

Practitioner Toolkit

Better Practices for Working with People with Disability and Mental Health Condition

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#weR4jobs *weR4everyone*

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This paper is based on their experiences, thoughts and research.

Better Practices for Working with Job Seekers with Disability

Thoughts on assessment

1. Assessment is a *process*, not an *event*

Understanding a job seeker's needs and the best way to help them can be a gradual process. It may be over several visits and through many different interactions that you can build the rapport and relationship that you need to get the best possible outcome. The best relationships are those built on mutual trust and respect. Get to know 'the person behind the job seeker'.

Many people with disability will be 'experts' in their disability and will feel comfortable in sharing their story. It forms part of your assessment and at the same time your skills and knowledge are growing. But remember, there are also reasons why people may be reluctant to disclose information— they may be tired of 'telling the story', or feel that there is a stigma attached to their disability or mental condition such that disclosure will be prejudicial to them. Trust needs to be earned.

2. Holistic assessment is the foundation

A quality, holistic assessment can be the foundation for good service provision. The more evidence you have, the easier it is to set achievable goals and put plans into place. Assessing how a disability may impact on a job seekers employment goals should be part of a more holistic assessment that allows you to build a bigger picture. For example, assessing the 'life skills' of a job seeker with *intellectual or cognitive impairment* can give us a better insight into capabilities:

- Can they cook and clean and maintain a home?
- Can they live independently?
- Can they count and use money?
- Can they take things apart and put them back together?
- Can they use a computer?
- Can they pay bills?
- Can they use public transport?

3. Evidence from multiple sources

In most cases job seekers will have been assessed before you meet them. Most job seekers are referred to you following a DHS assessment (JSCI and/or the ESAt/JCA):



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- **Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI)**
Conducted by DHS or, in some cases an Employment Services Provider. Used to identify a job seeker's relative difficulty in gaining and maintaining employment.
- **Employment Services Assessment (ESAt)**
Conducted by DHS Assessment Services when a JSCI identifies barriers to employment that need to be assessed in more detail to ensure that disadvantaged job seekers are provided with the most appropriate level of employment service assistance.
- **Job Capacity Assessment**
Conducted by DHS Assessment Services using medical evidence provided by treating professionals to assess how a condition affects a person's ability to work in the context of determining eligibility for a Disability Support Pension.

Your job seeker may have had other assessments – for example:

- **Functional capacity assessment**
Looks at a person's physical capacity to perform tasks (e.g. lifting, bending, reaching, manual handling, squatting, range of movement, cardiovascular fitness).
- **Workplace assessments**
Observes people performing daily tasks in a workplace with a view to assessing suitability for current and future jobs and looking at how the workplace environment can influence performance.
- **Supported Wage System assessment**
Looks at the assessed work capacity of a person as a percentage. For example, a person may be assessed as having an assessed work capacity of 70% in a particular job, meaning their productivity is 70% of what a person operating at full capacity might achieve.
- **Ongoing Support Assessment**
Looks at the degree of support a person may require in the workplace. A person who has been assessed as requiring a 'high' level of Ongoing Support may require regular and ongoing workplace support which is significant in hours and/or intensity.
- **Psychological tests and assessments**
Looks at how people think, feel, behave and react. They help to build a picture of a person's abilities and behaviours.

Try to gather as much evidence as you can. Your own assessments can build on what is already on record and maybe identify other things. Also remember that a job seeker may have a key support person – this could be a family member or someone who knows them well. With your job seeker's permission they can be an important source of information.

4. [Seek insight into motivations.](#)

Think about yourself and the work you do. What do *you* look for in a job? You will know what motivates and de-motivates you, and you'll probably agree that you are happier and perform better when the factors that motivate you are present. Knowing what motivates a job seeker can help you



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to identify jobs, industries and employers that ‘tick the boxes’ – that will be a good fit for your job seeker. The better the fit, the better the chances of a positive employment and life experience. The motivational ‘boxes’ are different for different people, and people put different weightings on different factors. In a work context, they might include:

- Money (including the basics such as food and shelter)
- Achievement and feeling good about ourselves
- Having a sense of purpose
- A feeling of independence
- Recognition
- Being part of a team and meeting new people
- Freedom
- Learning new things
- Feeling empowered (autonomy and responsibility)
- Feeling challenged
- Feeling safe and relaxed

So how can you work out what motivates a person? Well, you could ask questions such as:

What hobbies and interests do you have?

This might tell us if a person is drawn towards teams and groups – for example they might like to do things with others, or they might be happier by themselves – and help identify things they may enjoy and be good at (even though you don’t have to be good at something to enjoy it!)

What jobs have you done before?

This might help us identify:

- Talents and skills, and levels of autonomy and responsibility a person is drawn to.
- Whether a person is drawn towards jobs which fits a pattern, e.g. process or project work?

For how long have you been doing the things you like to do?

We can also look at longevity in e.g. previous jobs, and hobbies and interests. It might be that we tend to stick at things that we enjoy or feel comfortable doing, and the things we enjoy can give us skills and knowledge.

What did you like/dislike about... previous jobs, school, different things you’ve done?

This might tell us if our job seeker likes being with people or learning new things. Some people like a high pressure environment and others don’t.

What would you like to be doing in five years’ time?

People will tend to come up with things that they think they may be good at or enjoy doing, even if it is a ‘stretch’ goal.

They’re just a few ideas. You will have heard the phrase: “I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars” or “I’d do that for nothing” – so remember that money isn’t the only motivator!

Thoughts on building trust and rapport

1. Rapport

Some job seekers with disability may be new to employment services and to the concept of working. People may not understand why they are being referred to employment services and these job seekers may be highly anxious about possible change in their lives. Building rapport in the early stages can help to build a professional relationship. Mutual trust and respect can open the communication channels: your job seeker can become more comfortable in sharing with you, and more receptive to your ideas and suggestions. Building rapport is a term you've no doubt heard many times. But it's for good reason – rapport is just so important. Remember that rapport is the spark at the start of the relationship. Some suggestions:

- Watch and listen to pick up the signs of 'common ground'. It might be that you grew up in the same area, it might be that you both like the footy or the job seeker's Ramones tee-shirt might give you an opening to chat about music!
- Read the mood - your job seeker may be excited, anxious, nervous or agitated. Letting them know that you understand how they are feeling is a good starting point.
- Putting yourself in the other person's shoes. How would you feel if you were them? Try to feel what your job seeker is feeling.
- Remembering a person's name is a great start. It's a good feeling when someone you've just met remembers your name. You feel like you've got a connection. You might see them around town – a passing 'G'day Tom' can mean a lot (especially if their name is really Tom!).
- Some of us are great at talking but not so good at listening. Think about your active listening skills: paraphrasing, reflective listening, summarising, questioning. A lot of our communication is non-verbal. Let them know that they are what is most important at that moment.
- Have you ever been interviewed by someone who a) was bored b) seemed pre-occupied c) didn't listen to a word you said d) was easily distracted?
- Think about the environment in which you are meeting your job seeker. Think about comfort, access and privacy.
- Don't underestimate the value of a friendly smile and a friendly greeting.

2. A conversation or a lecture?

Your job seeker might be excited, confused, anxious or scared. Remember this when you meet them for the first time. There will be much you want to tell them, but think about how much they can take in at your first meeting. Have you ever been given so much information that it becomes a bit of a 'blur'? Have you ever been interviewed by someone who does all the talking? Look for the right balance between getting and giving information.

3. Setting and managing expectations

We've said a few times that good professional relationships are built on mutual trust and respect. Sometimes we can 'talk the talk'... but that's about it! It is important to most job seekers that consultants provide ongoing guidance and support, and demonstrate a sincere interest in their situation. Your messages of assistance will set an expectation. It's important to manage that expectation. Doing what you said you were going to do when you said you were going to do it will build trust and respect. But creating an expectation which isn't met can be deflating. Have you ever been in a situation where a person says to you: "I'll definitely ring you this afternoon"...and they don't? Game over...?

4. Educate yourself so you can feel comfortable, can engage with the job seeker and communicate openly with them

It's a good feeling when you come away after talking with someone and you think: "Great... they understand!" Remember, in addition to learning from your job seeker, you've got many other learning options:

- Networking – our colleagues, health professionals, training providers
- Remember that this is the 'age of information': there are so many resources available online
- Sitting in with/shadowing other consultants who are experienced with job seekers with disability to 'see how it is done' can also help to build our knowledge and confidence

Learning from the experts, and accessing expert resources, helps you to ask the right questions.

Thoughts on tailoring services to meet each job seeker's needs and goals.

1. Recognise that every job seeker is unique – so tailor your approach.

Avoid stereotyping people or using 'stock-standard' approaches – everyone is different. Focus on the *person* not the disability – everyone will have a unique set of skills, abilities, qualities and aspirations.

2. Help to set goals and identify the steps to meet them

It is important to set out realistic goals and ensure the job seeker has a clear idea of what they need to do and the extent of help they can expect to receive. It's a 'gap analysis' approach: "This is where we think we are today...and this is where we've decided we want to get to...now, we need to work out what steps we need to take to get there." To set a realistic goal and develop a realistic plan we'll need a lot of information. A good, holistic assessment will include aspirations and is the key to setting goals. Some goals might be easily achievable, while others might be more difficult to achieve – we call these 'stretch goals'. You'll need to think about what is appropriate for your job seeker.

3. Advocacy and a marketing strategy

Some job seekers may benefit from having an advocate to speak to an employer on their behalf. Maybe this is a role that you'll perform – being the 'voice' for the job seeker? How will you 'market' your job seeker? How will your job seeker market themselves?

Work with your job seeker to develop a marketing strategy – you'll use it when advocating, and the job seeker will use it when approaching employers. There may be situations where sensitive job seeker information needs to be shared with the employer or, even if it doesn't, your job seeker chooses to share it with the employer. Make sure you and your job seeker discuss this and agree on what information can be disclosed, when it can be disclosed, and the circumstances in which it can be disclosed. You'll know that you can't disclose personal, sensitive or protected information without the job seeker's permission.

For me, marketing is about identifying and promoting a product's strengths and at the same time thinking about reasons that a customer may choose not to 'buy' the product – and having ready answers.

Here's an exercise you can do with your job seeker:

Both put on your employer hats. If you were employers, what reservations might you have in employing your job seeker? Come up with possible reasons and then come up with responses that counter each possible reason.

"Can Stevie do the job?"

- *"Yes she can. Stevie has the skills, qualities and attributes to do this job really well, and what's more, we offer good after sales service (post placement support/Ongoing Support)."*

"Will Alex need time off?"

- *"Alex has a weekly one hour medical appointment but she always tries to take it before or after work. If she does have it during work hours she'll normally take it at lunch time or take a shorter lunch. She might start a bit earlier or finish a bit later to make up the time."*

"Will I have to make any changes to accommodate Jane or Sonja?"

- *"Jane has special software that can magnify the screen or read the words on the screen to her. It can easily be loaded onto the computer. No problem."*
- *"Sonja uses a stand-up desk so she can avoid sitting for long periods, and we can easily arrange that using the Employment Assistance Fund."*

"A guide dog? I don't know much about them."

- *"Well, over 450,000 Australians are blind or vision impaired – and the Vision Australia web site says it will go up as the population ages. Guide dogs assist blind and vision-impaired people in workplaces, restaurants, libraries and on public transport throughout Australia. We can help to arrange for someone to come and visit you* – you may even want to help train a puppy or find a home for a retired guide dog."*

**The Guide Dogs Australia and Seeing Eye Dogs (Vision Australia) web sites have information on how you can arrange this.*

"How might it impact on the other staff?"

- *"Same as for any new person. The other staff will be interested to get to know them and your new person will be keen to meet the team!"*
- *"Your staff will think you're a good person who's committed to giving people a fair go."*



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- *“Jane is used to talking about herself and she’s happy to talk to people about her vision impairment and her guide dog.”*
- *“There’s plenty of information on the internet about this disability and what it means. I’m happy to come and meet the staff and talk about disability and diversity in general.”*

“What happens if Joe has a seizure?”

- *“Yes, that can happen and there are steps you take to assist Joe if it does happen. Joe takes medication that helps stabilise things, but Joe and I can tell you what to do. Epilepsy Action Australia says that approximately 3% to 3.5% of Australians will experience epilepsy at some point in their lives. Approximately 25,000 people in Australia are diagnosed with epilepsy each year.”*

“Tony has an intellectual disability – that might be difficult.”

- *“Tony is a great guy and he’ll fit in so well with the team. He’ll give you 100% and once he learns how to do the job he sticks at it. He’s got a great work ethic – working means so much to him. I can come with him on the first day to help him get started.”*

What will our customers think?

- *“They won’t notice!”*
- *“They will think you have an excellent new staff member!”*
- *“They will think you’re a leader - an employer who’s committed to giving people a fair go!”*

Putting yourself in the employer’s shoes will help you to come up with responses to counter possible resistance – it will be part of your strategy.

4. Managing non-vocational barriers: need to get the basics stabilised (e.g. accommodation, health issues) before tackling job search.

Think about building a house. The first thing you need is a solid foundation – it’s difficult to build if the foundations aren’t set in place. Getting a solid foundation may be the first step for some job seekers. That might involve clarifying, treating and stabilising health (or other issues) or having assessment to help work out what your job seeker’s capabilities are. If a health issue is permanent or ongoing can it be stabilised and managed – is the foundation there?

We know that some conditions are un-predictable – but that’s OK: if we know they are ‘consistently inconsistent’ it’s still a solid foundation and we can plan for it.

5. Foster participation and ownership – empower the job seeker

Giving the job seeker an appropriate level of ownership of their job search is important and can be achieved in a number of ways. For example, you might get them to research occupations, public transport options, arrange appointments, and work out what they think they need to do to achieve their goals. It might be that their research causes them to re-adjust some goals.

You might get your job seeker to identify possible employers or training providers who can help them get the skills they need.

Remember – research tells us that employers value things like work ethic, initiative and accepting responsibility. Giving your job seeker some ownership and accountability helps them to develop and



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practice these 'work like' skills. It will also help you to assess their capabilities when reviewing progress. Maybe they are more or less capable than you thought? Maybe they are more or less motivated than you thought? Maybe they are more or less confident than you thought?

'Buy in' and ownership are important motivators.

6. Offer encouragement, expect participation, and persevere

At the end of the day, motivation comes from within. We can't motivate people but we can do all we can to find out what motivates people and set a path that reflects their motivations. Employment consultants tell us that what works for them is:

- Have clear goals, always keep the goal in sight and have a plan to meet the goal. But remember that goals and plans shouldn't be set in stone. Be flexible – as you learn more about your job seeker the goals and plan might change.
- Be resilient – some things take time and there can be disappointment along the way. See what the 'team' (you and your job seeker) can learn from each experience – but whatever happens keep the goal in sight.
- Make sure your job seeker is an active member of the team – to use a football analogy you won't kick goals sitting on the bench!
- Be encouraging and make sure you are both accountable to the 'team'.

7. The world is a classroom – and it's free!

In our daily lives we see lots of people doing their jobs. We see sales assistants, office workers, drivers, tradies, cleaners, bar and café workers, checkout operators etc. As part of your job you'll be thinking about potential occupations, industries and employers for your job seekers. Observe people as they do their jobs. Next time you go into a shop, an office, a hospitality venue, a bank or a small business, watch the way people do their jobs. Do they stand or sit? What equipment do they use? What skills are required? How easy might the job be to learn? How is the job done? What is the work environment like? Could someone with a particular disability do the job, possibly with some job redesign or workplace modification? Think about the *essential* requirements of these jobs.

Research occupations (talk to your family and friends about the jobs that they do), and employers (you may be one or know some!) and ask questions about jobs and environments to assess if occupations and industries are a good fit. Remember there are heaps of instructional videos on YouTube that show people performing tasks and doing jobs. I just went to YouTube and searched on 'barista' – and found plenty of Australian training videos. These videos will help you and your job seeker learn about specific jobs to see whether they are a good match for the job seeker's skills, attitudes and attributes.

In fact, [here's the link!](#)

Remember that short-term work placements can also help to clarify if a job is a good fit. Your job seeker might be keen on hospitality work but they haven't done it before. A work placement might be a good way for you, your job seeker and an employer to find out if your job seeker is suited to it.



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Sometimes we don't know what we can do until we try it – and sometimes we like to try it in a safe environment.

Thoughts on Building Your Networks...

1. Build your network of specialists

We talk about the importance of the relationship between you and your job seeker: trust, mutual respect etc. Think about the relationships you have with others who can help – employers, health professionals, workplace assessors, social and community workers, and training providers. Sometimes you might just have a 'quick question'. Building relationships with these people can open doors to information and assistance for your job seeker, and will build your professional capabilities. Who are you going to call when you need to talk about having a functional assessment or psychological report done for your person?

2. Build your network of peers

You'll find that some of your peers may be very experienced and skilled in assisting job seekers with disability. Try to tap into that knowledge! Look for opportunities to meet with other employment consultants.

3. Build your network of information

We are living in the 'information age' where much of what we want to learn is at our fingertips. Most sectors (health, housing, education and training) will have an online presence and most employers will have a web site.

- You can learn about industries and occupations
- You can research and learn about different disabilities from the web sites of organisations such as MindHealthConnect, Vision Australia, Beyond Blue, Black Dog Institute, SANE, Deaf Society (most states have one), Epilepsy Action Australia...and many more!
- You can learn about legislation (AHRC Act 1986, Disability Discrimination Act 1992 etc.)
- You can learn about the different initiatives that can assist people with disability to find and retain employment (wage subsidies, Supported Wage System, Employment Assistance Fund, assistive technologies)
- You can learn about effective communication strategies – for example working with 'difficult' clients, and building rapport
- You can watch people demonstrate different skills and occupations on YouTube

Why not set up a folder structure on your web browser and save some of these as 'Favourites' so you have information at your fingertips?

Thoughts on a Collaborative Approach to Case Management

1. Bringing people together



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Have you ever been caught in the middle and thought things would be a lot easier if the key people would just talk to each other? You think: “If they’d just speak to each other we can get everyone on the same page.”

We know that some of our job seeker’s may have multiple barriers to employment. For example, there can be a correlation between mental illness and homelessness. In these sorts of cases, think about a three-way approach to case management: you, your job seeker, and the other agency/agencies who can assist. Imagine how difficult it must be for a job seeker to be meeting with different agencies, and then trying to relay information between agencies. You’ll know that much will be lost in the translation. Think about trying to bring key people together so that all the ‘players’ can work towards a consensus approach.

