



Connecting Pathways to Employment with the Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE)–ability Model Final report

July 2024

CSI: Perri Campbell, Andrew Joyce, Jenny Crosbie and Erin Wilson.

Acronyms

ADE – Australian Disability Enterprise

WISE – Work Integration Social Enterprise/Australian Disability Enterprise

DE – Disability Enterprise

BE – Business Enterprises

CSI – Centre for Social Impact

DES – Disability Employment Services

IEP – Individual Employment Plan

ILC – Information Linkages and Capacity

LAC – Local Area Coordinator

NDIS – National Disability Insurance Scheme

PPE – Personal Protective Equipment

SLES – School Leaver Employment Supports

WISE – Work Integration Social Enterprise

WHS – Workplace Health and Safety

A note on terminology: Throughout this report, the terms WISE or Disability Enterprise are used interchangeably to refer to the enterprises (formerly Australian Disability Enterprises) that participated in the project.

Acknowledgements

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Cover image: Woman working in a commercial laundry.



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About the report

This report has been prepared by CSI Swinburne for the Department of Social Services Information Linkages and Capacity Building Program (2021). This research project was conducted by CSI Swinburne and partners including genU, Ability Works Australia, Windarring and The Disability Trust.

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Image: Woman working with equipment.

Executive summary

CSI researchers have been working with Disability Enterprises (previously known as Australian Disability Enterprises or ADEs) to develop an organisational design model to support pathways to mainstream employment for participants. This approach builds on previous work with Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) that identified the organisational design features that best support the health, wellbeing, and employment outcomes of marginalised young people in a social enterprise environment. WISEs have a social purpose to provide transitional pathways to meaningful work for people with experiences of marginalisation, including people with a disability.

In 2021, CSI and genU disability services were funded by the Department of Social Services to adapt and implement elements of this model into a genU supported employment (Disability Enterprise) environment. During stage 1 of the project, the CSI team worked collaboratively with genU and a variety of stakeholders in the Barwon region to develop and implement the WISE model to improve participants' work readiness and their transitions to Hybrid (working in both a supported employment setting and in Open Employment) or Open Employment. The project focused on the model elements: Structure, Space, Relationships, Culture, Finance and Funding and Industry and, through the initial testing of the model, identified and added an eighth design element Pathways to Employment. This model was named the WISE-Ability model. The characteristics of the model (Figure 1 and 2) can be adapted to support employment outcomes.

During stage 2 of the project, 2022 to 2024, the CSI team worked with three additional providers – Ability Works Australia, Windarring and The Disability Trust – to further test and develop the Pathways to Employment element of the model. The aim was to understand supports and NDIS funding required for the pathway from Australian Disability Enterprises to mainstream employment, and the steps/activities involved along the way.

In this stage, the Pathways to Employment element of the WISE-Ability model was developed via Action Learning workshops (3), fortnightly Action Learning meetings (60), case studies (18), and interviews (20) with each of the 4 partners between July 2023 and April 2024 (10 months). All participants were asked to consider the Pathways element, in particular, the activities that were involved in carving out a pathway from a Disability Enterprise to mainstream employment. Participants identified a range of employment barriers, supports and tools (see Figure 3 over page).

The updated WISE-Ability model (Figure 4, page 8) describes how to create a supportive work environment and how to develop pathways out of this supportive environment into appropriate and safe forms of employment for people with a disability (Appendix 1).



Figure 1: WISE-Ability Model

ILC PROJECT CONNECTING PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT with the WISE MODEL

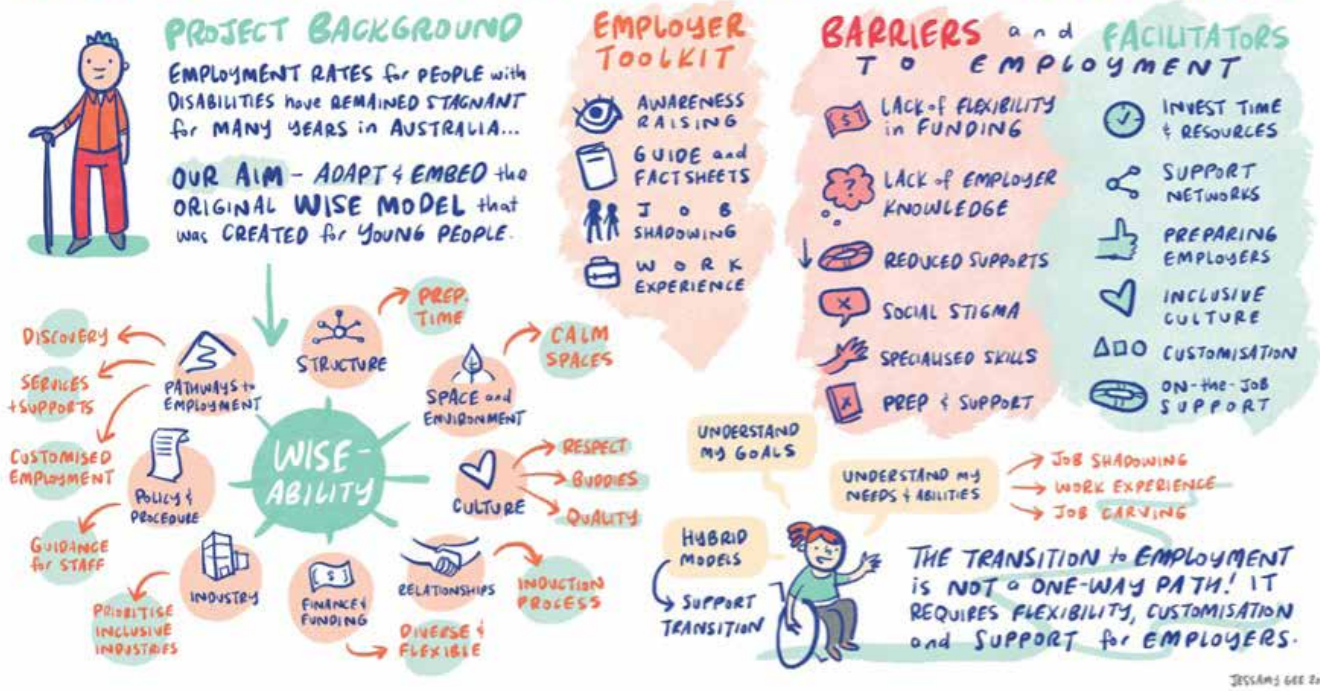


Figure 2: Graphic Drawing of the WISE-Ability model, phase 2

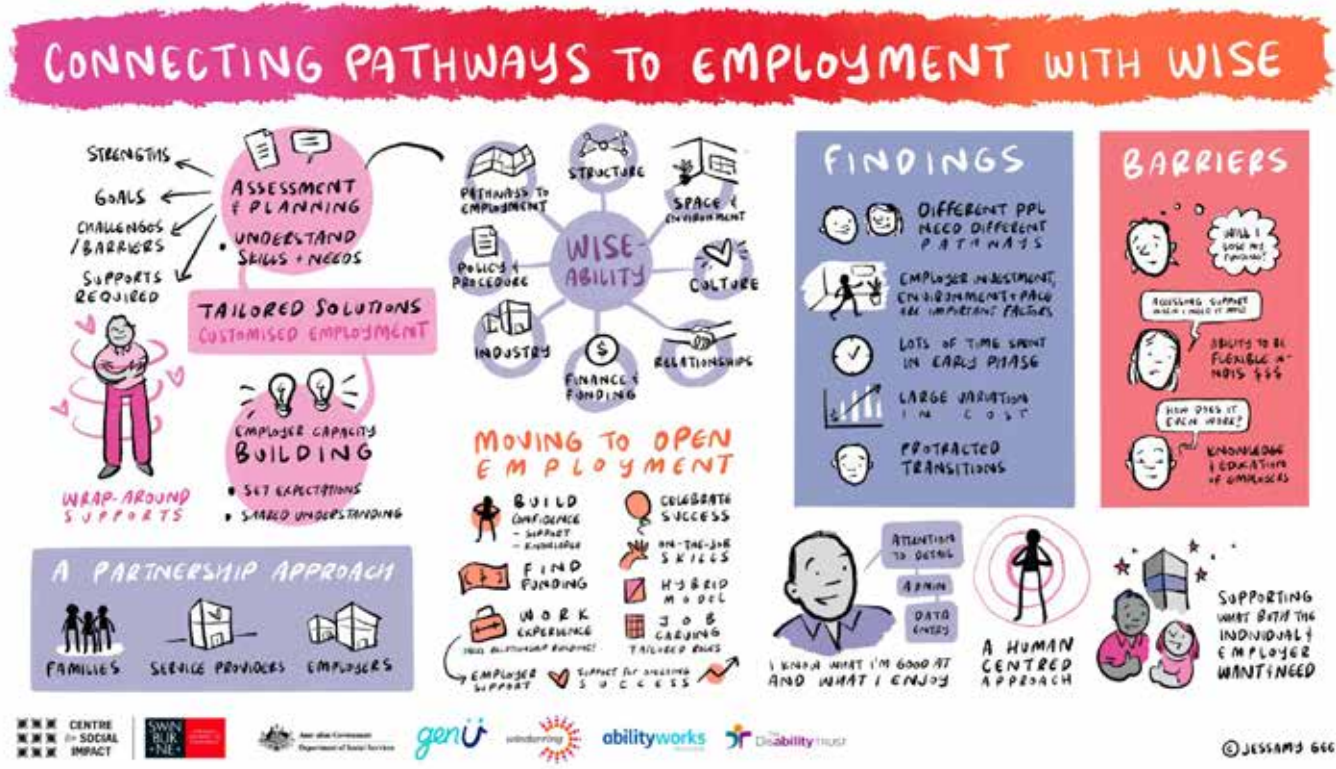


Figure 3: Graphic Drawing of the WISE-Ability model, phase 1

In this report we:

- ▶ Provide an updated WISE-Ability Model and share findings from our research with Disability Enterprise partners.
- ▶ Outline the challenges Disability Enterprises face in carving out employment pathways using NDIS funding.
- ▶ Outline what works to generate employment pathways.
- ▶ Project resources can be found here:
<https://www.csi.edu.au/research/connecting-pathways-to-employment-with-the-work-integration-social-enterprise-model/>.
- ▶ A new website which illustrates the WISE-Ability model is available here
<https://wiseabilitymodelaustralia.org.au/>



Image: Man working in warehouse.

Customised employment and job carving
Discovery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyday discovery • Formal discovery process
Hybrid employment
Work exposure and experience
Employer engagement, job negotiation and the partnership approach
Placement support for setting up the job

Post placement support on the job
Using services and supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Area Coordinator (LAC) • Support Coordinator and Hands-on Support • Disability Employment Services

Diverse work opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of choice • Variety and preparation
Wraparound support team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored support • Mentoring and check-ins • Healthy work-life balance • Transport

Vocational training and development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands-on learning and training • Certified and accredited training • Task matching • Modifying work practices and accessible equipment • Building personal, social and real work skills • Real workplace conditions

Environment and work pace
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Busy vs. Calm environments • Food access
Accessible and modifiable layout
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility and adjustments • Outdoor learning and work
Safe time and areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet rooms • Walking and driving

Guidance for staff
Formal communication channels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying in touch throughout the day
Engaging stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with family and networks
Policies that support disability focused WISE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intake • Shared rules • Risk management
Tailored business systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual and tactile tools
Structure, routine and support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily structure • Staff visibility

Type of industry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse industry engagement • Inclusive industries

Labour market and employment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employable skills

Social good and financial benefit
Diverse business offerings

Going 'above and beyond'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Respect
Belonging
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddies working together • Understanding
High quality products and services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality focused business

Building shared goals and knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New relationship opportunities • Shared goals for pathways
In-depth relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusting relationships

Funding the individual employment pathway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual NDIS funding • Seeking a Plan Review • Using NDIS funding flexibly • Working with other service providers



Key Findings

Different pathways to employment for different individuals.

- ▶ While some people benefit from intensive and sustained supports, other people benefit from decreasing supports on the job and building independence. These work forms can be supported by Disability Enterprises, Hybrid employment and Open Employment options.

The role of employers.

- ▶ Employer investment, work environment and pace are important factors in determining the sustainability of the employment position and the wellbeing of the employee. An employer who is invested in the work journey and everyday experience of an employee helps contribute to a supportive and enjoyable working life.
- ▶ In some cases, participants reported a negative experience in Open Employment, for instance, where a discriminatory and deficit approach was taken and individuals were made to feel like their disability was a problem in the workplace.

The importance of Discovery.

- ▶ Most Disability Enterprises are spending a significant amount of time in the early phase of the employment pathway, including discovery, assessment and administration documentation for Participants in the first place. This was the case whether Disability Enterprises were following a Customised Employment model or their own employment pathways and work experience model.
- ▶ After this initial phase, time was spent supporting the person on the job, providing travel support, career counselling and employer engagement. This can perhaps be supported by a partnership approach with other service providers to network individuals into employment.

Employment pathways costs.

- ▶ There is a large variation across partners in the cost for an employment pathway as some involve more intensive supports, while others involve light supports. The cost varies between \$10,000 – \$20,000 per year.
- ▶ Employment is a highly variable activity for people with a disability transitioning from Disability Enterprises into mainstream employment. Their movement/progress is not predictable and is based on a wide range of variables. For this reason, there needs to be different treatment of employment-related funding in NDIS plans. There could be some contingency funding/increase built in OR it needs to be able to be varied more easily with minimal approval through a specific process/function in the NDIS.

Protracted transitions.

- ▶ Participants who felt marginalised from employment opportunities or who were waiting for employment experienced a negative impact on their mental health.

Barriers to employment pathways

1. Resourcing staff time

Staff identified working in a capacity that was not always accounted for by funding available. This means working after hours or providing essential support beyond the hours funded in an individual's plan to ensure they have appropriate support for work in the WISE or in Open Employment. Staff provide support that is not always funded, for instance, quick chats if an individual calls on the phone.

2. Use of the NDIS funding scheme

Allocating funding and planning ahead for Disability

Disability Enterprises cannot block out participants' funding ahead of time for their services. Funding can be used by different service providers. The challenge is that funding for employment or WISE supports may be utilised for other things. Disability Enterprises cannot plan for long term programs if they cannot be assured of funding for services.

The NDIS have a plan management system called PACE. Staff identify early challenges, such as check-ins with individuals that are inaccurate, and funding not being able to be earmarked for employment pathways because it is being used by other service providers for recreational activities.

Support ratios for participant pathways

Having the right ratio of support makes a difference for individuals' employment pathways. Staff with high caseloads do not have the time to provide adequate support for a customised employment pathway. One WISE organisation states that 'a low ratio of sorts is essential. And also for employment supports, it takes a certain level of professional to deliver it.' (Staff 8)

Inadequate funding and Plan Review

Inadequate funding for employment pathways was an ongoing challenge for Disability Enterprises and individuals. Staff note that the Core supports in NDIS plans are not adequate for employment related supports. Many participants in Pathways to Employment programs were reliant on funding secured via participation in this ILC project.

Inadequate funding means that employer engagement is put at risk. Case Study organisations describe needing the Plan Manager for the financial planning aspect, but there is also planning for utilisation of the funding by the Support Coordinator. The two roles ideally work together, but if there is not enough funding allocated to one of these roles then problems may arise where this form of support is necessary.



Image: Man working in warehouse.

Plan reviews are an avenue for requesting funding for a specific activity, however funding for an employment pathway under Capacity Building is not always granted, even if this is a priority for the individual.

Plan reviews are an important part of ensuring individuals have adequate funding to pursue an employment pathway. They can also lead to discussions about employment pathways. However, the process of attaining a plan review can mean waiting long periods of time for an outcome.

Staff and clients may need to request a review to change NDIS plans to try to secure adequate funding for employment pathways. In cases where more intense supports are required or a customised approach is being taken, a higher level of funding may be required. The level of funding required is directly related to the level of support a WISE can offer (i.e. from light touch to customised employment) and that is matched to the individual.

A lack of funding for Plan Management was noted as an issue by one organisation. NDIS plans are managed by an independent Plan Manager, NDIS managed, or self-managed. Challenges arise where there is inadequate funding for a plan manager for individuals who need it. This can lead to inadequate supervision and forward planning for the use of funds.

Delayed plans and interrupted momentum

Delays in receiving the right funding in a NDIS plan can affect the employment pathway momentum. This is because:

- ▶ Support that staff can offer will be limited or will need to be stretched out over the course of a plan so that consistent support can be offered. If all support hours are used up in the early stages of the employment pathway then individuals risk being left without support. There is an expectation that providers make the plan work and make sure the funds last the length of the plan unless circumstances change.
- ▶ Roll-over: when a plan is rolled over no adjustments are made. The NDIS plan is rolled over without a review to adjust supports in relation to changing employment goals and needs (i.e. support or travel for employment).
- ▶ NDIS review time-lag: individual goals change which means the funding plan requires change, but the review is a slow process and often delays the employment pathway.



Image: Men working in commercial laundry.

3. Supported Wages for individuals in Open Employment

A range of concerns were raised about the use and assessment of Supported Wages, including in Open Employment.

- ▶ Disability Enterprise staff report that it can be difficult to engage with large organisations if they do not have a system in place for paying Supported Wages.
- ▶ Some Disability Enterprises are concerned that being on a Supported Wage may lead to individuals being underpaid for their work in Open Employment settings. Staff report that Supported Wages are too low and dehumanising, participants also reported low wages that were 'rotten'.
- ▶ Disability Enterprises are also concerned about assessment accuracy (i.e., the impact of performance anxiety on scores), and resourcing for these assessments.

4. Limited opportunities for personal development at work

Some participants reported that they outgrew roles and knew when they needed a change at work. While others experienced barriers in their jobs, for instance feeling like the employer wasn't right for them, or not being offered the chance to develop new skills.

Employer attitudes and approaches may vary depending on the size of the organisation. The risk is that the culture at the hiring level is not translated into the everyday culture of the organisation. There may be many pressure points in the everyday operations creating a barrier to an inclusive work culture. Many employers are aware of the need for choice, change and growth and consider additional roles that individuals may like to trial. This is applicable in an Open or Supported Employment setting where there are different roles or tasks that a person could take on. Appropriate allocation of greater responsibility to individuals advances personal development and also a sense of autonomy and confidence.

5. Training and Education

Externally offered Certified Training courses can boost individuals' skills and confidence. However, education providers may lack confidence and knowledge in providing training to people with a disability. This can lead to the marginalisation of individuals seeking further education.

6. Roadblocks to Workplace Modification

Changes to workplaces can take more time where equipment and structural changes are needed. Delays can be caused to employment when significant adjustments are needed to the workplace:

"Workplace being a barrier, I would say, in the case of [individual], we had to wait quite a while to get the workplace to get sorted with Job Access, to get him ready for his first shift. I believe it took around 4 months. So he got the contract offered on 7 August 2023, ... and from then, it took from that to around 27 November 2023 for him to start." (Stage 2, Staff 3)

In some cases, employers found it difficult to set up an accessible workplace using funding from Job Access. This delayed the employment pathway for the individual.

Facilitating Employment Pathways

1. Designated employment transitions funding: School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES)

Disability Enterprises report that SLES funding is useful because it is allocated specially for the transition from school to work. The amount is also considered adequate for most transition support, including a customised approach.

2. Connecting with other services: the role of Disability Employment Services

When a support worker spans different employment environments consistency is provided to individuals and employers. For instance, the work of Disability Enterprises (i.e. WISEs) and Disability Employment Services (DES) overlap and intersect. DES can help to place individuals with employers. WISE who work closely with DES can share in a mutually beneficial relationship as WISEs promote a tailored and customised approach to the job search process. Individuals can be linked with a DES to assist with their employment journey. Recent changes to applicant criteria mean that individuals are no longer required to work a set number of hours (i.e. 8 per week) in order to receive DES support. DES can be used to fill support gaps in the employment pathway if an individual has only NDIS Core funding. This is the case where organisations report that Core funding does not offer adequate support for employment pathways and that Capacity Building funding is preferable.

It is mandatory for employers to hire individuals via a DES if they would like to access a wage subsidy. This acts as an incentive for employers; however, it also brings to light a funding gap for Disability Enterprise organisations. DES receive government funding for placing participants in employment. Disability Enterprises (and other WISEs) do not receive this funding which could be utilised for resourcing staff and expanding the capability and reach of the Disability Enterprise.

3. Professional development and wellbeing at work

Meaningful and purposeful work can create the conditions for good mental health. As one participant said:

“Yes, because not only we get more money coming in, it gives us a good feeling that we can do a lot more.”
(Participant 6)

4. Knowledge sharing with employers

Knowledge sharing about how to create an inclusive environment in the workplace is pivotal for successful employment experiences. Disability Enterprises can support employers by sharing advice and advocating for change.

5. Customised Employment approaches and NDIS plans

Disability Enterprises offering Customised Employment engage with individuals interests, goals, hobbies, and networks while also engaging with employers needs to generate new employment opportunities or develop micro-businesses. This involves learning about and understanding individual interests and goals in the community they live in and steps like informational interviewing for the individual to learn about the employer (see Section 4.8.1 for more). This requires brokering new relationships with employers to generate a shared understanding of individual preferences, how supports can be provided, and learning how businesses operate so that appropriate roles can be generated for individuals (Moore et al. 2018).

Project Resources

The project team engaged with people with a disability, family members, WISE staff, and employers to understand their preferences and needs and build useable project resources and sustainable employment

pathways. Resources from the first phase of the project can be found at the Centre for Social Impact website: <https://www.csi.edu.au/research/connecting-pathways-to-employment-with-the-work-integration-social-enterprise-model/>

New project resources, added in the second phase of the project, include:

- ▶ The WISE-Ability model summary can be found at Appendix 1. The model captures Work Integration Social Enterprise organisational design which supports the well-being and employment pathways of people with a disability. The model combines elements that support individuals with a disability (for example, wrap around support, learning opportunities, safe spaces, and elements that support WISE organisations), with elements that WISE require (for example, strong structure, good partnerships, stable funding).
- ▶ The WISE-Ability Training Guide can be found at Appendix 2. The guide provides practical advice for organisations seeking to implement the WISE employment pathway approach.
- ▶ Policy document can be found at Appendix 3. The document provides a summary of the current policy and organisational barriers to Open Employment transitions.
- ▶ The WISE-Ability website which explains each of the elements with video footage from our partner organisations: genU, Windarring, Ability Works Australia and The Disability Trust. The website address is: <https://wiseabilitymodelaustralia.org.au/>



Image: Woman working in cafe.

Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) have been the main employer for people with significant disability in Australia, consistent with the intent of the Disability Services Act (1986). Within the Act, ADEs were identified as the main employment support for people needing ongoing support for employment. Over time, policies and attitudes have shifted, however this cohort of people with disability have been continuously excluded from mainstream employment services, Disability Employment Services (DES) and Open Employment.

In recent times, as confirmed by the Disability Royal Commission (2023), there is an increasing expectation that all people with disability, regardless of the level of their support needs, have entitlement to work in Open Employment. However, ADEs have historically not been designed as a transition pathway to Open Employment so only around 1% of ADE employees transition into other forms of employment out of ADEs. With the advent of the NDIS, the Commonwealth government ceased funding of the ADE program. In this broad environment of change, many ADEs have been actively re-envisioning themselves as Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE) to strengthen their organisational models and enhance the employment outcomes (Clifford et al., 2014). ADEs are in a unique position to provide training and supports to people with a disability for transitions to employment in the mainstream labour market (Cocks & Harvey, 2008).

In this context, CSI researchers have been working with WISE to develop an organisational design model for these Disability Enterprises to support pathways to mainstream employment (Barraket et al, 2020; Campbell et al 2022).

We have been working with four case study Disability Enterprises (WISEs): genU, The Disability Trust, Windarrang and Ability Works Australia. These Disability Enterprises are using a WISE approach to create employment and training opportunities as a transition to employment with other employers for some of their Participants with disability.

In the first stage of this project, CSI researchers built a new model (WISE-Ability model) to explain the important organisational elements needed for success in this work. In the second phase, CSI researchers have further adapted and refined the model to support employment pathways for people with a disability.

We also identify challenges in implementing the Pathways to Employment element of the model. This element requires the use of NDIS funding to support people with a disability into mainstream employment opportunities.

WISE are in a unique position to provide high quality training and supports to people with a disability as a transition step to employment in the mainstream labour market (Cocks & Harvey, 2008).

Our Partners:

genU

genU Business Enterprises (Geelong, Victoria) with the support of genU Employment Pathways. Business Enterprises employ and support over 200 people with a disability at 4 central locations in Geelong, with new enterprises opening in the Melbourne region. Individuals receive training, life skills coaching, welfare and behaviour support, mental health and emotional support, as well guidance for NDIS funding, service access and referrals. Employment Pathways are an outward facing division of genU matching Individuals with employment opportunities in the open labour market. Pathways Coordinators work with individuals to develop their employment plans based on personal interests, skills and goals.

Ability Works Australia

Ability Works Australia (Kew, Victoria) is a renowned not for profit social enterprise that offers a welcoming and inclusive workplace for people from all walks of life, delivering inventive, commercially competitive solutions for our business customers. Ability Works Australia is a highly supportive environment designed to offer employment to anyone in the community experiencing barriers to employment. Supported employment options are offered onsite in the following areas: Inclusive Design, Pack and Rework, Wire and Metal Fabrication and Records Management, however Ability Works Australia has also recently introduced a Customised Employment arm. Ability Works Australia is known for delivering inventive, design-led solutions that do not sacrifice on quality, and their creativity in developing job opportunities both internally and externally. Their hands-on, bespoke approach is perfect for creating high quality outcomes on every project.

Windarring

Windarring (Kyneton, Victoria) is a person centred, community-based organisation committed to eliminating barriers to participation, inclusion and acceptance for people with disabilities in their local community. Windarring offer client-centred service delivery and the support with a focus on the individual. Supported employment options onsite include work at the Emporium Retail shop and Gardening and Maintenance service (Castlemaine), The Copy Shop (Kyneton), and Administration, Head Office (Kyneton).

Windarring use a customised employment model for our employment supports, theirs is a person-centred employment approach which focuses on building skills of the individual to develop, progress and transition into a customised employment position that is sustainable long term.

The Disability Trust

The Disability Trust (Head office is in Wollongong, NSW) are a not-for-profit NDIS registered organisation with a rich history of providing person centred support services in QLD, NSW, ACT and VIC. The Disability Trust have been supporting people with disability and their families for over 50 years and operate several Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) based in Illawarra (NSW). These ADEs provide individuals with opportunities to gain real world paid employment experiences across a number of industries including food and drink preparation, customer service and hospitality with our Plant Room Cafes, grounds work and landscaping with our property maintenance team at Illawarra Vocational Services.

This report is divided into four main sections:

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Approach and Methodology
- ▶ Findings: In the Findings section we explore the key challenges to the employment pathway and key facilitators.
- ▶ The WISE-Ability Model: The model documents key components of organisational design that WISEs can explore to support good working conditions and pathways to Open Employment. We also explore the variance between organisational approaches to employment pathways and identify where staff hours are directed in the pursuit of pathways.

Approach and methodology

2.1 Research Questions

1. What do ADEs need to do to move people into decent and Open Employment pathways?
2. How is the WISE-Ability model useful?
 - ▶ How does it support pathways to employment?
 - ▶ How does it align or conflict with the WISE approach?
 - ▶ How are employment pathways funded?

2.2 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted via interviews (20), case studies (18), employment pathway spreadsheets (4), WISE-Ability workshops (3), and fortnightly Action Learning meetings (60) with each of our four partners between July 2023 and April 2024 (10 months).

2.2.1 WISE-Ability Workshops

Workshops were held with partner organisations to document and capture the opportunities and activities within Disability Enterprises to support the employment pathways of Participants.

The aim of the workshops was to understand:

1. How the WISE-Ability model aligns with other Disability Enterprise approaches
2. How the WISE-Ability model is aligned with current funding structures (i.e. NDIS funding)

Each organisation provides employment and support to people with a disability. Participants were asked to discuss with the research team which parts of the WISE-Ability model they found useful in describing their approach to employment and support, and what kinds of things were missing from the model.

Three organisations were asked to participate in one workshop each (of 2 hours in duration), to work through guided activities focused on elements of the WISE-Ability model. Each organisation was a WISE/ADE structure supporting people with a disability into employment.



Image: Man and woman peeling vegetables in kitchen.

Workshops were held in October-November 2022 and in June 2023 and included:

- ▶ Ability Works Australia
- ▶ The Disability Trust
- ▶ Windarrang

2.2.2 Action Learning Meetings

Fortnightly Action Learning meetings were held with organisations to develop data collection tools and to follow the progress of participants involved in the study. Challenges in developing the employment pathway and options were identified and discussed in meetings. Individual participants were identified as case studies (pseudonyms are used throughout for case studies), and key challenges related to their pathways were explored in more granular detail. In total, eight case studies were carried out across the four organisations. This research method supports knowledge transfer as part of an unfolding change process (Fricke, 2011: 256).

2.2.3 Employment Pathways Spreadsheets

Spreadsheets were developed with partner organisations to capture the employment pathways process. The spreadsheets were set up over the course of one month, defining the information necessary for data collection and how this would be captured. The first step was to determine the type of employment pathway for each organisation and the steps this pathway would involve. Each spreadsheet contained categories describing the steps involved in setting up and servicing an employment pathway for an individual, and how much time and cost was involved in each step. The steps specific to these pathways were listed in a drop-down menu in the spreadsheet. The spreadsheets were co-designed with the organisations to capture their unique approach and, as such, varied slightly across organisations depending on the pathway approach. However, each approach involved the same basic structure, including:

- ▶ Initial assessment or 'Discovery' process
- ▶ Training and development process
- ▶ Employer engagement and customising/carving/tailoring
- ▶ Placement and ongoing support and monitoring.

The following pathways were captured:

	Case Study Type	Pathway Type
1	Case Study one is a service provider operating as part of a large Disability organisation	Job Shadowing: a new pathway under development which focuses on work experience and learning (via Job Shadowing) towards employment.
2	Case Study two is a Disability Enterprise acting in the role of employment service provider in the pathway	Customised Employment Pathway: was informed by customised employment training undertaken by the organisation (i.e., with Peter Smith, Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice, and Sara Murphey, Transcen).
3	Case Study three is a service provider operating as part of a large Disability organisation	Tailored Employment Pathway: aimed to develop an individually focused employment pathway service for people working within the organisations Disability Enterprises.
4	Case Study four is a Disability Enterprise acting in the role of employment service provider in the pathway	Tailored Employment Pathway: as above

The aim of capturing this data was to better understand the detailed steps and funding allocated in developing an employment pathway for an individual, and which activities required more funding/were underfunded. Against each step in the employment pathway process, organisations were given an option to identify the allocated funding from the individual NDIS plan. The categories from NDIS Core and Capacity Building funding were included.

Spreadsheets captured data about **18 participants** and their employment pathway activity types and hours.

2.2.4 Interviews

See table below for interview participants.

The intent of the interviews was to gather information from Stakeholders, Staff and Participants who were not part of the Action Learning meetings. We established the following inclusion criteria for interviews:

- ▶ Individuals who are employed or supported by Disability Enterprises (aiming for a balance of men and women across organisations);
- ▶ Individuals who employ or have employed people with a disability via Disability Enterprise partners; and
- ▶ Individuals with whom our partners have an emerging relationship and where employment pathways may develop.

Interviews were used to: understand challenges to employment pathways, and NDIS funding for the WISE-Ability model by identifying appropriate NDIS funding line items and how these can be used by individuals and service providers to support Hybrid and Open Employment pathways.

All interview participants were provided with a Plain Language Information and Consent form. All Staff and Stakeholder interviews were conducted online via videoconference, and interviews were conducted online.

2.3 Data analysis

2.3.1 WISE-Ability Workshops

Workshop feedback on each element of the WISE-Ability model was recorded. The workshop feedback was compared to existing model content and gaps in the model were identified. The main area that the workshop participants identified as requiring more information was in the area of Pathways to Employment and how this is facilitated by NDIS funding.

2.3.2 Action Learning Meetings

Thematic analysis of data gathered at fortnightly Action Learning meetings was carried out to identify challenges to employment pathways for each Case Study organisation. Common challenges to employment pathways were then identified across the four Case Study organisations.

Disability Enterprise Staff	Individuals / Participants	Stakeholders / Family
12 (including: Employment pathways practitioners, Training Staff, Disability Enterprise Managers)	6 (age range 20 – 53)	6 (age range 20 – 53)
Total		20

2.3.3 Employment Pathway Spreadsheets

Starting with the categories for employment pathways developed by the organisations, sub themes were created for pathways activities of:

- ▶ Assessment and planning
- ▶ Building workplace and associated skills
- ▶ Employer capacity building
- ▶ On the job support (inclusive of work experience and paid work)
- ▶ Other.

The analysis covers the frequency of activities and hours for each of these categories for each individual. Appendix 4 provides Tables for the full set of categories.

One consideration for data analysis has been how to broadly categorise activities of employment support provided by each Disability Enterprise. Because there is a wide variety of activities, supports and interventions that can be used to support both people with disability and employers, there is no single set of categories or terminology used by the sector to describe these. Therefore, researchers have used two existing sets of categories:

1. The categories used for the School Leaver Employment Support (SLES) Provider Reporting Tool. This is a data collection approach used by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) for SLES providers to report on their activities. It has been designed only in reference to the type of activities that might be used to support young people with disability eligible for SLES funding; and
2. The categories of the Typology of Employment Support Interventions (Wilson, et al., 2022). This is a longer and more detailed list of activities based on literature review and analysis of employment interventions related to disability.

Summary tables which code the activities according to each of these can be found in the Appendix 5 and 6. As the detailed analysis of employment pathway activities from Disability Enterprises to Open Employment has not been done before and little is known about them, CSI researchers believe it important to continue to capture and analyse at this level of detail.

2.3.4 Interviews: Thematic Analysis

A selective and iterative coding approach was undertaken to identify key themes from interviews regarding employment barriers, facilitators, and how employment supports are provided to people with a disability. An initial coding framework was developed using the original elements of the WISE model. An iterative approach was undertaken during the coding process identifying new insights and themes emerging from the interview data (Saldaña, 2009).

This coding framework was built from: the original WISE model in year one, the journal papers identifying changes to the model, barriers and facilitators for employment pathways based on year two research, new key themes identified through Action Learning meetings carried out over the course of the project with partners in year three, and finally, new key themes identified through iterative coding. The overall coding process is selective and iterative. Coding was done across organisations.



Image: Young man working in nursery.

Findings

3.1 Barriers to employment pathways

3.1.1 Resourcing staff time and employer engagement

Most Disability Enterprises are spending a significant amount of time in the early phase of the employment pathway, including discovery and assessment /paperwork for participants in the first place. This was the case whether WISE were following a Customised Employment model or their own employment pathways and work experience model.

After this initial phase, time was spent supporting the person on the job, providing travel support, career counselling and employer engagement. This can perhaps be supported by a partnership approach with other service providers to network individuals into employment.

Staff identified working in a capacity that was not always accounted for by funding available. This means working after hours or providing essential support beyond the hours funded in an individual's Plan to ensure they have appropriate support for work in the Disability Enterprise or in Open Employment. Over the 10-month period across three organisations, staff recorded working 84 hours of non-funded time (28 hours per organisation) providing supports or working to put supports in place.

This small portion of unfunded time goes towards quick chats (i.e. over the phone). The greater issue is finding the time to identify and engage with employers while carrying out other support tasks:

"I don't think it's appreciated how much time's taken in that. All four in that group have core supports coming from family or a support coordinator, and we're in regular contact with them as well. So if someone's only got an hour a week and you're sending them a confirmation message of a meeting, you're meeting with the person, you're communicating with their family, it leaves very little time to actually be looking for work actively, or supporting someone in a placement to get work experience to help them get a job or to understand what a job is." (Stage 2, Staff 1)

"Obviously they're there because they want a job and if we're not able to do the activities of finding employers and reverse marketing and all of that, then it just stops there. And it's not really consistent for the participant and it's not really successful for them either. They feel as though they've wasted their time or they're wanting more." (Stage 2, Staff 2)

While funding may be included, it is invariably insufficient:

"Yeah, I think most people we work with don't have the specific employment funding in their Plans. Sometimes we work with them to get that funding into their Plans. Quite often we see people with employment funding of \$1,000.00 or \$2,000.00 over a year or two years, which won't lead to many outcomes. Even a person I met yesterday, he had a huge amount of funding in an area for PBS – positive behaviour support – but they didn't even know what positive behaviour support was, and they didn't even know how they

	Number Activities	Total Hours
NDIS funded	1163	3131
Non NDIS funded	147	84

would go about using that funding. But with their main goal of employment, they only had \$2,000.00.” (Stage 2, Staff 8)

“I think definitely this work has got me thinking more about that behind-the-scenes work, and what’s involved in delivering the service. Like someone’s Plan, if you think of, say, \$22,000.00 towards employment, it’s a lot of money for a person to think about when you’re sitting down with a person and their parents, or networks, they think it’s a very expensive service. They don’t realise how much of a loss an organisation actually makes, trying to deliver a service even costing – and we take the NDIS approach that we only charge for what we deliver ... At the current time, it doesn’t cover our costs.”
(Stage 2)

Even when funding is allocated, it may not be allocated to secure a level or type of staffing suitable to the activity or the person’s needs.

“One of the things is Core funding. A support worker with a Certificate IV in Disability could do the support person in Open Employment. With some people – and that could work really well – with some people, it requires somebody with additional qualifications and experience, like a mental health coach. And that’s funded in the Plan under a different category, at a higher unit cost rate. And that’s more difficult to get into people’s Plans. And the NDIS are less likely to provide support coordination funded in the Plan and a mental health coach; they might do either/or, but in my opinion, there’s often a need for both.” (Stage 2, Staff 5)

Feature Quote:

“In terms of whether it’s enough funding ... really is starting up a customised employment service, it’s not enough money to get all the background things up and running. It’s not enough funding to manage a team to do all the behind-the-scenes work, to answer questions from NDIS planners and Local Area Coordinators. So without external funding through philanthropic organisations, we wouldn’t be able to do what we’re currently doing...”



Image: Man working with machinery in warehouse.

Overall, rather than incur substantial levels of unfunded activity, Disability Enterprises have to limit the activities provided to participants in support of their employment goals, where these were not funded.

"We can only provide the service that's funded in the Plan, for the reason and the category in the Plan. So, if it's not there, then we can't do it, simple as that. Although, we do it in part, unfunded, whenever we can."
(Stage 2, Staff 5)

3.1.2 Use of the NDIS Funding

Allocating funding and planning ahead for Disability Enterprises

Disability Enterprises cannot quarantine individuals' funding ahead of time for their services. Funding can be used by different service providers. The challenge is that the funding may be used up, that is, funding for employment or WISE supports may be utilised for other things. Disability Enterprises cannot plan for long term programs if they cannot be assured of funding for services. This is potentially a barrier to individuals pursuing goals in the future.

Disability Enterprise staff shared concerns about the way in which funding is used by service providers. There were concerns about large amounts of funding in people's plans being reserved for activities other than employment, and WISEs being unable to reserve funding for employment pathways ahead of time.

"Well, I met someone who had [an Intellectual Disability]. They had a plan of \$120,000.00 a year. We met them, their goal was employment, and then we were told they didn't have any funding for employment. And when I asked why they didn't have funding for employment, they reported that the organisation that they had providing support workers was charging \$120,000.00 a year, and all the money was committed to that organisation, who sent people to have coffees with the guy every now and then. So you know, people need to be protected, the funding needs to be protected in some fashion."

Question:

So they blocked out the funding?

Answer:

"Yeah. So they'd designated that amount of funding – I think when we got around, we went back to the planner and said, 'I think you can talk to that organisation and the purse – they can free up some of that funding,' so we did start delivering employment with that person. And I guess that's a bit of an improvement point, is having organisations shouldn't be able to take someone's plan and allocate all the funding for their particular service; \$120,000.00 is a lot of money for one service.

But you know, if you're delivering a service – you can do it with plan managers, as well, I think, is, 'Okay, our service is going to cost X amount,' and get the plan manager to put aside that amount in their plan, that's kind of reserved, in a way, for that particular service. Same with people who are NDIS-managed, that it's kind of reserved through the portal. Now, it can be changed, and the person can make that change, but it probably shouldn't happen in the first place, and so you probably shouldn't be able to reserve larger than 30% of someone's plan, for example, but." (Stage 2, Staff 8)

Disability Enterprises note that adequate funding should be a policy priority for peak bodies to advocate for.

"I just think NDIS should be very clear on their role around employment, and that to really support someone's capacity to be independent long-term employment has to be high on the agenda. And if someone has a goal of employment they should have the adequate funds to choose their provider and get the kind of support that they need."(Stage 2, Staff 8)

Support ratios for participant pathways

Having the right ratio of support makes a difference for individuals' employment pathways. A ratio of 1 staff member to 100 Participants who are seeking pathway support is considered inadequate for a customised employment pathway by one Disability Enterprise:

"We could try and run a service like a Disability Employment Service and have a ratio of 1:100, and we would probably succeed in getting the same sort of outcomes, which are very little. So the evidence tells us that low ratios of sort of 1:8/1:10 is essential. And also for employment supports, it takes a certain level of professional to deliver it. So if we're talking about – and I think all support workers need to be at a certain level of skills, qualifications and experience, but it's much more complicated to find someone employment than it might be to take them to a concert or to take them shopping and things like that. So it means we're recruiting staff with Masters degrees and things like that, so there's a much higher wage cost for delivering employment with professionals than it might be to deliver services with a support worker type qualification." (Stage 2, Staff 8)

"Long-term, we do plan that it's going to be sustainable with the right number of people accessing our service, and the balance between staff and clients, where we're working towards a ratio of 1:8, and then 1:10 when they're geographically located closer to each other. But by keeping a really low ratio, which allows you to deliver evidence-based practices, it also puts you at risk of financially delivering that service." (Stage 2, Staff 8)

Case Study: Andy (Stage 2)

'Andy' has been allocated 156 hours of support under **CORE Centre Supports in Employment 1:1** over 3 years.

With this allocation the service provider was able to provide, on average, one hour per week for supports to investigate and explore areas of interest for open employment and then seek open employment once a direction is determined (in line with Andy's stated goals).

The service provider determined that additional support was needed to continue the employment journey. A reassessment was requested at the end of the previous plan period (August 2023) asking for 2 hours over 2 years for CORE Centre Supports in Employment 1:1 funding for Employment Pathways supports to continue in Andy's plan. Additional supports were not provided as Andy's plan was rolled over (extended 12 months until August 2024). The roll over means that he was not re-assessed.

ILC project funding has covered the short fall in the funding, especially in the preparation and planning phase early on for Andy's work experience. Non-NDIS funded areas in which the service provider did support Andy include tasks like:

- ▶ Paperwork for placement
- ▶ Email to placement to confirm, including paperwork completion
- ▶ Confirmation text to participant and parent
- ▶ Text exchange with participant re placement meeting spot
- ▶ 1:1 support at placement
- ▶ And tracking progress and development with Andy via conversations.

Inadequate funding and plan review or revision

Inadequate funding for employment pathways was an ongoing challenge for Disability Enterprises and individuals. Staff note that the Core supports in NDIS plans are not adequate for employment related supports. Some participants in the pathways program were reliant on funding secured via participation in this ILC project. This was the case across all three organisations.

“At this stage, all the participants from our branch involved in the Swinburne project have very limited funding and we wouldn’t really say it was an appropriate funding item, because it’s Core support. Usually when we have a participant with Core support funding, we can only really deliver work experience and those sorts of less complex activities, just due to the hourly rate from the NDIS. But in terms of that, at the moment, because we’ve got the Swinburne funding, we’re able to do more complex activities like seeking out employers and whatnot. But it’s hard to be able to put someone in work experience if they’ve only got 50 hours in their Plan for the whole year.” (Stage 2, Staff 2)

Inadequate funding means that employer engagement is put at risk. Plan reviews are an avenue for requesting funding for a specific activity, however funding for an employment pathway under Capacity Building is not always granted, even if this is a priority for the individual.

“Well, we had a person that asked for employment, didn’t get employment funding, appealed, still didn’t get employment funding, and still decided to go ahead with our service. And the fear that it caused them of what was going to happen if NDIS was going to ask for the money back, because they hadn’t been approved – you know, it’s a lot of time wasting for the family, but it’s time wasting for us when the person’s number one goal is employment and they’re not really interested in going to a day program where they got funded huge amounts of funding. So I think every single plan is overly complex.” (Stage 2, Staff 8)

Plan reviews are an important part of ensuring individuals have adequate funding in their plans to pursue an employment pathway. They can also lead to discussions about employment pathways:

“To be honest, it all started with - I think he was getting a review on his NDIS plan. And NDIS called me, and then we were just having discussion about his needs and his requirements and how old he is and what he’s doing. And it was that NDIS representative that recommended that [he] get onto the - what is it called? ... [SLES] for the plan for that two-year funding that NDIS give to help people with disabilities get employment.” (Family member 1)

For many individuals, Plan reviews are a time consuming, as one individual said:

“Yeah. I’m already on NDIS, but we’re doing a plan review. So [NDIS] have changed their system, and it takes even longer now. The plan manager’s saying maybe September/October we’ll get it back, but she’s hoping it to be earlier; but we’re giving it until then. And then she’ll ring and ask why it’s taking forever.” (Stage 2, Participant 9)

The process of attaining a plan review can mean waiting long periods of time for an outcome.

There are three different types of plan management, these are: plan managed, self-managed and NDIS managed plans. A lack of funding for Plan Management was noted as an issue by one organisation. Not all Disability Enterprises provide Plan Management as part of their service. In these instances, NDIS plans are managed by an independent Plan Manager, NDIS managed, or self-managed. Challenges arise where there is inadequate funding for a plan manager for individuals who need it. This can lead to inadequate supervision and forward planning for the use of funds.

Disability Enterprise staff note the key challenges in Managing Plan Utilisation:

- ▶ The Plan Manger helps individuals monitor funds and provide financial reporting. A Support Coordinator will support individuals to understand and implement supports included in their plan. A Support Coordinator will link individuals to providers and other community and government services.
 - ▶ Limited hours for a Plan Manager limit how well financial aspects of the plan are managed.
 - ▶ Not having a Plan Manager can occur because: the NDIS plan does not include one from the outset (i.e., there are not any funding/ hours in someone's plan for a support coordinator).
- ▶ If there is more funding for a Support Coordinator, then they are involved in monitoring how much funding is used and for what services. However, this is not the job of the Support Coordinator.
 - ▶ If someone is getting supports across a range of services and these are being recorded via different areas/platforms, then this means it is difficult to manage where funding is being spent and how much funding remains for activities. Hence, having adequate funding for management and coordination support where it is required is important.



Image: Woman dicing vegetables in kitchen.

Case Study: LOLA (Stage 2)

- ▶ Lola's current plan was coming to an end and required a review. Her plan had previously included Capacity Building funding which she used to fund her employment journey with the service provider that is part of a large disability organisation.
- ▶ The service provider requested an early plan review on behalf of and with the participants' permission because they ran out of Support Coordinator funding.
- ▶ The review resulted in a NDIS plan which had no Capacity Building funding. In order to access employment supports with the Disability Enterprise Lola made a decision to give up another service. This allowed her 128 hours of supports over 104 weeks for Employment support.
- ▶ This equates to approximately one hour a week of support for employment goals.
- ▶ The service provider has been using the line item Skills Development and Training 1:1 (a Capacity Building item) for Lola's employment journey.
- ▶ There have been 93 hours used for employment goals, with 94 hours left to cover the continuing supports for the employment pathway.



Image: Young man working in nursery.

Funding needed for employment

Staff may need to request a review to change NDIS plans to try to secure adequate funding for employment pathways:

"... we've had that with quite a few people. One person has had limited funding and we put in for an early plan review to get more funding but in the Capacity Building line item. But when they came back they just released more Core funding, which makes it difficult, especially if, depending on the participant, sometimes they really want things to happen now. But with the NDIS funding, sometimes it is a bit of a wait and you've got to try and stretch that funding over so many weeks before you get funding and then you find out that it's just the same as before." (Stage 2, Staff 2)

In cases where more intense supports are required or a customised approach is being taken, a higher level of funding may be required.

"I guess we know that a lot of the behind the scenes management work, we know that that's not going to be funded. But in terms of – I guess I stay true to our evidence-based practice, that if we deliver it true to the evidence, and discovery and customised employment is included, in terms of the NDIS funding, then probably – I read something the other day about the language; the NDIS price guide uses the language 'job customisation'. Now, I've never seen a definition or evidence-based practice that was called 'job customisation'. That, in my opinion, should be called 'customised employment'." (Stage 2, Staff 8)

The level of funding required is directly related to the level of support that a Disability Enterprise can offer (i.e. from light touch to customised employment) and that is matched to the individual.

"And that's another thing: we don't invoice the person double because we send two team members along, but we might choose to – say, for example, a new client has met me, and I want to introduce them to a counsellor, I will attend that session. So we're delivering twice the resources for that appointment, and the appointment's an hour, but it's probably half an hour each way to get there, so it's two staff for three hours - so it's six hours of work – yet we only charge the cost of one person being there. Now, maybe that's a fault of ours that we're not charging truly for what we're delivering, but we think it's better for the client that they have a consistent person, someone that they've met, so that then when they're meeting someone new it's less confronting, and easier for them to meet a new team member.

And I think that comes to – you've got to consider the level of professional that's required to deliver this type of service, you've got to understand the structure that's required to support the team members to deliver this service. And in terms of if we look at our – and we do that, we look at our income through NDIS, and we look at the cost of delivering our service; well, we make a huge loss at the moment. But it's through philanthropic funding that we're able to balance out those losses until we can get ourselves to a more sustainable area. But very difficult for other organisations that haven't had the same success in terms of the philanthropic funding to set up this type of service." (Stage 2, Staff 8)

Delayed plans

Delays in receiving the right funding in a NDIS Plan can affect the employment pathway momentum. This is because support that staff can offer will be limited or will need to be stretched out over the course of a Plan so that consistent support can be offered. If all support hours are used up in the early stages then individuals risk being left without support:

"... because it becomes inconsistent. You might be doing three hours of support this week and then you've got to cut it down to one the next week, so for them it's a big jump and there's not really any way you can support that." (Stage 2, Staff 2)

The way in which family members are billed by Disability Enterprises can help or hinder the use of funds, especially in the case of self-managed or family-managed Plans. One family member suggests invoicing for

payments in lots/ quarterly rather than receiving invoices for each amount of money spent from the Disability Enterprise. Delays also occur due to:

- ▶ Roll-over: when a plan is rolled over no adjustments are made. The NDIS plan is rolled over without a review to adjust supports in relation to changing employment goals and needs (i.e. support or travel for employment).
- ▶ NDIS review time-lag: individual goals change which means the funding plan requires change, but the review is a slow process and often delays the employment pathway.

3.1.3 Supported Wage System and salary for individuals in Open Employment

This section is about the type of salary paid to employees in Open Employment, e.g. Supported Wage or full wage, and the level of hours. Staff report that it can be difficult to engage with large organisations if they do not have a system in place for paying supported wages:

"Whereas if it was just a standard thing, in my thinking - this is just my thinking, this is not a [disability enterprise] thinking - if the employment bargaining agreements, the EBAs that everyone has, and the rules under which they employ their staff allowed for a supported wage and supported that recruitment and the benefit of people that would be to everyone's benefit. Because it would just be a standard thing." (Stage 2, Staff 1)

Staff report that supported wages are too low and dehumanising, and participants also reported low wages that were 'rotten':

"I just wanted to change my job. I worked hard. I've gotten paid from, so that's it." (Stage 2, Participant 1)

"I remember reading about supported wage ... and I was like, 'Well, that's really low. That's beyond low.' Yeah, so I would probably do something about supported wage, to be honest, because it's like you get paid minimum wage and, if you don't even get the minimum wage of an able-bodied or normal worker, then I still think that's dehumanising for someone with a disability to rock up to work, do the job, and only get paid seven per cent. Yeah, so I would say like a set minimum wage for everyone." (Stage 2, Staff 3)

Disability Enterprises are also concerned about assessment accuracy (i.e., the impact of performance anxiety on scores), and resourcing for these assessments for workers in open employment contexts.

One organisation reports that they pay a considerable supported wage compared to other similar organisations – \$11 per hour is the lowest wage, with \$17 roughly the average wage, with a full wage being \$20 per hour. But they fear that if participants were to transition into open employment they may be paid a lot less.

3.1.4 Limited opportunities for professional development at work

Some participants reported that they outgrew roles and knew when they needed a change:

"... it's hard to explain. The job was fine, because I'm used to this type of thing, it was just more that it was sort of like a family business kind of thing and because I worked with [individual] before and it was her mum. Yeah, it's sort of hard to explain, but – I think I just felt like I needed to grow." (Stage 2, Participant 6)

Participants preferred a mix of support and autonomy at work where they were given the opportunity to make decisions:

"Getting bossed around at work is annoying ... I do get frustrated." (Stage 2, Participant 5)

Other participants experienced limitations in their roles, for instance feeling like the employer was not right for them or not being offered the chance to develop new skills.

"Big W, and I was putting away stock and everything. And I was close – middling, so in the middle of the

learning and I asked about the cash registers and whether I can learn how to use them. And they said, 'We're just – it's too fast in learning the cash registers'. So I asked whether I can learn how to use the cash registers somewhere else. And that's where it began.

But I was pretty shocked and I'm going like that's what made me decide that I'm better off being on the floor in retail and knowing what's best, but still having that adaptable learning and knowledge of the retail cash register in an op shop." (Stage 2, Participant 1)

In the most challenging contexts, not only were there limited opportunities for development, but employer attitudes created a negative experience for individuals. For instance, where a deficit approach was taken and individuals were made to feel like their disability was a problem in the workplace.

"I couldn't do a lot in hospitality like carry the heavy pots and pans and all they did was tell me to stay out of the way you can't go near the stove or the oven. It was like they're showing me, like I'm some special disabled person. And I hated that because I don't want my disability to affect my job. I just want it – I know it's there. " (Stage 2, Participant 1)

3.1.5 Training and Education

Externally offered Certified Training courses can boost individuals' skills and confidence. However, education providers may lack confidence and knowledge in providing training to people with a disability. This can lead to the marginalisation of individuals seeking further education.

On-the-job training in the WISE setting allows individuals to learn in a supportive environment.

"They actually taught me a little bit how to use the cash register, but that was maybe once or twice. They taught me how to be a – what was the go around being a secretary. What the admin do." (Stage, Participant 1)

Disability Enterprises use different ways of teaching new skills that suit their individual participants, customised to individual needs.

"He's a great supervisor; he's basically taught me everything about the job, what areas are what and how to do it properly ... He's taught me in a way that I understand, and I appreciate, and I agree with as well." (Stage 1, Participant 8)

Staff and employees discussed a range of strategies that were used to support hands-on learning such as laminated instructions or lists of tasks to be done.

Some Disability Enterprises use work buddies and mentors on-site to assist with training and coaching in new skills. This can be as easy as working with a colleague (participant or staff member) who is able to provide guidance for learning new tasks.



Image: Supervisor and staff member working together in warehouse.

3.1.6 Roadblocks to workplace modifications

Changes to workplaces can take more time where equipment and structural changes are needed. Delays can be caused to employment when significant adjustments are needed to the workplace:

“And some workplaces not being sure whether, do they provide it or does Job Access assess it or what happens with what? But yeah, because I guess, maybe some employers are pretty new to employing someone with a wheelchair or someone who needs that accommodation in the workplace.” (Stage 2, Staff 3)

In some cases, employers found it difficult to set up an accessible workplace using funding from Job Access. This delayed the employment pathway for the individual. As one family member reports:

“I think they had to get funding from - what’s the government organisation - Job Access ...that took a little while. But once I complained to Job Access, and I said, this is ridiculous that he’s waiting this long. He needs to work. He wants to work. If anybody goes for a job, they can start almost immediately, or within a few weeks. Why are you punishing people with disabilities?”

They said, the delay is not from us. We’ve done all the funding part... We’ve given the approval. I think they were waiting for - they needed to do a table for him, which I don’t even think is even done for now. Currently, he can’t access a microwave to have warm meals at lunchtime. So, he can’t access a kitchen... So, he can’t make food. He has to have either cold sandwiches, or something that can’t be warmed up. So, I don’t know what all the delay was. They were supposed to get him a table, but he says, they’re still waiting for this, they’re waiting for that. So, it hasn’t even been done up until now.”(Stage 2, Family member 1)

Accessibility can be created with the support of the WISE and funding from Job Access Employment Assistance Fund.

“He’s been able to find a job at [Open Employer], where ... he’s got the workplace modified to suit his disability, after a while of back and forth with Job Access and the workplace as well, going back and forth, going, ‘Oh, whose job is it to modify the workplace,’ or getting the quotes and all that sorted.” (Stage 2, Staff 3)

In some cases additional funding is required from the employer which can prove a challenge.



Image: Supervisor and staff member working together in laundry.

3.2 Facilitating employment pathways

3.2.1 Designated funding for employment transitions – NDIS and SLES

There is a need to ensure a match between individual goals and funding at the outset in individual plans so that individuals are resourced with the support they need to bring plans to life. Planning ahead for success may mean including funding in NDIS plans for travel and a variety of supports for employment in the mainstream labour market.

Disability Enterprises report that SLES funding is useful because it is allocated specially for the transition from school to work. The amount is also considered adequate for most transition support. Having a sufficient designated benchmark for employment support would greatly assist all stakeholders:

“The School Leaver Employment Supports – the SLES funding – is probably the one that’s most straightforward. ...because the planner knows SLES is about \$22-26,000.00 a year. We’ve got a quote that’s somewhere in that ballpark. Their goal is employment. It’s nice and easy for that planner to go, ‘Okay, that makes sense.’ But then another planner, who might be funding ‘finding and keeping a job’ through Capacity Building, they’re not quite connecting: ‘Okay, it’s going to cost \$20/22,000.00 to deliver this service,’ they’re not quite then going, ‘That’s the funding we’re going to give.’ It’s overly complex, and we get different questions from every NDIS planner, from every Local Area Coordinator. And they ask us for a lot of reports, they ask us for a lot of questions, they’ll ask us for a lot of evidence, and that’s a lot of time that we don’t bill anyone for.”(Stage 2, Staff 8)

“I think it’s the plan that the School Leaver Employment Supports becomes a Transition to Employment Supports, and that it’s open to anyone of any age. So that should make the job of the planners easier, because they know that they’ve got \$20-26,000.00 that they can fund someone for transition to employment. So I guess my recommendations is make it simpler for the planner, make it simpler for the family and the person, and then that’s going to make it simpler for us. And if someone’s goal is employment, we need to be realistic and we need to provide them adequate funding to meet that goal. And if the person chooses to use funding that’s been put in there for a day program, or put in there for another form of support, they should have the flexibility to use it for what is going to help them meet their goals.” (Stage 2, Staff 8)

Staff at one Disability Enterprise reported that if a SLES style payment was made available to a broader segment of people with a disability (not linked to age and life stage) this would provide enhanced support and make a significant difference for employment pathways.

“But in our opinion, if you’re 66 and you’ve never had a job, and you want us to support you transition to employment, well we’re going to support you to transition to employment. It doesn’t matter if you’re 66 or 16, to us. I like the idea, and my understanding, that was the plan of the NDIS, that a person would have their funding and they could use that funding flexibly for their supports, and I think that’s the direction it should go into ... But if it’s about choice and control, I think if the person’s goal is employment they should have flexibility to use any part of their plan to meet that goal.” (Stage 2, Staff 8)

3.2.2 Connecting with other services

The role of Disability Enterprises in carving out and an employment pathway with a DES is not straightforward. There is no clear role for Disability enterprises or funding for employment outcomes. DES can be used to fill support gaps in the employment pathway if an individual has only NDIS Core funding. This is the case where organisations report that Core funding does not offer adequate support for employment pathways and that Capacity Building funding is preferable.

It is mandatory for employers to hire individuals via a DES if they would like to access a wage subsidy. This acts as an incentive for employers; however, it also brings to light a funding gap for Disability Enterprise organisations. DES receive government funding for placing individuals in employment. Disability Enterprises

(and other WISEs) do not receive this funding which could be utilised for resourcing staff and expanding the capability and reach of the Disability Enterprise.

When a support worker spans different employment environments consistency is provided to individuals and employers. For instance, the work of Disability Enterprises (i.e. WISEs) and Disability Employment Services (DES) overlap and intersect. DES can help to place individuals with employers.

Disability Employment Services (DES) can help to place individuals with employers. Disability Enterprises (i.e. WISEs) who work closely with DES can share in a mutually beneficial relationship as WISEs promote a tailored and customised approach to the job search process. Individuals can be linked with a DES to assist with their employment journey.

“We are dual-supporting a few people who are with a DES ... Obviously, it's a bit trickier, but if their funding is limited and whatnot, and at the end of the day it's their choice who they want to go with, so we still do that dual support.”

The work of the WISE and DES overlap and intersect. WISE can often be carrying out the work of a DES.

“I think we're working towards the same outcomes as a DES, but yes, we don't currently get access to the same incentives or – and even having access to the incentives that could be offered to employers could be helpful for a WISE. Or it could be the opposite. Because selling incentives doesn't usually lead to long-term job outcomes. So it's a balancing act.

But wouldn't it be great if the Disability Employment Service funding was the same as the NDIS funding, and the funding sat with the person and they knew what they were spending their money on. And they could use it with anybody who's delivering employment services? So you don't have to be a registered Disability Employment Service, because a lot of organisations like us wouldn't want to go near registering as a Disability Employment Service. But we are an employment service, so if a person had – you know, they might have – well, the report I read is a six month outcome for a DES is around \$40,000.00. So if they have \$40,000.00 budget and they could go to an organisation like us, and use some of that funding for us to provide the support, that would be a much better outcome, I think, for the person; and then they know what ratio they're paying for, and they know what support they're paying for.” (Stage 2, Staff 8)

There is a desire to see funding blended or the total quantum of funding for employment across diverse employment service systems made available for the individual to allocate to a provider of their choice.

3.2.3 Professional development and wellbeing at work

Employers are aware of the need for choice, change and growth and consider additional roles that individuals may like to trial. This is applicable in an Open or Supported Employment setting where there are different roles or tasks that a person could take on.

“So the next bit would probably be the office. They're trying to work on admin skills with [individual], very

Feature Quote:

“There's a few different ways they come in. I know that I've got a participant working in Open Employment and how we actually got them in there is that we linked up with a DES right beforehand so that the employer could get a wage subsidy. And in those ways is where it comes in, but then also we've got participants who might have Core funding so we can't do an extensive job search process, but we can do the work experience and whatnot and then the DES can help them with finding-the-employment side of things.” (Stage 2, Staff 2)

simple admin skills, things like shredding, something needs to be put in envelopes, things like that. So through the library we've started a little bit of that, with her getting books ready to be covered and processed so it's just that kind of work. We might look for opportunities where that could happen.” (Stage 2, Employer 3)

Appropriate allocation of greater responsibility to individuals advances personal development and also a sense of autonomy and confidence.

“The boss, [name] trusted me enough to get – to – once he got the money organised, he said, ‘Go to the bank’, wherever it is, ‘and take this money and put it into the bank’. And he put it in the bag and bring it back so that you can get the receipt back from the bank people. And I did that and then I took it back to my boss [name] and I gave it to him – gave him the bag with the receipt in it and the money bags and then said, ‘Here you go.’” (Stage 2, Participant 1)

Meaningful and purposeful work can create the conditions for good mental health.

“Yes, because not only we get more money coming in, it gives us a good feeling that we can do a lot more.” (Stage 2, Participant 6)

“Not only is it financial independence, but it's also that social aspect is a huge one. The feeling of belonging and feeling a part of the team and that you belong to something is hugely important for someone with a disability. It's the feeling of having their own identity and belonging and having something that's their own as well.” (Stage 2, Staff 4)

Conversely, individuals who felt marginalised from employment opportunities, including those who were waiting for employment, felt a negative impact on their mental health:

“We've also had our team leader, contact his mother, and [she] actually has shared with us that she thinks that [the individual] might be suffering from depression, because he hasn't been able to find a job, but he's also been unwilling to meet with [Disability Enterprise] staff on top of that, either.” (Stage 2, Staff 3)

“But that whole process was so disappointing, because it took six months, or maybe a little bit - maybe five months, or something from when he did the interview until he could actually start work. So, he already had made the decision to stop tennis, so he stopped it. And then he was basically just sitting at home for six months, just waiting for something to happen. So, if there's any changes that need to be made, I really think it needs to be made in the timeframe that, when they get the job, it needs to be a speedier process than six months for them to actually – so, that's everything in a nutshell, that's kind of what happened with his employment.” (Stage 2, Family member 1)

Some individuals reported that their medication affected their health and ability to attend employment, despite their own goals and career ambitions. Disability Employment staff take the health and well-being of individuals into consideration to ensure inclusive work conditions are provided:

“I think mental health of our clients is a much bigger factor ... and having our employment counselling as core to our service, I feel, is extremely valuable. And quite often it's not the person's intellectual disability, it's not the person's physical disability, it's not the – quite often it's that sort of psychosocial area that the person needs the most amount of support with. So having counsellors that can go into the workplace, that know the person really well, that can communicate with the person and support the person to self-advocate within an organisation, is huge for that person's integration and mental health in the workplace.” (Stage 2, Staff 8)

“Some people maybe can be placed, even though there's very high support needs, and we have been able to do that. So, it is that mindset as well that happens. And on top of all of that – and this, I'm talking about staff here, and then we can talk about employees as well – the growth in this field, in the IPs [Individual Plans] that they have actually progressed, and then you combine them together with the counselling that we actually provide, having a resident counsellor that comes in every two weeks, and as a part of counsellors, as a part of customised employment, we're directly dealing with them – a lot of that is the belief and the mental health and the wellbeing aspect that comes with it, making them believe.” (Stage 2, Staff 7)

3.2.4 Knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing about how to create an inclusive environment in the workplace is pivotal for successful employment experiences. Disability Enterprises can support employers by sharing advice and advocating for change:

"The biggest challenge is probably just finding businesses that are open to it and not wearing them out either. If you're putting someone in for placement, find a business that's really good, but then you don't want to overwhelm them by putting people in endlessly. And at the end of the day, there's only a limited number of places we can put people, because they're bound geographically.

... people I know, when they think about disability, they think about someone in a wheelchair or someone with Down syndrome. They don't think about the invisible disability. So providing a bit of information on disabilities, we've got the support that we will provide to the employer so it's not as scary for them. And that includes advice, advocacy and training on the job support. And then we've got a page that's benefits on disability inclusion in the workforce. So we've outlined the benefits to the business and the benefits to the employee.

So some [benefits] for the business would be trained and skilled employees, sustainable staffing, inclusive and diverse culture, social impact, improved performance and business growth and then for employees, we've got belonging, social connection, improved emotional wellbeing, financial independence, expansion of skills and experience. And then we've got, the next page is explaining some common stereotypes and misunderstandings, debunking some of those. So some of those might include people with disabilities have minimal skill which we're then saying [is] false and here's why. And then we've got information on what a disability inclusive workplace would look like, talking about accessibility, workplace adjustments, physical barriers, communication barriers, and all that sort of stuff. So providing a really good booklet that gives them all the information that they need to know as well as offering our full support." (Stage 2, Staff 4)

Employer attitudes and approaches may vary depending on the size of the organisation. The risk is that the culture at the hiring level is not translated into the everyday culture of the organisation. There may be many pressure points in the everyday operations creating a barrier to an inclusive work culture:

"I guess if the person who wants to employ a person with a disability, if they're sitting in their head office in New South Wales, it's not going to really help the person working in [location], for example. Where, if you're working with a small to medium business, and the person who wants to employ a person with a disability is actually there and will manage the person, or will manage their manager, you're more likely to have that supportive type workplace.

But I think, also, the risk of a corporate saying, 'Oh, I want to employ a person with a disability,' the risk is even though we've done the Discovery process and we've started with the person, there is the risk that we haven't identified that as a business for that particular person. So I think it gets much more success when we identify businesses ourselves that align with the individual's vocational themes, that we discover through the Discovery process. Because we know that that person is going to bring strengths to that particular industry and that particular type of work. But it's challenging, and it's hard to turn down offers of employment; when you're working with people who are desperate to work, it's hard to turn down offers of employment [that don't match the person's vocational themes]." (Stage 2, Staff 8)

3.2.5 Customised pathways to employment

Customised Employment is practiced in a range of different ways.¹ Disability Enterprises Customising employment options engage with individuals' interests, goals, hobbies, and networks while also engaging with employer and community needs to generate new employment opportunities or develop micro-businesses. This involves learning about and understanding individual interests and goals in the community they live in and includes steps like informational interviewing for the individual to learn about the employer (see Section 4.8.1 for more). This requires brokering new relationships with employers to generate a shared understanding of individual preferences, how the business operates, and how the individual's strengths can be used to benefit the business needs so that appropriate roles can be generated for individuals (Moore et al. 2018).

There is a need to ensure a match between individual goals and funding at the outset in individual plans so that individuals are resourced with the support they need to bring plans to life. Planning ahead for success may mean including funding in NDIS plans for travel and a variety of supports for employment in the mainstream labour market.



Image: Man working and laughing in warehouse.

¹ Customised Employment involves person centered planning with the goal of employment (Smith et al, 2023: 2; Murphey et al., 2014). Customised Employment is defined as 'a process for achieving competitive integrated employment or self-employment through a relationship between employee and employer that is personalized to meet the needs of both' (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2023). There are different approaches to customising with some organisations adopting a fidelity scale (see: Inge et al. 2022) to guide their practice.

The wise-ability model

In earlier research conducted by CSI (Barraket, Campbell, Moussa et al., 2020), we developed a Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE) model which shows the organisational design features that best support the health, wellbeing, and employment outcomes of marginalised young people in a social enterprise environment.

The two stages of this project focus on adapting and refining the model for use in Disability Enterprise settings, with the revised model termed the 'WISE-Ability' model. The WISE-Ability model highlights the key ingredients necessary in Disability Enterprises that adopt a WISE approach to support increased employment opportunities, particularly mainstream employment, for people with disability. The benefit of the model is that it builds on organisational strengths already present in some Disability Enterprises (formerly ADEs).

The model includes elements that support individuals with a disability, for example, wrap around support, on-the-job learning opportunities, and safe spaces. It also includes elements that Disability Enterprises require, for example, strong structure, good partnerships, stable funding, and pathways to mainstream employment.

The model is housed within a disability/social enterprise structure, but it also has a bridge to employment outside the social enterprise, and this is captured by the Pathways to employment domain.

The domains of the model are: Organisational structure, Space and Environment, Culture, Relationships, Finance and Funding, Industry, Policy and Procedure, and Pathways to Employment. Each domain identifies and describes some key organisational features that strengthen the wellbeing and employment outcomes for people with disability in the enterprise.

4.1 Structure

4.1.1 Diverse work opportunities

Diverse work opportunities can be built into the DNA of the Disability Enterprise in the initial set up or by diversifying operations.

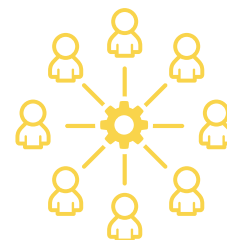
Diversity of choice

Disability Enterprises frequently have multiple business arms in different industry areas such as hospitality, landcare, manufacturing, packaging, business support, among others. These business areas provide different 'sites' or workspaces for employees to work in and learn a range of skills. This increases opportunities to try different job roles and environments.

"genU has a lot of different areas and you can jump across to different areas, which is really good." (Stage 1, Participant 1)

"We take people for tours and we don't say 'This is the only place'. We always say: 'What's your choice? Where would you like to work?' Because there's no point putting someone somewhere where they don't want to work. I mean that's a huge barrier." (Stage 1, Staff 3)

Having different options for activities and roles within the enterprise and in Open Employment allows individuals to expand their skill sets, generates interest and provides challenges and avoids disengagement from long term repetition:



"I did have a participant who was working in Open Employment and I noticed that they had become bored and disinterested at work. So I spoke with them and, obviously, sometimes they don't really talk about it. So when I spoke with their mum and that's when she said to me, 'He's becoming a bit uninterested because it's quite repetitive'. And so we got in contact with the employer and we suggested that maybe a bit more variety of tasks would be good. And at first the employer was a bit taken aback by it and they were like, 'Well, there's a pecking order', and all of that. And after a bit more discussion and the way we framed it was 'they're not trying to step on anyone's toes, they just want to learn more and be able to help more'. Now they're able to do a variety of tasks rather than just the same thing." (Stage 2, Staff 2)

4.1.2 Wraparound Support team

Organisational structure includes the way staffing is structured, including having designated support staff or teams. This includes both support within the workplace, as well as linking up supports outside of the workplace, though this work is not always funded.

If there are multiple sites within the WISE it is important that staff stay in communication with one another so that there is a common understanding of individual support requirements. Where a WISE is nested within a larger organisation (such as a disability service provider) this can assist connecting between supports.

"I think we're really lucky in terms of we have multiple sites and different supports, we've got our centre base, we've got our in-home support, supported living. We're a very close organisation where all of the managers are constantly conversing over the phone, emailing. We all have very strong relationships. So we're able to pick up the phone at any time and really mix in all of the services to make sure that we can put the wraparound supports to the person to get the best results. So when you look at employment, ... it's not just about the employment, it's looking at those other wraparound supports for them in the morning before they come to work and things like that." (Stage 2, Staff 4)

Wraparound support is pivotal to the employment success of individuals.

"When you think of ... clients, the wraparound services that are happening outside of their job, in their home and elsewhere, are just so important. We're dealing with people often who are very vulnerable, and can be easily taken advantage of in the community. And it's an ongoing thing to support people to become more independent and make their own decisions, with support. And so that's crucial, because we've had a number of things where, actually, it's really good that the support staff outside [the enterprise] and the ... staff [within the enterprise] talk and liaise together, with the client's permission, and that's really positive as part of a wraparound service." (Stage 2, Staff 5)

Tailored Support

Tailored support means matching supports, environment and equipment to individual requirements through a deep understanding of the individual. Tailored support can range from help with understanding NDIS guidelines, aligning work settings with work preferences (location and work mate/team), to providing specific forms of support if an employee becomes upset.

You get to know their personalities, their traits and when they come into work you can tell okay, you're not quote right today. You'll say, 'Oh, giddyay... how are you going? What's happening?' You can tell from their demeanor that something has happened. So, you start doing a little bit of digging. You can find out a piece of the puzzle and Support Services might have another piece of the puzzle and we can put something together where we go, 'Okay, we can give them the support they need while at work'." (Stage 1, Staff 6)

"It's about problem shooting and seeing what's involved in their life, not just their workspace." (Stage 1, Staff 1)

Tailored support draws on strategies such as:

- ▶ Developing or updating Behavioural Support Plans of employees/individuals.

- ▶ Equipping employees with the tools to monitor their own wellbeing, including strategies for de-escalation.
- ▶ Guidance and setting parameters for appropriate workplace behaviours.
- ▶ Dispute resolution procedures tailored to the person's communication style and needs.

Providing tailored support means being aware of the needs of individuals and having an understanding of the support services they are connected to. This may include family and friends who play an important role in the support network.

"We had one situation where it wasn't that they were actually in an Open Employment job but they were in Open-Employment-like experience and the previous time someone had met with them they didn't show up and they tried to contact them and didn't get a response and then tried to contact the parent and there was no response. Obviously, that was when the alarm bells started going off and then eventually the participant responded and said that they weren't really feeling okay mentally and we had to, obviously, have a little meeting and see what we could do. And we did get in contact with the parent and had to tell them about the urgency of it and how it was important to address it now. And then we referred them to some short-term immediate helpline services but also then, later down the track, we gave them some contacts for a counsellor and psychologist that they could use with their NDIS funding." (Stage 1, Staff 2)

This may also include referring out to additional supports as needs arise. For instance, if accommodation support is required WISE staff can get in touch with a Local Area Coordinator (LAC) or support coordinator to raise this issue which the LAC or support coordinator will then follow up.

Mentoring and checking-in

Support Staff and Managers in contact roles also act as mentors. These Staff roles involve answering questions, providing advice, ensuring individuals take breaks and have access to food and water. Mentoring support techniques can be learnt on the job and via training. Mentoring activities include:

- ▶ Answering questions/providing information about professional and personal matters
- ▶ Ensuring workers take breaks and have access to food and water
- ▶ Guidance for use of phones in the workplace and appropriate behaviour



Image: Woman working with products in warehouse.

- ▶ Support in the use of new equipment
- ▶ Support for work in different environments
- ▶ Providing tailored training.

Participants validated the importance of being able to discuss challenges as they arise:

"I talk to the supervisor. I've had incidents and I just tell [name] and she just said: 'Don't worry about him.' And she worked it out." (Stage 1, Participant 7)

Healthy work life balance

Employees have wider lives outside of employment, including social and group-based activities that contribute to building confidence and connections. Staff create a healthy work life balance by ensuring the appropriate amount of work hours, and matching work commitments to external programs, duties and leisure networks.

In this context, it is important to be aware that employees/participants need time to review their work schedule with their support network before they commit to additional work or changes in work/employer. Work hours should reflect the preferences of the individual, particularly if there are also health considerations:

"I chose how many days I would like to do... if you've got back problems or something that you're finding it hard to do a full day, some people can do a half day." (Stage 1, Participant 9)

Identifying appropriate levels of work is especially important for young people transitioning from school to employment:

"I know a lot of the participants we work with are younger and they've come out of school and we tend to look at just starting out as shorter hours and then building them up slowly, because going straight into full-time work from school can be really overwhelming. In that sense, we definitely do consider that." (Stage 2, Staff 2)

There are a range of things that contribute to wellbeing, including things outside of the workplace. External factors can influence both wellbeing as well as work attendance and participation. Absenteeism or being late may be associated with a lack of external support. Similarly, poor living conditions can affect sleep, experiences of safety and security, mental health and wellbeing. Having a strong support structure at work can pick these issues up and link to external supports as well as support activities within the workplace:

"... if someone comes in late every day, there could be other issues. We try and look at everything. It could be an issue where they've run out of NDIS funding, and they're walking to work ...Everything can lead into something else, and that's what I tell my team. We always try and think, especially changing behaviours, what's going on?" (Stage 1, Staff 3)

While it is important to identify factors that negatively affect wellbeing, it is also important to reinforce and respect factors that positively affect wellbeing. This may be through supporting an individual who identifies they want to do more exercise or where people need support to maintain a good chores routine (at home). These activities foster organisational skills and motivation that tie into employment goals through supporting wellbeing more generally.

Transport

Support staff provide assistance for individuals to travel to work safely whether by public transport, car or taxi. This may involve funding for travel (i.e. taxis) or marking out a safe, direct route to work.

Travel to work can be a challenge because of the lack of NDIS funding:

"I would say travel is a big one, definitely, because a lot of people don't really have funding for travel in their Plan and so that's where the travel training and stuff comes in." (Stage 2, Staff 2)

However, in some cases, Disability Enterprise staff are able to put supports in place, sometimes with no cost attached, and build safe and friendly touch points (i.e. a café) for participants along their travel route to work. One Disability Enterprise staff member explained a previous example of this kind of need and support.

"I've got one client ... high functioning autism, and actually there's a really good story. He did SLES, and then he worked in a different organisation, just factory type work, supported employment, just putting things together for different contracts. Him and his mum want him to learn customer service skills, so he ended up changing and moving to [employer]. And he was scared, even just getting there. And he had to go on the train. And so we ended up – the OT [occupational therapist] ended up having a support person – doing an assessment, having a support person to go with him on the train, and supporting him with potential meltdowns. And also, when he went during times when there'd be a lot of school kids, rowdy school kids on the train, and walking from the train station to [employer].

And his mum actually went with him and went to a coffee shop that was halfway between the train station and the [employer], and had a word to the proprietor, and had this informal agreement that he could just drop in there, collect his thoughts, take a breath and maybe have a coffee, and then go in. And that works brilliantly. It's fantastic, to the point where one of his comments was, 'I actually feel like a real person now.' That was one of his comments, that he's working in a place where he's supported, in customer service." (Stage 2, Staff 5)

4.1.3 Vocational training and development

Hands-on learning and training

Disability Enterprises play a key vocational training role dedicating over 1000 hours of activity time (32.5% of staff time) to vocational training, work experience, internships, and volunteering to develop participant skills on-the-job. While 15% of pathway activities (27% of staff time) was devoted to developing soft skills of participants.

Hands-on learning involves learning how to do a job or task through practice and with support of a co-worker or staff member. Management and Supervision Staff work 'on the floor' with individuals and go through the jobs/tasks teaching hands-on skills and professional development skills. This is an effective way of learning for many individuals.

Staff explained that this was a way of providing a 'skill set' that would be transferable.

"To an external warehouse, they knew for instance what the word 'pick and pack' meant." (Stage 1, Staff 9)

Hands on-learning and training requires Staff and Supervisors to plan in advance and structure an individual's workday. In stage 1 of the project, one Disability Enterprise used a 'skills matrix' which showed the skills of individuals and matched these up with work tasks or opportunities for skills development.

"So we had the crew, they're on one side and then all the skills that we wanted along the top for people to be able to do, and then work out how many people we needed trained in each one of those skills to be able to cover the day." (Stage 1, Staff 5)

Over time, those employees who had been trained and acquired skills could then 'take ownership' and train other staff in those skills.

Feature Quote:

"I've definitely learned all the machinery. Learned how to drive a little – we call it a buggy but it's an old ride-on lawnmower ... we use for just pulling the trailer around ... I get on the big ride-on as well ... I'm always keen on learning more tools and machinery." (Stage 1, Participant 8)

Training and development within the Disability Enterprise can be customised to individual interests to pursue career goals:

"I try to develop a specific kind of job-specific skill. For example, I've got a client on Monday that I go to [Council] Library with, and he would like to pursue a career in their streaming industry or video game streaming, and he would like to learn video editing, and I've got the skill set to teach him that. So every Monday, I go and do a capacity building session with him based on video editing." (Stage 2, Staff 3)

"I would say the one-to-one skill capacity building, especially when it's specific and targeted towards, and tailored towards, an individual or a client in an area that we feel they might need some development in. That can be really effective. For example, job interview skills, I would say, we do a bit of capacity building for job interviews, because some of our participants can be a bit nervous, or trip on their answers." (Stage 2, Staff 3)

On-the-job training in the WISE setting allows individuals to learn in a supportive environment.

"They actually taught me a little bit how to use the cash register, but that was maybe once or twice. They taught me how to be a – what was the go around being a secretary. What the admin do." (Stage 1, Participant 1)

Disability Enterprises use different ways of teaching new skills that suit their individual participants, customised to individual needs.

"He's a great supervisor; he's basically taught me everything about the job, what areas are what and how to do it properly ... He's taught me in a way that I understand, and I appreciate, and I agree with as well." (Stage 1, Participant 8)

Staff and employees discussed a range of strategies that were used to support hands-on learning such as laminated instructions or lists of tasks to be done.

Some Disability Enterprises use work buddies and mentors on-site to assist with training and coaching in new skills. This can be as easy as working with a colleague (participant or staff member) who is able to provide guidance for learning new tasks.

"So, ... they will mentor [Participants] on how to do the bales and stuff [in the shop] when we come out the back, in the donation area. Then if they forget, I'll be over doing something else and just prompt them, 'You writing that down? Remember to roll the thing before you hook the whatsy-doo-dah over'." (Stage 2, Staff 6)

Certified and accredited training

Individuals are offered formal targeted training matched to the area they are working in. Some Disability Enterprises offer certificate level courses (e.g. Certificate II in Hospitality) or are seeking to link micro-credentialing with hands-on learning.

Short courses are also offered to groups of Individuals by training staff and include:

- ▶ Hospitality: employees are provided with essential Occupational Health and Safety and food safety training, including knife handling:

"I'd say, probably 95% of hospitality [Supported Employees] have done that. Also, made a resource to do safe knife handling, which I'd say probably about 65% of the guys have done that." (Stage 1, Staff 4)

- ▶ Landcare: provide first aid training for encountering wildlife, especially snakes (including what to do if you get bitten)
- ▶ Packaging/Warehousing: training in packaging and forklift operation, training in document destruction.

Training and assessment can include a range of approaches: watching a video, demonstrating a task, and being assessed as competent or not. Pre-planning before training sessions is particularly important to

ensure adequate time and funding is available. The Support Team and Staff members take into consideration the abilities and learning needs of each individual:

“Does the person understand? Do I need to offer a different examples and ways of explaining/ delivering? Should I include images and printed tools? I did some printed things and laminated them and used them as kind of props in some of the hospitality training so that they would understand what I was trying to get across. We also use YouTube videos and apps. Everybody’s different and it just depends on the situation.” (Stage 2, Staff 4)

Participants reflected on the importance of education and certification. Learning in a group dynamic with other people with shared learning styles was considered beneficial by some.

“I think the group is better. I have learned better in a classroom visually.” (Stage 2, Participant 6)

Task matching

When matching Individuals with work, staff consider individual interests, strengths, and challenges and how these can be aligned with work tasks and industry. Support needs (for instance, physical and mental health needs) are taken into consideration alongside employee interests. Challenges may work to the individual’s advantage in the right setting. For instance, some tasks require a focus on details which suits particular Individuals. For individuals who find social environments challenging, work in less interactive settings is a better match.

Tasks and training can be matched to individual needs and strengths. Some Disability Enterprises have programs that are designed to build on technical strengths of individuals:

“I’m not an expert on this, but we are currently doing a program [name of computer based program], that helps people who might be more on the less sociable side and more like, let’s say, even for example, where we feel like he might benefit from that, but only if he wants to reach out to us because we can’t do it unless he wants to do it. And that program will help and has helped our clients with mental health problems who enjoy video games as they can bond together over that. And it’s pretty effective if that’s in place.” (Stage 2, Staff 3)

Matching strengths and tasks can also lead to job diversification and opportunities for more independent work.

“... we got her then through a computer course with about three or four others who showed the same capability. We got them trained up on reception, so now I’ve got five Supported Employees who can jump on reception. Now those same employees will now jump on a computer each morning ... and organise the couriers and I really have nothing to do with that job apart from making sure I’ve got enough stock.” (Stage 1, Staff 6)

Modifying work practices and accessible equipment

Many areas of Disability Enterprises have been modified for accessible training and work. Work tasks are often modified by the on-site support team on a daily basis. Accessible equipment is purchased and provided for employees. Some examples include:

- ▶ In Hospitality: a chopping board with spikes on top and suction cups on the bottom to assist someone to prepare food without having to hold the board or food in place; for individuals with vision impairment, talking scales that identify a shortfall or excess in the weighed amount; colour coding is also used to modify measuring tasks.
- ▶ In Reception/administration: Training staff are able to identify and adapt tools to the work environment (i.e. an iPad equipped with a Voice Over Aid Application)

- ▶ In Warehousing: Coding is used for individuals with literacy challenges. Warehousing equipment includes a forklift, but training can be modified and tailored for Individuals to use a walking forklift or 'Walkie'. This requires Warehouse spatial adjustments and planning to link the Walkie training to an accreditation.

Modifications can be supported via funding from Job Access Employment Assistance Fund.

Modifying and customising workplaces can be straightforward, including access to the right equipment (as above), as well as the use of checklists to guide workdays. Modifications deeply engage with the needs of employees:

"They don't know math. So, I'm like, well, we can't do that. So, now we have seasons and all the coat hangers with all the clothes, there's a little coloured piece of paper... there's four seasons. So, yellow is yellow like the sun, so the summer. That went in summer. ... Winter is blue, so every blue item that is in the shop at the moment, got reduced down to cost, because it's been there coming up 12 months." (Stage 2, Staff 6)

One staff member describes a system for handling and matching cash used in a cash register. This can involve using images rather than words for the purpose of matching items, or using a photocopy of an object like money so that it is easily recognisable.

"This is one of the things I've done in here, is change – because when I started, everything was coloured dots. An orange dot was a certain price and that, and I was just like, no, I have to change it, so they recognise on the till what it's going to be. ... So, I changed it so they would recognise, and I changed it to number tags instead of dots. ... The till is on our point of sale. It had children's clothing, adult clothing, men's clothing, shoes, this, that, and everything else. It was all written. I changed everything to pictures and simplified it, down to all clothing, doesn't matter if it's men or women's. I put a music symbol for CDs, I've put a picture of a DVD so they just know – what I found out during the course of that is a lot of these people can't read and write either. So, I had to do it so that they could recognise it." (Stage 2, Staff 6)

In some cases modifications can take more time where equipment and structural changes are needed.

Building personal skills, social skills and real-world skills

Employees can be supported to learn the soft and hard skills that are valued in work environments. A staff member describes the journey of one Individual from being 'shy and timid' to working in Open Employment. This journey involved training in different areas of Disability Enterprises over a number of years to develop social skills, work skills, self-confidence and, finally, working with reduced supports. Skills sets are strengthened via short courses, work and participation in meetings, which also assist in preparing Individuals for Open Employment.

Some Disability Enterprises offer formal training in soft skills, such as a module called 'I have confidence in me' that assists employees who are preparing for Open Employment if they are feeling hesitant or anxious (Stage 1).

Some participants report that it is helpful to begin preparation and build confidence for employment whilst in school via targeted course work and volunteering opportunities, and then build on these post school. One participant observed how learning these skills was easier with 'friends doing the same things'. (Stage 2, Participant 6).

Real workplace conditions and work preparation

Individuals are empowered and prepared for Open Employment via real workplace conditions at Business Enterprises. For instance, having autonomy at work coupled with support, job sharing with teammates, and being encouraged to apply for leave when they need it.

Employees are offered work in Disability Enterprises that include the activities of Open Employment, including activities around work schedules/rostering, opportunities for promotion, and staff meetings.

4.2 Space and Environment



4.2.1 Environment

Part of the job matching process for Disability Enterprise staff is understanding if a participant is comfortable in the Supported or Open Employment workspace. This can be determined after physically being in the workspace with the participant and seeking their feedback which may take different forms, for instance, verbal and non-verbal:

"... we can tell – or the person tells us – when they want to get out of a business, because it's not the right environment. So more so than having quiet spaces within businesses and things like that, it's actually finding an environment where the person feels comfortable, and you can either tell that by what they're communicating to you verbally or physically. So without doing true informational interviews, and job analysis/ workplace analysis type work, that allows you to really see if a person's comfortable in the workplace." (Stage 2, Staff 8)

Busy vs calm environments

Participants identified that working in busy environments can be a challenge, particularly if there is limited support. This can include fast-paced environments such as cafés and food service environments which can be overwhelming or stressful in dealing with customer demands. Disability Enterprises offer a variety of work environments ranging from busy to calm. While the cafés are busier, the laundry is a quieter. Calmer environments allow for a controlled pace and social interactions. Employees are able to request quiet workspaces:

"And you just go to the supervisor, 'Can I just have some time out?' And they understand, 'Okay, all right'. Then they'll put you somewhere, just quietly on your own and you'll just need some chill out time. Because sometimes you just want to work on your own." (Stage 1, Participant 4)

Food access

A focus of supportive spaces and environments that emerged in Stage 2 of the project is the importance of having access to food in workspaces or training environments. It is vital for all employees to have access to food and lunch areas. One Open Employer describes how there is always food in the common area/ kitchen for employees and volunteers:

"In the staffroom there's always biscuits, tea, coffee, whatever so she brings something with her and she loves the staffroom so she's more than happy to sit there for the 40 minutes and just chat to everybody who comes and goes. She's very, very social so loves that bit and I think that's one of the highlights of her day." (Stage 2, Employer 3)

Industrial work areas may have limited access to food. This can be an issue if a supported or open work setting does not have a staff cafeteria.

"We haven't really come into that side of things but I have seen it with business enterprises since moving to the [Open Employment] factory. A lot of them were quite frustrated that now there wasn't really any cafes around and by the time they got across the road and ordered lunch, the lunchbreak was over." (Stage 2, Staff 2)

4.2.2 Accessible and modifiable layout

Accessibility and adjustments

Spatial design can also affect how WISEs meet social goals. A flexible layout means that work areas can be changed to meet individual needs. For instance, utilizing an air-conditioned office on a hot day instead of working in an unconditioned environment is essential for some employees. As one Stakeholder describes, production can sometimes be mobile:

“Just move production into the office, so she’s comfortable ... So, let’s move her into the office, and let’s move the production area, basically, temporarily there so that she feels comfortable.” (Stage 1, Stakeholder 5)

Multiple use areas or a layout that can be modified (i.e. moveable tables, chairs, machinery) also means that WISEs are agile and can meet the needs of new/ different contracted jobs. These spaces can be made more accessible by, for instance, clearly labelling rooms, keeping walkways clear of objects, providing directions to nearby/ in-house food and coffee spots, and monitoring the number of people using spaces at one time. If there are large groups working, for example, then breaks and lunches can be structured, catered, and staggered for access to break rooms and food.

WISEs can test the layout of workplace and other spaces by seeking feedback from Individuals.

Outdoor learning and work

Not only do indoor areas need to be accessible, but this is also required of outdoor areas. Some people prefer outdoor areas (such as working in landcare or horticulture) and others prefer changing options of either indoor or outdoor areas.

“I like working here because we’ve got the option of working inside or working outside.” (Stage 1, Participant 6)

4.2.3 Safe time and areas

Finding a supported or Open Employment

workplace that is the right fit is essential and may require the use of on and off-site spaces. As one WISE staff member explains, leaving the workplace for a break is beneficial for good mental health and emotional regulation:

“So I’m not against quiet rooms, and I’m not against sensory rooms; I’m all for it. Do I think it’s essential? No, I think it’s more essential that we find a workplace where a person feels comfortable, ideally in all areas of that workplace. But it might be an accommodation that a person needs extra breaks, and somewhere to go during those breaks, but that location could be somewhere offsite that they could go. I like to get out of the office if I’m in the office all day, and find somewhere to regulate my emotions, so supporting the person to make those accommodations too.” (Stage 2, Staff 8)

Quiet rooms

Having available rooms as designated areas that facilitate rest, quiet time, privacy and personal conversations. A designated room for Individuals also creates a sense of ownership, belonging and empowerment.

Participants discuss the importance of having quite spaces and time out:

“It’s also a nice place to go and relax. Whoever wants coffee and milo can make themselves that.” (Stage 1, Participant 6)

Walking and driving

A sense of safety and relaxation may also be generated by physical movement. Walking and/or talking with someone may help to lower stress. Alternatively, being in the car can be a space of safety for some.



Image: Young man serving customers in a cafe.

4.3 Culture

Organisational culture has been described as ‘the shared basic assumptions, values, and beliefs that characterise a setting’ (Schneider et al, 2013: 362). Culture is enacted through the way people behave towards each other.



4.3.1 Going ‘above and beyond’

Overall, the culture of WISEs in this model is one of going ‘above and beyond’ in the support of their social goals and the people they work with. Going above and beyond means providing support to achieve personal goals with participants, and celebrating positive outcomes together:

“I’d say our staff, all of our staff that I’ve worked with, in our genU Epping office, very approachable, very caring and we all really want the best for any participant we work with. And we all celebrate when we hear the good news like a participant has got a job.” (Stage 2, Staff 3)

One Disability Enterprise staff member described examples of wrap around support (discussed above in relation to Structure) which is an accepted culture within the organisation.

“They may not have support coordination. They may not have some core supports in their plan ... There’s a gap. And our team do fill that. They assist with doctors’ appointments. They’ve been assisting people with vaccination appointments and getting prepared for that ... So, there’s things that we do over and above ... Our core purpose about having a positive impact on people’s lives is very much ingrained.” (Stage 1, Staff 1)

Trust and Respect

Staff create a culture of care and trust by being understanding in everyday work situations and respecting people’s needs.

“Well, they’ve [Disability Enterprise] got that good culture where they understand that everyone has different needs and other workplaces, they need to learn that. They’ve got to get on board with that I reckon.” (Stage 1. Participant 9)

Participants report feeling respected in their roles:

“They’re excellent here ... You’re not looked at or judged like you have a disability here.” (Stage 1, Participant 2)

Staff ensure that Individuals are valued, their accomplishments acknowledged, and their voices heard in the workplace. This generates a sense of empowerment and mutual respect.

A respectful work environment means that you are given an appropriate amount of time to do the task without being pressured, and that you have the right equipment to do the job. As one Participant says, ideally in any work setting, supported or not:

“I think just everybody should be able to feel safe in the job.” (Stage 2, Participant 6)

Having trusting relationships at the Disability Enterprise between staff and individuals facilitates troubleshooting inter-personal dynamics in a safe environment and in a timely manner. A supervisor explained that there can be instances of reluctance to report issues that arise in the workplace and that to address this all staff need to understand the culture of the workplace as a learning environment:

“I felt particularly with the disability that they needed to trust me. I find that [staff member] was an example. ... he didn’t tell me, ... I’d asked, but he didn’t tell me or indicate [that there was an issue in the workplace], ... I was like, ‘Oh, should have let me know when I asked ...Please tell me.’ He sort of goes – ‘I think they don’t want to cause waves, a lot of them. They think they’ll get into trouble for making mistakes’. One of the big things I say to them is: ‘there’s no mistakes, there’s only learning, mate. It’s a learning lesson. This is a lesson we can learn from, guys.’” (Stage 2, Staff 6)

4.3.2 Belonging

Buddies and working together side by side

In some Disability Enterprises, Individuals are matched with a Buddy from the Support Team. The Buddy helps with orientation and settling in, for example, protocols for arriving at work and leaving work, and adopt a 'side by side' working approach rather than a supervision approach.

The 'Buddy system' was discussed by Stakeholders and Employers who believed it would be useful in Open Employment contexts. Buddy training would be required to upskill staff in other organisations to be buddies, and funding would also be required for Buddies in Open Employment.

Understanding

A range of understandings are core to the culture essential in a WISE-Ability model:

- ▶ Difference: Understanding that everyone is different and that difference and acceptance go hand-in-hand is an important part of Disability Enterprise culture.

"Every disability is different and some people handle their disability differently ... and you've got that help there." (Stage 1, Participant 9)

- ▶ Calm culture: an understanding attitude is important to mediate and control potentially reactive environments.
- ▶ Everybody makes mistakes: learning from mistakes on an everyday basis generates new skills.
- ▶ Positivity: Staff report that providing encouragement helps support a positive workplace culture.

"I think that if crew feel safe and they've got that positivity around them, positive staff to encourage them where they need to be. I think just having those kinds of things in place, it is better for their mental health. And obviously, if their mental health is on track, then they're going to be better at what they're doing... 'Okay, I feel emotionally good at work, I feel mentally good at work, I feel supported at work. I feel safe at work,' all those kinds of things reflect in the work that they do physically." (Stage 1, Staff 8)

An added aspect that emerged from stage 2 is about the importance of actively monitoring for relationships that are turning negative, including signs of conflict that could interfere with performance at work.

"That's definitely one we look out for and also just keeping an eye on how their relationships are going with other people in the workplace, because sometimes there can be conflict and that can obviously impact them." (Stage 2, Staff 2)

4.3.3 High quality products and services

Quality focused business

All Disability Enterprise staff, including individuals working with support, are invested in producing high quality products and services as a business. Disability Enterprises see themselves as an inclusive business striving for both quality of product and workplace conditions. One staff member gave an example of working hard to build a quality product for a customer:

"So can you do hampers? Can you bring us a small, medium, and large?' And we actually went one further. We took about eight different-sized boxes, and then we took four big boxes of just all different products. And we said, 'How about we build a hamper that suits you with all our products?'" (Stage 1, Staff 9)

4.4 External Relationships



Disability Enterprises focused on supporting the employment goals of people with disability require strong relationships with both customers (i.e. those businesses and customers who purchase goods and services from the WISE) as well as other Open Employers. These relationships underpin both the success of the enterprise as well as opportunities for Open Employment pathways.

4.4.1 Building shared goals and knowledge

New relationship opportunities

Relationship development with participants, partners and employers is crucial to build shared goals and knowledge, break down barriers around social stigma, and facilitate the transition of individuals to Open Employment. Relationships are developed over time and require sensitivity to both employer needs and the individual's needs for an inclusive work environment. Business and employment pathway opportunities may arise from contacting other businesses to discuss how a WISE can fulfil their unique needs as well as its own.

"I reached out to them, and before you know it, we've got a job painting ... it's just getting the conversation started, but where does it end? There is really no endpoint." (Stage 1, Staff 9)

New relationships can be built through offering trials that might both offer diverse work experience to employees as well as lead to new business opportunities for the WISE:

"We'll do a little trial day, whether it's two hours, three hours, four hours, we'll bring our Supported Employees to you. We'll trial the work, which means our guys can feel it, touch it, see if it meets our scope of work, and then from there we can present quotes. We're actually giving you a better price because we actually know what we're quoting for." (Stage 1, Staff 9)

Alternatively, staff can approach customers and employers with strategies for engaging individuals for particular tasks off-site. This is the next step (towards Open Employment) in an employment pathway for individuals:

"... if we're going into an employer, we don't want to be ambiguous ... So, if I was going to go into a factory, I would've already thought about what tasks would happen in this factory ... you just be very specific about some ideas of things that our participants could do to generate those conversations in the beginning." (Stage 1, Staff 10)

The process of building new relationships can also raise awareness about individuals' skill sets and breakdown preconceived ideas about disability and capability. One staff member describes opening up business possibilities by describing the skill set of Individuals:

"They [participant] said 'So what? Someone with disability can jump on a ride-on mower?'... I said 'Well, they can actually - they can chop trees, they can use brush cutters, they can use petrol hedgers,' and they're going, 'Well, can they just start coming to mow our lawn at the front of one of our prisons?' Absolutely." (Stage 1, Staff 9)

Shared goals for pathways

To build strong relationships for employment pathways it is important to share goals with partners regarding social mission, employment parameters and career pathways. Once the employment goals and interests of the individual and employer are established there are key areas that the employer and WISE should discuss to ensure a smooth transition to Open Employment.

These include:

- ▶ Agreed upon start and finish times, and break times
- ▶ Agreed upon accessibility and support requirements

- ▶ The role of the WISE in assisting
- ▶ An induction process for Individuals
- ▶ A briefing for all staff to ensure an inclusive work environment and clear expectations about the role of Supported Employees (their capability, skill set, employment or career goals).

Potential employers may also have requirements for work times and the nature of seasonal work (i.e. for an Open Employment position, consider if there are quiet times of the year where coaching can be provided to individuals), and these should be discussed with all stakeholders to ensure best fit.

4.4.2 In-depth relationships

Trusting relationships

Disability Enterprises seek to establish trust with new customers and business partners by demonstrating their capability to deliver products and meet deadlines. An additional level of trust is required to ensure the needs and rights of individuals are attended to in off-site and Open Employment contexts. Individuals often have a staff member or Support Worker visit them at work, however, in Open Employment contexts support is eventually reduced.

Business Enterprise Staff look for a 'connection' with Employers to build a trusting relationship.

"I find if there's a connection, we're going to do better in someone else's business ... I was able to make a better connection because one of the director's brother is disabled, and he's based in Melbourne ... So when he came for the tour and realised how much work we do, whether it's onsite or offsite, he welcomed us to work within his site." (Stage 1, Staff 9)

It takes time to identify and build a relationship with a suitable employer. Relationships with employers may arise out of participants' own networks, for instance one participant was able to customise a volunteering role at the school they had attended, where there was already a strong foundation and trust.

Building trusting relationships is also about setting expectations about what Individuals are capable of and identifying employer needs. Employers are offered advice and coaching along the way to maintain open communication and transparency:

"Oh I think the WISE relationship has been going for a long, long time. It's a small town. [The individual] went through here, she was a student with us when she was a primary school student. ... she kind of grew up knowing a lot of people that we still have on staff here. It was a very natural progression for her to come here to help to do some work and to be part of her program." (Stage 2, Employer 3)

Meeting people with disability directly is an important strategy. Employment expos, in which WISE participate, are a good way to meet employers and establish networks that lead to employment.

"But it was once they went to this expo, it was a great opportunity because the employers could see - because sometimes when you tell an employer that we've got someone with a disability, and he's in a wheelchair, they could assume the worst. They could assume that he can hardly move. But for my son, he has got quite good mobility, despite being in a wheelchair. So, when they actually see him face-to-face, that made a big difference. They were able to see his ability.

So, these expos are a fantastic way for people with disabilities to go and get a job, because they can actually meet before they even get an interview - before they even secure an interview, they can just have a chat with people, so I think that's a great way for people with disabilities to get employment." (Stage 2, Family 1)

Lasting relationships help to develop the identity of both organisations and enhance the social impact of support programs. For example, existing relationships may be developed to offer new forms of employment and associated training.

4.5 Funding and Finance



Financial sustainability is often a challenge for Disability Enterprises. The business model will include grants, government funding, NDIS and commercial income (often across diverse commercial enterprises), among other sources. Understanding WISE cost structures and having a commercially competitive (high quality, fair price) offering is vital to sustainability. Long-term grant funding, multi-year contracts and/or repeat customers can support success. Choosing the right industry, and balancing social and business goals, is vital for financial sustainability.

A key WISE challenge to be built into the organisational model is balancing the support needs of employees, building and maintaining commercial operations, while transitioning participants both into and out of the Disability Enterprise, noting that WISEs have to maintain their own skilled workforce.

Disability Enterprises need to attend to the financial viability of their commercial operations. Despite a potential range of funding and revenue sources, the enterprise needs to employ detailed financial analysis in order to assess the sustainability of any aspect of its operations.

“My focus is in terms of running the commercial operations of the business, and as much as it is commercial, in the not-for-profit world – it is making sure that we are sustainable... I wanted to show what makes money, what doesn’t make money, in the same – or maybe if not with higher integrity than commercial enterprises. So, we actually have P & Ls now that go to product level, and literally, we’ve got in manufacturing [product] ... It actually tells you how much money [product] makes. I need to go down to that level to actually figure out what we can keep, what we can’t keep. So, you have to have a very sophisticated operation to pull this through. So, it’s a few different things. It’s like anything else, right? Even in a normal corporate environment, if you’re dealing with things, there’s multiple things that make a BHP might succeed, whereas another new mining company may not get to that level because of a combination of those factors. Those same things apply.” (Stage 2, Staff 7)

Key considerations that support Disability Enterprises are:

- ▶ Drawing on a range of NDIS funding to support employees
- ▶ Drawing on social procurement policy and incentives for commercial businesses to work with Disability Enterprises
- ▶ Considering diverse business offerings.

4.5.1 Social good and financial benefit

Disability Enterprises are driven by social purpose that may be shared by other customers, funders and stakeholders. Disability Enterprises may be selected by other organisations and local businesses to assist with their needs, based on this social purpose and/or their related status as a for-purpose or social enterprise.

Social Procurement incentives

This demand for Social Enterprise goods and services may be supported by various Social Procurement (spending for ‘social good’) Frameworks of organisations or governments. WISE can leverage such frameworks to gain business and work for Individuals, on- and off-site, as it incentivises businesses to contract Social Enterprises. As one staff member describes:

“... they [an industry partner] went and put it on their Socials and promoted us as part of their social procurement. That’s one good conversation I can have about [how] we can meet people’s social procurement needs. Especially when they’re tendering the large jobs, whether it’s big developers or others.” (Stage 1, Staff 9)

4.5.2 Funding the individual employment pathway

Individual NDIS funding

NDIS funding makes it possible for NDIS participants to enter a WISE (and Open Employment) and use funding to support their development of hard and soft skills, gain work experience and employment. As such, NDIS funding is a revenue source for Disability Enterprises.

"I don't know when NDIS got involved in my life, I'm not too sure, but I'm glad they did because without them I couldn't work here. I enjoy working here." (Stage 1, Participant 10)

NDIS funding line items are identified alongside the goals of NDIS participants when they complete a NDIS plan. This funding predicts the type of support that can be provided within the Disability Enterprise and in the Pathways to Employment element. A NDIS Individual Plan includes different types of funding to support different activities. There are two main categories of NDIS funding for employment purposes: Capacity Building and Core Support. NDIS funding amounts and names of funding line items are frequently adjusted by the NDIS.

Individuals can use their NDIS funding in the Disability Enterprise, in Open and Hybrid Employment arrangements (that is when working in both a Disability Enterprise and Open Employment). Often, part of the funding is used for a Support Worker to visit the workplace. Funding for Hybrid and Open Employment is challenging and requires careful planning to ensure individuals transition in a sustainable way (see Section 3.1). Local Area Coordinators and Support Coordinators provide recommendations for future NDIS funding and this potentially impacts on whether or not individuals will receive an appropriate rate of funding to maintain employment in a WISE setting.

Data from Stage 2 of this project discussed in Section 3.1, highlights that the majority of hours of activity provided by Disability Enterprises within the Pathway to Employment element were funded through the NDIS. However, Disability Enterprises were restricted in the types and level of support they provided to participants, due to an absence of suitable employment support funding in Individual Plans. Appendix 2 shows a list of pathways activities and the NDIS line items that were used to fund these activities. This is a list of diverse line items which demonstrates that, as discussed by interviewees, Disability Enterprises get creative in trying to find ways to fund the necessary activities of the employment pathway, in the absence of clear and sufficient funding. As noted in Section 4.8 particular activities were carried out unfunded.

The use of funding shows that there is a large variation across partners in the cost for an employment pathway as some involve more intensive supports, while others involve light supports. The cost varies between \$10,000 – 20,000 per year.

Employment is a highly variable activity for people with a disability transitioning from Disability Enterprises into mainstream employment. Their movement and progress is not predictable and is based on a wide range of variables. For this reason, there needs to be different treatment of employment-related funding in NDIS plans. There could be some contingency funding/increase built in to packages, or it needs to be able to be varied more easily with minimal approval through a specific processes and function in the NDIS.

Individual NDIS funding Plans are typically reviewed annually. During this review the LAC or Planner can determine what employment support is needed, including if an individual requires continued support on the job and will need funding for this in their Plan.

Funding for Hybrid and Open Employment requires careful planning to ensure individuals transition in a sustainable way. Many individuals do not always have adequate funding in their Plans for the support they require in Open Employment. The assessment of individual capacity does not always take into consideration the need for more intense supports when transitioning into Open Employment nor of the needs related to supporting varying pathways to employment that oscillate between the Disability Enterprise and the mainstream labour market.

When funding is inadequate, a Plan review can be requested. Disability Enterprise staff may set this process in motion:

“So, when people move to Open Employment, we will look at the Plan and see if the Plan funding can accommodate the sorts of supports within the existing Plan. If yes, great. If not, the person might move to Open Employment, and then there’s potentially gaps. And what we would need to do to do that, to fill the gaps, is perhaps go back to the NDIS and ask for a review, an unscheduled review, or a review if the Plan’s coming to an end anyway.” (Stage 2, Staff 5)

Plan reviews are also an avenue for requesting funding for a specific activity, however funding for an employment pathway under Capacity Building is not always granted, even if this is a priority for the individual.

“Obviously they’re there because they want a job and if we’re not able to do the activities of finding employers and reverse marketing and all of that, then it just stops there. And it’s not really consistent for the participant and it’s not really successful for them either. They feel as though they’ve wasted their time or they’re wanting more.” (Stage 2, Staff 2)

Using NDIS funding flexibly

As discussed in Section 3.1, inadequate funding for employment pathways was an ongoing challenge for Disability Enterprises and individuals. Staff note that the Core supports in NDIS plans are not adequate for employment related supports. To cope with inadequate funding, Disability Enterprises sought ways to support individuals through additional funding sources, or using NDIS funding more creatively. Some participants in the pathways program were reliant on funding secured via participation in this project.

Use of NDIS funding for supports is limited by the line items that are included in individual Plans, but staff and individuals sought legitimate ways to more flexibly apply these funds to employment goals.

“So most people I see don’t have that funding. Many people we work with use their Core supports funding, and because employment is their biggest focus, they tend to prioritise funding employment within their Core supports.” (Stage 2, Staff 8)

“Some people have a really good Plan that’s going to cover everything they want and more, where some people have more limited Plans, which can be challenging, because you’ve got to try and make use of the Plan that they’ve got so that they can still get the desired outcomes that they’re looking for. We just have to be a little bit creative with funding, sometimes, to make sure that it works for the person, because sometimes their funding won’t be a lot to accommodate to what they’re looking for. ... I guess that’s [i.e. getting creative with the limited funding in the Plan is] all part of the initial intake, which isn’t funded. So going through how we’re going to work with the Plan, I guess that part wouldn’t be funded. But I guess what that would look like is seeing what funding lines they have available, how much funding in each area and how we can flexibly use it. So for example, with ‘employment supports’, that’s funded under, ‘finding and keeping a job’. However, not everybody has a lot of funding in that area. So we have the opportunity to tap into our ‘social and community’ [line item], which is a bit more common and has a bit more funding available in there, so just being a little bit creative and flexible.... It looks different for absolutely every person because of course, everybody’s got a different plan.” (Stage 2, Staff 4)

For those who are self-managing their Plans, they have more flexibility in funding allocation:

“Long term the whole intention wasn’t it, the NDIS to shift away from having particular line items and particular price guides and to go to a more open system. I think probably if you looked at 80% of the people accessing customised employment at the moment, probably most of them are self-managed. And they’re using the flexibility [which is allowed by the NDIA under the self-managed funding model].” (Stage 2, Workshop)

Working with other service providers to share the workload and reduce unfunded work

Commonwealth funded Disability Employment Services (DES) can be used to fill support gaps in the employment pathway.

"You need someone in your corner at all times to help and transition and I guess understand the information from the NDIS world to open employment world to DES and all the other supports that's connected. That could mean family participants, employer." (Staff 10, Stage 2)

This is the case where organisations report that Core funding does not offer enough for employment pathways and that Capacity Building funding is preferable.

"So the DES is actually the one who's been, I guess supporting and providing support to him in the workplace. However, it was a couple of weeks ago, he gave me a call and he said, 'I want to come back to ADE.' And I said, 'How come?' And he said that some of his hours had been limited and stuff because he was struggling with some of the hours and getting a little bit overwhelmed, which is understandable because he hadn't worked in that kind of busy environment before, so it was very different for him. So working with the employer, they cut down some hours so it was a bit more manageable for him." (Stage 2, Staff 4)

Such examples highlight that Disability Enterprises continue to be available to support participants and can work collaboratively with other providers such as DES. However, if an individual is supported by a DES this can make obtaining employment support more difficult. One organisation discusses their approach to this barrier:

"I guess it's been challenging to get the employment supports in their plan. The feedback that we've had from some LACs, I'm not saying all but some LACs around, if they're connected in with DES, we're not giving them employment supports in their plan because they see that as double-dipping."

"It has been easier to get the supports, the funding in the plans if they're not linked with DES. That's what we've been trying to do, to increase their funding prior to getting them linked in with Disability Employment Services, then we can utilise both and making sure that they've got the right supports at work in the supported employment environment but also the right supports with us as well." (Staff 10, Stage 2)

4.5.3 Diverse Business Offerings

Running multiple businesses or enterprises in key industries can help to secure relationships, jobs and contacts with a range of partners. This diversification can support overall financial sustainability, particularly if one business is operating in a financially precarious industry. Some industries are better suited to diversification, such as Hospitality, Warehousing and Business Solutions. Warehousing can offer a range of services including: pick-and-pack, labelling, component work, storage, and unpacking containers. This diversification can support overall financial sustainability:

"I'm not just stuck selling one product. So I can go to a customer and say, 'What are your needs?' because I'm sure there is something that we can support your businesses with. So, then they say, 'Well, what can you do?' and I say, 'How about we start with a tour of our place and a tour of our facilities?' That gets the conversations going. And if it's not something we do onsite here, we'll always give something a go." (Stage 1, Staff 9)

Having diverse business offerings also creates variety of work for Individuals:

"Having new clients coming in means different jobs. So you'd need that essentially to keep the hands-on learning aspect flowing along as well and the up-skilling aspect. They go together." (Stage 1, Staff 9)



Image: Food preparation.

4.6 Industry

4.6.1 Type of Industry

The type of industry a Disability Enterprise operates in not only gives the organisation a particular direction and culture, but can impact finance, funding and program outcomes. Aligning social goals and strategy with the right industry or vehicle for change can help.



Diverse industry engagement

There is a dual social and financial benefit of diverse industry engagement: Disability Enterprises are able to service different industries and offer different goods and services to clients, and individuals are exposed to different work environments. For example, one Disability Enterprise involves off-site contractual work which means that individuals experience a range of working environments and industry settings outside the WISE premises. The financial benefit is that Disability Enterprises are able to engage a diverse pool of customers to build revenue.

Inclusive industries

Connecting with industries that have a culture of care, understanding, and are responsive to individual needs and interests is important for employee wellbeing. Given that enterprises using the WISE-Ability model aim to offer inclusive and supportive work environments that align with the interests and skills of their employees, these may differ from the environments of other employers. External/Open Employment Hospitality settings are identified as more 'high pressure' and may pose challenges to some employees. As one staff member identifies, not all industries allow for regular break times and support.

The data from Stage 2 of the project (see section 4.8 'Employer engagement'), shows that Disability Enterprises spent time engaging with industries and employers to find suitable employment matches, as well as building capacity of employers. Organisations engaged with a wide range of Open Employers including large retail organisations (Big W, Kmart, Office Works, Cotton on); Supermarkets; Schools; Libraries.

These engagement activities are reported as being inadequately funded. Disability Enterprises have a role to play in building the capacity of industries and employers to be inclusive. As described by one staff member, Disability Enterprises do a range of activities 'to actually bring about the design changes required to make an inclusive work space' when working with a potential employer (Stage 2, Staff 7). This work is often supported by a Customised Employment approach which involves more contact time with employers to design appropriate employment positions. This approach is labor-intensive, especially when Disability Enterprises are starting from scratch with no prior industry connection.

One organisation in Stage 2, took an individualised, customised approach which did not lever existing industry connections, (as we discuss in Section 4.8.1, the Customised Employment approach focuses more on job creation and the right match between employer and employee rather than the industry). The organisation worked with participants and employers to explore opportunities in areas like: Pet grooming (boutique shops and as a micro-business run from home); farm work (urban farms); music (live performance/impersonations); paranormal investigation (documentation of paranormal activity); and sports and broadcasting (radio hosting).

4.6.2 Labour market and employment

Employable skills

Disability Enterprises offer training and hands on learning in employable skills such as food preparation, reception, pick-and-pack, stock maintenance, cleaning, landcare, and laundry work, printing and copying and retail (see also Section 4.1 Training and Development). Disability Enterprises work to link these skills to Open Employment opportunities for participants in the local area.

Disability Enterprises can function as valuable talent pools for relevant industries and employer partners. As demonstrated earlier, once shown the skill set of employees, employers are keen to tap into this talent source, especially when it comes with support from the Disability Enterprise.



Image: Man working with machinery in warehouse and smiling.

4.7 Policy and Procedure

4.7.1 Guidance for staff

Disability Enterprise Staff members are qualified in their profession (i.e. Chef, Landscaper), but are also required to provide support or mentoring while training individuals. This combined skill set can be hard to find and such staff have been referred to as 'Unicorns' in the Social Enterprise sector. One staff member comments:



"We've worked out that there's probably six main things that we all need, not just employees: you need to work effectively with the industry; you need to just have your heart in it a little bit; you need to get on with others, have a bit of patience; you need to follow work and health procedures and directions; you need to communicate in the workplace if you need something or want something or want to know something." (Stage 1, Staff 7)

Having processes and policies in place supports business operations, staff and employee wellbeing. Policies that provide guidance, and accessible, modifiable and flexible ways of working for staff and individuals help to create an inclusive organisational culture. Clear processes provide guidance for troubleshooting and can save valuable time. It is important to provide strong guidance for new staff members (both within the WISE and in Open Employment), especially if they do not have previous experience working with people with a disability. The hybrid (social + business) nature of the WISE means that staff often bring industry skills, for example in hospitality, to the WISE and develop other skills on the job.

To support this learning process, one Disability Enterprise provides staff with an 'Understanding our Mental Health and Disabilities' Handbook:

"... it's got one page on every disability ... a description, some common behaviours and conditions and symptoms and the support you would provide to that person." (Stage 1, Staff 3)

4.7.2 Formal communication channels

Staying in touch throughout the day

Staff from different teams stay in contact via face-to-face discussions on-site, and via email and phone, to make sure Individuals are comfortable throughout the day and that their concerns are addressed in a timely manner. Staff members report that this is about ensuring all necessary staff members across teams are kept up to date. Formal processes support good communication:

"Between 4:00 and 4:30pm I have a meeting to debrief the day with my supervisors, so we go through how the jobs are going, any issues with the job itself. We'll talk about the Supported Employees, were there any issues regarding them, do they seem okay? So, we get some feedback from their supervisors as to how actually Supported Employees are going. After 4:30 we work out labour for the next day." (Stage 1, Staff 6)

Staff take a holistic approach to wellbeing and work by taking the time to check on participants, discuss work, the activities of the day, and ask for feedback about how this is going. This can take place in an informal setting, for instance, during a morning meeting or 'huddle' where there is an opportunity to discuss not just work, but activities outside of work. This can help to build a sense of solidarity, safety and belonging around participants and staff.

4.7.3 Engaging stakeholders

Communication with family and networks

Staff put in place processes for communicating with individual's networks and family members to provide clear information about the work individuals are doing. Individuals are then able to work through information they receive with networks/family. Information includes: the structure of the workday, instructions that reinforce this structure, pay slips with letters of explanation if there are any changes, achievements and

challenges in the workplace, upcoming events and meetings, milestones such as NDIS reporting, changes to NDIS policy and if these affect individuals, and options for employment off-site or variation to employment.

4.7.4 Policies that support disability-focused WISE

Intake

An intake policy of diversity and group coherence supports productivity. This means including people who will likely get along and learn new skills together. Intake is crucial for generating pathways into and out of Disability Enterprises. Staff call for an intake policy that acknowledges different levels of skill and skill requirements for individuals:

“For our dedicated team help people move into Open Employment through a framework or a smooth transition ... I would like that same team to recruit Supported Employees [for Disability Enterprises] as well. So, they understand the type of employee we’ve lost to Open Employment and they know then the type of employee they need to get in.” (Stage 1, Staff 6)

New individuals commencing at Disability Enterprises should be inducted via an orientation process that involves: meeting with the Support Team and other staff members, being assigned a Work Buddy who is the go-to staff member during the first few weeks of work, being provided with information in the form of a manual (i.e. which staff member to talk to for particular issues), and attending staff meetings which promote team building and feedback.

Shared rules

Individuals at one Disability Enterprise developed their own guidelines for effective workplace behaviours. Setting boundaries creates clarity for new individuals. These shared rules focus on teamwork and understanding, supporting each other and communicating issues and challenges with staff.

“We have 10 commandments as well that the Supported Employees decided on - like no use of bad language ... turning up on time, being respectful to your peers ... just simple, clear instructions that are really good.” (Stage 1, Staff 3)

Common behaviours and supports that can be put in place are clearly identified. One Disability Enterprise has developed a handbook for this, discussed above, the A-Z of disabilities with supports containing detailed information.

Risk management

“I would just say providing a safe workplace where they feel seen [is] ... probably the biggest thing for productivity.” (Stage 1, Staff 3)

Workplace health and safety is a top priority at Disability Enterprises. Staff ensure that individuals:

- ▶ Are equipped with appropriate WHS training, clothing, communication skills, physical aids, access to PPE
- ▶ Watch safety videos to help visually communicate relevant information
- ▶ Have knowledge of and access to a hygiene station and emergency kits (with household supplies and facilities).

It is also important to ensure individuals stay hydrated during summer and are rotated through different jobs to avoid any repetitive stress injuries.

Some roles at Disability Enterprises require manual labour and lifting which is monitored on a daily basis via an 'Individual Employment Plan' (IEP) (Stage 1, Staff 7). Once heavy lifting is flagged in an IEP, training is offered to the individual which includes protocols for assistance with lifting.

In one enterprise, when new equipment is introduced into the Disability Enterprise, a risk assessment and

testing and trialling of machinery use with individuals is undertaken, along with the development of a Safety Card. The Safety Card describes machine settings to be used, warnings that are needed for safe operation, and cleaning instructions. The Card (or 'Tag') is kept in a satchel next to the machine and has step-by-step instructions for people using machinery. Individuals receive training to ensure they understand the Card. Staff report that if equipment is deemed hazardous or dangerous, an authorised user list is attached to the Card:

"... over time, obviously, they get used to doing it and it becomes second nature. So, training support and I think for all the staff, even a chef or anything like that, to make sure that the staff that are using, say a griller or a deep fryer, they should have training signed off, even though they said they can use it, but it's good to make sure everyone's on the same page." (Stage 1, Staff 7)

Working off-site or at a different location requires staff to do a safety check of the premises to ensure the work site has accessible breakrooms and access to water. Off-site checks follow a detailed procedure:

"My first bit was site inspection of the Warehouse, then the next step was to our WHS representative. He then came and did a safety walk. So we tick all the safety boxes before we actually engage any Individuals to do a trial day. So there's a lot of conversations had before we even start doing the actual work." (Stage 1, Staff 9)

4.7.5 Tailored business systems

Visual and tactile tools

Disability Enterprises often have bespoke business systems tailored to individual skill sets and disabilities. These systems are particularly important where work practices have been modified to incorporate tactile forms of communication and task tracking. For instance, in one commercial kitchen, a whiteboard system is used to manage tasks and allocate staff resources. The whiteboard has different magnets and tags used to indicate tasks and task status. It is tactile and visual. When a new person starts work they can be shown the whiteboard and refer to it as needed. As one staff member explains:

"... on our whiteboard, we'd have – they call them 'Kanbans', so if we need four tubs of carrots, there'll be four can bands on the whiteboard, so when you've done a tub, you get to take the tag off, put it on the tub and it goes into the cool room, then you know you've got three left. So it's a very tactile, touchy process rather than going up to a touch screen and pressing a button." (Stage 1, Staff 5)

This system is accompanied by a job instruction sheet, which, includes more detailed information on each task, for example, how to peel, top and tail a carrot.

4.7.6 Structure, routine and support

Daily structure, work planning and schedules

A reliable work structure and routine, which includes consistent use of equipment, contributes to individual wellbeing. Change of tasks or work type is discussed with individuals ahead of time to enable appropriate time for adjustments and to minimise any change-related stress. Staff plan the work schedule of individuals in advance and reassess work plans each day to ensure appropriate staffing for jobs. Individuals discuss work tasks in planning meetings and are able to access a suitable communication supports, such as a digital whiteboard, to confirm their work schedule.

Staff visibility: knowing who to go to

It is important that individuals know who they can approach for support, mentoring and checking-ins (i.e. the Support Team), or to report incidents (Supervisors and Managers). While the roles of these team members overlap at times, it is important that individuals are clear that they have a designated staff member they can approach if needed. Staff report that this is a fine balance and that staff across all roles (e.g. Training Staff, Supervisors, Support Team) should be involved, especially if personal or outside work issues arise.



Image: Young woman communicating with other people.

4.8 Pathways to Employment



A major element of the WISE-Ability model is the Pathways to Employment' element which focuses attention on the organisational design ingredients and activities of establishing pathways and transitioning participants into diverse work opportunities, with a strong emphasis on Open Employment. As encountered in the discussion of the other model elements above, other elements of WISE organisational design dovetail with and support the element of Pathways to Employment. For example, the way the structure of the organisation opens up opportunities for diverse work contexts or the attention to how to finance the delivery of employment supports, are both key elements of WISE organisational design that support pathways to employment.

In stage 2 of the project, three Disability Enterprises tracked the activities (Table 1 below) they provided within the Pathways to Employment element. This focused on eighteen participants across the Disability Enterprises, with data collected on both employment pathway activity types and hours. Participants included NDIS (and SLES) participants. This data gives some insight into the sorts of activities and levels of support that fall inside the Pathways to Employment, though reflects only a small sample.

A range of activities were undertaken by the Disability Enterprises on the employment pathway journey, which are listed in Table 2 (right).

In undertaking these activities with participants, on average 196 hours of support time were spent with each individual over a period of 10 months along the employment journey. Participating case studies provided support to people who were at different points in their employment journey, however, many were in the early phase of the employment journey, including the Discovery phase (see Table 2 below).

Inclusion Australia (2024) and Hall et al. (2018) recommend that the average number of support hours for the Discovery phase alone is 50 hours. The minimum number of hours of support was 17, while the maximum number of hours was 642. Our data shows a large difference between the minimum and maximum hours of support provided to people over a 10-month period. The standard deviation also reveals considerable variety in the number of hours per person.

These activities may vary, for instance, a Disability Enterprise may undertake an informal or formal process initially with individuals. The informal pathway involves learning about the person's goals on the job, while the formal process begins with a NDIS Plan and Discovery Process. This formal pathway is supported by the Disability Enterprises, though individuals must be registered with NDIS to work with the Disability Enterprise and use their services. Depending on capability and NDIS plans, individuals can also work with a Disability Employment Service (DES) to look for Open Employment opportunities.

Detailed data from the 18 participants tracked, Figure 5 (over page), shows that the greatest number of activities to set up an employment pathway took place in relation to assessments and planning, and building workplace skills. This aligns with feedback from service providers who identified this as an area requiring substantial investment of NDIS plan hours.

Table 2: Data on hours per client/Participant

Average of number of hours	195.9
Minimum hours	17.5
Maximum hours	641.75
Standard Deviation	234.23

Table 1: Activities involved in the employment pathway

1. Assessments and Planning

Onboarding/intake initial discussions

Confirm vocational themes and build visual portfolio

Discovery process – Understanding skills and interests/hobbies; setting a plan; understanding support needs; understanding the person (home and community visits); goal setting and self-determination; exploring vocational themes through informational interviews; exploring work experience and employment options.

Planning and reviewing progress (i.e. progress star for self-reflection purposes)

Engagement with family/carer, unpaid personal networks to support employment directions (i.e. circles of support)

2. Building social, presentation and communication skills

Building social, presentation, travel and communication skills

Employment counselling

3. Building workplace skills

Preparing participant for work experience and paid work

Employment related skills and knowledge (whether industry specific or general)

4. Employer Capacity Building

Preparing employers for job shadow, work experience and paid work

Seeking employers for job shadow, work experience and paid work

Industry visits – Employer engagement and understanding the business;
Educating employers and Job negotiation; Customisation

5. On the job support

Support for job shadow, work experience and paid work

6. Other

Post placement support (support on the job)

Administration and paper work

Engagement with other professionals/providers to support employment goals

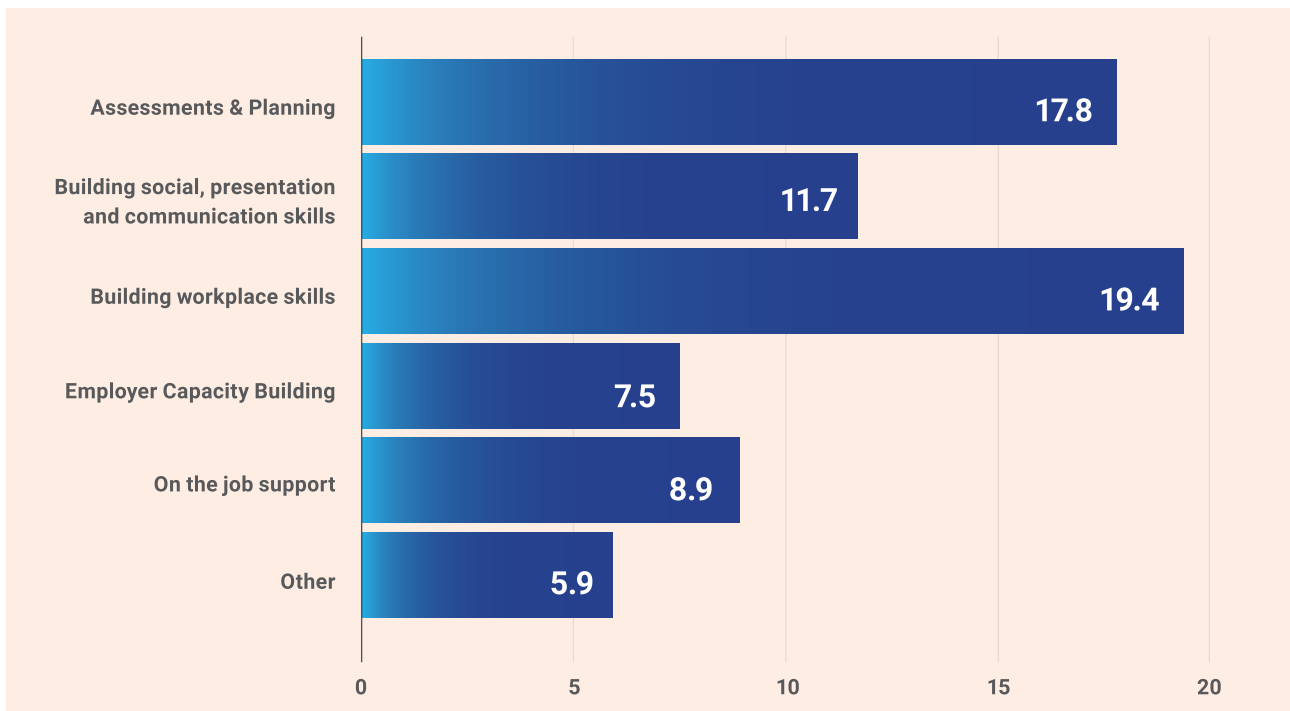


Figure 5: Average number of activities undertaken for each participant by activity type.

The amount of time spent on each activity varied. Table 3 (right) shows the average time per each activity. Assessments and planning took on average just over 50 minutes for each activity for each person, and includes:

- ▶ Onboarding/intake initial discussions
- ▶ Confirm vocational themes and build visual portfolio
- ▶ Discovery process: Understanding skills and interests/hobbies; setting a plan; understanding support needs; understanding the person (home and community visits); goal setting and self-determination; exploring vocational themes through informational interviews; exploring work experience and employment options.
- ▶ Planning and reviewing progress (i.e. progress star for self-reflection purposes)
- ▶ Engagement with family/carer, unpaid personal networks to support employment directions (i.e. circles of support)

On the job support (Support for job shadow, work experience and paid work, including face-to-face and over the phone or messaging) was closer to three hours for each activity on average for each person. Building skills was around four hours for each of these activities:

- ▶ Preparing participant for work experience and paid work
- ▶ Employment related skills and knowledge (whether industry specific or general)

Again, it is important to consider the very large standard deviations and large range for each activity type which highlights the considerable variation for each Participant. Employer Capacity Building shows an average of 1 hour and 7 minutes per person across these activities:

- ▶ Preparing employers for job shadow, work experience and paid work
- ▶ Seeking employers for job shadow, work experience and paid work

- ▶ Industry visits: Employer engagement and understanding the business; Educating employers and Job negotiation; Customisation

The Other category shows that for each participant 2 hours and 21 minutes were spent on activities including:

- ▶ Project meeting 1:1 about the Swinburne project
- ▶ Project meeting group
- ▶ Industry visits
- ▶ Face-to-face support - work experience
- ▶ Non-supported - work experience
- ▶ Face to face support - job shadow
- ▶ Non-supported - job shadow
- ▶ Face-to-face support - paid work
- ▶ Non-face-to-face support - paid work
- ▶ Work experience - documentation
- ▶ Paid work – documentation
- ▶ Staff brainstorming, strategies of support
- ▶ Other - Progress achieved; Progress Update: (state area increased)
- ▶ Improved job readiness (i.e. working in open employment)
- ▶ Employment related skills and knowledge (whether industry specific or general)
- ▶ Increased access to employer groups and employment support networks
- ▶ Exit - give details to why

Of these activities many were unfunded, including essential activities (see list below) that fall under all of the pathway categories in Table 1. Interestingly, the amount of time staff spent working on these activities unfunded was recorded as minimal (84 hours of non-funded time, 28 hours per organisation) (as noted in Section 3.1).

- ▶ Onboarding/intake
- ▶ Non-face-to-face support - paid work
- ▶ Project meeting 1:1
- ▶ Discovery Process - understanding support needs
- ▶ Preparing participant for work experience
- ▶ Progress update - progress star
- ▶ Non-face-to-face support - paid work
- ▶ Seeking employers for paid work
- ▶ Face-to-face support - work experience
- ▶ Initial discussion regarding intake
- ▶ Planning and reviewing progress
- ▶ Telephone discussion

	Average	No. activities	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Assessments and planning	51.8	317	53.8	15.0	435.0
Building social, presentation and communication skills	265.1	209	145.9	15	480
Building workplace skills	216.2	347	156.3	15	360
Employer Capacity Building	67.8	135	90.6	15	360
On the job support	171.8	160	124.8	15	375
Other	141.1	106	123.2	15	480
Total	155.7	1274	146.4	15	480

Table 3: Average time per activity.

The Typology of Employment Support Interventions (TESI) comparison shows a concentration within the Addressing Personal factors where activities included building expectations and capacity from family to support employment, and also building work skills and expectations of the individual (see Appendix 6, Table 6).

In what follows we describe the key elements of an employment pathway, while taking NDIS funding into consideration.

Key elements of an employment pathway					
Addressing personal factors	Addressing Personal Context	1	0.1%	2	0.1%
	Integration of health, disability and employment supports	19	1.5%	15	0.5%
	Building capacity of informal (family) supports to support employment	113	8.9%	52.5	1.6%
	Building foundation skills and work expectations	68	5.3%	51.75	1.6%

Table 4: Key elements of an employment pathway.

4.8.1 Customised employment and job carving

An important part of setting up a pathway, whether it is volunteering, work experience or employment, is customising and shaping the role to leverage individual strengths from the outset. This can be based on the knowledge of the Disability Enterprise about the individual workstyle, preferences and support needs.

"Initially we had a few talks about where [participant] was at and what the [Disability Enterprise] had down as her goals but when she came back to us after COVID we flowed on. So she was working in our library and her skills have developed in that area. When she first started it was with assistance, now she has a list. She comes in, there's books that need to be shelved, there's dusting, there's a little bit of organisation and she's just straight into it. Bit of stamping of books, getting them ready for processing and covering, things like that and [participant]'s all across that now. She doesn't need that with assistance as much as what she did five years ago." (Stage 2, Employer 5)

Customising employment roles provide the right conditions for productivity, meaningful work, a healthy working environment and enjoyment.

"Because we can provide on-the-job support to people with disabilities. So with the DES, their role is to look for available opportunities that are out there already and then placing people into those, where our role would be working on customising positions that are suitable for the person. Rather than placing into what's available, actually customising something based on interests, skills, needs, and also providing on-the-job support. So directly alongside them, if they need it, not everybody needs that, depending on the person." (Stage 2, Staff 4)

The customisation of employment commences in the Assessment and planning phase and is also actioned in the Employer Capacity Building phase (with activities listed in Table 2 above). As one participant explains, customising a job starts with conversations about what an individual is interested in doing, personal strengths and existing skills:

"I think ... the manager there ... he said, 'we got to find the job that's right for you'. So, he didn't want to put me in a role that was not right for me. I love building long term relationships with people. I love talking to people. And I love smiling, which is what everybody at [Open Employer] loves doing, too. So, I feel like I'm doing my job. And [Open Employer supervisor] can rely on me to do my job so she can do her job." (Stage 2, Participant 8)

One staff member notes that Informational Interviewing is a good way of determining the role and match between an employer and employee. Informational interviewing is a two-step process where the Service Provider meets the employer to discuss the business and the employer's goals. The next meeting is a tour and further discussion. This may then progress to a meeting for Job Development, which is the negotiation and crafting of the employment position (CDERP, 2018).

"And I guess the good thing about our customised employment model is that the person goes into these businesses before we would ever consider negotiating employment. So through the informational interviews that we do with businesses, we can tell – or the person tells us – when they want to get out of a business, because it's not the right environment." (Stage 2, Staff 8)

CDERP (2018: 9) note that Job Development is driven by: (a) person-centred data, drives job development (b) the individual is always central to any decision making (c) the job development team cannot simply use the next job vacancy as an employment option and (d) CE meets the UNCRPD charter for respecting the rights of the individual during their employment and career development.

Customising takes on different forms depending on the preferences of the individual and the employer. For instance, a role may involve varied tasks but some repetition, especially during the learning phase:

"I'm a man of repetition. If somebody shows me what to do, I'll pick it up fairly quickly within about 24 hours. And I feel like if they can leave me alone and they can rely on me to do my job without them looking over my shoulder and micromanaging me, as I say, I feel like I'm doing my job." (Stage 2, Participant 8)

Customised roles need to be monitored and hours adjusted as the work environment goes through busy and slow periods:

“He started doing three days a week with three six-hour shifts, which at the start it was okay because the cafe was new and it wasn’t really busy, but now it’s really increased in how busy it is. So I feel like perhaps even, he could do four-hour shifts. And what I was explaining to him is maybe slowly he can build up his confidence and build up some of his hours over time - because it’s a huge jump from going from one hour to six hours.” (Stage 2, Staff 4)

Customising also includes establishing a work routine that is appropriate for each individual and appropriate hours of work. This can mean gradually increasing hours or maintaining regular hours as part of a routine:

“I think setting up her program so that it wasn’t outside of her comfort zone is really important, so she’s got a routine, she comes in, she knows what she needs to do and she’s feeling very, very capable and enabled in the task that she is doing. I think if we’d set it up and it was a little bit less structured or a bit more airy-fairy, ‘come in and we’ll let you know what’s going on on the day’, I think that would make it harder for [participant]. But the routine is good, she loves the routine, she loves to know what she’s doing. She comes in very confident and just settles straight into it.” (Stage 2, Employer 1)

“I started with 12 hours a week and then I was doing 13 hours a week. Then I was doing 15 hours a week. Then I was doing 21.” (Stage 2, Participant 4)

It is important for there to be opportunities where the employer, the Disability Enterprise staff, and the individual can regularly check in to discuss works hours, experience on the job and any adjustments needed to support overall well-being. As one Disability Enterprise staff member says, she noticed one of her previous participants was tired after working long hours in Open Employment and discussed this with the employer:

Case Study: Charlie (Stage 2)

Charlie has a Certificate III in Dog Grooming which he attained at the local TAFE and is using his qualifications to build up his own micro-enterprise.

The Disability Enterprise have provided customised employment and support, discussed with multiple businesses the work that Charlie is capable of doing and his skill in the area of dog grooming. He was able to move into a **customised employment job trial** at a dog grooming business. This process involved liaison between the TAFE, the Disability Enterprise and the Employer.

- ▶ Charlie tried out work at the dog grooming employment site. He worked across different tasks: shampooing and conditioning, drying, doggie daycare, nail clipping, body hair clipping (he did not carry out the scissor work which is more advanced).
- ▶ After this visit to the potential employers, the Disability Enterprise staff and Charlie decided that the employment environment was not the best fit because it was not as inclusive and supportive as it could be. The Disability Enterprise staff wanted someone at the employers who would be able to work alongside and mentor Charlie, but this was not available.

However, there are benefits that come out of this exploration and discovery time. Charlie’s confidence has been improved via visits to employers, discussions, engagement and experience with the employers, job trials.

“But then [individual] would come in and he was very tired by then. It was like, he’s getting overworked in there.” (Stage 2, Staff 6)

A related aspect to employer engagement is the support provided to employers to modify and customise workplaces. This can be straightforward, such as ensuring access to the right equipment, or the use of checklists to guide workdays (as discussed under the Training and Development element of the model).

One strategy may be working to identify which workplace staff will assist when the employee with disability needs it.

“And it may not work. [In this case] does someone help you when I need it? There’s always help around for me when I ask. Is there other support I need? Only when carrying heavy boxes and if I need to go on a ladder? So if there’s a height in the shop.” (Stage 2, Participant 1)

Sometimes the customisation of workplaces required a combination of modifications (for example checklists to prompt tasks to be completed) as well as emphasising pre-existing workplace features like structured ways of working.

“[The individual] was really, really motivated to get back to work. And something that stood out was when we spoke about things like accommodations or things that would help or would be good – checklists. We talked a lot about using checklists, about ticking things off while you’re at work. And that would help the structure. If that was the structure of the work, it would suit [him] the best. And then, this role is essentially going down a checklist and ticking things off and having a checklist. ... And then [Disability Enterprise staff] have been coming in and trying to have regular support to help with the tasks and task analysis, that sort of stuff.” (Stage 2, Participant 8)

Job carving is a related strategy where particular areas of a job an individual has experience can be ‘carved off’ as a micro-job for this person. Disability Enterprises do this by creating new paid positions that match up with individual interests and skills. Employers and staff report that job carving is ideal for Individuals and is achievable across different industries. For instance, Landcare jobs can be carved into watering, or pruning trees or mowing, and these jobs do not vary or change too often which means that people can be trained over time and progress to other carved jobs at their own pace.

4.8.2 Discovery

Discovery is a formal stage of a Customised Employment approach (as discussed above) but is also a broad approach used by Disability Enterprises to better understand individuals.

‘Everyday Discovery’

Everyday Discovery refers to learning about a person’s skills, interests, hobbies and ambitions on-the-job in the Disability Enterprise setting. Staff who work with participants on an everyday basis have the opportunity to identify an individual’s work style, training and employment goals and draw on this information when matching a person with a job. This information can be captured in an Individual Employment Plan that may be used for professional development purposes. This ‘Everyday Discovery’ process takes place during the workday and is informed by hands-on work and relationship building and means that staff can better understand employees’ preferences, for instance, for continued work in the Disability Enterprise, in Hybrid or Open Employment.

Formal Discovery process

The formal NDIS funded ‘Discovery’ process is completed with a Disability Enterprise staff member who will meet with an individual to understand individual interests, goals and strengths, to eventually broker matches to industries and jobs in Hybrid or Open Employment. This process provides a deep understanding of the individual and involves documentation which is updated as employment goals and interests develop and change. This is an opportunity to identify existing networks of the individual which may lead to employment pathways.

The Discovery process differs across organisations. Some organisations start with goal setting, while others start with interests and hobbies. The important outcome of Discovery is understanding the individual, their goals and interests. Large goals can be broken down into steps:

“So with all of our participants, we have what’s called Smart Goals, ... So they have their own, I guess what you’d say is an employment plan ... So that’s sitting down with a participant and with a key person if they choose, whether that’s a family member, an advocate or someone in the organisation. And that’s sitting down and working out their goals for the next quarter of the year. So we do quarterly reviews. So what that looks like is at the start of it, it’s saying, what are my challenges? What are my strengths and achievements and what are my future goals?”

And then in the next section, it’s got the opportunity to set three goals. Not everybody will set three because it may be too complex to try and focus on three at a time. Some may just want to focus on one if it’s a larger goal. So they’re choosing that goal and then they’re breaking it up using the Smart Goals model. So being specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound. And then what that means is over that next quarter, their supports are going to be surrounded around that specific goal.” (Stage 2, Staff 4)

Discovery can become a continuous process and involve ‘re-discovery’:

“In terms of missing out on anything, the Discovery of the person and the Re-Discovery of the person is really important. When I say Re-Discovery, when there’s some other – something else has happened in the person’s life; like, for example, [participant], his father passed away. When there’s big life events; and what does that mean for him in terms of what his parents are doing to support him, emotional support. They’re older and ageing, they continue to look after his finances, but there’s less emotional support and other support around decision-making. So that sort of stuff is really important in that Discovery of the person, and Re-Discovery.” (Stage 2, Staff 5)

“And I guess it goes back to any model, if it’s lineal, that’s not necessarily the case; but there’s the review. You can always review and go back. So I think with the WISE model, it’s sort of implicit that it’s Re-Discovery in there.” (Stage 2, Staff 5)

The discovery process is integral to a deep understanding of the individual, their skills and goals in order to match people with the right jobs. Discovery documents are constantly updated:

“They’re living documents, they need to be updated, they need to reflect current information, not just what’s happened in the past, it needs to reflect strategies to support that person in a workplace or support that person to successfully obtain employment.” (Stage 1, Staff 11)

Part of Discovery includes identifying existing networks. ‘It’s all about who you know who can get you a job’ (Stage 1, Participant 8). Family and friends play an important role in connecting individuals with work opportunities. Networks can help people to understand their own strengths and interests and identify ways of using these in a job. For example, some people are detail oriented which is a skill that can be used in Warehouse and Nursery work.

Understanding individual strengths can assist with the interview process. For instance, for some people with Autism minimal eye contact may be preferred and this can be facilitated by a walking interview or casual introduction. Disability Enterprise staff suggest that interviews be held online or with this preference in mind to ensure individuals have a positive interview experience with minimised stress levels.

4.8.3 Hybrid employment

A Hybrid Employment pathway provides individuals with the opportunity to transition into Open Employment gradually, and work varying hours in both a WISE and Open Employment setting. This allows individuals to develop work skills, confidence, networks, relationships and transition into Open Employment at their own pace, or build a working life that involves both engagement types.

"... people don't want to leave [Disability Enterprise] because it's a safe, supported environment and I get that, like we don't want to leave something that we love and that our friends are there and we've built relationships. So it's about having those conversations but it doesn't necessarily mean you have to leave [Disability Enterprise], maybe you could be doing something at [Disability Enterprise] and in Open Employment." (Stage 1, Staff 12)

The journey to developing confidence and skills can take considerable time and has to be conducted at the pace that is appropriate for each person. In the following example it took a year for the individual to become confident enough to attempt working in an Open Employment context:

"I'm currently working with somebody at the minute who came to us who ... we had a hard time even getting him to engage. It took about a year, it's been a year now. Actually, Mum and I were talking about him last week. We had a greet, face-to-face meeting, and Mum was in tears, she just can't believe how far he's come. So he's attending two work experience sessions. He's travel trained, so we've travel trained him to and from so he doesn't rely on Mum to pick him up and drop him off anymore. He's talking about doing a forklift license. I managed to get him an interview in a store, so he's going to go for a job interview." (Stage 2, Staff 13)

One of the challenges identified by participants was that transitions only work in one direction, and it is very difficult to transition back to a Disability Enterprise. One participant commented that he is now out of work and unable to move back to a Disability Enterprise which has both quality of life and financial implications:

"Yeah, that was a regular wage. That was normal. One job I used to work from 9:00 until 5:30, and then I worked with him until he got made redundant. So, now, I've got made redundant. I don't know what to do. And now I've resigned from ADE, I can't go back in." (Stage 2, Participant 4)

Hybrid work arrangements mean that individuals can move back and forth between Open Employment and Supported Employment contexts and manage the hours they spend across both settings.

"... it was a couple of weeks ago, he gave me a call and he said, 'I want to come back to ADE.' And I said, 'How come?' And he said that some of his hours had been limited and stuff because he was struggling with some of the hours and getting a little bit overwhelmed, which is understandable because he hadn't worked in that kind of busy environment before, so it was very different for him. So working with the employer, they cut down some hours so it was a bit more manageable for him." (Stage 2, Staff 4)

4.8.4 Work exposure and experience

While opportunities within the Disability Enterprise can be used to offer a variety of work roles and settings, Disability Enterprises can also set up diverse work experiences in Open Employment settings both as part of Discovery, and as part of trialling potential employment. Our data shows that most work exposure for participants in the project was work experience, paid work was small in comparison (see Appendix 5, Table 4). A large amount of support hours were provided for work experience.

Disability Enterprises draw on a range of strategies to offer these diverse opportunities, including Job Shadowing, Work Experience and Job trials. As one staff member explained, work experience is accompanied by detailed planning and preparation to ensure they are successful:



Image: Young man working with equipment.

"... we complete a lot of evaluations in that work experience phase, so we have a really clear understanding of what may happen, we don't have a lot of surprises." (Stage 2, Staff 10)

Individuals might complete a Supported Job Placement/ Trial in groups or individually (up to a 12 week trial period) with an employer.

"At Rebel Sport, we tidy up and pump up balls ... Security tagging's another big one, so putting security tags on clothes ... So that's fine motor skills, it's attention to detail ... that's just an option and a way to get the participants started ... We are looking for separate placements as well for them. So they might start off with the groups and then end up doing an individual placement after six months. They might love the groups and do that for a year and try different ones. It just depends on each person. Some never do the groups. They don't want to do groups at all ... That's just an option that we have." (Stage 1, Staff 10)

Work Experience in Open Employment is a vital step to determining the preferences of individuals and to develop work skills:

"Our staff members are there. We're running the session. We're there with them the whole time. We couldn't claim any funding if we're not with them because in a sense we're not really providing support to them. So we are going into Target with three or four participants and we're running that session. We're observing. We're assessing them. We're checking all those things. We're doing workplace assessments. We're providing the training." (Stage 1, Staff 10)

Employers note that trailing work with individuals takes time but allows for best fit:

"You need the time and the resource to be able to go – 'that didn't work there' or ... 'Ah, you've got this – you can spot these defects.' One good example is just, one [Participant] was poor-sighted, so it was hard to get him into manufacturing, but the feel when he touched a finished part, he could feel any defect straight away because it just spoke to him ... and it just showed, there's the job for him." (Stage 1, Stakeholder 3)

4.8.5 Employer engagement, job negotiation and the partnership approach

The detailed data collection about the activities of employment support provided in stage 2 of the project, highlighted the important activity-set around employer engagement. The process of building confidence and skills requires a partnership approach between families, service providers, and employers.

Disability Enterprises engage with potential employers through personal networks, local professional networks, individuals' networks, family and friends, DES and other job networks. This provides an opportunity for education of employers and a shared understanding of how an inclusive workplace can be created step by step:

"If you're looking at an employer in Open Employment, there's the education, understanding of the person's disability, the standard of work expectations. There's flexibility in supported employment – whereas, you've got to get out these coffees by this time, to this table. Some things are not negotiable, whereas there's a bit more flexibility with supported employment. So, that transition around education of the employer." (Stage 2, Staff 5)

Some people may also engage in their own job search, preferring to approach employers independently. A number of participants described going into a business that they had identified as a place they would like to work and handing over their resume or having a chat with the employer. In some cases, this grew out of prior assistance the Disability Enterprise had provided.

Setting up expectations and developing a shared understanding with an employer as part of the job negotiation process can ensure that the employer feels confident and the employee feels appropriately supported in a new workplace. However, negotiations with employers can be complex. Workplace accommodations are required by many individuals and some employers struggle to be more flexible and make changes in a role. Some Disability Enterprises had found smaller businesses to have more capacity for flexibility, possibly due to heightened understanding of the realities of the job role.

Feature Quote:

"But at the same time, I would say in November last year or so, he contacted his caseworker saying he didn't want to do any more work experience for the rest of the year, which is why we have decided to do more job applications with him, and so we've handed out his resume to a lot of different places, after we've researched potential work placements or potential places that he might be interested to apply to as well. And on top of that, he's also commented to us, after we've given him a list of suitable jobs, that he would like to apply to these without our assistance." (Stage 2, Staff 3)



Image: Young man working in a nursery.

Working with employers to build understanding and capacity is described by one Disability Enterprise as 'bringing the employer along on a bit of a journey':

"You know, [we] knocked down our doors to make it happen, and even though the manager is very caring and supportive, the structure behind her isn't supporting her to manage someone with relatively complex disabilities. So that, perhaps, reflects the culture of the organisation: it's quite ruthless, in terms of what their expectations are. So just because they want to employ a person with a disability, doesn't mean that they're necessarily set up to do so.

So if that's the case, we believe that we need to spend more time with them prior, to really bring them along on a bit of a journey to being an inclusive employer, and we're working on some projects to make that happen. But it also shows us – and it sort of relates to the evidence around customised employment – that it tends to work better with small to medium businesses versus large corporates. And fundamentally, the theory tends to encourage you to stay away from big businesses ... and focus on more small, family, community-based organisations." (Stage 2, Staff 8)

"But if we can place them directly, then we place them through customised employment. But not just that. I mean, obviously, we have a follow-on support and everything for customised employment, but even in general, if that person is going to be placed in customised employment and external employment, what we also found was, the external employment providers are not set up for that. So, we actually have people who go there to help our own participants ... but we also actually provide some training material [for employers] for our people there to actually be able to deliver that. And not just that, we actually have an inclusive design which is our third business unit, where it actually provides guidance and advice to [major transport provider] or governance board to actually bring about the design changes required to make an inclusive work space." (Stage 2, Staff 7)

The end result of the successful employer engagement is that employers reflect on the positive experience of employing a person with disability: that they get along with the individual, that they have proved to themselves they can make adjustments in the workplace successfully, and that the individual is hard working and committed are all rewarding aspects for employers.



Image: Young man wearing work safe uniform at work.

Setting up relationships that support successful employment outcomes could be facilitated by a collaborative model, such as the Ticket to Work model. This approach was designed to promote local partnerships and sector collaboration to create better post-school social and economic outcomes. The additional resourcing for this approach to employment pathways would sit outside the Disability Enterprise model (i.e. as part of a Disability Employment Service or DES). This would mean that Disability Enterprise staff are not taking on the sole responsibility of brokering relationships with new employers for customised roles.

4.8.6 Placement support for setting up the job

In most cases Disability Enterprises were able to support employment pathways through playing a role in setting up appropriate supports for individuals when they start in new roles:

“They support [individual]. They [the WISE] check in, ‘how’s she going? What’s she doing? What does she need?’. Initially they had to help out with the Working With Children’s Check and things like that so they sorted all the paperwork side of it and getting all that completed. They brought her up, they ensured that she was settled.” (Stage 2, Employer 3)

WISE staff work with individuals in Open Employment roles to help build capacity and confidence:

“I currently am only out on supports during the week, which means I work either one-on-one with a client with a disability, it could be autism or another mental disability or a cognitive one. And we either do work placements, which was the one I was doing earlier, where I support a client, either in a group setting, or a one-on-one setting, or a work experience placement to help them with their job. For example, today’s work placement was with a client at a book warehouse, where his work experience there is to scan books into the library system. I basically sit next to him and help him with his job. I’m not trying to do it for him, because I’m trying to build his independence. But yeah, that’s one aspect of it. The other aspect, if I’m doing a one-on-one session, is capacity building.” (Stage 2, Staff 3)

Placement support can be offered to groups:

“So if it’s a group support, then it is basically looking like, let’s say, I’ve done it a couple of times last year. Let’s say it’s at [Local Government]. I would rock up at [employer] at 8.50am for a 9.00am session. We only work from 9.00am to 4.00pm technically as employment mentors. And I would wait for - my participants ... three participants to come outside the job site. For example, [large employer]. I would wait outside [large employer] for them to arrive. I’d wait 15 minutes after the scheduled time. If they are not there, I will obviously have to ring them to ask, ‘Where are you, what’s going on?’ After that, you would go inside with them, you would sign in as a contractor visitor.” (Stage 2, Staff 3)

Preparation for work and support during a placement can include Employment Counselling. This involves working on things that people may be unsure of, like the social norms of being at work, setting goals and expectations for capability especially when working independently. Work expectations or norms are determined by the type of job that someone wants to work in, i.e. hospitality, where taking breaks and dealing with stress might be part of the discussion. Discussing, planning and strategising for encounters within work norms and expectations builds individual independence and confidence. This work ties into customising employment opportunities to build on the interests and strengths of the individual. This approach is consistent with building self-advocacy skills and building independence in everyday life. Support is also provided to deal with stressful elements and build an understanding of coping strategies such as through learning what people have done in the past. This may include strategies to self-regulate while they are at work.

One Disability Enterprise offers mental health coaching through a registered counsellor. Shorter sessions (1 and 2 hours) provide people with a chance to work on themselves and their goals. For instance, if a job doesn’t work out then this can be discussed in session and reflect on how to build resilience from the experience.

4.8.7 Post placement support on-the-job

Levels of support provided to individuals who are working in Open Employment can vary from a quick check in twice a week to multiple visits during the week.

Yeah, support every now and again. Once every three weeks, once a month, depending if there are any issues. If the supervisor rings me and says, 'We've got an issue.' Then I will go in the day after. It hasn't happened, but I would go in the day after. If the manager that I talk to, they won't allow me on site, if there's an issue, I'll call the participant straight away and say, 'Hey, get off the phone. You're on the phone too much. Every time she looked your way, you're on the phone.'

(Stage 2, Staff 13)

One staff member describes providing intensive check-ins on job commencement focusing on:

- ▶ Daily tasks, what are they, and less regular tasks?
- ▶ Is the person sitting somewhere where he is comfortable?
- ▶ Are there friendly people there?
- ▶ What does it look like every day for him to be in the workplace?
- ▶ Who are the people he will be working closely with?
- ▶ What is the induction process?
- ▶ What's the daily routine, especially around lunch?

Participants benefit from different levels of support, and many move towards independence at work:

"Yeah, it's more – they don't hover, like how I felt – I think it's sort of – my moods are better here." (Stage 2, Participant 6)

Levels of support can change to bolster growing independence on the job:

"I could take it or leave it. When it comes to managers and workers, we're all to our own. It's – we're all to ourselves. We have to look after ourselves basically." (Stage 2, Participant 1)

Support on the job may be provided by both the Disability Enterprise as well as other employees in the workplace. One focus of post-placement supports is building the capacity of natural supports in the workplace. For example, the person who is sitting next to someone can naturally provide support/ advice/ a bit of help with tasks. Individuals may need little support on the job, or they may appreciate staff being readily available to work alongside them if they are learning a new skill:

"Yeah, and she's always there on a Wednesday trying to teach me, and I'm going like 'Maybe you could lessen the ropes'. But without her I wouldn't be able to learn the cash register and then but – I have – on Fridays when she's not around I have ...any of the other people to help assist me with the cash register and I'm putting stock in the bags and they're using the cash register. So I'm still learning as I go along." (Stage 2, Participant 1)

Disability Enterprises need to attend to scheduling the staff time required to provide this support, which ensures adequate support for individuals:

"It's all about time management and we've always got the things scheduled in on a weekly basis, so when it comes to the week we're not like, 'Where am I going to fit this in?' It's always scheduled there." (Stage 2, Staff 2)

A Fade-Out Plan can help staff and participants to plan support on the job and how this may change over time to build independence as confidence in the job grows:

“And ideal – a fade-out plan in that, okay, as the worker builds their confidence and skills, there’s less of a need for the [Disability Enterprise] staff to be involved. But ideally, to still be available to jump in, especially with mental health clients, where there’s episodic things. And people ...[who] may have episodic things where there’s something that happens environmentally, and then there a potential for it not to work out.” (Stage 2, Staff 5)

4.8.8 Using services and supports

As part of its wraparound support role, the Disability Enterprises necessarily work with a range of other services that support employment attainment. The major ones are those in the NDIS system (Local Area Coordinators and Support Coordinators), and Disability Employment Services.

Local Area Coordinator (LAC)

The pathway to employment involves planning to work out how individuals want to use their NDIS funding package to support their goals. This planning process is often with the individual, their nominee (i.e. family member or guardian), a Local Area Coordinator (LAC), and/or the NDIA. A LAC helps individuals access the NDIS, specifically to create a NDIS plan. LACs who have a strong understanding of the individual and their employment goals, and who work closely with Disability Enterprises and other employment services, are able to provide strong support to individuals.

Support Coordinator and hands-on support

Support Coordinators play a valuable role in making sure NDIS plans include all the resources needed to support employment pathways. They liaise across networks to oversee appropriate supports are in place.

“And if there’s Support Coordination in the Plan, then that’s great, because that can be – the information that’s needed to provide to the NDIS to make a decision on the funding, there needs to be reports written; allied health reports go a long way as well. And [Disability Enterprise]’s service in supported employment doesn’t know necessarily if a client has OT [occupational therapist] or anyone else involved in their life. So it’s up to the Support Coordinator, who has the picture of the whole – all services – to do that. If there isn’t a Support Coordinator, then that’s a problem. Unless the client has the skills to navigate the NDIS themselves. And we know that the NDIS is a complex system, and more often than not, they don’t have those skills.” (Stage 2, Staff 5)

Disability Employment Services

As discussed in Section 4.5, individuals can be linked with a Disability Employment Services (DES) to assist with their employment journey. DES can be used to fill support gaps in the employment pathway. This is the case where organisations report that Core funding does not offer enough for employment pathways and that Capacity Building funding is preferable. The work of the WISE and DES can overlap and intersect.

Feature Quote:

***“With post placement support, we like to offer a minimum of two hours a week. Generally we’ll go in and do a site visit and then we’ll do a phone call with the parent and maybe sometimes just chat with the employer offsite over email.”
(Stage 2, Staff 2)***

Conclusion

Disability Enterprises (WISEs) have significant potential to support employment that is valued by both employees and by a wide range of employers. The project identified that the same organisational design features that Work Integration Social Enterprises use to support the health, wellbeing, and employment outcomes of marginalised young people are also beneficial to the wellbeing and increased employment opportunities of people with disability in Disability Enterprises. An important additional organisational element, identified within this project, is the intentional provision of Pathways to Employment. Together, eight organisational elements make up the WISE-Ability model which aims to build and strengthen both existing and new organisational elements within Disability Enterprises (formerly ADEs).

However, this project also highlighted the barriers encountered by Disability Enterprises and people with disability as they attempted to enact this model. Of critical importance is the resourcing of the workload of the WISE-Ability model and, in particular, the Pathways to Employment element of it. While NDIS funding can be used where individuals have it, in general it is insufficient to meet the range and quantum of employment support activities needed by individuals over, often, extended timeframes. Instead, Disability Enterprises attempt to piece together or creatively apply funding from diverse line items to meet the employment goals of individuals, highlighting both a lack of clear employment logic in funding and the overall inadequacy of funding amounts.

Project informants highlighted that some issues could be solved by more standardised recognition of the quantum of support needed, similar to that offered through the current School Leaver Employment Supports funding of the NDIS that has a common funding envelope of around \$20,000. Additionally, as the employment aspirations and pathways of individuals change, NDIS planning and funding stymies this progress and does little to keep pace. Instead, it acts as a substantial handbrake on employment attainment as individuals wait for Plan reviews to provide the funding necessary to accept or maintain Open Employment. Working alongside other employment services, such as Disability Employment Services, may provide an avenue for shared effort that is resourced through different funding sources. Nonetheless, the unfunded employment support provided by Disability Enterprises (or funded only via philanthropic funding) is a critical risk factor for the viability of the WISE-Ability model and for the employment outcomes for Participants within these enterprises.

This project captures, perhaps for the first time, the types and level of employment support provided by Disability Enterprises, as part of the Pathway to Employment. Disability Enterprises in this project spent most time at the front end of the Pathway, in assessment and planning, and in building the workplace skills of individuals. These foci tie well to the inherent and potential strengths of Disability Enterprises and to leveraging those aspects of the WISE-Ability model that support them. For example, as employers of people with disability, Disability Enterprises recognise that they are likely to have acquired deep understanding of the individual and the customisation needed in the workplace, both of which can be used to underpin the employment pathway. In addition, the diverse work opportunities and industries within a Disability Enterprise, supplemented by other types of work exposure organised by the enterprise, provide a foundation for both training and job testing. However, Disability Enterprises in this project, also spend time with employers and provide support to modify workplaces, customise jobs and build inclusive employment settings.

Implications for the future

If we can address the barriers to the implementation of the WISE-Ability model, the evidence of this project suggests that individuals with disability can be employed as valued employees in workplaces that support their wellbeing. As described by one employer, purposeful work:

“Needs to be something that they know we need to have happen, and then they know that they’re contributing, and they know that it is well appreciated, that what they’re doing is a good job.” (Stage 1, Employer 3)

Similarly, employees with individuals aspired to this kind of value in the workplace:

“The money doesn't motivate me. The pride motivates me. And receiving good feedback from the people who are working for me or are working with me. To receive good feedback from them is the icing on the cake for me. To know that they can rely on me to do a good job, which means they don't have to look over my shoulder.” (Stage 2, Participant 8)

The WISE-Ability model provides a unique focus on the organisational features necessary to support the attainment of such employment for people with disability, including significant disability.



Image: Man smiling at work in a warehouse.

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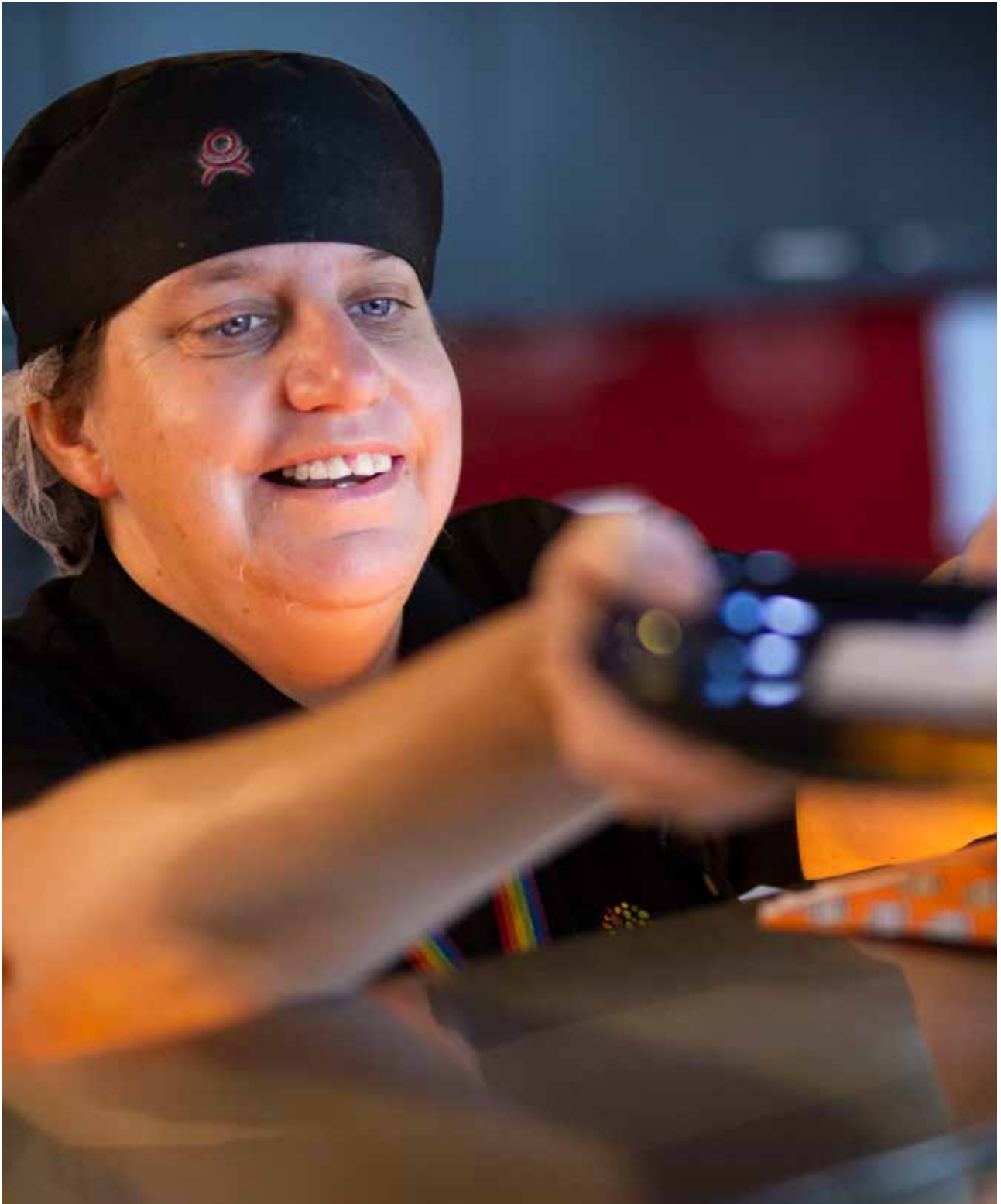


Image: Woman serving customer at a cafe.



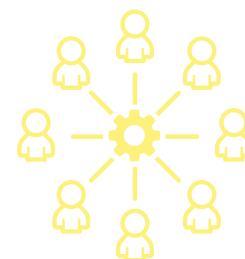
Image: Young man working in a nursery.

Appendix 1

The WISE-Ability Model



1. Structure



Aligning your business goals with your training and employment pathways program creates a strong WISE structure. Consider how your organisational structure can support the employment goals and pathways, as well as the overall wellbeing, of your participants.

Diverse work opportunities

Diverse work opportunities can be built into the DNA of the Disability Enterprise/WISE in the initial set up or by diversifying operations. Having different sites or spaces and offering different types of work means that there is variety and choice for individuals. This also provides varied social interactions, as well as skills development opportunities.

Work sites and spaces may all be under one roof or may be located at different premises.

It is important to enable people to access these different roles and workplaces through moving around or transferring across activities to acquire diverse experiences.

- ▶ **Diversity of choice:** For many people with a disability there are limited choices of where you can work. Having different work choices, both within the WISE and in Open Employment, enables people to explore their interests and develop new skills. Having options for work and different workplaces, enables people to match up their strengths and preferences with workplace or job role characteristics. For instance, a calm outdoor work environment might be preferred over a busy or social work environment. This also supports engagement through generating interest and providing challenges that avoid disengagement from long term repetition.
- ▶ **Variety and preparation:** Variety of work, which is balanced with lead-in time, allows individuals to prepare for change. Change may include different types of work, working with new people, and working with new equipment in different environments

Wraparound support team

Organisational structure includes the way staffing is structured, including having designated support staff or teams. Understanding each person and providing in-depth, tailored support is important. Support teams are private and respectful. They provide day-to-day guidance, mentoring, ensure work-life balance, and connect individuals and services outside of work to ensure wellbeing. If there are multiple sites within the WISE it is important that staff stay in communication with one another so that there is a common understanding of individual support requirements.

- ▶ **Tailored support:** Tailored support means matching supports, environment and equipment to individual requirements. A deep understanding of the individual means that Staff are able to pre-empt needs and challenges that may arise during training and the workday. Providing tailored support also means having an understanding of the support services they are connected to. This may include family and friends who play an important role in the support network.
- ▶ **Mentoring and check-ins:** Support Staff and Managers in contact roles can also act as mentors. These Staff roles involve answering questions, providing advice, ensuring Individuals take breaks and have access to food and water.
- ▶ **Healthy work-life balance:** Individuals participate in a range of activities outside of work. A Support team can match workload commitments with external programs, duties and leisure networks. The right balance of working hours is required for personal health, social and recreational activity and professional productivity. The Support team help to manage this balance. Staff create a healthy work life balance by

* = new to ILC project | > = Adapted for Disability focused WISE model

ensuring the appropriate amount of work hours related to different needs and context such as young people transitioning from school to employment.

- ▶ Transport: Support Staff provide assistance for individuals to travel to work safely whether by public transport, car or taxi. This may involve funding for travel (i.e. taxis) or marking out a safe, direct route to work. Travel to work can be a challenge if individuals do not have adequate support. In some cases, WISE staff are able to put supports in place that have no cost attached, like touch points along the journey including cafes with friendly staff who can provide a welcoming or safe environment.

Vocational training and development

Organisations need both formal and informal mechanisms for training development. Knowing that there are opportunities to learn on the job and that these opportunities will keep arising is a motivating factor. Certificates may be completed by some, however this type of learning does not suit everyone.

Having Supervisors and Mentors on-site supports learning and skills development. Learning experiences are supported by hands-on, structured, accessible, and tailored training and learning activities. Progressing to different activities supports engagement and skill development. All training and work is underpinned by modified equipment, environments and tasks.

- ▶ Hands-on learning and training: Hands-on learning involves learning how to do a job or task through practice and with support of a co-worker or Staff member. WISE use different ways of teaching new skills that suit their individual individuals. For example, using images rather than words, and having laminated lists of tasks in the workplace.
- ▶ Certified and accredited training: Recognised forms of training (i.e. Certified) can be tailored to each person. The trainer can take into consideration questions such as: 'Does the person understand? Do I need to offer a different examples and ways of explaining this content?' Use of verbal, printed words and images, prompts, and digital tools including video can assist.
- ▶ Task matching: Consider personal challenges and strengths when matching individuals to work and training. For instance, a social/team environment in a café can be a challenge for people who experience anxiety. Less socially interactive work can be an alternative. Some WISE have programs that are designed to build on technical strengths of clients such as computing or gaming skills.
- ▶ Modifying work practices and accessible equipment: Work tasks can be modified by the on-site support team on a daily basis to ensure good work experiences. Modifying workplaces can be straightforward, such as ensuring access to the right equipment, or the use checklists to guide workdays. Modifications are guided by deep understanding of individual needs.
- ▶ Building personal skills, social skills and real world skills: Skills sets are strengthened via short courses, work and meetings (i.e. Individual Toolkit meeting), which also assist in preparing Individuals for Open Employment.
- ▶ Real workplace conditions and work preparation: Individuals are empowered and prepared for Open Employment via real workplace conditions. Individuals are included in decision making processes and management meetings, participate in Work Health and Safety training, and everyday work participation is aligned with organisational policy and practices.

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2. Space and Environment



The use of physical space can improve or undermine participation. Consider for example: do busy work environments suit individuals? And where are the safe areas, nooks and crannies? Spatial design can also affect how you meet your WISE social purpose goals. Consider, for example, who and how many people the work and training settings can support.

Environment

Part of the job matching process for WISE staff is understanding if a participant is comfortable in the Supported or Open Employment workspace. Having a mix of busy/active and calm work spaces available to individuals supports different workspace preferences and mitigates workplace stress. Consideration also needs to be given to how individuals have access to food and drink in any work or training environment.

- ▶ **Busy vs Calm Environments:** Supported Employees identified that working in busy environments can be a challenge, particularly if there is limited support. Busy means an active environment and involves working at fast pace often with high levels of social interaction. A calm environment includes controlled social interaction, controlled noise levels and pace. Provision of protective equipment (i.e. sound cancelling headphones) can help.
- ▶ **Food access:** It is vital for all employees to have access to food and lunch areas. Industrial work areas may have limited areas to food. This can be an issue if a support or open work setting does not have a staff cafeteria.

Accessible and modifiable layout

Having enough space to move safely and freely around the workplace is vital. Having clear pathways for Supported Employees to access different rooms/spaces enables participation and productivity.

WISEs that have business sites that are connected to the outdoors or to open-plan areas are better for personal health. Open, spacious environments can also be simulated by warehouse settings or indoor-outdoor cafes.

- ▶ **Accessibility and adjustments:** Making spaces easy to access includes monitoring the number of people using spaces, i.e. a lunch area. Layouts that can be modified (i.e. moving tables, chairs, machinery), means that individuals can work in large or small teams and equipment can be moved to suit these different configurations. Being agile in this way can also help WISEs meet the needs of new/different contracted jobs. WISEs can test the layout of workplace and other spaces by seeking feedback from Individuals.
- ▶ **Outdoor learning and work:** Some employees prefer outdoor work so this requires external environments to also be accessible.

Safe time and areas

Feeling safe and secure in the workplace reduces stress levels and increases belonging and productivity. Consider what kinds of safe areas you will offer. Different kinds of safe areas can be generated through informal use by Staff and individuals. While quiet rooms suit some people for breaks, relaxation and meetings/conversations, others enjoy physical movement or driving to support well-being.

- ▶ **Quiet rooms:** Having designated rooms for employees creates a safe space for time out and personal conversations. Having a designated room for individuals creates a sense of ownership, belonging and empowerment.
- ▶ **Walking and driving:** A sense of safety and relaxation may be generated by physical movement. Walking and/or talking with someone may help to lower stress. Alternatively, being in the car can be a space of safety for some.

3. Culture



An organisational culture of care, inclusivity and genuine collaboration empowers Staff and individuals. Culture is crafted by people – from your leadership and stakeholders to your Individuals, your unique combination of business and social goals, the WISE space and environment, and the industry you connect to. A culture of recognition, working together and valuing each other supports well-being.

Going 'above and beyond'

A non-institutional, 'above and beyond' approach is a cornerstone of the culture of the organisation. Trust and respect are created through understanding of individual needs, creating a safe space to learn and potentially fail, and providing sufficient time and the right equipment to perform well.

- ▶ **Trust:** WISEs are committed to the health and well-being of Individuals. Individuals know that they can turn to Staff when they need to address issues both within and external to the workplace. Having trusting relationships at the WISE between staff and individuals facilitates troubleshooting workplace dynamics in a safe environment and in a timely manner.
- ▶ **Respect:** Valuing individual abilities creates a culture of respect. Staff and individual's share in a culture of mutual respect and appreciation by, for instance, listening to one another. A respectful work environment means that you are given an appropriate amount of time to do the task without being pressured, and that you have the right equipment to do the job.

Belonging

An organisational culture that is accepting, inclusive and disability-aware, creates spaces of belonging for and with individuals.

- ▶ **Buddies working together:** A culture of support can be established in the first week of employment. Individuals are matched with a Staff member 'Buddy' on their first day of employment. The Buddy will induct the individual, have lunch with them, answer any questions they might have, and introduce them to other team members.
- ▶ **Understanding:** Everyone has good and bad days. It is important to acknowledge when someone is struggling in the workplace so that they are not faced with unrealistic work expectations. Putting pressure on someone on a bad day can exacerbate stress levels, or worse, impact upon their health and well-being. A range of understandings are core to the culture essential in a WISE-Ability model: Difference, Calm, Accepting, and Positivity. Relationships in the workplace are important and there is a need to keep an eye out for any signs of conflict that could interfere with performance at work.

High quality products and services

WISE compete with commercial organisations in the marketplace. A culture of high quality products/services is essential for building meaningful relationships, reputation and social purpose.

- ▶ **Quality-focused businesses:** WISE Staff and Individuals are invested in producing high quality products and services as a business. WISE are inclusive businesses striving for both quality of products and workplace conditions. Individuals experience meaningful and purposeful work when they are invested in the team, and the goals, daily operations, and success of the business.

4. External Relationships



Disability Enterprises focused on supporting the employment goals of people with disability require strong relationships with both customers (i.e. those businesses and customers who purchase goods and services from the WISE) as well as other Open Employers. People external to the organisation (for example, employers, education providers, stakeholders) play an important role in providing different forms of support. They can reinforce and broaden social and financial goals and help build organisational culture.

Creating relationships with commercial partners opens up funding opportunities.

Strong relationships can intersect with WISE programs leading to further training and employment opportunities.

Building shared goals and knowledge

involves going on a journey with your business partners and stakeholders to break down barriers. This helps to facilitate transitions and build appropriate supports for Open Employment environments. This bridging work can also be used to define a pathway, for instance, for Individuals from Disability Enterprises into Open Employment.

- ▶ **New relationship opportunities:** May arise from contacting potential and existing partners and identifying how your social enterprise can fulfil their needs as well as your own. WISEs that offer trials (i.e. in Landscaping) allow all partners to work on the right match/fit to create good work experiences.
- ▶ **Shared goals for pathways:** Work with partners to set up an induction process for individuals, including: briefings for all Staff to build teamwork and a strengths-based culture, expectations about when the Individual will be on site (i.e. what times of the year provide the right environment to host an Individual? When are the low-stress, quiet times of the year where you can provide more coaching than usual?).

In-depth relationships

Lasting relationships help to develop the identity of both organisations and enhance the social impact of your programs. For example, existing relationships may be developed to offer new forms of employment and associated training. Partners who have an in-depth understanding of each other are better able to leverage new work and training projects that benefit all parties involved.

- ▶ **Trusting relationships:** Establishing a relationship of trust with your partners ensures that individuals have their rights and requirements met, and provides for a trusted Staff member to be on site who serves as a 'go-to' person for individuals. Relationships with employers may arise out of individuals' own networks, such as schools, where there are already shared goals and understandings.

5. Finance and Funding



Financial sustainability, or having consistent funding, is often a challenge for WISEs. Understanding WISE cost structure and having a commercially competitive (high quality, fair price) offering is vital to sustainability. Long-term grant funding, multi-year contracts and/or repeat customers can support success. Choosing the right industry, and balancing social and business goals, is vital for financial sustainability. A key WISE financial challenge is balancing client demand, growing/scaling, and, at the same time, transitioning skilled individuals into Hybrid/Open Employment.

Social good and financial benefit

Disability Enterprises are driven by social purpose that may be shared by other customers, funders and stakeholders. Disability Enterprises may be selected by other organisations and local businesses to assist with their needs, based on this social purpose and/or their related status as a for-purpose or social enterprise.

- ▶ Social procurement incentives: Can be a draw card for customers and business partners to select the WISE as the supplier of goods and services.

Diverse business offerings

Running multiple businesses or enterprises in key industries can help to secure relationships, jobs and contacts with a range of partners. This diversification can support overall financial sustainability, particularly if one business is operating in a financially precarious industry.

Funding the Individual employment pathway

NDIS funding makes it possible for individuals to enter a WISE (and Open Employment) and develop skills at their own pace.

- ▶ Social procurement incentives: Can be a draw card for customers and business partners
- ▶ Individual NDIS funding: Can be used to fund employment support activities both within the Disability Enterprise, and along the Pathway to Employment. Individuals can use their NDIS funding in Open and Hybrid Employment arrangements. Funding for Hybrid and Open Employment is challenging and requires careful planning to ensure individuals transition in a sustainable way. Individuals often do not have an appropriate rate of funding to attain their employment goals.
- ▶ Seeking a Plan Review: Individuals do not always have adequate funding in their plans for the support they require. In this case a plan review can be requested. Adequate funding significantly contributes to adequate supports that can be provided in Open Employment settings.
- ▶ Using NDIS funding flexibly: Use of NDIS funding for supports is limited by the line items that are included in individual Plans. Your plan may include line items, including: Core Supports and Capacity Building. Disability Organisations can use funding flexibly, for instance if an individual does not have Employment Supports under Funding and keeping a job, individuals may have funding in other areas like Increased Social and Community Participation (Capacity Building), or Assistance with Social & Community Participation
- ▶ Working with other service providers: DES can be used to fill support gaps in the employment pathway.

6. Industry



The type of industry you choose to operate in not only gives your WISE a particular direction and culture, but can impact finance, funding and program outcomes. Aligning your social goals and strategy with the right industry or vehicle for change can help.

Consider if the costs of operating in the industry are high or low; if they are high, how will you offset your expenses? You will need to be able to sell your product/services at a margin. It's important to find out if there is a market for the goods/services you are thinking of producing.

Type of Industry

What industry will you be connected to? For example, Warehousing, Farming, Horticulture, Building, Landscaping or Hospitality. Consider how the industry will affect your training program. For example, do the industry regulations and conditions support on-the-job training or on-site training? What certification will you need to build a WISE in this industry? Will the industry area support other activities that benefit individuals?

- ▶ **Diverse industry engagement:** Disability Enterprises operate across multiple industries. There are both social and financial benefits in diverse industry engagement: Disability Enterprises are able to service different industries and offer different goods/services to clients, and individuals are exposed to different work environments and skill sets in different industry areas. For example, the Landscaping WISE involves on- and off-site contractual work which means that individuals experience a range of working environments outside the WISE premises.
- ▶ **Inclusive industries:** Connecting with industries that have a culture of care, understanding, and are responsive to individual needs and passions supports well-being. Disability Enterprises can assist industries and employers to build their capacity for inclusion.

Labour market and employment

Consider if there are employment opportunities or other significant benefits for individuals in your chosen industry area/s. For example, will employment opportunities be accessible and local or will people be expected to travel and commute?

- ▶ **Employable skills:** Consider the skills that individuals will develop and how these match with Open Employment opportunities. For instance, if you are a Nursery that teaches horticulture skills consider if there are other opportunities in Open Employment in horticulture for individuals in the local area. Consider how the WISE can function as a talent pool for local industry.

7. Policy, procedure and process



Having processes and policies in place at your WISE supports business operations, as well as Staff and Individual wellbeing. Policies that provide guidance, and accessible, modifiable and flexible ways of working help to create an inclusive organisational culture. Clear processes provide guidance for troubleshooting and can save valuable time.

Guidance for staff

Employing individuals with skills in social and business operations, who communicate effectively and can empathise with others (i.e. have 'emotional intelligence') can help to support the goals and mission of your organisation. The hybrid (social + business) nature of the WISE means that Staff often bring industry skills, for example in hospitality, to the WISE and develop other skills on the job.

Peer support and guidebooks

Just as individuals require guidance in their roles, so too do Staff members. Existing Staff members can encourage new Staff members to be supportive, patient, understanding, responsive and aware. Background reading can help inform your workplace culture (for example, genU have a booklet called 'Understanding our Mental Health and Disabilities').

Formal communication channels

Having a time and space for regular Staff meetings is vital for information sharing. Informal Staff chats are just as important and allow Staff to share knowledge, strategise, develop new ideas and build relationships

- ▶ Staying in touch throughout the day: Staff from different teams stay in contact via face-to-face discussions on-site, email, and phone to make sure individuals feel supported and that their concerns are addressed in a timely manner. Using mechanisms to check-in, update or get feedback from Supported Employees are important. For example, one WISE uses a team 'huddle' each morning.

Engaging stakeholders

A 'with not for' approach to working with people with a disability helps to build an inclusive organisational culture.

- ▶ Communication with family and networks: There needs to be effective communication structures that provide clear information about the work individuals are doing. This information should be communicated to family and other networks to allow challenges to be addressed in supportive ways.

Policies that support Disability focused WISE

- ▶ Intake: Intake: An intake policy of diversity and group coherence supports productivity. This means including people who will be able to get along and learn new skills together. Intake is accompanied by clear induction and orientation processes.
- ▶ Shared rules: Setting boundaries creates clarity for new individuals. For instance, employees developed their own handbook – 10 policies and procedures around effective workplace behaviours to support teamwork.
- ▶ Risk management: Risk management strategies create a safe learning environment and workspace. A safe and healthy work environment means individuals have access to: essential WHS training via different forms of communication (visual, audio); food and water facilities especially in warm environments; protective clothing where appropriate; Covid-safe equipment such as PPE; and a hygiene station. Different work environments will have different levels of risk that need to be managed and communicated to individuals.

Tailored business systems

Disability Enterprises have bespoke business systems tailored to individual skill sets and disabilities. These systems are particularly important in Disability Enterprises where work practices have been modified to incorporate tactile forms of communication and task tracking. Having a defined set of principles, practices and procedures that are applied to specific activities (i.e. food preparation) can help to achieve businesses goals. Tailored business systems suit the diverse skills of Individuals and enable Staff and Individuals to maintain a relaxed and productive atmosphere.

- ▶ Visual and tactile tools: For instance, in the commercial kitchen, a whiteboard system is used to manage tasks and allocate Staff resources. The whiteboard has different magnets and tags used to indicate tasks and task status. It is tactile and visual. When a new person starts work they can be shown the whiteboard and refer to it as needed. This system is accompanied by a job instruction sheet which includes more detailed information on each task (e.g. specific instructions for how to peel, top, and tail a carrot).

Structure, routine and support

It is important to have a reliable structure and routine for individuals. This may include the same arrival time, work team, equipment and location to ensure consistency and productivity (see also: Structure - Variety and Preparation).

- ▶ Daily structure: Staff plan the work schedule of individuals in advance and then reassess work plans each day to ensure appropriate resourcing of jobs. Change in tasks or work type is discussed with Individuals ahead of time to enable appropriate time for adjustments and to minimise any change related stress.
- ▶ Staff visibility: It is important that individuals know who they can approach for support, mentoring and checking-in (i.e. a go-to person or the Support Team), or to report incidents (Supervisors and Managers). While the roles of these team members overlap at times, individuals are clear that they have a designated number of Staff they can approach if needed.

8. Pathways to employment



WISEs include a strong focus on pathways to employment for participants. The transition into Open Employment is not usually linear. A individual's journey will often involve movement back and forward between Open and Supported employment contexts as confidence and skills develop. WISEs support the individual along this journey, working with them and employers

Customised employment and job carving

Individuals can team up with an Employer to customise a job to capitalise on their strengths. Alternatively, there may be particular areas of a job an individual has experience in and these can be 'carved off' as a micro-job for this person.

Customisation is based on building a deep knowledge about the individual's workstyle, preferences and support needs.

- ▶ **Conversations:** Customising a job starts with conversations about what an individual is interested in doing, personal strengths and existing skills. Customising takes on different forms depending on the preferences of the individual and the employer. Informational Interviewing is a good way of determining the role and match between an employer and employee. Informational interviewing is a two-step process where the Service Provider meets the employer to discuss the business and the employer's goals.
- ▶ **Work routine:** Customising includes establishing a work routine that is appropriate for each client and appropriate hours of work. This can mean gradually increasing hours or maintaining regular hours as part of a routine. Customised roles need to be monitored and work hours adjusted as the work environment go through busy and slow periods.
- ▶ **Check-ins:** It is important for there to be opportunities where employer, the Disability Enterprise and the individual can regularly check in to discuss works hours, experience on the job and any adjustments needed to support overall well-being.
- ▶ **Modify:** Support is also provided to employers to modify and customise workplaces. A combination of modifications may include example checklists to prompt tasks to be completed as well as emphasizing pre-existing workplace features like structured ways of working.

Discovery

Employment pathways can be supported by informal or formal processes. The informal pathway involves learning on-the-job with employers like Disability Enterprises and this can take place in short term work experience/work placements.

- ▶ **'Everyday Discovery':** Through this day-to-day process, Staff and individuals work out what individuals are interested in doing for training and work. Learning about someone's interests, goals, passion, individual work style and how they work best can help when matching a person with a task, job, business and industry. This process can unfold on the job over time with a Individual, Staff and/or the Wraparound Support Team.
- ▶ **Formal Discovery process:** A formal Discovery focuses on individual interests, goals, strengths which are later used to inform potential matches to industries and jobs in Hybrid or Open Employment. This process is NDIS funded. Family and friends play an important role in Discovery and can help individuals to understand their own strengths and interests and identify links to potential jobs. Discovery can become a continuous process and involve 're-discovery'.

Hybrid Employment

There are different ways to find the best fit between an individual and a job. Hybrid employment – working in both a supported setting (ADE) and in Open Employment – may be suitable for some. A Hybrid Employment Pathway allows individuals to develop work skills, confidence, networks, and relationships and transition into Open Employment at their own pace.

A Hybrid Employment pathway provides people with the opportunity to transition into Open Employment gradually, and work varying hours in both a WISE and Open Employment setting. This allows individuals to develop work skills, confidence, networks, relationships and transition into Open Employment at their own pace, or build a working life that involves both engagement types.

The journey to developing confidence and skills can take considerable time and has to be conducted at the pace that is appropriate for each person. The length of time this pathway takes can vary, for instance, from 2 weeks to a year or more

Work exposure and experience

While opportunities within the Disability Enterprise can be used to offer a variety of work roles and settings, Disability Enterprises can also set up diverse work experiences in Open Employment settings both as part of Discovery, and as part of trialing potential employment. Job shadowing, formal work experience and job trials are examples of this.

Employer engagement, job negotiation and the partnership approach

The process of building networks, relationships, individual confidence and skills requires a partnership approach between families, service providers, and employers.

WISE engage with potential employers through personal and professional networks and by reaching out on behalf of individuals. This provides an opportunity for education of employers and a shared understanding of how an inclusive workplace can be created step by step. Knowledge sharing about how to create an inclusive environment in the workplace is pivotal for successful employment experiences.

Setting up expectations and developing a shared understanding with an employer as part of the job negotiation process can ensure that the employer feels confident, and the employee feels appropriately supported in a new workplace.

Placement support for setting up the job

WISE can play a role in setting up appropriate supports for individuals when they start in new roles. WISE Staff work with individuals in Open Employment roles to help build capacity and confidence. Placement support can be offered individually or in groups.

Preparation for work and support during a placement can include Employment Counselling. This involves working on things that people may be unsure of, like the social norms of being at work, setting goals and expectations for capability especially when working independently.

Post placement support on the job

Individuals benefit from different levels of support, and many move towards independence at work. Levels of support provided to individuals who are working in Open Employment can vary from a quick check in twice a week to multiple visits during the week.

A Fade-out Plan can help staff and individuals to plan support on the job and how this may change over time to build independence as confidence in the job grows.

Using services and supports

The pathway to employment involves planning to work out how individuals want to use their NDIS funding package to support their goals. This planning process is often with the individual, their nominee (i.e. family

member or guardian), a Local Area Coordinator (LAC), and/or the NDIA. A LAC helps individuals access the NDIS, specifically to create a NDIS plan. LACs who have a strong understanding of the individual and their employment goals, and who work closely with Disability Enterprises and other employment services, are able to provide strong support to individuals.

- ▶ Local Area Coordinator (LAC): A LAC helps individuals access the NDIS, specifically to create an individual NDIS Plan.
- ▶ Support Coordinator and hands-on support: Support coordinators play a valuable role in making sure NDIS plans include all the resources needed to support employment pathways. They liaise across networks to oversee appropriate supports are in place.
- ▶ Disability Employment Services: Individuals can be linked with a Disability Employment Services (DES) to assist with their employment journey. DES can be used to fill support gaps in the employment pathway if an individual has only Core funding. This is the case where organisations report that Core funding does not offer enough for employment pathways and that Capacity Building funding is preferable. The work of the WISE and DES can overlap and intersect.



Image: Man at work in a warehouse.

Appendix 2

Training Guide: WISE-Ability

WISE-ABILITY ELEMENT	How to create inclusive workplace conditions
<div data-bbox="188 488 371 689" data-label="Diagram"> </div> <p data-bbox="188 719 328 750">Structure</p> <p data-bbox="188 763 695 853">Setting up the right organisational structure is the first step to ensuring you have the capacity to meet the needs of clients and Individuals.</p> <p data-bbox="188 875 705 1061">Aligning your business goals with your training and employment pathways program creates a strong WISE structure. Consider how your organisational structure can support the employment goals and pathways, as well as the overall wellbeing, of your participants.</p>	<ul data-bbox="794 495 1406 1883" style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Offer different work types/tasks and work environments or settings. For instance, in-door and out-door work options, different locations or rooms for work. ▶ Allow ample time for individuals to prepare themselves to change environments, and support them through this change. ▶ 'Have clear support roles or support team in the organisation. ▶ Identify Staff to be a buddy or mentor to frequently check-in and offer support in a range of areas in and outside work. For instance, learning on the job and the development of soft skills in the workplace. Work buddies can be colleagues (i.e. a Individual or staff member) who is able to provide guidance for learning new tasks. ▶ Connect individuals with a support team member. Understanding each person and providing in-depth, tailored support is important. Be aware of the support needs of individuals and the support services they are connected to. This may include family and friends who play an important role in the support network. ▶ Support a healthy work life balance through adjusting work hours and supporting external activities. ▶ Build skills and support networks for travel, for example through introducing employees to friendly/safe locations that they will pass through on their way to work (i.e. a local café). ▶ Identify accessible equipment requirements (funding may be available via Job Access). ▶ Identify and document individual interests and skills and create opportunities for hands-on learning and training in these areas. Through this process identify goals and work aspirations. ▶ Customise hands-on-learning opportunities and certified training to match individual interests and pursue career goals. ▶ Modify work practices by developing solutions based on a deep understanding of the needs of your employees. E.g. a system for handling and matching cash used in a cash register. Images were used rather than words to match cash and determine the appropriate amount of change to give customers. ▶ Replicate workplace activities such as engaging employees in rostering decisions, having opportunities for promotion, and participation in staff meetings.

WISE-ABILITY ELEMENT

How to create inclusive workplace conditions



Pathways To Employment

WISEs include a strong focus on pathways to employment for participants. There are ways to ensure the best fit between an individual and a job. The pathway to Open Employment is supported by informal and formal processes. The informal pathway involves learning on the job with employers who can support professional development. The formal process starts by making sure individuals have access to all the resources they need, for example via their NDIS Plan.

The pathway to employment involves financial planning to work out how individuals want to use their NDIS funding package to support their goals. Employer engagement and post placement support are also important elements of the pathway.

- ▶ Create pathways to outside work experiences and opportunities that match up with individual interests, strengths and needs.
- ▶ Start with conversations about what an individual is interested in doing, hobbies, personal strengths and existing skills.
- ▶ Use a Discovery process to learn more about the individual, their career preferences.
- ▶ Draw on an individual's networks (support network, family, friends) to link up with potential employers who can offer appropriate work conditions.
- ▶ Draw on established relationships with stakeholders, and partners to unlock work opportunities.
- ▶ Support the individual to plan carefully for the pathway with a LAC or Support Coordinator (i.e. the individual NDIS funding plan).
- ▶ Create Job Shadowing and work experience opportunities for individual to observe how a job is carried out and what the job involves.
- ▶ Identify an employer and engage with them to understand the kind of roles and jobs they require.
- ▶ Engage employers by setting up expectations and developing a shared understanding with an employer as part of the job negotiation process can ensure that the employer feels informed, confident, and the employee feels appropriately supported in a new workplace. One WISE describes this as 'bringing the employer along on a journey'.
- ▶ 'Customise' employment opportunities by actively shaping the job to match the individual's strengths and needs ((i.e. modified hours, tasks) and the employer's needs.
- ▶ You can also carve off specific work tasks to create a new job.
- ▶ Provide placement support, this may involve help with setting up the pre-conditions of employment like Working With Children checks as well as on-the-job support from the WISE
- ▶ Create a routine and monitor employment hours to match the needs of the employer and employee.
- ▶ Check in regularly with both the employer and employee to make adjustments to hours, routine and the workspace as appropriate.
- ▶ Support Hybrid work arrangements by offering employment opportunities at the WISE and in Open Employment so that individuals can move back and forward between the two.
- ▶ Connect up with other services such as Local Area Coordinators, Support Coordinator and DES. Support coordinators play a valuable role in making sure NDIS plans include all the resources needed to support employment pathways. They liaise across networks to oversee appropriate supports are in place.

MODEL WISE-ABILITY ELEMENT

How to create inclusive workplace conditions



Space And Environment

The use of physical space can improve or undermine participation. Consider for example: do busy work environments suit individuals? And, where are the safe areas, nooks and crannies?

Spatial design can also affect how you meet your WISE social goals. Consider, for example, who and how many people the work and training settings can support?

A warehouse layout that can be modified (i.e. moving tables, chairs, machinery), means that individuals can work in large or small teams and equipment can be moved to suit these different configurations. Being agile in this way can also help WISEs meet the needs of new/different contracted jobs. WISEs can test the layout of workplace and other spaces by seeking feedback from Individuals.

- ▶ Provide calm spaces and busy/active spaces for work by sectioning off tasks and work areas.
- ▶ In addition to lunch breaks provide quiet, safe times of the day for Individuals to relax/talk freely with peers and trusted Staff. If quiet spaces are not available on site, create opportunities for individuals to leave work, as appropriate, for a break (i.e. at a café or for a walk).
- ▶ Create access to an outdoor environment for work or lunch breaks.
- ▶ Create an accessible environment by clearing walkways and modifying/providing accessible equipment.
- ▶ Provide options for rest when individuals are not feeling physically or mentally well, like going for a walk, drive, sitting in a quiet/hidden nook or cranny.
- ▶ Ensure employees have access to food options and cafes, especially in industrial areas.
- ▶ Check to see if an employee is comfortable by going for a visit to the workplace, especially if this is with a new open employer. What is the individual's feedback about the workplace (either verbally or non-verbally)?



Culture

An organisational culture of care, inclusivity and genuine collaboration empowers staff and Individuals. Culture is crafted by people – from your leadership and funders to your Individuals, your unique combination of business and social goals, the WISE space and environment, and the industry you connect to.

A culture of recognition, working together and valuing each other supports well-being.

- ▶ Establish a culture of understanding and support on day one by identifying a buddy or go-to person that individual Individuals can contact for support/issues within and external to the workplace.
- ▶ Create opportunities for Individual voices to be heard; i.e. feedback on daily routine at work via Staff meetings.
- ▶ In addition to your social goals, establish a common goal of high quality services and products to build pride and purpose at work.
- ▶ Create a trusting and respectful workplace culture by providing appropriate amounts of time for employees to complete tasks.
- ▶ Take a holistic approach to wellbeing and work by having informal morning 'huddles' to provide an opportunity to touch base going into the workday, reflections of individual commitments outside of work (i.e. weekend activities) and feedback of daily work activities as well.

MODEL WISE-ABILITY ELEMENT

How to create inclusive workplace conditions



External Relationships

People external to the organisation (for example, employers, education providers, stakeholders and intermediaries) play an important role in providing different forms of support. They can reinforce and broaden social and financial goals and help build organisational culture.

Creating relationships with commercial partners opens up funding opportunities.

Strong relationships intersect with WISE programs and can lead to further training and employment opportunities.

New relationship opportunities may arise from contacting potential partners and identifying how your social enterprise can fulfil their needs as well as your own. WISEs that offer trials (i.e. in Landscaping) allow all partners to work on the right match/fit.

- ▶ Identify other organisations linked to your industry or business goals and discuss how you can work together to meet common goals.
- ▶ Ask: How you can leverage current services to meet partner/client their needs? Consider how this will meet your WISE needs as well.
- ▶ Develop shared goals for pathways: set up an induction process for Individuals and a briefing for all Staff to build teamwork and strengths-based culture. Set up expectations about when the Individual will be on site (i.e. arrival time, departure time). Consider when you will have time to induct a Individual – are there quiet times of the year when you can provide coaching and support/ make necessary adjustments?
- ▶ Take time to time to identify and build a relationship with a suitable employer via your own and individual's networks. For instance, one Individual was able to customise a volunteering role at the school they had attended.
- ▶ Employer Expos are a good way of meeting new people.



Finance

Financial sustainability or having consistent funding is often a challenge for WISEs.

Understanding your cost structure and having a commercially competitive (high quality, fair price) offering is vital to the sustainability of your WISE. Choosing the right industry is also vital for success and financial sustainability.

Long-term grant funding, multi-year contracts and/ or repeat customers can support the success of your WISE.

- ▶ Social Procurement frameworks encourage commercial businesses and governments to work with organisations that have social goals. Consider how you can leverage these frameworks to support demand for business, contracts and work for Individuals on- and off-site.
- ▶ Draw on NDIS funding to support the employment pathways of participants.
- ▶ Proactively support individuals to seek NDIS Plan Reviews to update funding to support their employment goals
- ▶ Use NDIS funding creatively. For example, re-purpose Social and Community Participation funding to support employment goals.
- ▶ Work with other service providers like DES to gain additional support for the participant
- ▶ Consider diverse business offerings: Running multiple businesses or enterprises in key industries can help to secure relationships, jobs and contacts with a range of partners. This diversification can support overall financial sustainability, particularly if one business is operating in a financially precarious industry.



MODEL WISE-ABILITY ELEMENT	How to create inclusive workplace conditions
 <p>Industry</p> <p>The type of industry you choose to operate in not only gives your WISE a particular direction and culture, but can impact finance, funding and program outcomes. Aligning your social goals and strategy with the right industry or vehicle for change can help.</p> <p>What industry will you be connected to? For example, Warehousing, Farming, Horticulture, Building, Landscaping or Hospitality? Consider how the industry will affect your training program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Consider operating across industries which can be achieved by running multiple micro-businesses from the one location. ▶ Understand labour market demand and what skills will increase the employability of your Individuals. ▶ Prioritise inclusive industries that offer a supportive workplace culture and environment. ▶ Consider the role of the WISE as a talent pool for local industry. Environments that mimic external businesses prepare Individuals to move in to Open Employment in the future.
 <p>Policy And Procedure</p> <p>Having processes and policies in place at your WISE supports business operations, staff and Individual wellbeing. Policies that provide guidance, accessible, modifiable and flexible ways of working for staff and Individuals helps to create an inclusive organisational culture, while clear processes provide guidance for troubleshooting and can save valuable time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide guidance for Staff about how best to provide support. Awareness Raising training and background reading can help inform your workplace culture (i.e. genU have a booklet called 'Understanding our Mental Health and Disabilities'). ▶ Work to understand individual needs which vary throughout the day. Staff should stay in contact with Individuals to meet changing needs. ▶ If there are multiple sites within the WISE it is important that WISE staff stay in communication with one another so that there is a common understanding of individual support requirements and how these may change throughout the day. ▶ Keep family/networks informed about any changes at work or challenges that the individual may need assistance with. ▶ Have a policy for intake and outgoing Individuals to keep your workforce strong. ▶ Develop shared rules for how to work together. For instance, employees developed their own handbook – 10 policies and procedures around effective workplace behaviours to support teamwork. ▶ Safety first! Making sure Individuals have access to: essential WHS training via different forms of communication (visual, audio); food and water facilities, especially in warm environments; protective clothing where appropriate; and COVID-safe equipment such as PPE. Different work environments will have different levels of risk that need to be managed. This may require particular communication skills or physical aids. ▶ Use visual and tactile tools. For instance, a whiteboard system can be used to manage tasks and allocate Staff resources. In addition to words, you can use tactile magnets and tags to indicate tasks and task status. ▶ Plan ahead and inform Individuals of any changes to their work schedule ahead of time. Doing this will minimise work stress. ▶ Ensure Staff members are visible and accessible to Individuals, and employees know who to go to if they need help. ▶ Set up strong teams to work together and adjust team members as needed to ensure good relationships at work.



Image: Young woman at work in a warehouse.

Appendix 3

Policy guide

Summary of the wise-ability model

CSI researchers have been working with Disability Enterprises (previously known as Australian Disability Enterprises or ADEs) to develop an organisational design model to support pathways to mainstream employment for people with a disability. This approach builds on previous work with Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) that identified the organisational design features that best support the health, wellbeing, and employment outcomes of marginalised young people in a social enterprise environment. WISEs have a social purpose to provide transitional pathways to meaningful work for people with experiences of marginalisation, including people with a disability.

The updated WISE-Ability model describes the elements of organisational design that best support the health, wellbeing, and employment outcomes of people with disability in a social enterprise (or supported employment) environment. In particular, the model highlights how organisational elements contribute to Open and Hybrid employment for people with a disability.

How the model was developed

In 2021, CSI and genU disability services were funded by the Department of Social Services to adapt and implement elements of this model into a genU supported employment (Disability Enterprise) environment.

During stage 1 of the project, the CSI team worked collaboratively with genU and a variety of stakeholders in the Barwon region to develop and implement the WISE model to improve participants' work readiness and their transitions to Hybrid (working in both a supported employment setting and in Open Employment) or Open Employment. The project focused on the model elements: Structure, Space, Relationships, Culture, Finance and Funding, Policy and Procedure, and Industry and, through the initial testing of the model, identified and added an eighth design element Pathways to Employment. This model was named the WISE-Ability model. The characteristics of the model (Figure 1) can be adapted to support employment outcomes.

During stage 2 of the project, 2022 to 2024, the CSI team worked with three additional providers – Ability Works, Windarrang and The Disability Trust – to further test and develop the Pathways to Employment element of the model. The aim was to understand supports and NDIS funding required for the pathway from Australian Disability Enterprises to mainstream employment, and the steps/activities involved along the way.

In this stage, the Pathways to Employment element of the WISE-Ability model was developed via Action Learning workshops (3), fortnightly Action Learning meetings (60), data collection about individual employment support activities (for 18 individuals), and interviews (20) with each of the 4 partners between July 2023 and April 2024 (10 months). All participants were asked to consider the Pathways element, in particular, the activities that were involved in carving out a pathway from a WISE to mainstream employment. Participants identified a range of employment barriers, supports and tools. These are documented in Campbell, P., Joyce, A., Crosbie, J. & Wilson, E. (2024) Connecting Pathways to Employment with the Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE) model. (Final Report), Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University.

Policy implications

There are three potential policy areas for which implications arise:

1. NDIS
2. DES
3. Supported employment sector – transformation

1. NDIS

The NDIS has been and remains the main (and sometimes only) source of funding for many individuals (in the former Australian Disability Enterprise sector). Individuals within this sector are predominantly people with intellectual disability, Down syndrome and Autism (Wilson et al., 2022).

While Disability Enterprises in this study (former ADEs) provided a range of activities along a 'Pathway to Employment' for this cohort, obtaining sufficient or relevant NDIS funding remained a key challenge. A common concern raised was the lack of flexibility in the ways that people could use NDIS funding with respect to employment transition. People were reluctant to attempt open employment as it might jeopardise future plans and funding availability. There were two scenarios that were of concern. Firstly, if they tried open employment but it was not suitable and they wanted to return to supported employment. Or if they wanted a mix of open and supported employment. In both contexts people were worried that if they commenced in open employment it would mean less money and supports available in future plans. There were stories of this occurring. For this reason, people were very reluctant to try something different in case it did negatively impact on future plans. Delays in plans and inconsistencies in how needs were interpreted by planners were other issues of concerns that were raised. There were also concerns raised that funding assessments often underestimate the level of support someone will need when working in an open employment environment.

Possible policy solutions:

Identify base level of employment funding (to be used across a range of employment support activities without delineation), in a similar way to SLES. For example, provide a base level of \$20,000 support over two years.

Provide additional identified funding items. For example, funding for employer engagement, workplace modification and job customisation activities.

2. DES

Disability Enterprises in this study were undertaking substantial activity in relation to preparing individuals for Open Employment. Participants from the interviews commented that support from DES was often insufficient for people with moderate to higher support needs and that the organisations themselves were providing the more intensive support finding suitable employment.

Possible policy solutions:

- ▶ Remove barriers to shared delivery of employment services. For example, individuals can receive supports from both service providers simultaneously.
- ▶ Share DES outcomes payments where shared delivery occurs.

3. Supported employment sector

This research makes visible the diversity of activity and the diverse quantum of activity across individuals. In particular, it is clear that Disability Enterprises provide a strong focus on working with the informal and formal supports of the individual as part of setting up a strong foundation for employment around the individual. Disability Enterprises provide substantial activity in relation to development of soft skills and vocational skills. They also have a strong focus on job and workplace customisation, including developing

job-based modifications such as task lists (with images etc.). Another important role they undertake is building the capacity of the new employer and building their inclusion skills.

The WISE-Ability model makes visible the benefits of the enterprise environment in terms of its potential to support transitions to employment and employee wellbeing. This has implications for thinking about the 'transformation' of the supported employment sector, in particular:

- ▶ How the sector can enable transitions both ways between supported and open employment (Hybrid employment) as part of Pathways to Employment
- ▶ How to fund the range of activities on the Pathway to Employment.
- ▶ How to support the transformation of the sector (for example, via government investment such as the Structural Adjustment Fund).



Figure 1 WISE-Ability model



Image: People working in the nursery together.

Appendix 4

Pathway activities and NDIS funding list

Below is a list of the NDIS line items WISE used to fund the activity drawing on the NDIS plan.

NDIS line items used for the employment pathway	
Capacity Building	
Capacity Building – Increased Social and Community Participation: Skills Development and Training	<p>Increased Social and Community Participation</p> <p>Individual Skills Development and Training</p> <p>Individual life skills development and training including public transport training and support, developing skills for community, social and recreational participation.</p>
Capacity Building - Increased Social and Community Participation: Life Transition Planning Incl. Mentoring Peer-Support And Individual Skill Development	<p>The supports in this support category allow participants to take part in skills-based learning to develop independence in accessing the community.</p> <p>This support item, which includes mentoring, peer-support and individual skill development, is designed to establish volunteer assistance within the participant's home or community to develop skills. For instance, assistance in attending appointments, shopping, bill paying, taking part in social activities and maintaining contact with others.</p>
<p>Capacity Building - Support Coordination Level 2: Coordination of Supports</p> <p>*Line item used for only one participant</p>	<p>This support item strengthens a participant's ability to design and then build their supports with an emphasis on linking the broader systems of support across a complex service delivery environment. Coordination of Supports is to focus on supporting participants to direct their lives, not just their services, and is focused on assisting participants to build and maintain a resilient network of formal and informal supports. This involves working together with the participant to understand the funding, identify what participants expect from services, and how participants want this designed. Coordination of Supports also includes coaching participants, and working with participants to develop capacity and resilience in their network.</p>
Capacity Building - Improved Daily Living	<p>This support category includes assessment supports, training supports, strategy development supports, and therapeutic supports (including Early Childhood Supports) to assist the development of, or to increase, a participant's skills and their capacity for independence and community participation.</p>
Capacity Building – Capacity Building Supports (low use)	<p>In remote and very remote areas (MMM6 and MMM7), providers delivering core and capacity building supports may enter specific arrangements with participants to cover travel costs, up to the relevant hourly rate for the support item. Providers should assist participants to minimise the travel costs that they need to pay (for example, by co-ordinating appointments with other participants in an area, so that travel costs can be shared between participants, or by considering the delivery of the support by telehealth where appropriate).</p>
<p>CB: Improved Daily Living: Finding and Keeping a Job: Individual Employment Support</p> <p>*Line item not used by any organisation in spreadsheet data. Used for one participant in case study (Lisa).</p>	<p>Time limited, on-the-job training including post placement support related to the participant's disability that enables them to adjust and manage demands of the job in the workplace environment, and to assist employers to successfully manage the participant's placement.</p>

NDIS line items used for the employment pathway

Core

<p>CORE: Assistance with Daily Life</p> <p>*line item used more than 50 times for pathway activities across all participants and organisations</p>	<p>Assist participant to undertake and/or develop skills to maintain their home environment where the participant owns their own home and/or has sole or substantial responsibility for its maintenance. Includes assisting participant to do basic house and yard work.</p>
<p>CORE Centre Supports in Employment</p> <p>*line item used more than 50 times for pathway activities across all participants and organisations</p>	<p>While some participants, with supports offered through DES or employer reasonable adjustment, will successfully maintain work, others will need higher intensity, often daily, support delivered in the workplace to maintain employment. These supports have typically been available in an Australian Disability Enterprise.</p>
<p>CORE: Assistance with Social & Community Participation</p> <p>*line item used more than 50 times for pathway activities across all participants and organisations</p>	<p>These supports enable a participant to engage in community, social or recreational activities. They may be provided in a centre or in community settings at standard or higher intensity rates.</p>
<p>CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports in Employment (low use) 	<p>While some participants, with supports offered through DES or employer reasonable adjustment, will successfully maintain work, others will need higher intensity, often daily, support delivered in the workplace to maintain employment. These supports have typically been available in an Australian Disability Enterprise. They can also be used in a range of employment settings including: private, government or not for profit organisations; a social enterprise or similar environment; self-employment or a micro-business; or a family run business.</p>
<p>Core - Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation (low use)</p>	<p>This support category relates to assisting with or supervising a participant to engage in community, social, recreational or economic activities. These supports can be provided in a range of environments, such as in the community or a centre.</p>
<p>School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES)</p>	<p>Support for Year 12 school leavers to assist them transition from school into employment if they have a goal or aspiration to be employed. Supports may include work experience generally in open employment, job site training, travel training and activities that contribute to achieving an employment outcome and linkages to ongoing employment support</p>

The list below shows activities next to the NDIS line item that the four organisations utilised for their pathways program.

Activity	NDIS Line Item
Discovery	
Understanding the person (home visits)	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment
Understanding the person, discovering interests and strengths (community visits)/ Understanding support need/ Onboarding and Intake	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment CORE Centre Supports in Employment TTP 1:1 School Leaver Employment Supports
Engagement with family or carer, unpaid personal networks to support employment directions (i.e. circles of support)	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment
	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment CORE Centre Supports in Employment TTP 1:1 Capacity Building - Increased Social and Community Participation: Skills Development and Training 1:1 School Leaver Employment Supports
Engagement with paid providers to support employment goals	Capacity Building - Capacity Building Supports
Assessments – initial assessment documents	Capacity Building - Support Coordination Level 2: Coordination of Supports
Setting a plan	CORE Centre Supports in Employment TTP 1:1
Exploration	
Experience and exploring (could be hobbies/interests or related to employment)	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment
Confirm vocational themes and build visual portfolio	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment
Learning through doing/ Building social, presentation, travel and communication skills	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment CORE: Assistance with Daily Life CORE: Assistance with Social & Community Participation Capacity Building - Improved Daily Living
Preparing the employee	CORE Centre Supports in Employment TTP 1:1 Capacity Building - Increased Social and Community Participation: Life Transition Planning Including. Mentoring Peer-Support And Individual Skill Development School Leaver Employment Supports Capacity Building - Increased Social and Community Participation: Skills Development and Training 1:1
Exploring vocational themes through informational interviews	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment
Training	Capacity Building - Assistance with Social & Community Participation
Exploring paid work options	CORE Centre Supports in Employment TTP 1:1

Activity	NDIS Line Item
Job Development	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment
Employer engagement and understanding the business	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment School Leaver Employment Supports CORE Centre Supports in Employment TTP 1:1 Capacity Building - Increased Social and Community Participation: Skills Development and Training 1:1
Work experience support (on the job)	School Leaver Employment Supports
Customising tools	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment
Job negotiation (hours, pay, award wage)	CORE Centre Supports in Employment TTP 1:1
Career	
Post placement support	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation – Supports in Employment
Work experience /Job Shadow / Job Documentation	Capacity Building - Increased Social and Community Participation: Life Transition Planning Including Mentoring Peer-Support And Individual Skill Development CORE Centre Supports in Employment TTP 1:1
Support for work experience	CORE Centre Supports in Employment TTP 1:1 School Leaver Employment Supports
Employment Counselling	School Leaver Employment Supports
Goal Setting and Self Determination	School Leaver Employment Supports
Capacity Building	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation - Supports in Employment
Progress Update: (state area increased)	
Planning and reviewing progress	CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation - Supports in Employment
Improved job readiness	Core - Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation
Employment related skills and knowledge (whether industry specific or general)	Core - Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation CORE: Assistance with Social, Economic and Community Participation - Supports in Employment
Increased access to employer groups and employment support networks	
Exit	
Exit - give details to why	
Other	
Other - give detail, i.e. when the category is not quite right	
Staff brainstorming, strategies of support	
Referral to other support services	School Leaver Employment Supports

Appendix 5

List of Activities and Hours as Recorded by Organisations

Table 4: List of Activities and Hours as Recorded by Organisations

List of Support Activities	Total Activities	Activity Percentage	Total Hours	Hours Percentage
Assessments - initial assessment documents	37	2.9%	18.5	0.6%
Building social, presentation and communication skills	198	15.5%	910.5	27.5%
Capacity Building	3	0.2%	4	0.1%
Confirm vocational themes and build visual portfolio	10	0.8%	18	0.5%
Discovery process - setting a plan	19	1.5%	18.25	0.6%
Employer engagement and understanding the business	14	1.1%	18	0.5%
Employer engagement, education and job customisation	11	0.9%	63.5	63.5
Employment Counselling	5	0.4%	6	0.2%
Employment related skills and knowledge (whether industry specific or general)	150	11.8%	859.5	26.0%
Engagement with family/carer, unpaid personal networks to support employment directions (i.e. circles of support)	113	8.9%	52.5	1.6%
Engagement with other professionals/providers to support employment goals	1	0.1%	5	0.2%
Experience and exploring (could be hobbies/interests or related to employment)	35	2.7%	47.25	1.4%
Exploring vocational themes through informational interviews	15	1.2%	25	0.8%
Exploring work experience options with participant	8	0.6%	6.5	0.2%
Face to face support - job shadow	1	0.1%	2.25	0.1%
Face to face support - paid work	7	0.5%	16.75	0.5%
Face to face support - work experience	82	6.4%	338.75	10.2%

List of Support Activities	Total Activities	Activity Percentage	Total Hours	Hours Percentage
Goal Setting and Self Determination	3	0.2%	3.75	0.1%
Learning through doing/ Building social, presentation, travel and communication skills	6	0.5%	7	0.2%
Non face to face support - paid work	29	2.3%	12.25	0.4%
Other	94	7.4%	222.25	6.7%
Planning and reviewing progress	21	1.6%	40	1.2%
Post placement support	11	0.9%	22	0.7%
Preparing employers for job shadow	1	0.1%	0.25	0.0%
Preparing employers for paid work	7	0.5%	4	0.1%
Preparing employers for work experience	16	1.3%	6.75	0.2%
Preparing participant for job shadow	2	0.2%	0.5	0.0%
Preparing participant for paid work	106	8.3%	68.5	2.1%
Preparing participant for work experience	36	2.8%	21.25	0.6%
Progress update - progress star	8	0.6%	5.25	0.2%
Project meeting 1:1	3	0.2%	1.5	0.0%
Referrals to other services/supports	12	0.9%	7.75	0.2%
Seeking employers for paid work	53	4.2%	37	1.1%
Seeking employers for work experience	28	2.2%	15.75	0.5%
Training	1	0.1%	6	0.2%
Understanding the person (home visits)	1	0.1%	2	0.1%
Work experience support (on or off the job)	11	0.9%	48.5	1.5%
Work experience support (on the job)	1	0.1%	1.5	0.0%

Appendix 6

Analysis of Employment Pathways (Spreadsheet Data)

Table 5: Summary List of Activities and Hours Coded Against the Administration Data Categories Used for the School Leaver Employment Support (SLES) Provider Reporting Tool

	Total Activities	Activity Percentage	Total Hours	Percentage of Hours
Assessments	99	7.8%	84	2.5%
Planning and reviewing progress	47	3.7%	58.25	1.8%
Exploring employment options	58	4.6%	78.25	2.4%
Engagement with family/carer to support employment directions	113	8.9%	52.5	1.6%
Building social, presentation and communication skills	209	16.4%	923.5	27.9%
Work skills training	347	27.2%	1250.25	37.8%
Employer engagement education and job customisation	135	10.6%	152.5	4.6%
Work experience support (on the job)	118	9.3%	425.25	12.9%
On the Job Support when initially employed	42	3.3%	32.75	1.0%
Other	106	8.3%	249.25	7.5%

Table 6: Summary List of Activities and Hours Coded
Against the Typology of Employment Support Interventions Long List (TESI)

Broad Employment Support Domain	Activity Type	Total Activities	Percentage of Activities	Total Hours	Percentage of Hours
Job seeker/ employee with disability focused/facing					
Addressing personal factors	Addressing personal context	1	0.1%	2	0.1%
	Integration of health, disability and employment supports	19	1.5%	15	0.5%
	Building capacity of informal (family) supports to support employment	113	8.9%	52.5	1.6%
	Building foundation skills and work expectations	68	5.3%	51.75	1.6%
Service access and information	Referrals/ connecting to services	45	3.5%	24.5	0.7%
Building and mobilising social capital	Building and mobilising community networks	5	0.4%	9.5	0.3%
Planning and preparation for work	Developing soft skills	198	15.5%	910.5	27.5%
	Career guidance and planning	23	1.8%	34.75	1.1%
	Assessments of work 'capacity' and need for supports	4	0.3%	1.75	0.1%
	Transition to work activities (School/ Education to work i.e. young people; ADE/day service to open employment)	57	4.5%	297.5	9.0%
Vocational skills development	Vocational training	151	11.9%	865.5	26.2%
	Work experience/ internships/ volunteering	203	15.9%	208	6.3%
Job Search	Job search matching and assistance	19	1.5%	22.25	0.7%
Pre Placement Support	Job commencement/ RTW and customisation	11	0.9%	63.5	1.9%

Analysis of Employment Pathways (Spreadsheet Data)

Table 6: Summary List of Activities and Hours Coded
Against the Typology of Employment Support Interventions Long List (TESI) – Continued

Broad Employment Support Domain	Activity Type	Total Activities	Percentage of Activities	Total Hours	Percentage of Hours
Post placement/ on the job support	On the job / workplace-based training	6	0.5%	7	0.2%
	Post placement support (limited or fixed period)	19	1.5%	27.25	0.8%
	Ongoing assistance in the workplace (day to day)	112	8.8%	399.25	12.1%
Employer focused/facing					
Information	Information provision/ co-ordination	14	1.1%	18	0.5%
Recruitment services and support	Recruitment services/support	53	4.2%	37	1.1%
	Hosting work experience/ interns/ volunteers	44	3.5%	22.5	0.7%
Workplace / employer capacity building	Skill building, training, resources	3	0.2%	4	0.1%
	Inclusive workplaces capacity building	7	0.5%	4	0.1%
Supports in the workplace	General support to employers	1	0.1%	0.25	0.0%
Societal change intervention (broader environment)					
Service capacity building	Interagency collaboration	1	0.1%	5	0.2%
Other		97	7.6%	223.75	6.8%

Table 7: Summary List of Activities and Hours Coded Against the Typology of Employment Support Interventions (TESI) Summary Category by Component

Activity Type	Total Activities	Percentage of Activities	Total Hours	Percentage of Hours
Addressing personal factors	201	15.8%	121.25	3.7%
Service access and information	45	3.5%	24.5	0.7%
Building and mobilising social capital (to link to employment)	5	0.4%	9.5	0.3%
Planning and preparation for work	282	22.1%	1244.5	37.6%
Vocational skills development	354	27.8%	1073.5	32.5%
Job search	19	1.5%	22.25	0.7%
(Pre) Placement Support	11	0.9%	63.5	1.9%
Post-placement / on the job support	137	10.8%	433.5	13.1%
Information	14	1.1%	18	0.5%
Recruitment services and support	97	7.6%	59.5	1.8%
Workplace / employer capacity building	10	0.8%	8	0.2%
Supports in the workplace	1	0.1%	0.25	0.01%
Service capacity building	1	0.1%	5	0.2%
Other	97	7.6%	223.75	6.8%

Analysis of Employment Pathways (Spreadsheet Data)

Table 8: List of Activities and Hours for each participant (number and percentage)

Participant ID	Assessments & Planning	Building Social, Presentation & Communication Skills	Building Workplace Skills	Employer Capacity Building	On the Job Support	Other		Total Hours
1.00	14	0	2	0	18	0	34	79.5
	41.2%	0.0%	5.9%	0.0%	52.9%	0.0%	100.0%	
2.00	13	0	8	6	18	1	46	139
	28.3%	0.0%	17.4%	13.0%	39.1%	2.2%	100.0%	
3.00	17	0	0	1	5	0	23	44
	73.9%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	21.7%	0.0%	100.0%	
4.00	15	0	5	2	14	3	39	47.5
	38.5%	0.0%	12.8%	5.1%	35.9%	7.7%	100.0%	
6.00	42	0	35	20	1	3	101	54.75
	41.6%	0.0%	34.7%	19.8%	1.0%	3.0%	100.0%	
7.00	69	0	51	34	81	12	247	261
	27.9%	0.0%	20.6%	13.8%	32.8%	4.9%	100.0%	
8.00	31	0	32	28	9	13	113	75.5
	27.4%	0.0%	28.3%	24.8%	8.0%	11.5%	100.0%	
9.00	36	0	9	17	2	14	78	52.75
	46.2%	0.0%	11.5%	21.8%	2.6%	17.9%	100.0%	
10.00	8	3	1	3	1	0	16	17.5
	50.0%	18.8%	6.3%	18.8%	6.3%	0.0%	100.0%	
11.00	33	2	2	9	1	0	47	68
	70.2%	4.3%	4.3%	19.1%	2.1%	0.0%	100.0%	

Participant ID	Assessments & Planning	Building Social, Presentation & Communication Skills	Building Workplace Skills	Employer Capacity Building	On the Job Support	Other		Total Hours
12.00	5	1	0	3	0	0	9	16.5
	55.6%	11.1%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
13.00	11	5	1	1	0	11	29	51.5
	37.9%	17.2%	3.4%	3.4%	0.0%	37.9%	100.0%	
14.00	1	0	105	0	0	0	106	630.5
	0.9%	0.0%	99.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
15.00	7	2	0	0	0	31	40	134.75
	17.5%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	77.5%	100.0%	
16.00	1	0	15	0	0	0	16	78.5
	6.3%	0.0%	93.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
17.00	15	102	10	11	8	14	160	635.75
	9.4%	63.8%	6.3%	6.9%	5.0%	8.8%	100.0%	
18.00	3	55	58	0	2	0	118	641.75
	2.5%	46.6%	49.2%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	100.0%	
19.00	0	40	15	0	1	4	60	497.5
	0.0%	66.7%	25.0%	0.0%	1.7%	6.7%	100.0%	
Total	321	210	349	135	161	106	1282	3526.25
	25.0%	16.4%	27.2%	10.5%	12.6%	8.3%	100.0%	



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