

WISE-Ability Webinar Questions & Answers

How can we ensure that people with compounding vulnerabilities feel more supported in their employment?

Hybrid approaches are one strategy to support people. For example, they may work in open employment 1 or 2 days and in the WISE or ADE the other days. There is also opportunities for work crews where there is a support person on hand. Tailored and customised approaches to employment also provide supports and develop inclusive employment conditions.

Could you expand on the types of support and engagement employers need? How long does it take to build that initial relationship and match, and then continue to provide support?

Customised Employment is one strategy to engage employers. Asking 'what doesn't get done around here' can open up a conversation about a customised role. There are also opportunities to build contracts with companies where there is an expectation that some or all of the work is done on site at the company. For example, document destruction work that is outsourced can be 'insourced', where a supported employee undertakes the work onsite.

In general employers report the need for shoulder-to-shoulder support and a trusted partner that can help solve any problems that arise. Tasters and short structured work experiences are a good way to engage too.

In our report we outline approaches to the different steps involved in Customised Employment and the time investment required.

Can you give a sense of the hours of work people are taking in open employment? Many people in ADEs have limited 'work capacity' - does this mean that they are looking for fairly small part time roles in open employment?

Work hours vary from person to person depending on their previous experience in open employment and work hours in the ADE or WISE. When individuals first commence in a role the hours are determined through conversations between the employer, the individual and supporting organisation. In many cases organisations and individuals report feeling confident to build contact hours in open employment over time, working towards independence with the help of professional development opportunities.

What are the primary industries where you have found success in placing employees?

ADEs spent time engaging with 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. ADEs also took a customised approach which saw engagement across a range of different industries (see forthcoming project report sections 4.6 Industry, and 4.8 Pathways to Employment).

What are barriers to all ADEs just picking up these kinds of WISE-Ability activities? I am sure there must be some ongoing tensions in the way ADEs get revenue or are funded and their enterprise demands. Can you talk about the barriers to change?

ADEs have identified NDIS funding mechanisms as a barrier, due to the highly individualised nature of the funding and the lack of certainty around funding. Also, the need to fulfill contracts has been identified as an issue. For example, if people are out doing work tasters or work experience then there are fewer employees to undertake the work. ADEs need to be able to balance this.

How does the current job shortage impact the outcomes of achieving sustainable mainstream employment?

While employers have been more willing to recruit from a diverse talent pool while there are labour shortages, we don't have any evidence that they have been a factor in people moving into mainstream employment.

Congratulations on the progress to date. Question for Gen U, do you have a labour hire license or do the staff get paid directly by the employer when working for another employer?

Jaime-lee Demmer (genU): 'Hybrid' and labour hire or onsite work in other industries while still working in the ADE seem to be good strategies - especially when employees want to maintain their contacts inside the ADE - is it easy to match NDIS funding to this kind of activity because it sounds like DES could not support this.

GenU have successfully done this using NDIS funding. They have 1 supervisor supporting 4 supported employees. You're correct that under the current DES contract these types of arrangements may not attract an outcome payment.

When partnering with a DES, what support is provided by the DES, and what is retained by the social enterprise to maintain trust with both participants and employers?

In this case, support is provided via NDIS or by the small amount of funding CSI Swinburne provided partner ADEs. However, not all hours were funded.

The current DES contract makes these sorts of partnerships very complex to deliver. It is hoped that the next iteration of the employment services system will provide more flexibility to have ADEs and Specialist Disability Employment Services working together more effectively.

I am finding it difficult in getting engagement with potential employees. With the market the way it is at the moment, people don't have capacity to take on someone with disabilities. How do you work around this?

One strategy is to 'de-risk' it for the employer. For example, start small, do work trials etc. It is a key point. Thanks for raising.

Customised employment is one strategy that can be used to gain employer engagement. The informational interview can unearth tasks that are not getting done or other 'pain points' that employing a person with a disability can address. For example, high turnover positions.

How many supported employees were given the option to participate in the program and what is the success rate of those participating in achieving their individual employment goals?

Individuals working in the ADEs as Supported Employees who were interested in transitioning into job trials, work experience or Open Employment were given the option to participate in the program.

Over half of the individual participating in the study moved in Open Employment as part of either hybrid or customised employment via work experience, work trial, or employment.

How is the employer support funded?

Currently the partners are using NDIS funding and project funding to undertake the employer support. However, there is a need for additional funding or strategies to engage employers, as the funding provided by NDIS is somewhat restricted. For example, non-contact hours can be charged but it's not always easy.

We are hopeful that the new employment system might address some of these issues.

What about the people who do not want to go to open employment, who's supports needs exceed what an employer would be willing to take on. There is a cohort of people that open employment is not an option.

Yes, not all people will choose open employment as something they want. The WISE-Ability model also focuses on thinking about career pathways inside the enterprise. Having said that, there are some examples of people with significant needs who may only want one short shift a week in open employment and have obtained that. There are also opportunities for people to remain in supported employment but undertake work that is more highly skilled or community facing. For example, working in a cafe in a community setting or undertaking grounds maintenance for a council in a small work crew.

When people moved into open employment did they commence on full award wages or were tools such as Supported Wage utilised?

People can move into open employment under award wages or supported wages. Both full Award Wages and Supported Wages were utilised.

Does Centrelink offer any direct information on the effect on DSPs when participants move to open employment that providers can use for reassurance?

DSS have recently funded an organisation who will be providing information to supported employees around working conditions and options. I would assume that DSP and wage interaction will be included in those sessions. I believe more will be known soon.

What are the specific issues in pathways to employment in rural settings? Do closer relationships help, or are labour market opportunities smaller and narrower? How have you addressed these challenges?

Employment in rural settings may be more challenging due to the range of employment and career options available. However, this is where customised roles can be initiated, and micro-enterprises developed. This area of employment pathways requires more research with partner organisations.

Is the WISE model used by long-term ADE participants or by new participants who want to quickly transition to open employment?

WISE-Ability is an organisational design approach, so it is hoped that organisations who adopt it can support existing supported employees to create pathways to open employment and also attract new people who need support to create a pathway.

Considering participant choice and control, what support strategies work best for participants reluctant to transition to open employment? We use strategies to help participants understand the financial and social benefits of open employment, but is there a specific strategy that works best?

Some ADEs used strategies like working with the supported employee by giving them diverse experience within the ADE, eg moving them across enterprises, or setting up job shadow days in open employment, or work experience - so offer diverse experience to test out new settings with low risk.

One of the biggest barriers seems to be access to sufficient funding. How will this research work with the NDIS to understand and facilitate access to adequate funding and support?

Thanks for the comment. Yes, we have presented to NDIA along the way and will do so again. We continue to discuss the findings and also use the data to respond to Inquiries and other policy consultations.

We are also hopeful that the new employment services model will offer cohort specialist services who can work in partnership with WISE to create pathways to open employment.

Where would philanthropic funding have the greatest impact in this work?

Great question. At CSI Swinburne, we are paying a lot of attention to the funding available. Very happy to discuss further.

At the recent DEA conference there was considerable discussion about the need to upskill staff working in the disability sector. Philanthropy could potentially support the building of training resources. There is also a need for more research about the different approaches to 'meaningful employment', and the need to include people with disabilities in the ongoing design of the model. There is also a need for resources that support employer knowledge and confidence.

How can social inclusion activities outside the WISE in the local community be collaboratively integrated with the WISE for a holistic approach?

Many people who work within a disability enterprise are connected to their local community through undertaking activities that are funded by the NDIS, or through family and friends. Given the high importance people who work in disability enterprises often place on the friendships they have with other supported employees, this is an area that could definitely be further explored.

What steps can local government take to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities?

Local government can play an important role in improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. One strategy is to buy from social enterprises and encourage others in their council area to do the same. They can also support the 'Discovery' phase by offering tasters and work experience opportunities. There are also opportunities for internship programs that help people get onto the career ladder. And of course, Councils have job opportunities across a range of areas that are suitable for people who are working in an ADE, such as grounds maintenance and administration.