategies. The Autism and Agriculture program exemplifies how individualised, person-centred approaches to employment can benefit society and can be used as a template for creating customised approaches to employment in an effort to diversify employment options for people with intellectual disability.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

People with intellectual disability face myriad barriers in gaining and maintaining employment in Australia. This human rights issue has yet to be suitably addressed by the Department of Social Services nor the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), both of which have the power to affect long term change. This report has identified the challenges faced and offered an example pilot program which used customised employment strategies to help solve this problem. It is crucial that the Australian Government and wider community work to better empower this demographic by evolving current customised employment approaches by further developing from the research gathered in this report.

1. FUND PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYERS THAT USE CUSTOMISED, PERSON-CENTRED APPROACHES TO EMPLOYMENT IN ORDER TO EXPAND EMPLOYMENT CHOICE AND SUSTAINABLY EMPLOY MORE PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY.

In an effort to combat the barriers people with intellectual disability face in gaining and retaining employment in Australia, it is recommended that the Department of Social Services and the NDIA help expand employment choice by funding person-centred disability employment services that use individualised, customised approaches to employment. Truly customised employment strategies are rare in Australia, which is why people with intellectual disability have been forced to choose between the three primary models of employment—open, segregated, or social enterprises. However, as we have seen, each of these models has significant limitations and none of them entirely enable people with intellectual disability to be completely socially and economically integrated. Also, while customised employment has limitations as an emerging model of employment, this report contends that its benefits outweigh the limitations of the other three models. For this reason, it is recommended the Australian Government fund grassroot organisations which utilise other strategies that have been proven successful, such as the Customised Wage Employment Logic Model created by Griffin-Hammis Associates and the Work First program created by the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice.

In the United States, Griffin-Hammis Associates have pioneered an innovative strategy to customised employment using highly individualised, person-centred strategies, laying

the foundation for countries around the world (Griffin, 2020). The Customised Wage Employment Logic Model (see Figure C below) is a four-part framework which has been proven to sustainably employ people with disabilities in the United States by matching a disabled individual's strengths, skills, and interests with the business needs of an employer (Griffin, 2020). The first stage, Discovering Personal Genius, is the most unique and crucial aspect in which “activities are performed in various real-life environments—not segregated settings—to provide data on skills, tasks, and ecological fitment” (Griffin, 2020, p. 4). These activities are directed in order to gain qualitative data regarding the vocational themes, skills, and interests of people with disabilities in order to match them to jobs that will be appropriate to their skills and provide opportunities for advancement (Griffin-Hammis Associates, 2015). This process of ‘discovery’ is unique and has the potential to be adopted by organisations in Australia to create individualised and sustainable employment for people with intellectual disability because, as previously stated, this group is not at all homogenous—each individual has unique interests, skills, and requirements. Therefore, this unique approach to customised employment has the potential to be well-suited to helping people with intellectual disability successfully gain and retain employment, which would lead to their social and economic integration (Thies et al., 2021).

Informed by the work of Griffin-Hammis Associates (GHA), the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice (CDERP) in Australia has created several programs such as Work First and Glide In, that centre around customised approaches to employment. In particular, CDERP uses the Discovery method informed by that of GHA as the first step to helping people with disability attain sustainable employment (CDERP, 2020). Work First is a unique suite of person-centred disability employment services that supports companies and individuals to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce using customised employment strategies (CDERP, 2020). The CDERP Work First program should be used as a blueprint for implementation across Australia with funding provided by both the Department of Social Services and the NDIA.

Finally, the Autism and Agriculture case study demonstrates another method of customised employment which could expand choice and move the onus of sustainable employment away from individuals with disability and onto companies, by simply making reasonable adjustments to create a more inclusive and adaptive workplace (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017). This form of open employment is unique and requires employers to think outside the box but has proven to be beneficial for both employees with intellectual disability and their employers.

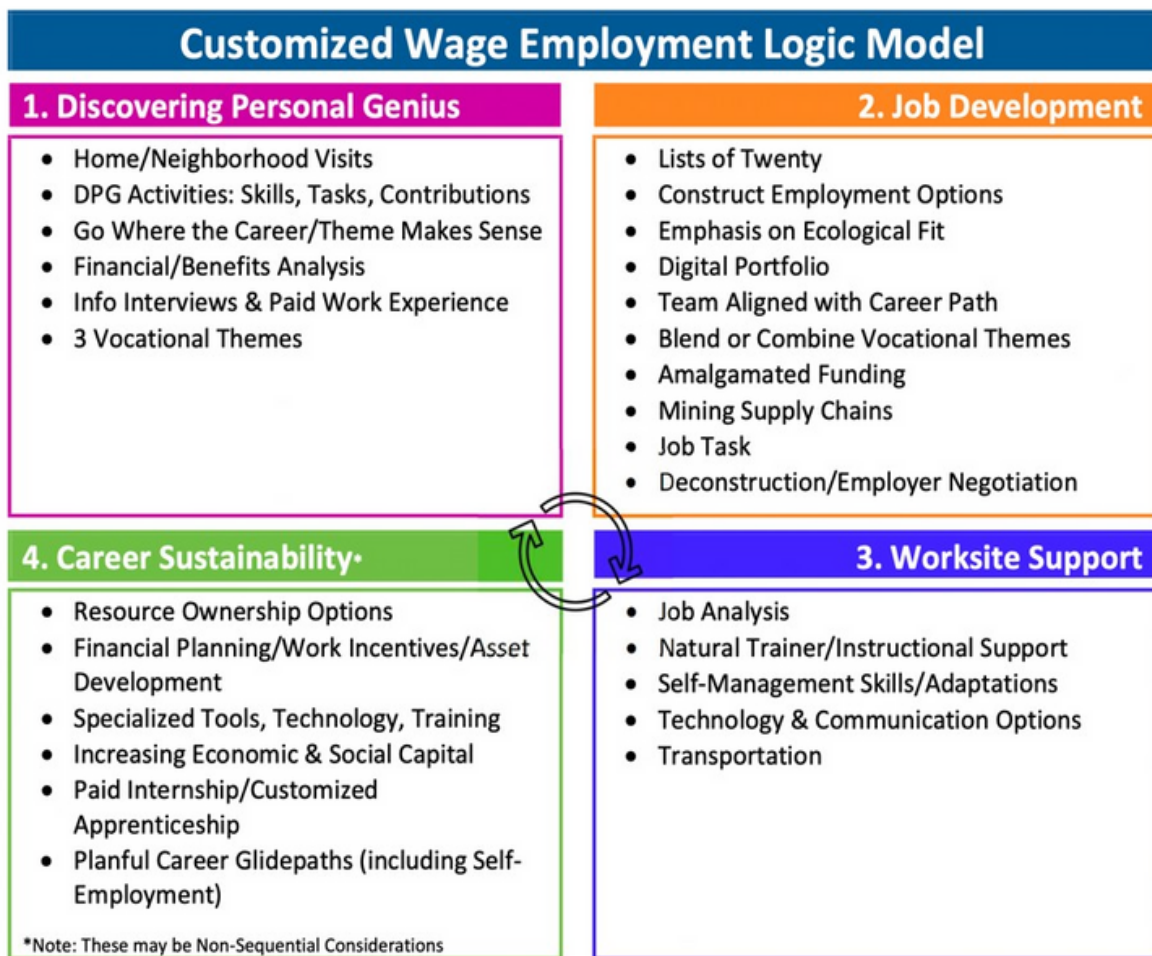


Figure C: Griffin-Hammis Associates' Customised Wage Employment Logic Model

2. IMPLEMENT POLICIES TO HELP SHIFT COMMUNITY ATTITUDES ABOUT PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES.

While customised approaches to employment are useful in sustainably helping people with disabilities into the labour market, negative community attitudes and discrimination are still a barrier to maintaining employment. As we saw in the Autism and Agriculture case study, the attitudes of employers did not indicate increased positivity about their autistic employees, but rather were concerned they were not “getting the job done” (Gatfield & Falkmer, 2017). For this reason it is recommended strategies that shift employers, employees, and community attitudes about people with disabilities and their capacities be widely implemented across Australia (Meltzer et al., 2019). This could be in the form of mandatory training for employers and non-disabled employees on how to adjust their communication to be more inclusive and promote positive expectations of the capabilities of people with intellectual disability (Thies et al., 2021). Training such as this could be implemented using disability advocacy organisations, such as Amaze, which

have workshops such as *Autism in the Community* and *Autism in the Workplace* (Amaze, 2022). Fewer instances of discrimination and stigma in the workplace will allow for better retention in open employment and won't push people with disabilities into seeking inadequate sheltered employment simply to avoid discrimination (Meltzer et al., 2019).

Shifting community attitudes may also help address various structural barriers that inhibit people with intellectual disabilities from accessing their desired employment. For instance, learning more about the job seeking process and required support necessary to help people get into jobs could allow more people with intellectual disabilities to access open employment (Meltzer et al., 2019). Furthermore, if individuals working in disability employment services better understood how crucial employment can be to the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, and their attitudes were less dismissive and discouraging, then there would be a greater chance people with intellectual disability could overcome the structural barriers inhibiting them from accessing employment, such as the low wages in ADEs (Meltzer et al., 2019).

3. FUND RESEARCH LED BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES THAT PROMOTES SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES

The slogan “nothing about us, without us” is frequently used by disability advocates to express the importance of including people with disabilities in the creation and implementation of disability strategies and policies (Charlton, 1998). When people with disabilities are excluded from creating these strategies, there is a risk of inaccurately representing their needs (Charlton, 1998). For this reason, this report recommends the Australian Government provide funding to organisations such as the CDERP that research and create programs that work to fully integrate people with intellectual disability in the workforce. Research specifically surrounding people with intellectual disability and access to employment in Australia is quite limited—especially that which provides in-depth perspectives from people with intellectual disability about the barriers they face in finding and retaining open employment (Meltzer et al., 2019). The evidence-based strategy called Active Support should be used to include people with intellectual disability in the co-design of these projects (Bircanin et al., 2021). Co-design is a crucial hands-on approach for the inclusion of people with disabilities by relating the personal experiences of individuals with the processes of design (Sarmiento-Pelayo, 2015).

CONCLUSION

This report argues that the participation and contributions of people with intellectual disability to Australian society is invaluable, thereby arguing that this issue is worthy of close consideration. This report has identified three of the current approaches to disability employment used in Australia. While each of them has benefits, none of them are entirely suited to sustainably integrating people with intellectual disability in the labour force. Each of them falls short in several ways. Using the case study of Autism and Agriculture, this report has exhibited how customised employment strategies are worthy of investment by the wider community and Australian Government. Investing in programs and employers that use customised, person-centred approaches to employment would help expand employment choice and sustainably employ more people with intellectual disability. This would increase their social and economic inclusion in society, which is integral to equitably upholding their human rights. Shifting community attitudes will help mitigate instances of discrimination and identify and clarify misconceptions held by employers about the capabilities of people with intellectual disability. Finally, this report contends that this issue must be further researched, and that this research must be inclusive of people with disabilities.

APPENDIX

Elements	Enabling Aspects	Limiting Aspects
Candidate Training and Selection	Training allowed for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ candidate/job match ▪ candidate self-assessment of suitability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training weeks not sufficient to assess candidate stamina, speed or ability to work ▪ Support needs outside of work environment and co-morbid conditions not identified
Training for Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Basic knowledge of autism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Format not conducive to questions ▪ Brevity and generality ▪ Focus on negative aspects and homogenous presentation of autism
Mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive relationship ▪ Realistic expectations of autistic employees ▪ Compatibility of mentors-mentees considered ▪ Capacity to adapt communication, tasks, training and work instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mentor role and expectations of candidates not sufficiently defined – potentially impacting mentor-mentee relationship ▪ Ability to work together not considered ▪ Capacity to engage during peak production times
Work Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Co-worker attitudes to workers with disabilities ▪ Co-worker attitudes to autistic employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mentor/supervisor attitudes to workers with disabilities ▪ Co-worker attitudes to autistic employees where there was perception of reduced work performance ▪ Unpredictability of production
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Espoused advantages of the Program ▪ Support from autism specialists and others at outset of Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceived attitudes of autistic employees ▪ Longevity of support provided ▪ Ongoing support personnel knowledge of individual autistic employees

Figure D: Co-workers, Mentors, and Supervisors/Managers—Summary of Enabling and Limiting Aspects

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