Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

Steps to Employment

Transition to work for young people with an intellectual disability

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings of a collaboration between the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and the Melbourne-based Onemda organisation. The primary objective of the collaboration was to further develop and upscale the Onemda *Steps to Employment* (STEPS) program. The STEPS program *and* the collaborative research both focus on helping young people (15–25 years of age) with an intellectual disability (ID) make the transition from school to employment. While Onemda provides the STEPS program, the role of UTS is to provide an evidence base for expanding the program's possibilities.

The research presented in this report took a multi-method approach, using desktop research, a national survey and interviews/focus groups to gather both quantitative *and* qualitative data from a range of stakeholders in the Australian disability landscape. The report focuses on themes emerging from comprehensive data gathered from five key stakeholder groups: young people with an ID and their parents/families teachers, Disability Employment Support (DES) providers and employers/colleagues. Guided by the overarching questions 'What do young people with an ID need to successfully transition to open employment?', and 'What do young people with an ID need to maintain this employment?', this report identifies the following themes: employability skills, work experience, support networks, particular kinds of work and conditions at work, employers attitudes and employment opportunities, working knowledge of the 'system' and the role of families and communities.

Employability skills: The STEPS program is centred around the development of eight 'employability skills'. Taking an even broader view of 'skills', the research asked stakeholder groups to identify and rank the skills needed in the workforce. The skills identified by stakeholders as important were then mapped across those at the core of the STEPS program. This process supported the focus on *most* of the eight employability skills and identified some additional areas that were not explicitly represented in STEPS. In particular, soft or social skills were highly rated as essential or desirable by *all* stakeholder groups but not explicitly developed in STEPS.

Work experience: Work experience was seen as critical to successful future employment by all stakeholder groups. Opportunities for work experience in open employment are few and difficult to secure. However, the disability sector workforce is taking innovative approaches to provide an alternate range of work experience opportunities for young people. In addition, lack of casual employment during school years inhibits opportunities for post-school transitions.

Support networks: The research identified the importance of strong and multifaceted networks supporting young people to transition to employment. In terms of securing a job, this requires coordination between DES providers and employers, and families' networks, schools and communities. A feature of successful transitions identified in this research are those that included multiple stakeholders working together to make it happen. Furthermore, a strong network was also identified as a factor in helping young people keep their jobs.

Types of work and conditions at work: Families and DES providers identified 'retail' as the most common industry for employment of young people with an ID. Volunteer/unpaid work experience is the most common (59%) form of employment for young people with an ID. Conditions identified that support ongoing work include, the commitment of supervisor/colleagues, specific/personalised on-job training, having a DES workplace support person, the actual work being not too easy or too challenging.

Employer attitudes and employment opportunities: The employers referred to in this report are not representative of *all* potential employers. However, employers (that did participate in this study) provide work placement opportunities (75%) and unpaid volunteer work (67%) but did not provide paid work (e.g., paid internships or casual employment during school years). Specific employer qualities/characteristics that support ongoing employment opportunities include:

- being selective about the type of work they allocate

- willingness to work with support workers

- ability to 'see' the whole person

- able to communicate with the young person

- interested and committed to the inclusion of people with disabilities

- and, most commonly, already knowing someone with an ID.

The top three items identified (by all groups surveyed) as essential in the successful transition from school to work are: specific/personalised on-job training, work experience during the school years, and employment preparation subjects run in schools.

Working knowledge of 'the system': Many examples of a complex and ever-changing 'disability sector' were provided throughout the research. For example, changes in school curricula, changes in broader policy or changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The overall sector is a complex system that incorporates numerous human and organisational stakeholders. Some government initiatives and gaps in the broader system pose issues for successful transitions to employment for young people with an ID. The sector's complexity can work to hinder the transition to employment for young people with an ID. Many parents, families and young people with an ID require greater support to navigate the system.

Role of families: Families are important stakeholders in the transition-to-employment process for any adolescent, and this is no less true for families with a child with an ID. Families are key players in successful transitions to employment, and they are often responsible for securing work experiences. Families of children with an ID have dreams for their young people, which, while similar to all families' dreams, differ in significant ways. Most disability organisations see families as having a role in successful transitions to employment; however, the relationship between disability organisations and families is complicated. Most organisational stakeholders would like to work more with families but are hindered by their already full workloads.

Community support: Attitudes in the broader community form an important foundation for young people's successful Transition to Work; these have flow-on effects for employers, families and the young people themselves. Schools and other organisations engage in innovative practices to work with their broader communities. While promoting awareness of IDs, many community initiatives do not necessarily lead directly to employment opportunities for young people.

Future possibilities: While the research confirms significant movement away from decades of a 'sheltered workshop mentality' for young people with an ID, there remains scope for further development. This report concludes with suggestions on potential directions for future focus. While it presents these grouped into various stakeholder interests that work with and around young people, the overarching recommended direction for the future is that which successfully 'joins up' the efforts of individual stakeholders. In simple terms, it echoes the adage of 'it takes a village'.

University of Technology Sydney

1   Introduction

The Onemda organisation (Melbourne, Victoria) provides a unique integrated learning and therapeutic service model for young people with disabilities. The term 'onemda' is an indigenous one, meaning *with loving care.* Through this lens, the Onemda organisation embodies this care through their work: The organisation works holistically to help the participants of their services achieve their goals and build their confidence, independence and control. Onemda delivers high-quality, reliable services that enable their participants to achieve their wellbeing and social and educational aspirations.

A collaboration between Onemda and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) was awarded an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

The primary objective of this collaboration was to further develop and upscale the Onemda *Steps to Employment* (STEPS) program delivered by Onemda staff to schools across Melbourne. The role of UTS in this project was to prepare a report for NDIA to underpin the further expansion of the STEPS program through research evidence from key stakeholders.

Part of the remit of UTS was to identify the facilitators and inhibitors to the employment of young people (15–25) from the perspective of these young people, their families, schools, DES providers and relevant workplaces.

This research report commences with an overview of the methodology used to uncover the transition-to-work experiences of young people with an intellectual disability (ID). The report then examines the complex disability sector and its workforce, focusing on the relationship between families, school systems, local communities and workplaces. The workplace skills valued by key stakeholders are identified, along with the challenges that limit successful transition to work and/or maintaining employment.

The research has uncovered innovative practices in schools and families and significant gaps in the system that prevent employability skills acquired in school-based programs from translating into open-employment opportunities for young people with an ID.

The report overviews the Onemda STEPS program and concludes with recommendations for Transition to Work programs and systemic issues that need to be addressed to improve the opportunities for young people to gain meaningful employment both during school years (where relevant) and as a post-school option.

2   Research Methodology

To address the project's objectives, the researchers applied a mixed-methods approach that enabled specific insights and rich accounts of lived experiences of Transition to Work programs in the form of vignettes. This approach involved gathering both quantitative and qualitative data using three interrelated methods: desktop research, online survey and interviews/focus groups.

Firstly, desktop research was undertaken in the early stages of the research to gain a deeper sense of Onemda's STEPS program and gain an in-depth understanding of national and international perspectives of school-to-work transition for young people with an ID. Specific literature searches on topics such as existing transition programs, families' roles in school-to-work transition, desirable workplace skills, workplace practices that either enable and hinder young people's experience in paid or unpaid employment, and various support roles that enable successful transitions.

Desktop research also informed the design of an online survey, being the second data-collection method. The use of Qualtrics software enabled respondents to answer specific questions based on their relationship to young people with an ID. In other words, there were parallel questions for employers, disability agencies, families and young people that were tailored to their specific relationship. This method provided insights into the groups' points of consensus and difference on certain aspects of transition programs, and workplace skills and experiences.

2.1   Research participants

2.1.1   Survey

A national survey was distributed, receiving responses from most Australian states and territories.

Figure 1
Survey Respondents' Location
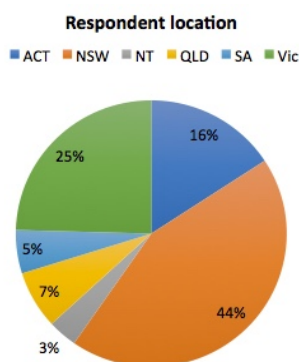
After filtering questions were applied, the responses are representative of all three stakeholder groups:

- parents/caregivers**   31%
- disability service providers 39%
- employers/colleagues   30%

Parents' responses were included if they met the condition of having a child with an ID aged between 15–25. Of these, 100 per cent reported that young people with an ID currently lived in the family home. They described their child's ID as mild (28.57%), moderate (50%), severe (21.43%), with most (64%) having additional diagnosed conditions. Almost all parents (75%) described their child's personal independence as requiring ongoing regular support. Only 7.5 per cent said their child was able to perform age-appropriate personal independence activities with minimal support. Young people with an ID were invited to respond to questions alongside their participating family members.

Disability Employment Service (DES) providers' responses were included if they met the condition of working with young people aged 15–25. Of these, 88 per cent of respondents said that they personally regularly worked with this age group. DES organisations ranged from fewer than 50 employees (26%), to over 500 employees (21%). In addition, almost all DES organisations (87%) were not-for-profit organisations.

Employers/colleagues of young people with an ID were included in the survey if they met the condition of being in an organisation that had employed a young person in the past two years. Of these, organisations were evenly spread across for-profit and not-for-profit organisations. The size of the organisations was also relatively even and represented small, medium and large organisations and represented a variety of industries. However, 'public administration and safety' and 'education and training' accounted for the majority of industries represented (47% combined).

2.1.2 Interviews and focus groups

Participants for the interviews and focus groups were recruited through an information flyer distributed across Onemda's, UTS' and the researchers' networks. In total, 13 individuals volunteered to participate in either an interview or a focus group. The demographic details of each participant are provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Interview and focus group participants

Pseudonym	Location	Current position
Alanna	Sydney, New South Wales (NSW)	Support teacher, transition
Eleanor	Perth, WA	Associate principal (Curriculum, Vocational Education and Training (VET) & workplace earning)
Elizabeth	Hunter Region, NSW	Employment consultant, DES provider
Elsie	Canberra, Australian Capital Territory (ACT)	Specialist secondary school teacher
Emily	Perth, (Western Australia) WA	Specialist secondary school teacher
Evelyn	Hunter Region, NSW	Support teacher, transition
Ian	Hunter Region, NSW	Engagement consultant, DES provider
Imanuel	Melbourne, Victoria (Vic)	STEPS, program facilitator, Onemda
Isabel	Newcastle, NSW	Assistant principal, specialist school (secondary)
Leanne	Darwin, Northern Territory (NT)	Teacher, Transition and Pathways
Leisel	Canberra, ACT	Inclusion officer, Network Student Engagement, Dept of Ed. school
Natasha	Central Coast, NSW	School advisor, transition
Nathan	Newcastle, NSW	Employment consultant, DES provider

Interviews and focus group protocols were semi-structured and invited participants to speak about their general practices in supporting young people transition from school to employment, including those that helped or hindered success and the programs they were involved in. In addition, they prompted discussions around necessary skills and fruitful opportunities that would benefit school–employment transitions. Interviews were typically around one hour in duration and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. These methods accrued approximately 14 hours of recordings and 180 pages of transcriptions.

2.1.3   Research ethics

Strict adherence to ethical research guided all phases of this research. Informed consent of participants was secured before participation via comprehensive information sheets and informed consent forms. Cognisant of potential ethical dilemmas of researching young people with an ID presented a challenge for a research that explicitly sought to include the voice of young people themselves. As a compromise, young people were invited to participate alongside their family members. This strategy meant that young people with ID only participated in the survey and interviews/focus groups when they were in the company of their parents/family. We recognise this limitation and the effect of silencing the voice of young people with ID and note our objective in future research is to overcome this ethical dilemma.

University of Technology Sydney Ethics Approval No. ETH19-4386

2.1.4   Limitations

The onset of COVID-19 limited our capacity to carry out as many interviews/focus groups as initially planned. Travel, site visits and onsite interviews/focus groups scheduled for early 2020 were not possible due to national and state lockdown restrictions. A reworked plan resulted in interviews and focus groups being carried out virtually in late 2020. While this was a satisfactory compromise for DES providers and teachers, it severely limited participation of parents and their children. We are hopeful that when interstate and local travel becomes more secure, face-to-face focus groups with families can be undertaken in organisational locations that families are familiar with and trust.

Further, COVID-19 restrictions prevented the researchers attending schools where Onemda was delivering the STEPS program, and this significantly impacted the ability of UTS to fully report on several aspects of the STEPS program.

3   The complex disability sector

3.1   Overview of the sector and its workforce

The transition from school to employment for young people with IDs is reliant on multiple players in and related to the Australian disability sector. The sector is a complex system involving a multitude of human *and* organisational stakeholders. The human stakeholders include young people with an ID, their parents, carers, siblings, broader family networks, friends, teachers, support workers, employers, colleagues and general community members. Key organisational stakeholders include schools (special and otherwise), training providers, disability service providers, health and allied health, and business/employment organisations. Added to this can be the complexity of accessing services through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

This already complex system is further complicated by Australian federation. This means that there are differences across state and territory borders regarding educating students and providing services for young people with IDs.

This system is constantly evolving, and its ever-changing nature has both positive and negative impacts on school-to-employment transitions. Many describe recent changes in the disability sector in positive terms and approve of a shift away from day workshops being the only employment option.

> *Just the fact that there is, and I quote, choice and control really is opening doors for some many people and it's just lovely … this really positive change* (anonymous survey respondent).

There is a belief by some that this has caused providers to '*lift their game*'. However, the downside is that those involved (regardless of role) struggle to stay informed of changes. This is a source of frustration for many and is a critical issue for parents and young people.

> *Like every man and his dog has come along as a service provider and so many people are offering different things and it's just so hard to stay abreast of everything that's going on and the opportunities and what's great and what's new* (Emily, WA).

Despite complexities and stakeholder frustrations, it is obvious that the disability workforce consists of many passionate and innovative individuals. One teacher exemplifies both this passion and innovation when she said:

> *There's no guidelines and that's really hard because the stakes are so high in this job. I'm not just going into an office and doing data entry, it's like if I'm not performing to my best then I'm short-changing an individual in their future path. I feel like a lot of pressure to do my best and it really worries me that I'm not or there's glaring opportunities that I'm missing like skills that I could be teaching these guys that I'm not just because I don't know what I'm doing and I'm flying by the seat of my pants because no one's telling me anything … It's like we just make it up as we go along* (Emily, WA).

This comment exemplifies an interesting theme reoccurring throughout the disability workforce data, and this is the commonplace of innovation in daily work. By 'innovation', we mean novel ways of achieving results. Almost everyone we spoke with illustrated this in their accounts of work (and workarounds)—such as the teacher above who suggested she 'made it up' as she went along.

The most common manifestation of this is forming relationships between one's organisation and other parts of the sector. Connecting disparate stakeholder groups is seen as critical. *'No one person or organisation can do it alone!'* we were told. Regardless of whether workers were a teacher, a DES provider, an educational provider or held some other role, creating connections between, and building relations with various people beyond their organisations is a feature of their work. More specifically, this included building working relationships between families, employers, schools and other education providers, and the community and/or other entities. These connections and relationships are essential to achieving success in their own roles. They are also a defining feature of examples of successful transitions to employment that occurred when various stakeholders worked together.

However, the capacity for stakeholders to work together can be hindered by the nature of the system itself. An identified downside of the disability sector funding arrangements is (what some interviewees named as) *unscrupulous* providers. This is a common phenomenon seen in other sectors (e.g., in VET, Allied Health and Aged Care). In the disability sector, like these other sectors, the tendering process enables for-profit providers to access funding, and this can lead to *some* (not all) service providers giving priority to obscure targets rather than achieving real and meaningful outcomes for those to whom the service is directed. While we emphasise that this is not the case is all instances, a few examples were raised in interviews and focus group discussions. That said, it is also clear that many individual employees of for-profit organisations elect to prioritise meaningful outcomes for young people despite their employing organisations' demands—and this can cause tensions for them in their workplaces.

3.2   Families of young people with ID
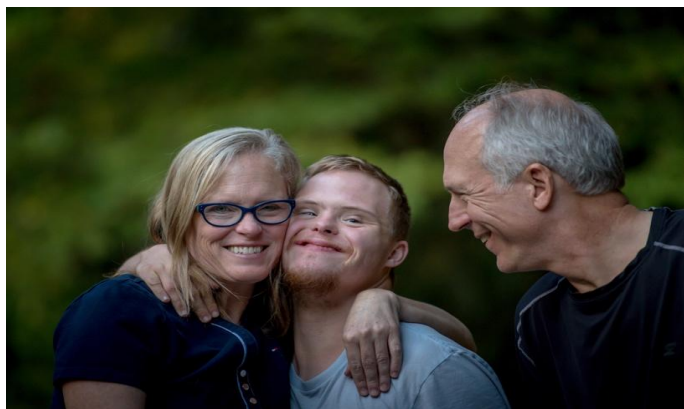
Families are important stakeholders in the transition-to-employment process for any adolescent, and this is no less true for families with a child with an ID. Parents' aspirations for their child's future influence the child's aspirations. Young people with IDs acknowledged the support of family members in helping them prepare for work. This includes the young person who spoke about how their mother helped them '*learn to polish cutlery and teaches me how to speak with people*'.

When asked about their dreams for their child's future, parents overwhelming responded by saying things like they hoped for their child to have a happy life that included employment:

- *'To be able to work. He will be very happy'.*

- *'A job earning some income, that they are happy and supported and doing something they enjoy'.*

- *'More than a career, we are looking for him to have a happy life. Contributing to something while earning money and being part of a community are part of this'.*

- *'Part-time employment. I hope she will become a valued member of a team in a situation where she feels challenged and fulfilled'.*

- *'That they find a job they like when they finish school'.*

These hopes for children are remarkably similar to those of most parents. However, parents added provisos that differentiate their dreams for a child with an ID:

- '*without being discriminated [against]*'.

- '*where he can work because of his medical conditions*'.

- '*as long as his health can stand it*'.

- '*[in] an inclusive workplace*'.

One parent described their dream for their child and justified the provisos with the following:

> To enjoy going to work every day, working with people who respect and enjoy support her. Having a purpose every day is important. No one wants to wake up with nothing to do and nowhere to go, and my daughter loves being able to contribute to work and come home and share her day, even if it wasn't great. Because we can talk about that and what we can learn from that experience. She is always talking about wanting to have experiences, and that is because she is like every other human being ... I want for my daughter to be happy that she gets to pick out her work clothes each day, get ready for work, put on her makeup, go to work, perform her tasks to the best of her ability,

socialise with her peers, and share her experiences with her family and friends. I want her to be able to say, 'I have earned enough money', too, just like everyone else. She wants to buy big things and go on great holidays and she knows that if she was working she would be able to plan for these things independently and that is what she wants for herself (anonymous survey respondent).

Most disability workforce members *implied* a role for families in successful transition. Some were very *specific,* and a few spoke specifically about families as being absolutely critical. This was more often the case with teachers, where some (although not all) mentioned how they worked with families. School interactions with families often involved ad hoc activities, supporting them through issues with NDIS plans and linking them to external service providers. Schools were instrumental in bringing together families and support service providers necessary to move into post-school employment training and options.

However, some teachers described families of senior students as surprised when they raised the issue of a young person's future employment with them. On the one hand, the assumption could be that parents had not considered employment an option for their child. If this is the case, then it is also possible that important conversations about future employment (between parents and children) are not happening at home from an early age either. On the other hand, it could be a communication issue between schools and families. Only 16 per cent of surveyed parents knew that their child had been involved in work preparation programs at school, and 50 per cent were unsure if it was the case. If programs *are* being run at all schools, then this raises questions about why many families are unfamiliar with these activities, particularly when considering the importance of reinforcement of new learning from school to other environments, including the home. More importantly, knowing about employment programs enables parents to have conversations about future work with their children. Knowing more about family conversations about work constitutes a fruitful issue to raise with parents at a later date.

Many teachers and DES providers wanted to work more with families but could not because it was superfluous to their already full workloads. Teachers and DES providers' attitudes towards families were complex too. Some spoke negatively about parents, referring to experiences where parents had appeared over-protective, overbearing and sometimes unwilling and disinterested in issues surrounding employment options and transition programs. Examples were also shared of instances where parents were unrealistic about their child's employment opportunities, which negatively impacted the young person's workplace experiences.

At the same time, most also acknowledged the difficulties facing parents/families of young people with an ID, noting that parents were tired, scared and fearful of the future. Teachers noted that parents could become grief-stricken over the limitations of their child's future towards the end of formal schooling. Parents/carers are often under-resourced and can lack the necessary skills and time to be more actively involved, particularly where families had more than one child with a disability. There were also examples given where families did not feel entitled to help (particularly culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families) and thus did not pursue options for support. Most critically, when lacking system knowledge, parents/carers did not have the capacity to navigate the complex disability sector without help.

Where teachers and DES providers spoke positively about parents and carers being actively engaged in the transition from school to work, the qualities were described as:

- a willingness to be engaged in the transition process

- being supportive of school and providers initiatives

- re-enforcing employment skills being learned at school with home activities

- having realistic expectations

- being well-educated with substantial income.

Finally, many teachers provided examples of entrepreneurial families who arranged microbusinesses for their child (this is explored in detail in Section 5.2 of this report).

3.3 School systems

Unfortunately, the Australian education system continues to comprise a three-tiered education model for students with disabilities: specialised school settings, support units in mainstream schools and inclusive mainstream classrooms. Despite a National Curriculum with a *Work Studies* curriculum that incorporates *Skills for Learning* and *Work and Career* and *Life Design* each Australian state and territory engages different approaches to program delivery and various substantive roles for teachers in supporting transition to employment for students. For instance, NSW employs dedicated School Transition Teachers (STT). This is an itinerate role where STTs usually commence working with students in Years 10, 11 and 12, but may start as early as Year 7 if requested. These teachers assist in translating student goals from personalised learning plans to goals that are specifically related to transition beyond school. More recently, these teachers have found themselves as the liaison between families and NDIS, most notably assisting parents in developing NDIS plans that incorporate services required for post-school transitions. STTs face significant workload issues, from working across large metropolitan schools where they may be required to write over 350 plans per year, to having 80 per cent of families from non-English speaking backgrounds, to working in remote locations where travel distance requires a full day just to visit one school.

STTs lament the diminishing of their role with the introduction of the NDIS, noting the increased time now spent assisting families in navigating the NDIS landscape, compared with previously supported employment pathways. Further, the removal of the STT assessment activities now sees NDIA's Local Area Coordinators (LACs) undertaking functional assessments and making decisions about funding. An illustrative example of where issues arise that negatively impact any Transition to Work support funding:

> *An STT would ask a question of a parent, and a lot of our parents don't have capacity, whether through being CALD community or have mental health issues themselves or just by the time their kids are at the end of school they are pretty much out anyway, but if I asked a parent, can Linda travel independently? They might say yes, yes she can, she travels to school every day and I would say okay well so if I said to her you need to go into the city today to Sydenham Station, would she be able to do that? Oh no, no she wouldn't be able to do that. I would say so she can't travel independently and we would write that in a particular way. Whereas someone without experience would just ask that simple question and then write yes, can travel independently* (Alana, NSW).

There are also 31 National Disability Coordinator Officers across Australia funded through education departments but housed by employers (such as Mission Australia, university or Technical and Further Education (TAFE)). These officers aim to support people with disabilities to access tertiary education and then move into paid employment. They work across local networks, with high school teachers, TAFE teachers, disability organisations and existing community participations programs.

A significant issue and consistent theme emerging from teachers' interviews were concerns about the significant jump for young people in leaving the supportive school environment to accessing post-school services. At school, learning is facilitated in small groups by an educator and support staff who have an in-depth understanding of their needs. Strategies to avoid dysregulation are employed, along with effective pedagogical techniques that recognised students' various learning phase. Such techniques include errorless learning opportunities, new tasks being broken down into small sequential steps, explicit instruction and pro-active questioning to ascertain understanding. Teachers noted that the gap between the support provided within specialised school setting and workplaces is often too great.

3.4 Local community

Attitudes in the broader community form an important link in the system for transition to work and have flow-on effects for employers, families and the young people themselves. Yet, despite overall acknowledgement that general attitudes are changing for the better, there is still a long way to reach full inclusion. Special education teachers are mindful of this and purposefully interact with broader communities in a number of ways:

- fundraising events that feature 'student success stories'
- showcasing student achievements through printed and social media

- school-led cafes and various retail outlets operated by schools that expose the general community to young people with IDs.

Having a cafe or similar embedded in the local community is seen by some as *'value-adding in terms of promoting positive views of young people in the broader community'* (Leanne, NT). Where schools have close relationships with local communities the benefits in some cases are enormous, not only for the inclusion of young people in the community but also for the schools who can raise funds and build post-school options for their students:

> The [name] corporate lunch, it's massive, so it's been running for 10 years, we have nearly 300 guest attends. It's held at the Convention Centre, 200-odd dollar tickets to attend. So that luncheon has created massive community awareness. Having the op shop there for 10 years, that's created massive awareness. We've got really strong partnerships with [names] which are our postschool pathways for a lot of our students. [location]'s such a small place so everyone kind of knows [school] (Leanne, NT).

Despite this community support raising money and awareness (as will be discussed in further detail in Section 5), these community connections do not necessarily translate directly into employment opportunities:

> They are happy to give us money, they're happy to come to our [school-run] cafe, we had lots of kids going out to Woolworths, to McDonald's, to Officeworks, to the hospital laundry so we had lots of connections for work experience but I guess with NDIS there's opening up all this funding for support workers but people just don't understand or have the knowledge of how that could fit into their business, I think (Leanne, NT).

3.5 Employers

The research sought to explore the relationship between employing organisations and other system partners. Survey data revealed the main industries in which young people were employed and the level of employment obtained. Both parents/carers and DES providers nominated retail trade as the most common industry of employment. Parents/carers then identified agriculture, manufacturing, administration and arts/recreation services. The second-most-common employment industry nominated by disability service providers was in accommodation and food services, followed by administrative roles. Other fields of employment identified by disability service providers were transport/postal/warehousing, manufacturing, health care/social assistance, manufacturing and agriculture. Figure 2 depicts the industries and activities identified in survey and interview data, including in-school activities and workplace experiences.

Figure 2
Identified employers and workplace experiences/activities

The level of employment the young people obtain is presented in Table 2. Unsurprisingly, casual/part-time work features prominently. There is also significant participation in volunteer and unpaid work experience, which is expected as survey respondents were focused on young people aged 15–25, with many still in formal schooling.

Table 2
Level of employment

	Parents/Carers	Disability Services	Employers
Volunteer/unpaid work experience	59%	30%	33%
Casual/part-time employment	18%	62%	25%
Paid internship	0%	6%	33%
Full-time/permanent employment	0%	2%	9%
Unsure/no employment	23%	0%	0%

Collectively, survey respondents (parents/carer, DES providers and employers) identified the most common way for young people to obtain employment was facilitated through a DES provider (59%). Eleven per cent of respondents reported that the employment was secured because the young person was known to someone already working in the organisation.

It is essential to note that the employers who responded to this survey specifically did so because they currently employ a young person with an ID (or have in the past). Given this, the level of employment reported by these organisations is not reflective of the majority of organisations in Australia.

With regard to employment opportunities during the school years (Table 3), parents/carers reported their children as having engaged in unpaid employment experiences but not yet experiencing paid employment during the school years. Employers also reported that they provided work experience placements but no casual employment opportunities for young people with ID while in their school years.

Table 3
Employment opportunities during the school years

	Parents/carers	Employers
Work experience placement	75%	67%
Volunteer work	67%	52%
Unpaid internship	8%	29%
Paid internship	0%	52%
Casual employment	0%	0%

Again, it is important to note that employers who responded to the survey already employ young people with an ID (this was one of the screening questions for participation in the survey). Given this, the experiences they report are not reflective of organisations who choose *not* to employ young people with an ID.

Participants spoke about the difficulties of working with potential employers (whether school or work experience or post-school employment). Aspects that were highlighted included, but were not limited to, employers:

* not having the right mechanisms in place

* not understanding what an ID actually means

* not taking a strengths-based approach (i.e., focusing on what young people *can* do).

Interviewed disability workforce personnel named the qualities employers that supported work experience placements and employment opportunities for young people with ID as being decent and understanding, with a willingness and openness towards the process. Specific actions and characteristics included:

* being selective about the type of work allocated

* willingness to work with support workers

* ability to 'see' the whole person

- able to communicate with the young person

  interested and committed to the inclusion of people with disabilities

- most commonly, knowing someone with an ID themselves.

In contrast, the interviewees articulated ineffective qualities of employers that led to negative employment experiences. These included:

- lack of understanding of the nature of disabilities

- low expectations leading to the allocation of menial work

- lacking compassion

- were only after free labour and/or were motivated more by wage subsidies.

Despite some positive changes, disability workers suggest employer views needed to change. Among these were suggestions about changing/challenging businesses' views on what *is* possible and what young people with ID *can* do. These exemplify a strengths-based approach where a young person's strengths and interests are utilised in the job. This approach requires helping organisations create *appropriate* roles for young people.

Parents and carers also voiced concerns about employers:

> *We just need to find the right organisation that wants to nurture her to share those experiences and help build on* [my child's*] goals in her life and work. It sounds so simple and we are often left wondering why it is so hard! It is ignorance, time and fear that prevents business leaders from supporting a person with ID in work. The fear of the unknown, but there is so much help, resources and great supports that could aid business leaders to create/develop roles that a person with ID could be successful in. They need time to be trained and resources to support employment for people living with ID and in the current world we live in* (anonymous survey respondent).

This was echoed by some employers in open-ended survey questions when asked what they could do in preparation for employing young people with an ID. Among employers' suggestions were:

> *Creating a specific role covering repetitive tasks rather than expecting the person with ID to fit into a role that is already existing* (anonymous survey respondent).

> *More awareness and consideration for some of the smaller or jobs that their business have that are overlooked, these could, in fact, be undertaken by someone with a disability who is highly capable of completing these jobs and would gain so much satisfaction out of doing so* (anonymous survey respondent).

The complexities of the system network comprising young people, families, educators, service providers and employers both support and constrain Transition to Work activities and subsequent employment opportunities. Section 4 discusses the identified barriers to successful employment, contributing factors to successful transition and employment, and the workplace skills valued by young people and their families, DES providers and employers.

4 Workplace barriers, supports and skills

4.1 Barriers to successful employment

4.1.1 Causes of challenges in the workplace

Survey respondents (i.e., families, DES providers and employers) were asked to rank 13 items (Table 4) according to the degree to which they believed each item contributed to challenges in the workplace.

Table 4
Survey items for Question 34

Where a young person with ID has experienced challenges in the workplace/employment, rate the impact of each item
1. Transport to and from home and workplace
2. Health issues
3. Lack of flexibility (e.g., work hours/break time)
4. Lack of specific work-place training provided to employee (i.e., young person with ID)
5. Unrealistic expectations (of employee and/or their family members)
6. Unrealistic expectations (of employer and/or colleagues)
7. Negative social interactions
8. Lack of training for employees/colleagues working with a person with an ID
9. Lack of reasonable adjustments/supports available in the workplace (e.g., assistive devices, sensory supports)
10. Employee/family losing government support/financial support due to employment (e.g., carer pension)
11. Employer losing government support (e.g. government incentive scheme finished)
12. Work not challenging enough (boring)
13. Work too challenging

Figure 3 shows the top three items rated as having *high impact* for negative employment experiences:
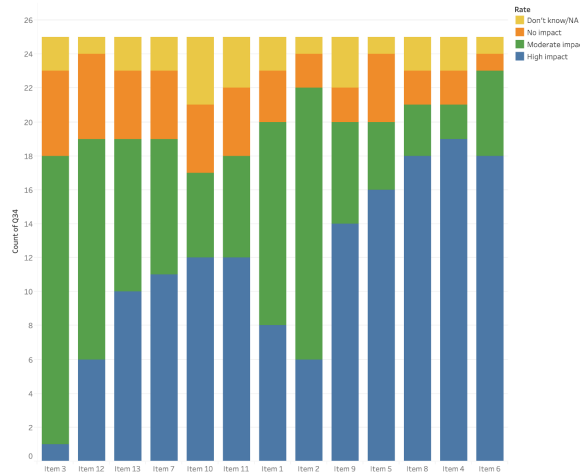
Item 6: Unrealistic expectations (of employer and/or colleagues)

Item 4: Lack of specific work-place training provided to employee (i.e., young person with ID)

Item 8: Lack of training for employees/colleagues working with a person with an ID.

Figure 3
Question 34: Employment challenges ranked by survey respondents

Item 5: Unrealistic expectations (of employee and/or their family members) was the fourth-highest ranking for negative impact on employment. An anonymous survey respondent provided an illustrative example of this:

> *An example would be we currently have a client who we support into work, the parent however has decided that three months into the position, their son should gain a significant pay rise- he is currently on the award rate the same as other workers. The parent wants them to live independently and buy a house so he's actually putting the job at risk due to badgering the employer on pay. Effective communication and understanding of boundaries is paramount to success of sustainable employment. This is not an isolated case—we're seeing more of this occurring.*

When moderate to high impact is taken into account, Item 2, 'health issues', also appears to be a significant factor. A further breakdown of this data into cohort groups revealed different moderate to high impact factors contributing to challenges in employment.

Table 5
Highest-ranking causes of challenges ranked by survey respondents

Families	DES Providers	Employers
1. Transport to and from home and workplace 8. Lack of training for employees/ colleagues working with a person with an ID 6. Unrealistic expectations (of employer and/or colleagues)	4. Lack of specific work-place training provided to employee (i.e., young person with ID) 6. Unrealistic expectations (of employer and/or colleagues) 8. Lack of training for employees/colleagues working with a person with an ID 5. Unrealistic expectations (of employee/and/or their family member)	4. Lack of specific work-place training provided to employee (i.e., young person with ID) 6. Unrealistic expectations (of employer and/or colleagues) 10.Employee/family losing government-supported services/financial support due to employment (e.g., carer losing financial support payments)

As depicted in Table 5, each group reported slightly differently. Families and DES providers saw a need for training employees/colleagues who work with or alongside a person with an ID as important. In contrast, employers were alone in identifying families' loss of financial support as having a high impact, and parents were alone in identifying travel between work and home as having a high impact. Both DES providers and employers identified lack of specific workplace training for the young people as having a negative impact.

Further, employers and DES Providers recognise that unrealistic expectations of employers and colleagues can result in challenges.

4.1.2 Issues with government initiatives

A number of interview participants referred to government initiatives that were commendable in trying to increase employment opportunities for school leavers but, in an attempt to demonstrate inclusive practices, inadvertently resulted in discrimination towards young people with ID. For instance, an initiative by a state government for school leavers to gain employment in government departments had no option on the application form to identify that the applicant had a disability. This was done to be inclusionary but instead, disadvantaged young people with ID as their application was assessed in a pool with all school leavers.

Another interviewee who works with students who constantly require one-to-one support noted:

> I find when it comes to anything related to special needs, whether it's education at a tertiary level or policy and legislation it's always targeted towards a very specific demographic and I think our guys in many cases are just considered too difficult, too complicated and they just fall through the cracks (Emily, WA).

There also seems to be an issue with removing the Commonwealth Employment Support program (delivered through state organisations). Some young people with ID would move automatically to open employment through a DES, and other young people, with higher support needs, were also eligible for the Transition to Work programs. This has now been removed with the introduction of the NDIS, and the School Leavers Employment Scheme (SLES) has taken its place. A transition teacher shared her perspective, with some students ineligible for SLES but *'too good to go into an Australian Disability Enterprise'* (Elaine, NSW), and the issue with funding through SLES is that:

> They aren't seeing the whole picture, that some people had to stay there for two years to get benefit out of it. They had the belief that everyone would get the skills I think within six to 12 months, so it was quite unrealistic (Elaine, NSW).

Others raised concerns about the SLES programs being:

> Basically a whole lot of workbooks, not much experience and after the first year the parents have said 'you promised work experience, you have not lived up to anything that you promised. I'm not going to give you any more money' and that young person has ended up in a day respite centre (Elsie, ACT).

4.1.3 Gaps in the system

In most interviews, interviewees raised concerns about the gap between the supportive school environment and post-school experiences, notably the shift in responsibility of these young people from teachers to service providers who may lack the knowledge or experience to appropriately support the young person. The lack of a bridge for the transition from school to employment is a significant issue. The solution may not be as simple as starting transitions earlier, as students may not be ready cognitively, emotionally and/or socially. What may instead be required is continued support for personnel who have an adequate understanding of special education practices.

Similarly, concerns were raised that the young person's support person as part of their NDIS plan may be insufficiently trained to transition between their role required during leisure activities and their role required in an employment environment.

The post-schooling transition was described by one participant as being:

Excruciating because that point in time relies on a parent to then take over the ownership of where the NDIS plan includes employment support and making sure those things are in place. So we work really hard with our parents, we make sure that they put in suggestions like the SLES programmes and things like that but as much as we can work it really depends on if it ends up in an NDIS plan and how effective that plan is and a lot of our parents don't have capacity to either ask for it like we can go into those meetings and advocate with them but if they get it and they're not sure what they actually have to do…they get told by their LAC you don't need that just yet just wait, whereas I'm the one saying no you put that in, that you need and SLES in there from Year 10 onwards, like I would start putting [in the NDIS plan] *that you would like employment, you would like these things* (Eleanor, WA).

4.2   Contributors to successful transition and employment

Several key factors were identified as contributing to successful transition and employment experiences. This was especially notable with the need to educate all staff around disability and the importance and benefits of a diverse workforce. A disability support worker observed that workplaces needed to become '*disability confident*' and saw this as part of their role. He further suggested that '*we need to find the right employer and prepare the employer for the kids'*. Organisational level training has potential to change the way young people are treated by their colleagues. A young person with ID confirmed the need for organisational change when making suggestions about what their employer could do to support them: '*be friendly and look in my eyes when we talk'*.

The negative impact on an employee when their work was *not* challenging enough was recognised by 54 per cent of survey participants. This was echoed by young people themselves who were keen to do more in their jobs. One young person wanted their employer to '*show me how to do other jobs'* and another suggesting that '*the boss could teach me how to do harder jobs like take orders and sell drinks'*.

Seventy-two per cent of survey respondents indicated that the commitment of supervisors and colleagues was also essential to support young people with an ID at work. Many believed that training colleagues in employing organisations could make the transition process go more smoothly as well as deflect potential issues that may arise. Examples given included educating managers/colleagues in employing organisations on how to give instructions and how to deal with challenging behaviours and use task analysis to break tasks into smaller steps.

Survey respondents were also asked to *rate each of the following for their value in helping young people with an ID keep their job*. There were 10 items (Table 6).

Table 6
Survey items for Question 23

How important is each of the following in helping young people with ID transition from school to work?
1. Employment preparation subject/s run at school (by teachers)
2. Employment preparation course/training run at school (by external providers)
3. Work experience placement during school years
4. Paid casual work during school years
5. Volunteer work experience (post-school)
6. Disability service provider workplace support
7. Specific/personalised on-job training
8. Workplace mentor/job coach on site
9. Family–workplace training sessions (job-specific)
10. Family–workplace partnerships (support/communication rather than training)

Figure 4 depicts rankings by the survey respondents (collectively) on the factors that the value placed on each of the 10 items.

Figure 4
Ranking of factors that contribute to successful transition to work
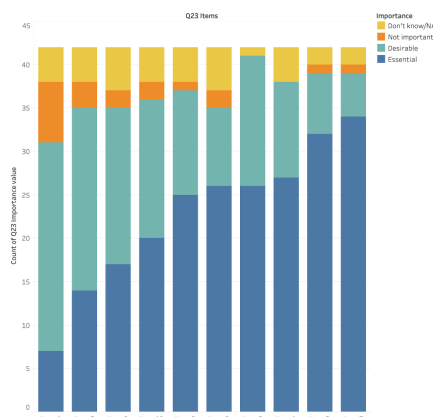
The top three items identified as essential in the successful transition from school to work are:

Item 7: Specific/personalised on-job training

Item 3: Work experience placement during school years

Item 1: Employment preparation subject/s run at school (by teachers).

Also ranking very highly (essential/desirable) was:

Item 8: Workplace mentor/job coach on site.

Interestingly, the lowest-ranking items related to casual work during school years, volunteer work post-schooling and, surprisingly, items related to family supports.

Further analysis of the survey data reveals the differences in parent/carers, DES providers and employers' priorities (Table 7).

Table 7
Supports for successful transition to employment ranked by survey respondents

Families	DES Providers	Employers
1. Employment preparation subject/s run at school (by teachers) 3. Work experience placement during school years 7. Specific/personalised on-job training 5. Volunteer work experience (post-school) 8. Workplace mentor/job coach on site	2. Employment preparation course/training run at school (by external providers) 7. Specific/personalised on-job training 6. DES (or similar) workplace support 1. Employment preparation subject/s run at school (by teachers) 3. Work experience placement during school years 8. Workplace mentor/job coach on site	8. Workplace mentor/job coach on site 2. Employment preparation course/training run at school (by external providers) 6. DES (or similar) workplace support 3. Work experience placement during school years 7. Specific/personalised on-job training

All respondent groups saw value, during the school years, for employment preparation courses run by both an external organisation and also the teachers themselves. Work experience placements during school years also featured as a priority for all groups. Parents were alone in identifying volunteer work experience (post-school) as valuable to support transition to employment. Employers were alone in identifying the need for workplace mentor/job coach on site as the number one contributor to successful transitions. All respondents agreed (to varying degrees) that specific/personalised on-job training was necessary.

An anonymous survey respondent provided insightful advice to potential employers:

> The number one biggest thing is acceptance and focus—look at the skills and what an individual person brings to both the role and the company. Don't focus and become overwhelmed with the 'disability'. There may be a need for workplace modifications, on the job support or job carving, however, these are normally simple steps that can be implemented, from my experience, there are a lot of employers who get caught up in disability and over think it causing it to fail or an opportunity not to be offered.

Young people themselves were cognisant of what helped them to get a job. This included their school, by enabling work experience 'in a cafe and in the school office' and 'in the school coffee shop'. Young people also recognised that they learned from the teacher important workplace skills such as to 'listen to the teacher and follow instructions' and, more specific skills such as learning 'how to wear an apron and sell drinks in the canteen'.

There is recognition from young people that assistance in getting ready for employment comes from various supportive sources, for example 'my mum, she helped me learn to polish cutlery and she teaches me how to speak with people' and 'my support worker helps me to understand how to do the jobs'.

The survey also investigated items that contribute towards the young person to **keep their job**. There were 10 items (Table 8).

Table 8
Survey items for Question 32

Rank each of the following for their value in helping young people with an ID keep their job
1. Has a workplace mentor/job coach on site
2. Has a disability employment service workplace support person
3. Has a virtual/online mentor or job coach available
4. Ongoing family workplace training sessions (jobs specific)
5. Ongoing family–workplace partnership (support and communication, rather than training)
6. Employee (with ID) has specific/personalised on-job training
7. Work not too each (boring) or too challenging
8. Flexibility with workdays/hours
9. Opportunities to interact socially
10. Commitment of supervisor/colleagues

Figure 5 depicts the ranking of each item by the survey participants.

Figure 5
Ranking of factors that contribute to young people keeping their job
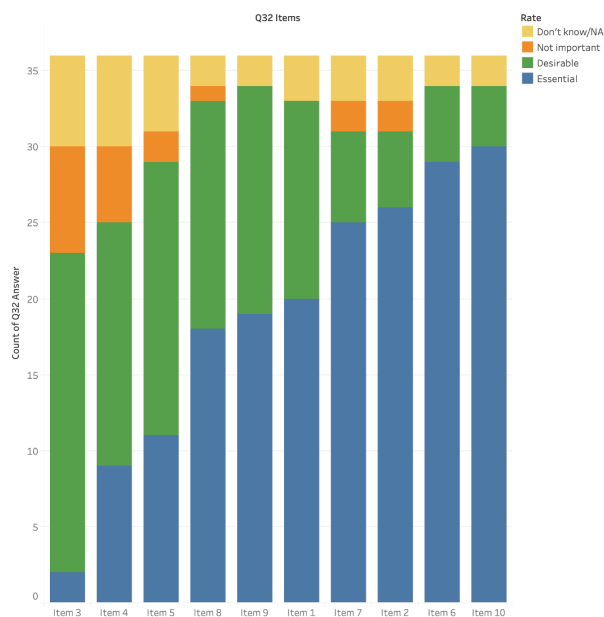
The highest ranking items identified as essential are:

Item 10: Commitment of supervisor/colleagues

Item 6: Specific/personalised on-job training

Item 2: Having a disability employment service workplace support person

Item 7: Work not too easy (boring) or too challenging.

Qualitative survey responses further highlighted the importance of familiarising the young person with the workplace and building up their work hours over time. It was also noted that managing parental expectations is an important part of this process. Further, making use of the SLES (which provide additional time for young people with disabilities to gain employment skills) was noted. However, interviews and focus group participants raised concerns about the suitability of SLES programs due to lack of accountability.

The importance of effective communication was mentioned numerous times, for example:

> *open & honest communication between all parties, goals setting for both the employer and the employee—CELEBRATING SUCCESS!!!*

While another anonymous survey respondent reflected:

> *Just communicate—if the employer includes the family in the journey then it will be easier to reach out to them when there are concerns and equally if the person with ID has personal issues, having a great relationship with the employer will ensure that any hurdles can be crossed as a collective. A person with ID wants to work and contribute and enjoy life just like everyone in society. They just need more support to achieve that. It is all anybody wants—to feel that they are part of something and not sitting in the stands watching everybody else play the game of life!*

Access to the local community (as described in Section 3.4) and the value of work experience opportunities was highlighted. The innovative work experience initiatives introduced by schools are examined in detail in Section 5.1, along with challenges and benefits of securing meaningful work experience during the school years.

Interview participants were also cognisant of the need to provide sufficient information to employers (including those taking on work experience students) about the ways in which an adolescent's ID may manifest in the workplace and strategies to prevent challenges arising.

The development of appropriate skills to participate in the workforce and attributes that contribute to becoming a valued and included employee is paramount to success and discussed in detail in Section 4.3.

4.3   Workplace skills

Survey participants from all groups were asked to rate the importance of 14 employability skills (Table 9) for young people with an ID transitioning into work. These employability skills are drawn from the eight employability skills that form the foundation of Onemda's STEPS program and additional employability skills from the research literature.

Table 9
Survey items for Question 37

Please rate the importance of each of the following 'employability' skills
1.   Oral communication (speaking & listening)
2.   Written communication (e.g., reading, filling in forms, taking notes)
3.   Numeracy/math skills
4.   Teamwork/collaboration
5.   Problem-solving/independently finding solutions
6.   Showing initiative
7.   Ability to plan/be organised
8.   Ability to manage oneself/not need constant supervision
9.   Willingness to learn new things
10. Confidence using technology
11. Punctuality and reliability
12. Personal grooming/hygiene
13. Social skills (e.g., conversation skills, personal space, self-awareness)
14. Following instructions

Figure 6 depicts rankings for each item by all survey respondents.

Figure 6
Ranking of employability skills by survey respondents
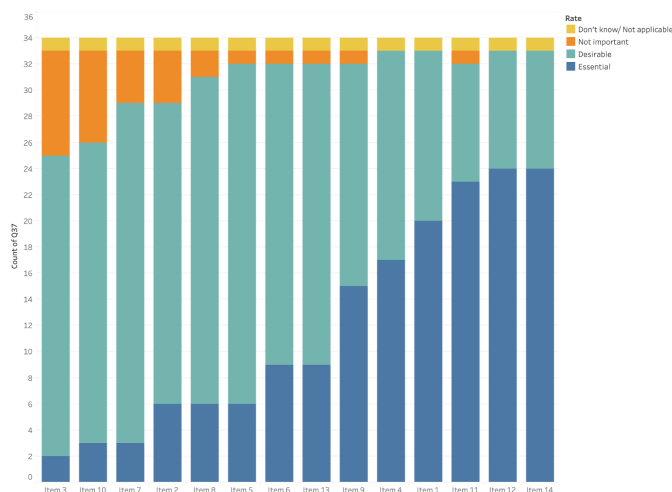
The highest-rated skills (ranked as essential) across all groups were:

Item 14: Following instructions (1st)

Item 12: Personal grooming/hygiene (1st)

Item 11: Punctuality and reliability

Item 1: Oral communication (speaking & listening).

The two skills with the lowest rankings (i.e., rated non-essential) were:

Item 3: Numeracy/math skills

Item 10:Confidence using technology.

Survey respondents were then asked to identify the top four most-important employability skills (from the list of 14 items). Table 10 reveals the priorities for each respondent group.

Table 10
Essential employability skills ranked by survey respondents

Families	Disability Service Providers	Employers
4. Teamwork/collaboration	11. Punctuality and reliability (= 1st)	12. Personal grooming/hygiene (= 1st)
14. Following instructions	12. Personal grooming/hygiene (= 1st)	14. Following instructions (= 1st)
1. Oral communication (speaking & listening)	14. Following instructions	2. Teamwork/collaboration
11. Punctuality and reliability (= 4th)	1. Oral communication (speaking & listening)	3. Willingness to learn new things
12. Personal grooming/hygiene (= 4th)	5. Problem-solving/independently finding solutions	4. Punctuality/reliability

All three groups identified following instructions, punctuality and reliability, and personal grooming/hygiene as priorities. Both DES providers and families identified the need to be able to follow instructions. While employers and parents both identified the need to engage in teamwork and work collaboratively as important, DES providers were alone in identifying problem-solving as a priority skill.

Where survey respondents justified their choices, the issue of punctuality and reliability was noted as essential because, '*If a participant is reliable and always on time, most employers will have the patience with them to pick up the skills required to succeed at the job'.* And another:

> *Just turning up is such an important achievement for a person with ID's this establishes a routine … there will be challenging days and having resilience to get through that day and then still turn up to the next shift, being able to follow instructions, however simple, makes the person feel part of the team and as they were achieving. It also allows the employer to rely on the person with ID to complete their tasks* (anonymous survey respondent).

Sector workers generally saw social skills as being more important than academic skills. Concerns were raised about courses that focused only on teaching vocational skills, leading to conflict between disability service providers and vocational education providers:

> *It's not just the work experience, it's actually everything that's tied around it. This is where I come to loggerheads a bit with* [Vocational Education Provider] *because* [they]*, yeah, I agree, it's all about vocation and that's what it should be. However, the soft skills that are around that—that is more important to our young people. More so than perhaps the topic of what they're going to learn. It's those skills that I see as being the most important* (Nathan, NSW).

Similarly, transition teachers may disagree with classroom teachers who are obliged to address key learning areas in the curriculum. In contrast, the transition teacher considers the primary focus should be on developing socially acceptable skills, such as using bathrooms correctly and other hygiene and self-care skills. Personal presentation was also highlighted as important.

Several interview participants identified the importance of young people learning to communicate and work with a variety of different people. This is necessary to ensure young people have the skills to talk to others—beyond the adults with whom they regularly converse. Developing wider communication skills was also seen as important in assisting the young person in working with a variety of people, including less-preferred supervisors and colleagues in workplace settings. Similarly, several interview participants suggested another soft skill required is learning how to accept a less-preferred undertaking. This builds understanding that work generally includes enjoyable tasks and tasks that are not preferred but that both need to be completed to maintain employment.

In addition, a number of interview participants noted that '*asking for help*' was another essential skill to be developed. Also, learning how to accept correction from supervisors and co-workers. Teachers recognised the challenges for their students in dealing '*with life outside this wonderful little cocoon we've created [school]' to be able to 'cope with change of routine*' (Emily, WA).

Importantly, the need for young people with ID to understand their own strengths, weaknesses and preferences was considered paramount to identifying suitable employment and building confidence in the young people to see themselves in employment.

Survey respondents and interview/focus group participants provided a wealth of understanding of issues surrounding transition-to-work and subsequent employment experiences. The skills required to successfully transition to work and maintain employment were also identified. The report now moves to examine the activities that occur during the school years to develop employability skills and workplace readiness.

5 Transition to work strategies and programs

5.1 Work experience

As highlighted in Section 4.2, survey respondents identified work experience placements during school years as the second most essential strategy in helping young people to transition from school to work. Schools are adopting programs that support workplace experience both within school or as part of external work experience placements.

5.1.1 Challenges securing work experience placements

Sixty-seven per cent of parent/carer survey respondents reported that their child completed work experience during school years. Organising work experience is not an easy task for schools, particularly in highly populated locations when:

> You've got huge numbers of kids in support units in schools … finding work experience for 30 kids [with disability], and that's just one school … I've gone out on a limb and begged [organisation] and had to get down on my hands and knees to get five days of work experience for this kid and he was so thrilled about it and when we arrived no one knew we were coming, no one cared (Elaine, NSW).

This challenge is confounded as both specialised schools and mainstream schools compete for placements:

> If we can go to proper work placements that tends to be quite difficult to get into 'cause you're competing with mainstream students and you're competing with lots of other people trying to get into those niches. So, what we tend to do is align ourselves with places that perhaps do a lot of volunteering or already have a clientele base that have disability (Eleanor, WA).

It is apparent that gaining work experience placements is highly reliant on schools, particularly individual teachers, building relationships within the local community:

> We get connections with organisations that will be happy to have our young people coming in and out and usually they've got an interest in disabilities. Our careers advisers are really good at tyring to support us finding things. It's a bit hotchpotch, it depends on how good the school is at accessing them (Elianna, NSW).

A number of interview participants lamented the lack of opportunities provided by local councils and large schools where obvious connections between young people with ID interests and capabilities and the types of employment opportunities in these organisations, highlighted in these reflections:

> I've been on the part of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan of the councils … you have so many areas that could provide work experience and these are huge councils … and all I've got in the five years I've been in this role, I've managed to get five days of work experience at a council for one student … They write it into their Disability Action Plan but there doesn't seem to be any accountability then or they'll give the job to the cute 17 year old with Down's syndrome who can and at the door and greet people 'cause that looks good (Alana, NSW).

> You just have to go out anywhere on the weekend down the Main Street and I always think there's a place for everybody and I think if one of those things where we need to shift our culture and shift our perspective around people with disability and actually open up the door a little bit more. I think some places do it really well but I think we can do a lot better. I think schools can do better as well in terms of employment. You think if some of these massive schools that I've even been visiting now and the potential and possibility of employing previous past students with disability, whether it's doing some admin roles or working in the canteen and there seems to just be no pathway or

links but the places are there, it's just that people's understanding and the time hasn't been invested into exploring that (Leisel, ACT).

In securing work experience placement, teachers report, '*we tend to find work placements that understand disability*' rather than work experience options being any local business or organisations that are open to taking in students from mainstream classrooms:

> *I think the biggest factor that makes it really successful is in the places we choose, there's often a lived experience of those volunteers there. They either have had children, grandchildren or some experience close to home of someone with a disability. So they're more inclined to want to accept our kids into that work placement and their expectation and they don't mind things being a bit differentiated and they have more time to work with the student then I find if you're trying to get them say into a Coles or a Bunnings. You've got to have people there that understand disability and that's lots of conversations throughout that process* (Eleanor, WA).

This severely limits the number and variety of available work experience opportunities for young people with ID.

5.1.2   Flexibility and training for work experience placements

A need was noted for more flexible work experience placements beyond the two-week block models most commonly used. Teachers preferred models that allowed the young person to attend the workplace for 1–2 hours per day, a few days per week, and building this time up gradually.

The interviews further highlighted the need to build a relationship between the student and employer prior to the placement and engage in specific training for the work experience employers. For example:

> *I will start out making sure that we actually take the young person to meet the employer prior to them ever starting and explain to the people that working with that young person how to give instructions. It's not just about the young person learning to take instructions, it's also about learning how to give instructions sometimes so whatever might be needed on that end we just talk about prior … A lot of times if they're successful the employers will go hey we will have them again which is great ... I say to the students, with work experience it's not about what you want to do, it's also about finding out what you don't want to do* (Natasha, NSW).

Similarly:

> *I spend a lot of time going to sites. I disclose the disability to the employers then talk to them about how that may manifest we talk about the triggers. So all the way throughout we disclose everything to employers we make sure they understand. Some of our kids actually have risks so we actually make sure that they understand those two so if there's risk management plans, behaviour management plans, I believe the more opened and transparent you are with them they have a better understanding. It's not to scare people off, it's so you have an understanding of the needs of that disability* (Eleanor, WA).

Finally, the need to develop understanding within the workplace is essential. This includes how to effectively work with the young person and developing best-practice protocols for working with support persons accompanying the young person, such as the School Learning Support Officer (SLSO) (previously known as teacher's aides).

5.1.3   Lack of casual employment during school years

The challenges associated with securing appropriate work experience placements and the time involved was deemed worthwhile to afford the students these opportunities. However, as noted in Section 3.5, Table 3, parents/carers reported that their child had not had any casual employment during their school years. Employers confirmed this, noting that although they do employ young people with ID, these young people did not obtain casual employment during their school years.

One interviewee reported a single example of a student who did get paid employment while at school. They cleared tables at a local coffee shop. However, his parents organised this, '*so any of the paid*

opportunities haven't happened through school, they've been because parents have gone out and knocked on doors' (Elsie, ACT).

This is concerning. One principle underpinning inclusive practice is that of normalisation. It appears that young people with ID are not afforded the same opportunities as their peers to engage in casual employment during their late-teenage years.

5.2   Innovative school and family practices (in their own words)

This section presents examples of innovative school practices to develop work readiness for young people with ID. The examples include school-based activities and also activities that extend beyond and into the community. There are also examples of family initiatives to create employment for their child.

Skillset Program (NT)

The program begins in Year 7, where students spent one day per week involved in the Skillset Program. This continues in Years 8 and 9, and then in the senior years, the program ramps up in intensity. All students gain skills and experience in retail, hospitality, horticulture, hairdressing, design (sewing, woodwork, recycling, art, tie-dye), recycling, bike maintenance and IT skills. It also involves running a cafe in the local community (next to an 'OP' shop that we also run). The cafe also gives us somewhere to sell the merchandise made by the kids. We've been really lucky to have new, purpose-built spaces, so when our students can't be in the community for their work experience activities, the school has set up spaces within the school, such as a hair salon. Having a cafe embedded in the local community is value-adding in terms of promoting positive views of young people in the broader community.

Succulents to Market (ACT)

We've got some students with very challenging behaviours at our school and the teacher and support worker have taught them to make concrete pots so they brought moulds and they're doing concrete pots and then growing succulents. They go to markets and he would like to take the young people to markets eventually so they can make between $400 and $800 at markets, the teacher teaches the skills at school but then wants them to set them up for that microbusiness post-school ... they recognise that some of our students with very challenging behaviours are very unlikely to get open employment such as having some kind of employment in a place outside their home where they can go.

UberKatie (WA)

We found that she loved cooking, she loved being in the kitchen. Her name is Katie and we set up UberKatie where every Friday she would have a menu which she'd go around, take orders, no understanding of money or anything but we supported her with all of that and she would prepare pizza or nachos or whatever it was that day. She had a badge and a uniform that she would wear and in the end that did so well that we set up volunteer work for her we've got a neighbouring school that we have zero interactions with, we've tried a lot but anyway, so she ended up going up there and volunteering at the canteen a day a week which was amazing. Unfortunately, I don't think the family had any aspirations for her to continue with any of that so it just fell by the wayside.

Jack-of-all trades (WA)

We've always been limited in terms of work experience in getting our students out of the school for financial reasons as well as just trying to find places that are suitable for Jack, he's had quite significant needs. So, what we've done instead is to make sure we have work schools programmes going on within the school. So, we've always done enterprise like car washing, students cook lunch for the staff. Students make handmade products, candles, tie-dyed baby clothes we've got a whole range of things that we actually make and then sell.

Candle works (NSW)

In making a candle there's quite a number of processes. They have to weigh out the wax, they have to be able to work the microwave, understand the timing, OH&S safety issues around handling hot wax and those sorts of things. Teachers have come up with things that are of interest to the students we've just started making some little clay earrings that the kids like to do so it's a combination of what's easy for their kids to do, as I said what has a lot of processes so they've all got a job that they can do. We've tried particularly with the candle making to bring in any kind of props that we need that help them to be able to do the task more independently.

Veggie Patch (NSW)

Students were obviously learning life skills and doing cooking programmes and to reduce what it was costing us for the cooking programs we decided to build a veggie patch but the veggie and herb patches just got huge and the kids loved it. So, then we went well we've got all this extra produce, what about we sell it put? So, then we started selling it and then we were putting the money back into it and it was becoming like its own little business. We ended up getting a worm farm to fertilise the plants and we had a worm farm then that was so successful we started selling off the worm poo juice stuff. That was our biggest money maker ever I think we sell at $5 for two litres and it cost us nothing to make it was incredible … succulent plants and candles we were selling them at markets on the weekend and then local real estate agency became interested so now they don't have to turn up to Saturday to the markets they go to the real estate agent ... the teachers got a roaring little business going but it keeps going back in and the kids get a bit of a pizza party or something like that for all their hard work.

Little Bird Enterprises (Western Australia)

We've started an enterprise program here called Little Bird Enterprises. We have a series of small enterprises that are all geared towards sustainability, recycling, reusing and repurposing. We make bird seed feeders so we go and buy bulk wild bird seed mix and we actually add gelatine and sugar and turn it into proper moulds and we sell those in just reused coffee kind of display satchel things. So we do okay out of that like we make our money back and we make enough to reinvest every year and at the end of the year we do something really fun with the kids. We were able to say your kid has paid for this themselves, they'd made the money themselves and that was really meaningful.

Examples of innovative enterprises developed by parents were also shared during the interviews.

Cooking Coordinates (ACT)

He had some work experience at a place called Cooking Coordinates where he was chopping up all the fruit and vegetables and stuff to make chutney and things like that and his dad I think was a chef at one stage. So, he's pretty skilled in the kitchen but his parents are also the kind of parents who will practise whatever he needed to do at home ... but then that Cooking Coordinates closed down when the markets closed down so he started his own catering business then with the help of his family and I think he still does some catering. He also has a business where he converts old slides to digital it's some kind of technology where they bought the machine and you can take your old slides in and convert them.

Bottle Collection (ACT)

A mother was told by the services she's visiting that her child has next to no chance in getting employment at the end of the year because of COVID but she was setting up for him and another student a bottle collection business. It won't earn a lot of money but it will bring something in I think and she's been liaising to get support from unit blocks. They were just brainstorming the other day on clubs in the area that they could collect from. One of the other young lads just got his licence so that will help as well and she's got a lot of other parents interested.

Fire Briquettes (Western Australia)

[A] *mother talking was about [how] there was nothing out there for her son, he's high support, he's complex, he has challenging behaviours. So rather than him missing out on meaningful work she set up his own business which was making fire briquettes. She was really wonderful. I had a lot of questions, she took me under her wing. She took me to her home and showed me everything her son was doing and so I imported a couple of briquette makers from the UK and they've been really great with some of our kids. They shred all of the paper, they make the paper mulch. When they compress it, it's really giving them that proprioceptive deep pressure feedback which a lot of them seek. We box those up and they've been really successful sellers as a wood alternative.*

The above examples emerged directly from interview participant data for this project. Anecdotally, the researchers are aware of many such enterprises across Australian schools. The positive outcomes of these initiatives are undisputed. The skills the young people are mastering and the satisfaction from meaningful work is immeasurable. However, the concern remains that such initiatives are not translating to post-school employment opportunities:

> *I feel like maybe from a government level there needs to be recognition that some schools are really trying hard to compensate for the huge gaps out there for our particular kids. There's no niche for them to be going into that's a smooth transition so we're trying to fill that gap for them so they at least have something ... there's no funding for schools to continue that to have the students come back and see us after they graduate and continue on and have a little sister project with the school ... Kids who struggle so much to form social networks. If they've got a special staff member or peer and once they graduate there's very little invested in trying to progress that and to keep those relationships. They just move on. I think if we had this sort of facility, maybe a morning a week these guys could come back and socialise and work on these enterprises* (Emily, WA).

Further, there are considerable costs in sustaining the workplace enterprises in schools that present challenges in making sufficient money to continue operating while also working within various departmental guidelines and policies. Also of concern, these enterprises remove the onus from the community and employers to provide meaningful work experience placements and post-school employment options for young people with ID. Instead, the burden is placed on teachers and families. This works against the principles of inclusion.

5.3   School-based external programs

5.3.1   External Work Preparation Courses

Eighty-eight per cent of survey respondents stated that work skills courses run in schools by external organisations was desirable/essential. Organisations identified by participants included Northcote's Future Fit program, Disability Trust, The Next Step program, Nova Employment's Job Club, Ability Options and Job Centre Australia. Teachers reported that courses run by these providers are usually held for six to eight weeks for 45 minutes per week. See Appendix A for examples of other Transition to Work programs (national and international) identified in the research literature.

Focus group participants from a DES provider described their approach: go into schools each fortnight and run various pre-employment skills workshops in the learning and support units on everything from building a resume, engaging with an employer to body language. The purpose is to give the students additional support '*so when they leave school, they've got some tools under their belt to start applying for their first job*'.

One transition teacher expressed frustration when she felt she was asked to:

> *Flog them* [the courses] *in schools and I think, so you've designed this whole program and you haven't spoken to me once … You haven't spoken to a teacher in a school, and you want me to flog this to my schools who I have a level of trust with that has taken years to build up* (Alana, NSW).

She also felt that:

> *The providers need to hear what the kids are learning at school so they don't repeat it 'cause we do resume writing and interview skills, our kids don't need to sit down for another 12 months and learn how to write a damn resume; they need work experience.*

One program that was spoken very highly of was the *Dress for Work* program. This allows young people to go offsite, select a suitable outfit for a job interview and have a stylist. The program also includes other preparation ideas, such as how to sit. It was deemed particularly valuable because it is run by an external organisation and described as not being done in a '*special-ed way*', thus giving dignity and respect to the participants.

5.3.2   External Vocational Education Courses

Interview participants identified a range of Certificate I and Certificate II VET courses that their students might undertake in part or in full during their school years. As noted above, interviewees highlighted the value of these courses for the vocational skills learned and the soft skills that were naturally integrated into the programs. Further, undertaking courses with an external provider outside school also presented opportunities for young people to learn to interact with a wider variety of educators and peers.

One interview participant described this situation:

> *We follow an endorsed unit called WPL which includes workplace learning in class where the teachers teach work readiness skills with the students go out on placements that complement their VET courses, we work with TAFE, they don't get the entire Cert II but may do half and get accreditation. You're teaching the kids the core skills that they can transfer to all employment so it's not the place that you go to but it's the skills that. They get assessed on they get assessed on their enthusiasm, approach to safety, approach to learning, approach to others, reliability, initiative, response to advice and quality of work. They are the work readiness skills that we believe is part of this course that can be transferred. The class teachers would then do things like create resumes, practise interview skills with the kids, they would do some of the coursework back in the classroom and normally the staff that go to TAFE courses are the same staff that would then go to work placement as well so that way they are learning about something with the teacher or with that EA back in a proper context actually practising those skills … This is the same programme that mainstream students would be doing, workplace learning, but we have to make quite a few accommodations there's a lot more negotiations that are required and we have to have a really strong relationship with the organisations we go to* (Eleanor, WA).

Such programs incorporate significant work experience and subsequently contribute towards the student's leaving certificate, in this example, the West Australian Certificate of Education (WACE):

> *Endorsed units require they do work skill journal they actually have to do 55 hours at a placement that signed off by the supervisor on site we have to keep the documentation, make sure it's actually at the standard that's required when they graduate from school if they've done those things they can actually earn points towards the West Australian Certificate of Education. If they are not going to get the WACE They will still get a certificate like everybody else but it will actually have those accreditations on there* (Eleanor, WA).

Despite the work experience opportunities, school and/or family-driven enterprise initiatives and external work readiness programs, it remains unclear the degree to which the young people who have benefitted from these activities end up in open employment:

> *We do train them all up and they get certificates and they can go down and do work training, have the chance to work on the cash register or they'll be sorting donations or clearing or all the things you can imagine but helping them then take that—well they leave us and I must admit there is a little bit of a shortfall of where to go* (Leanne, NT).

There is a lack of longitudinal tracking to gain an in-depth understanding of the employment outcomes of students who have had exposure to innovative programs and activities during the school years.

6   The STEPS to Employment program

A fundamental goal of this project is to apply the research findings presented in Sections 2–5 to enable Onemda to continue to develop and upscale their STEPS program.

The STEPS program consists of 10 modules. Modules 1 and 10 provide an overview of the course and course reflection. Modules 2–9 focus on eight employability skills: communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning and technology. The program runs within schools over six weeks for 1.5 hours per week and is facilitated by an Onemda staff member.

In developing the program, Onemda staff actively sought to trial the ideas and concepts underpinning the program with young people with ID who attend Onemda for a range of other programs and support services. Piloting the concepts and language underpinning the STEPS program with these young people and adapting the content and delivery based on their feedback was essential to ensuring the program is fit for purpose. This contrasts with some other providers who develop programs with little to no consultation with key stakeholders.

The STEPS program is sufficiently flexible, enabling the facilitator to select the modules most relevant to complement other employment-focused activities occurring in the school. The flexibility also enables the facilitator to adapt content to meet the needs of the different student cohorts, noting no two classes will be the same. Onemda staff are focused on tailoring the STEPS program to reflect whatever the school wants them to deliver at that given point in time.

In addition to consultation with teachers to ensure that content meets the students' current needs, the facilitator encourages teachers to get involved during the delivery of the sessions. As a result, the facilitator reports:

> *I found nothing but supportive teachers all the way through, supportive transition coordinators, supportive teachers, supportive students. They just love it it's been in my view more successful than I thought it would be. I thought it would be successful but not like this, I just think some of that's been lacking in schools and you can see that they're happy and there's an organisation that can come in and fill that gap for them. It just marries up so well.*

The value of working collaboratively with classroom teachers provides even greater benefit in allowing the STEPS facilitator to link his examples back to other learning and activities taking place in the school. For example, finding out that the school is putting on an 'Expo' links back to the eight employability skills. This could be highlighted, making explicit connections. Teacher feedback has focused on the value of having an external person coming into the classroom. The novelty aspect for their students is important—it is someone they have not heard before, so they actively listen.

Within the program, students are asked to undertake a self-evaluation on employability skills and identify where they situate themselves in terms of their other skills and abilities, such as concentrating and active listening. These are not necessarily stated as employability skills but are equally as important. Once students identify their current level of performance, the focus moves to demonstrate to students that they can do a job but not necessarily be limited to that industry. For example, a student might want to be a chef, but the hours in hospitality can be challenging, so they are encouraged to think about other options, such as cooking in a hospital or childcare centre. This is done to open up their world, allowing students to see how the workplace skills they develop can be generalised to other settings.

There is also a focus on helping the students understand how they can turn a challenge into an employment goal, learning how to use people's support around them. Developing assertive communication is a fundamental part of the program, such as learning how to speak up for oneself, knowing who to turn to if problems arise and knowing the steps to find solutions.

The program takes a game-based approach that incorporates many interactive activities. It is hands-on and aims to be social and inclusive. Feedback from schools at the end of sessions has referred to how engaged the students have been and how long their attention has been held.

The program also incorporates case-based scenarios where students solve problems such as '*Jenny's not getting her breaks at work, she's new to the job, what do you suggest Jenny does? How should she problem-solve this?*'. The students collaborate in small groups to solve problems, furthering opportunities to practice teamwork, communication skills and problem-solving, thus linking back to the eight employability skills.

Sixteen per cent of parent survey respondents reported that their child had taken part in the STEPS. A survey respondent whose child had participated in the STEPS program reported the greatest changes to their child's behaviour, after undertaking the program, were in the areas of:

- communication (e.g., listening, speaking, reading and writing)

- problem-solving (e.g., independently finding a solution to a problem they face)

- initiative and enterprise (e.g., identifying and undertaking a task without being asked)

- self-management (e.g., having a realistic understanding of how well (or not) they are doing with a task).

A parent reported that as a result of participating in the STEPS program, their child would '*often talk about appropriate workplace behaviour and hygiene and OHS issues that she has learned about*'. A young person who completed the program reported that Onemda staff '*taught me to follow instructions and to focus*' while both Onemda and her occupational therapist taught her '*money skills*'.

Section 4.3 reported survey respondents' ranking of employability skills. Table 11 demonstrates links between these findings and the eight employability skills incorporated into the STEPS program.

Table 11
Essential employability skills ranked by survey respondents

Employability skills	Alignment with research data
Skill 1: communication	**Oral communication** (fourth-highest *essential skill* ranking) **Written communication** (fifth-lowest (of 12) *essential skill* ranking) **Numeracy** (lowest of *essential skill* ranking and highest ranking for *not important*)
Skill 2: teamwork	**Teamwork** (fifth-highest importance ranking)
Skill 3: problem-solving	**Problem-solving/independently finding solutions** ranked as one of the fifth-lowest *essential skills* but was the highest-ranked *desirable* skill
Skill 4: initiative and enterprise	**Showing initiative** was highly ranked as a *desirable* skill but not highly ranked as an *essential skill*
Skill 5: planning and organising	**Ability to plan/be organised** was another skill that ranked highly as a *desirable* skill but not as an *essential skill.*
Skill 6: self-management	**Ability to manage oneself/not need constant supervision** also ranked highly as a *desirable* skill but not as an *essential skill.*
Skill 7: learning	**Willingness to learn new things**: sixth-ranked *essential skill* (of 120)
Skill 8: technology	**Confidence using technology**: ranked second-last as an *essential skill* and second in the *not important* category.
Additional skills (raised in the research literature)	
social skills	**Social skills:** ranked highly as a *desirable* skill but not as an *essential skill*
punctuality and reliability	**Punctuality and reliability**: Ranked as the second-most important *essential skill*
personal grooming/hygiene	**Personal grooming/hygiene**: Ranked equal first as an *essential skill*
following instructions	**Following instructions**: Ranked equal firs as an *essential skill*

Interestingly, while numeracy ranked as a low skill priority in the actual workplace, it is important to recognise that numeracy underpins many functional skills needed by young persons to maintain their employment, such as telling the time to ensure punctuality, understanding their wage and reading transport timetables.

As noted, this project aims to uncover the current situation in terms of transition to work and workplace experiences of young people with ID. These could then inform future directions for Onemda's STEPS program. The next section provides suggestions and strategies to overcome some of the issues identified in the research as limiting the effectiveness of work preparation activities during the school years to translate into post-school open employment options.

7   Future directions and conclusion

Together, the various players in the Australian disability sector are working towards more acceptable employment options for young people with an ID. This research has gathered a broad range of views from multiple stakeholder groups to investigate the issue of 'what helps young people with an ID to successfully transition to open employment'. Through this investigation, numerous examples of successful programs were illustrated that might inspire future directions for Onemda and other stakeholders. In addition, several issues that hinder progress towards better employment options for young people were identified and must be overcome to enable students who have completed the STEPS program to apply those skills in meaningful employment contexts.

Clearly, the employment of young people with an ID is moving away from the 'sheltered workshop mentality' of previous decades. Stakeholders are joining forces to provide young people with better opportunities than were previously available. However, while these developments appear to be headed in the right direction, more can be done.

In the words of families, we should aspire to a world where all young people can hope for '*more than a career, we are looking for* [them] *to have a happy life. Contributing to something while earning money and being part of a community*' and '*become a valued member of a team in a situation where* [they] *feel challenged and fulfilled'.* Or in the words of young people themselves who hope for '*just a job'.* This final section presents possibilities for future directions that may help realise these hopes.

Possibilities at the System Level

A key issue arising across this research has been that young people's pathways to make successful transitions are hindered by the overarching system meant to make such transitions possible. Strategies that 'join up' the pathways for young people, where various stakeholders worked together, are key features of the 'success stories' throughout this report. This presents possibilities for the sector as a whole, and some of these include:

- greater collaboration between education departments and DES providers during the school years to support young people and their families and avoid the lag time between completing school and finding meaningful workplace training and/or employment

- explicit training for NDIS assessors and providers to understand the nuanced and varied supports required to prepare young people for employment during school years and the subsequent supports required to find and maintain employment

- NDIS documentation should automatically flag employment supports (even where no money is attached) early in the high school years so that necessary supports come into action well before a young person leaves school

- reducing time delays between finishing formal schooling and entering an appropriate workplace (with adequate support) or a work-preparation program

- responsibility to assess and report on the required employment supports for individuals (and their families) should be returned to transition teachers, rather than the current move towards NDIS assessment

- improved community engagement to translate work experience placement into opportunities for casual employment during school years

- distinguish work from leisure activities—consideration should be given to a young person having a 'job coach' attend work with him/her, rather than the support workers used for leisure and social activities—job coaches should be purposefully trained to understand the needs of the employer and employee

- further research on the role of families in supporting young people to make school-to-employment transitions could be undertaken.

Possibilities for employers

Employers who take on a young person with ID for either work experience and/or post-school paid employment often do so because they have direct experience with disability or have developed a relationship with specific teachers and/or families. While many organisations have inclusive employment policies, relatively few translate these into practice.

A lack of understanding of the potential for young people with ID to meaningfully contribute as active employees prevents employers from thinking more broadly about how young people can undertake work at their organisation. Further, a lack of understanding of simple strategies to support a person with ID in the workplace hinders successful workplace experiences for both parties. Some possibilities for employers to address these issues include:

- Organisations (and particularly managers and colleagues working directly with people with ID) could receive training on special education techniques (e.g., such as task analysis (breaking tasks into small sequential steps), errorless learning, building mastery, effective questioning techniques).

- Teachers, DES providers and others could help organisations understand a 'strength based' approach when distributing work activities.

- The regulation strategies used within schools to assist students in monitoring their feelings and apply strategies to self-regulate (or co-regulate, as appropriate) should be integrated into workplaces.

- There should be greater accountability for companies and organisations to act on their inclusive employment policies (noting local councils were mentioned numerous times during data collection for this project).

Possibilities for Schools

Schools have demonstrated innovative practices to provide young people with ID with varied opportunities to develop employment skills during the school years (often contingent on individual teachers' motivation). The range of microbusinesses described by educators demonstrates the potential for young people to actively participate in employment and gain work experience when the right supports are provided. This research highlighted the significant gap between the support young people receive at school and what happens post-school. Some possibilities for schools include:

- Through photos and video, schools could document how their students are working in microbusiness and on work experience to develop portfolios that demonstrate to employers the potential for a young person to participate (portfolios could also be shared with families).

- A more gradual transition from school to work could lead to more successful outcomes. For example, students starting work 1–2 days per week during school years supported by their teacher and/or SLSO with a cross-over period before moving to a post-school support worker. This would also provide an opportunity for teachers to educate employers/colleagues on effective strategies.

- Build the language of transition and the language of employment into students' Learning Support Plans early in the high school years, with an expectation that each student has the potential to engage in some form of meaningful employment with the right support.

- Ensure consistent communication and engagement with families regarding future employment.

Possibilities for work preparation programs (external providers)

Providers of work preparation programs beyond school play an important role in preparing young people with an ID to transition to work. While the various stakeholders prioritised different skills necessary to prepare young people for employment, there was a general consensus on the importance of soft skills. While many of these soft skills are developed in schools, external providers can help students practise these skills daily with their peers as young people move closer to adulthood. The value of external programs being delivered in schools provides possibilities to work alongside teachers to augment their importance for future work opportunities. Furthermore, the novelty of having an unfamiliar instructor can motivate student participants and also assists these young people with broadening the range of unknown people they communicate with. These present a focus for future possibilities for external providers to consider, including the following:

- external work preparation course outcomes could be explicitly linked to:
  – the National Curriculum
  – each student's individualised learning support plan
- provide opportunities to check for maintenance of skills learned over time (revisit the program after the initial intense period of delivery)
- develop modules that are available to parents/caregivers (perhaps delivered online to maximise participation) so that skills developed in the program can be practised and reinforced at home
- consider using video portfolios of young people performing work skills (see 'schools' above) to share with families and others
- develop modules for potential employers to prepare to support students on work experience and, ideally, casual employment opportunities during school years.

Possibilities for young people and their families

Two reoccurring themes throughout this research have been the value of various stakeholders working together and how families are formally involved in the transition process (or not). Our findings support developing further connections between families, DES providers, schools, and other education providers to support successful transitions are 'wrapped around' young people. Whether it is starting a microbusiness or simply having conversations about the future with young people, families can strengthen the likelihood of successful transitions to employment. As such, they can be among the Disability sectors' strongest advocates. However, they need support (and sometimes even an invitation) to do so. All stakeholder groups could consider how they can work productively with this undervalued group. Further future directions for the broad Disability sector may be found throughout this report and possible future directions throughout this section. In essence, this report reminds us that it does, indeed, *'take a village'*.

8   Appendix A – Transition to Work Programs

International Examples

Among international examples are programs from Wisconsin, Toronto, Alabama, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Let's Get to Work Wisconsin (Molfenter et al., 2017) is a program involving schools and a state agency in the American state of Wisconsin. It aims to work with young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, specifically to improve their employment outcomes.

A Canadian social enterprise program, the *Common Ground Co-operative*, started as a small cookie company in 1998 and has grown into five social enterprises based in Toronto that employ people with developmental disabilities as trainees, apprentices and business partners (Owen et al., 2015, p. 214).

Given the underrepresentation of persons with disabilities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), the Alabama Alliance for Students with Disabilities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (*AASD-STEM*) program is an effort to support college students with disabilities to move into STEM study and employment (Dunn et al., 2018). It is described as a multi-component program featuring mentoring as its main strategy.

Project SEARCH is a program focused on developing internships for young people with intellectual disabilities leaving school or college (Kaehne, 2016). Project SEARCH originated in the USA and had over 200 sites across North America, United Kingdom and Australia (Kaehne 2016, p. 521).

Real Opportunities is a supported work experience project delivered by small job coaching teams in nine local authorities across Wales (Beyer et al., 2016).
Job in Sight is a Swedish supported employment transition-from-school program in the city of Orebro (Tholen et al., 2017). Students with intellectual disabilities from upper-secondary schools were supported and provided with internships at a workplace.

Australian Examples

Ticket to Work is an Australian transition program that helps young people with a disability move into work. A national initiative run by National Disability Services New South Wales is a cross-sectoral collaboration that works through local partnership networks bringing together schools, employment services, employers and post-school providers to support career development, vocational skills, and provide work experience (Ticket to Work, 2020; ARTD, 2016).

ON-Q's School Leaver Employment Support is a DES provided by ON-Q based in Northern NSW and South-East Queensland through its network of 23 offices. The program works to prepare young people with a disability to transition from school into study and develop skills through a set of tailored activities (e.g., life skills such as literacy, numeracy, budgeting, travel training, workplace communication) and help them find and keep a job (ON-Q, 2017). To become ready for work, school leaver employment support can be provided for up to three days a week for up to two years.

STEPS Employment Solutions is a program by the STEPS Australia Group that works with individuals to set career goals, prepare resumes and for interviews, improve workplace skills and provide support once a person is in work (STEPS, 2020a). A component of their offering is the *STEPS Skills for Education and Employment* program that works as a first step to finding employment. It focuses on an individual's language, literacy and numeracy assessment and training, and can include a work experience component (STEPS, 2020b). The *STEPS Pathways College* at Caloundra in Queensland provides a 12-month training course for young people with a disability to develop critical thinking skills and gain confidence and self-awareness (STEPS, 2019).

Under the NDIS (2019) Economic Participation grants, 14 other projects that specifically focused on ID (in addition to Onemda's STEPS program) were funded including:

- Prioletti Consultants, local government program (Victoria): The *Transformative Employment Opportunities for Adults with an Intellectual Disability in Local Government Authorities* designs employment opportunities, recruits employees (participants ineligible for DES support) and provides employer training and support for adults with an ID.

- *Jobsupport* project (Melbourne and Brisbane): works to promote employment as an option for students with a moderate ID in special school and high school, assessing each student to identify barriers, provide work experience in customised jobs that is supported by onsite training.

- Holmesglen Institute (Victoria): The *Integrated Practical Placement* program is a structured study program for students with learning or intellectual disability. Students are placed with an employer in partnership with a learning institution to develop work-related skills and transition students into paid employment at the end of the program.

- Anglicare (NSW and ACT): *Developing a new social enterprise* is a pilot of the social enterprise model, offering training and employment opportunities to about 10 current disability clients registered under the NDIS.

- Inclusion Australia (NCID) Limited: The *Employment First* project aims to influence family attitudes to help navigate pathways to employment for people with ID.

- Brite Services: The *Brite* project is an industry partnership (comprising Brite, RMIT and North Link) developing new and sustainable employment opportunities for people with disability, producing an assistive product (an electric bike) built by people with disability.

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