

From School to *Real Work*

**A Social Inclusion Initiative
National Council on Intellectual Disability
March 2009**

*“They have a job just like their sisters
and brothers . . . and they’re valued.”¹*

- A brief overview of the status of open employment participation and people with intellectual disability in Australia
- A brief overview of the research findings about school-to-work practices that demonstrate effectiveness in assisting students with intellectual disability achieve open employment participation
- Suggested recommendation for NCID to present to government on a school-to-work policy for people with intellectual disability

Introduction

Before 1986, people with intellectual disability in Australia didn’t generally work in the open labour market in Australia.² It was believed that this group of people could not learn skills to be productive in regular business and industry.

At best, people with intellectual disability were offered sheltered workshops or day programs³. These programs, conflicting in their objectives, were considered a better alternative to institutions and thought to provide some with a vocational pathway to open employment⁴.

The research findings demonstrated that only a rare few moved from day programs and sheltered workshops to open employment, and that placement in a sheltered workshop was essentially *a terminal placement*.⁵

Research, beginning in the 1950s and confirmed in the early 1970s, provided evidence that people with intellectual disability, across the spectrum from mild to profound impairment, have the capacity to learn productive vocational skills.⁶

The findings of this research indicated that, with the right instruction, people with intellectual disability could learn the skills of many open labour market jobs. Describing this paradigmatic shift in knowledge, Wehman wrote:

From the research of Marc Gold in 1972 showing how persons with severe retardation could put together bicycle brakes to the initial demonstration that people with similar labels could be competitively employed less than 10 years later, it is evident that the increase in knowledge about transition has been incredible.⁷

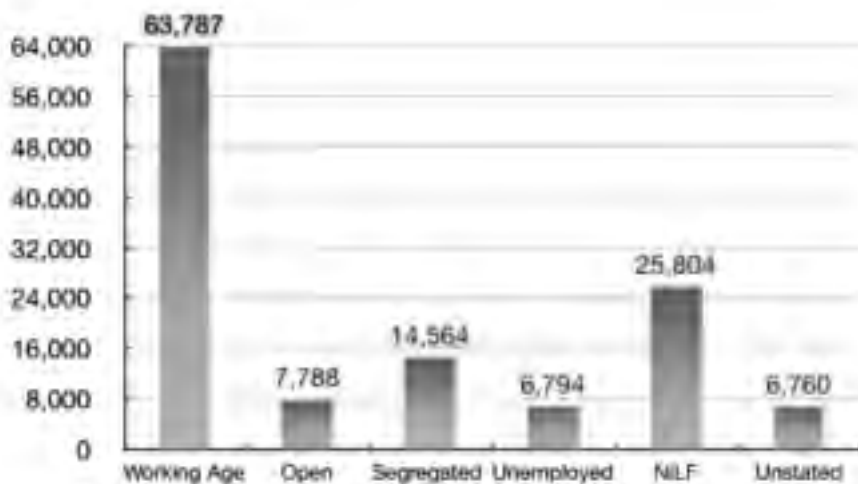
From the very first formal open employment program in 1976⁸, to a generation of such programs since, there is internationally over 30 years of evidence on *what works* when assisting people with intellectual disability to participate in the open workforce.

In response to this shift of knowledge, the Australian parliament passed the Disability Services Act in 1986 which enabled the funding of open employment models of assistance in Australia for people with intellectual disability.⁹

As a result, we have today a small number of specialist open employment services that support people with intellectual disability to work in the open labour market. These are world-class services that continue to demonstrate successful open employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability.¹⁰

Yet the majority of students with intellectual disability in Australia leave school without any expectation of working. Most students are destined to become known in the data as *Not in the Labour Force* (NiLF), or placed in segregated or non-work programs, unlikely to move to a real job for the rest of their lives.¹¹

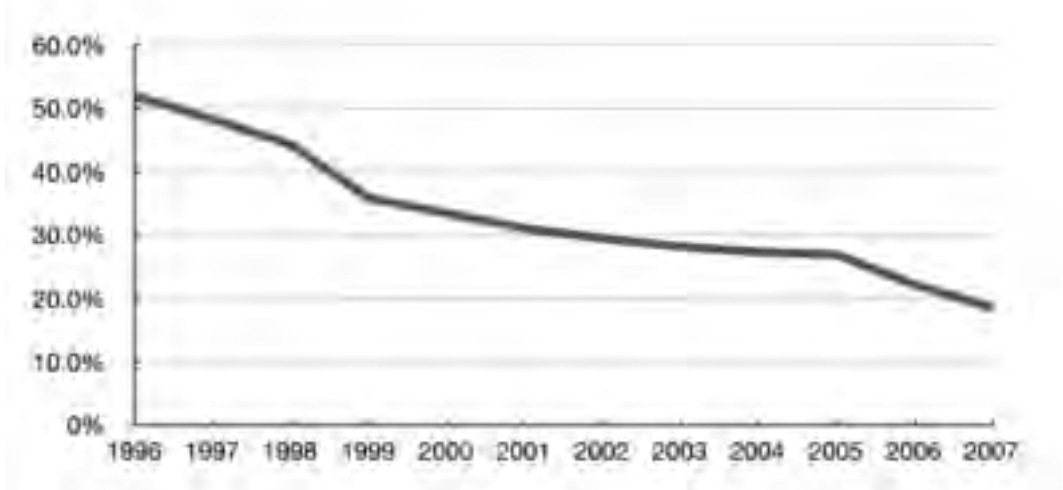
Chart 1: Employment Status of People with Intellectual Disability 2007¹²



We estimate that only one in ten Australians with intellectual disability of working age are employed in jobs in the community. Two out of ten attend sheltered workshops, and more than six out of ten are either unemployed, deemed not in the labour force, or unknown.

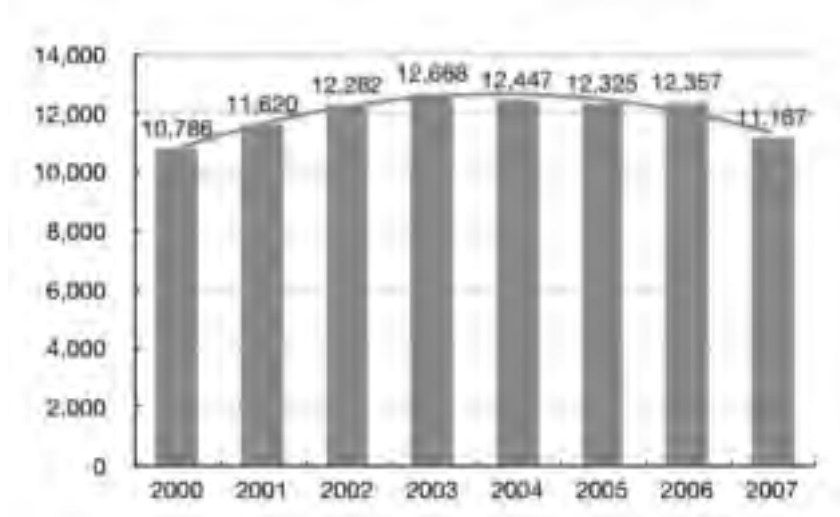
Since 2001, we have witnessed a disturbing trend in the open employment service data. People with intellectual disability are increasingly becoming a smaller proportion of jobseekers assisted by the Commonwealth open employment assistance program.¹³

Chart 2: Percentage of people with intellectual disability in the open employment program¹⁴



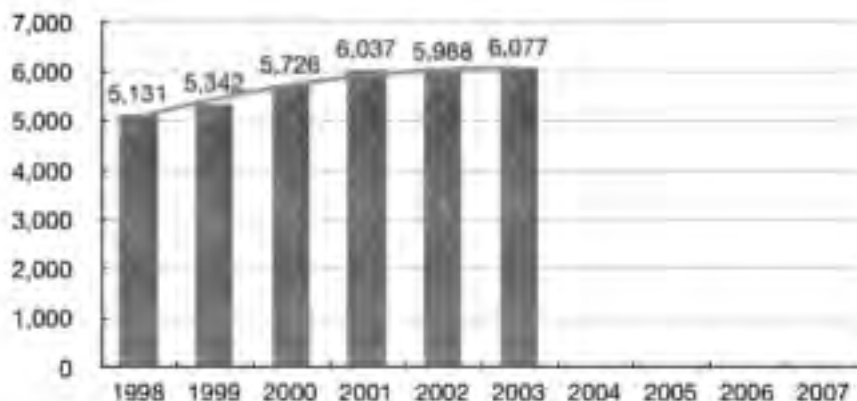
The actual number of participants with intellectual disability in the Commonwealth program has also stagnated and begun to decrease.

Chart 3: Number of consumers with intellectual disability of open employment services for the year¹⁵



The proportion of new jobseekers with intellectual disability entering the open employment program, reported by the 2007 Case-Based Funding Evaluation, was only 13.5%. At this rate, it is likely that the negative participation trend of people with intellectual disability in the open employment program is set to continue.

Up to 2003, the Commonwealth published the number of workers on a snapshot day each year as part of the Disability Service Census.

Chart 4: Number of people with intellectual disability employed on 30th June each year¹⁶

In 2003, there were about 6000 employees with intellectual disability supported by the Commonwealth open employment program. We are waiting for the Commonwealth to publish the data from 2004 to 2007 so that we can fully understand the recent trend. The data does suggest a stagnation trend from 2001 in the number of new workers with intellectual disability.

The data portrays an underemployment and social exclusion of substantial magnitude. And the data shows that the open employment program is failing to address this situation. This is clearly unacceptable. Furthermore, such a high unemployment and underemployment rate for persons with intellectual disability is unnecessary. Research and practice show that many, many more people with intellectual disability are capable of open employment.

Our experience is that employers do and will employ people with intellectual disability when this decision is based upon economic value, together with ongoing support from quality specialist employment assistance.

It is our belief, however, that our service systems do not generally have the expectation that youth with intellectual disability can and will move into open employment. These lowered expectations are shaped by outdated or inadequate training, and by a lack of exposure to programs that have fidelity with the evidence and successfully achieving positive open employment outcomes.

In simple terms, we must move from a position where open employment for young people with intellectual disability is demonstrated on a small scale, to a new position where it is expected and typical.

Australia must begin to implement national strategies that produce greater rates of open employment participation and social inclusion for this population group. The Australian Government's Social Inclusion agenda and the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy offer an opportunity to implement effective *joined up*¹⁷ solutions to assist young people with intellectual disability to successfully move from school to work.

It will require, however, a national leadership that has fidelity with the research evidence, facilitates collaboration across levels of government and service sectors, and a preparedness to test and trial new approaches.

It will require empowered parents and innovative educators to collaborate with quality specialist open employment services to vigorously set down a path for young people leaving school to go to *real* work.

If our goal for students with intellectual disability is the dignity of work and not welfare, the dignity of inclusion and not segregation, then the research evidence provides a way forward.

School to *Real* Work

What is school to *real* work transition?

A *transition* is literally a process or period of changing from one state or condition to another.¹⁸ *School to work transition* has been described as *a bridge from youth to adulthood*.¹⁹ It is a *coming of age or rite of passage*.

In our society, *transition may be defined as the life changes, adjustments and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from a school environment to independent living and work environments . . . a change in status from behaving primarily as a secondary school student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include having employment, participating in post secondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships*.²⁰

School to work transition encompasses a critical developmental period between youth and adulthood. It flows from a time and place of compulsory schooling to valued adult roles in society — a society which highly values employment as a basis for social inclusion.²¹

Transition raises questions about the roles of parents, schools, employment agencies and others through this period. What should schools be doing that is effective in supporting young people move from school to work? What are the key skills that young people need to be successful in making this transition? What should parents and families be doing to support this developmental phase? And how should schools link students with adult roles and employment services to ensure a smooth transition?

Transition from school to work is often a period of anxiety for young people and their families. Making life decisions about future study, careers and personal relationships can be a daunting period of decision-making.²² There is no reason to doubt that, for young people with intellectual disability and their families, this transition is as at least as daunting, if not more so.²³ Yet the research provides us with some promising models which contribute positively to a successful transition to work and adult roles.

A presumption of employability in the open labour market

Our position is that potential can never be shown . . . changing expectancies, however, is where any hope to make major changes must begin.²⁴

A critical component of assisting young people with intellectual disability to successfully move from school to work is to have the expectation of open employment after school.

We must presume that people with intellectual disability have the capacity to be employed in the open labour market — a presumption supported by the research evidence, but one that needs

to be vigorously supported by the adults in the lives of young people – i.e. parents, educators and employment services.

Expectations have profound implications. If we agree that *schools are time-limited means to ends*,²⁵ what we do now is heavily influenced by the *ends* we are seeking to achieve. If our expectation is open employment, we have the technology for instructing and supporting young people with intellectual disability to achieve this goal.

A presumption of employability will cause us to investigate models of *school to work transition* that demonstrate positive findings. When we study successful models of school to work, we find models marked by high expectations that students will leave school in paid work and be linked to open employment services to continue this goal after graduation.

Parent-Teacher Partnerships

*Parent involvement is perhaps the most significant factor in the transition outcomes for students from youth into adulthood*²⁶

Parents are key in creating the expectancy that young people with intellectual disability will move from school to open employment. And creating a collaborative and informed parent-teacher partnership is essential in the success of a school to work transition model.

It is common, however, for many parents to currently expect that a non-work day program or a sheltered workshop is what their son or daughter can expect after graduation. With only one in ten young Australians with intellectual disability moving from school to open employment, it is not surprising that parents reflect these low expectations.

The research literature suggests that educators should begin a partnership with parents from the beginning of the transition process — a partnership built upon a collaborative and cooperative approach.²⁷

There are some key reasons. Parents have the most knowledge of their children and bring invaluable information to the planning, implementation and evaluation process of transition strategies. Parents are first and foremost lifelong advocates of their children and will be the only people to have a long term and stable contact with the student throughout the entire transition process.

Participation includes, but is not limited to, involvement in transition planning, supporting the development of skills and strategies, and becoming informed and familiar with the role of employment and adult support agencies. Parents and family members can also play a critical role through their contacts in the community when seeking opportunities for community-based instruction and on-the-job training.

Ultimately, parent participation is important in creating the expectancy that having a job in open employment after graduation is a realistic goal. Exposing parents to the research evidence of open employment for people with intellectual disability, and to meet other parents and people with intellectual disability who are examples of success, allow parents and students to have informed choices when setting goals for school to work transition.

Teachers are a critical component of the partnership with parents in the implementation and success of a school to work transition model. Innovative teacher advocacy in providing evidence-based school to work practices has been identified as a key factor of success.²⁸

The goal is open employment. Non-work support is supplementary to, not a replacement for, employment

*We believe, however, that all students must work in real jobs before they leave school. We believe strongly that paid employment before exiting school is highly correlated with successful adult employment.*²⁹

Work is a way of life in Australia. Like other western economies, having a job is considered to be a valued adult role providing not only income, but esteem, self worth, dignity, mental and physical health, and a large part of who we are as adults.³⁰ The current deep concern of the global financial crisis and its effect on jobs, underlines the importance of employment to social inclusion and participation in our society.

People with intellectual disability are typically at great risk of low expectations and being perceived as *unable to work* in open employment. This is a significant barrier as they move from school to becoming an adult. In response to this risk, this paper focuses upon inclusive employment as the primary goal of *transition* rather than the wider goal of *community inclusion*. This is not intended to minimise the importance of other adult roles, but rather to emphasise the substantial influence that employment can have on the social inclusion of one's life.

This position is also purposely intended to counter the misconception that many people with intellectual disability do not have the capacity to work in open employment and need to have *other options* when they leave school.

The broader goal of *community inclusion* involving home, recreation, art, sport and relationships, is a genuine human need for people with intellectual disability to be fulfilled, as it is for any member of our community. However, these adult roles and activities should not be perceived as *alternatives* to work. They are not. They are important aspects of personal growth and community participation and should be seen as *supplementary* to the role of work, not a replacement.³¹

Early development is critical to success in real work

*The education of children with disabilities is critical to the foundation of adult adjustment and success in work and the community.*³²

We need to interpret the developmental process of becoming an adult as beginning early. The research evidence emerging from brain science and developmental research emphasises the importance of early learning, particularly during the years before school.

As noted by the Prime Minister:

*Leading developmental researcher Jack Shonkoff argues that 'all children are born wired for feelings and ready to learn', and that it is from birth to age five that 'children rapidly develop foundational capabilities on which subsequent development builds'. During this early period of life, brain cell growth and 'wiring' of connections drives 'remarkable linguistic and cognitive gains' and development of 'emotional, social, regulatory and moral capacities'.*³³

Research from many developmental fields of study, including literacy and positive behaviour, emphasises the early developmental period for creating a foundation of skills important for success as adults. The Prime Minister also noted the impact of early development on economic participation in later life.

*Professor James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences, concludes that learning starts before formal education begins, and sets the foundation for success or failure at school and life beyond.*³⁴

The importance of early education and how this relates to adult roles is a critical understanding for parents and teachers to consider. For instance, teaching a young child to return toys to a toy box after play time may be interpreted as setting early habits and skills that become the adult skills of following instructions and completing tasks to a required standard — key competencies considered vital by employers. Here we see the opportunity of building developmental steps at an early stage for long term adult benefit — skills and habits which are easier to teach early rather than later.

Beginning *early* has another dimension that is particular to *school to work transition* models. For young people with intellectual disability at secondary school, early means setting career and post-school goals, gaining skills in community settings, work experiences and developing an expectancy of work after graduation.

For educators, it is about providing a curriculum both at school and in the community that prepares young people for adult and work roles. Research indicates that there is a greater likelihood of success in open employment if students, parents and educators utilise the time before graduation to begin to build expectancies and skills of adult and work roles.

Discrete school to work transition activities (i.e. transitional planning, work experience, community-based instruction) should begin before leaving school³⁵ and should include participation of progressively extended periods of time in community-based sites away from school.³⁶

The secondary school curriculum needs to move beyond the classroom, early, in order to prepare young people with intellectual disability for adult and work roles. The message for educators is that the goal of open employment is enhanced through ‘early intervention’ before graduation.

Inclusion

*All young people with disabilities should have the opportunity to be included in the workplace and schools. Special schools, segregated work activity centers, and programs that are designed only for people with disabilities must become institutions of the past. People with disabilities consistently perform better in typical work environments and natural community environments.*³⁷

The history of education for children with intellectual disability is dominated by their exclusion from compulsory education. When education was provided, this was frequently arranged by grouping together children with intellectual disability in segregated classes or schools.

Although many children with intellectual disability have increasingly had the opportunity to be included in regular classes, the habit of grouping students with disability together in special classes or schools is still pervasive.³⁸

The comparative educational research, however, has repeatedly shown since 1932 that students with intellectual disability do better academically and socially in inclusive classes than in segregated classes.³⁹

Brown, in his recent longitudinal research on school to work, highlights the important relationship of inclusive education to adult and work roles. He recommends that educators:

- *teach skills in inclusive settings at school, but also in community settings*
- *teach students under natural supervisory conditions instead of 1:1 or low ratio instructional groupings*⁴⁰

The core of Brown's message is that inclusion with peers in school, and in community settings while still at school, offers an opportunity to learn skills within real settings. Within these settings, students learn how to behave and adapt within the rhythms, interactions and difficulties of typical groupings that they cannot learn in segregated classrooms. This (early) development before leaving school provides a young person with the experience of the skills and behaviour required by their peer group both at school and among co-workers and customers at a work site.

Brown, however, provides a word of caution about inclusive education and its curriculum design at the secondary school level. He concludes that the position that the only place where students with disability can learn what they need to learn to lead a productive adult life is the general education classroom is absurd.⁴¹ Brown points out that inclusive education in the general education classroom needs to be supplemented with community-based instruction outside the classroom and, in particular, systematic instruction in inclusive workplaces. The best curriculum in the most inclusive school will not automatically lead to open employment unless there are also increasing opportunities for community-based instruction and training on-the-job in paid positions.

Self-Determination and Planning

*Promoting and enhancing the self-determination of youth with disabilities has become best practice in transition services.*⁴²

Self-determination is considered to be a characteristic of success in adult life. Self-determination is defined in the literature as a characteristic of individuals who choose goals, pursue them with persistence, evaluate progress, adjust strategies and solve problems in the process of achieving goals.

*School to work transition planning is about determining the steps in order to reach a future goal. Transition planning during secondary school offers parents and educators a process to begin to teach and facilitate the setting, implementation and monitoring of goals with a student.*⁴³

*One of the most important aspects of helping young people attain happiness, success and competence is the process of helping them set goals.*⁴⁴

The research has found that teaching young people to make choices and effective decisions results in enhanced transition outcomes including reduced problem behaviours, increased engagement in activity, developed problem solving skills, improved social skills, increased learning skills and higher work productivity.⁴⁵

Including the teaching of self-determination in the secondary school curriculum, and active student involvement in transition planning, are important evidence-based strategies that have a positive effect on employment outcomes.

Community-Based Curriculum

*. . . natural environments must be used when teaching. Natural environments refer to those environments that are frequented by nonhandicapped peers. In order to facilitate generalization of skills, instruction should occur within a variety of natural environments.*⁴⁶

A core feature of successful school to work transition programs is the practice of community-based instruction (CBI)⁴⁷. CBI is about instruction in natural settings, such as restaurants, shopping complexes, recreation centres, work sites and other age appropriate settings in the community.

CBI is not meant to replace inclusive education in terms of class-based curriculum, but rather to expand and complement this with instruction in community places outside the classroom.

Research has repeatedly found that skills are best taught in the environment where they are to be used. This finding becomes increasingly important for people with intellectual disability who invariably find it difficult to transfer or generalise skills from one environment to another.

Learning in the community allows students to be involved with the actual situation including the physical landscape and materials, the social demands of communication and behaviour, and learn skills among the typical distractions of the natural environment.

CBI exposes students to a variety of experiences while building skills to participate in activities that are typical in their community. These experiences provide a rich environment in which to learn adaptive social and communication behaviour with members of the community.

A key discussion on what to teach requires consideration of what skills will allow a student to be competent at home and in the community. Such a consideration needs to take into account the skills upon which the community and employers place high value, the strengths and weaknesses of the student, and the relevant skills required by different community settings.

Community-based instruction is not exclusive to models of *school to work transition*. A reading of research from early education through to employment indicates a convergence about the importance of typical and inclusive settings for adaptive development. We find this in the research of early intervention where there is great interest in how to provide parents with education on how to teach their child at home and in community settings.⁴⁸ We find this in the research on inclusive education where there is great interest in building the capacity of regular teachers in teaching to the diversity of students, including students with disability.⁴⁹ And we also find in the vocational research that the systematic instruction of skills on-the-job at a typical workplace produces the best open employment outcomes.⁵⁰

The message from research is clear. If we are to intervene and teach skills, we must resist the old habit of grouping young people with intellectual disability, but rather embrace and figure out how to teach skills in the settings where they are to be performed — be it at home, in the classroom, in the community or at the work place.

Systematic instruction

*Research has repeatedly demonstrated that systematic instruction in the community leads to learning and retaining new skills better than in a facility.*⁵¹

An important teaching component of community-based instruction is the systematic instruction of job skills. Systematic instruction is arguably the key instructional technology which provided the foundation for assisting people with intellectual disability to work productively in the open labour market.

It is a training model famously brought to the world's attention by Dr Marc Gold who demonstrated between 1967 and 1972 how people with significant intellectual disability – thought to be unable to work – could learn complex job tasks such as building bicycle brakes and assembling electronic circuit boards.

Gold utilised a training technique that involved the breaking down of job tasks into smaller steps (i.e. task analysis). The instruction is characterised by high levels of engagement with the task together with enough instruction to correct errors until mastery of the task is achieved. Gold demonstrated that, via this form of training, people with intellectual disability could achieve productivity and quality work levels commensurate with workers without disability.

Today, systematic instruction of skills on-the-job is a critical practice for open employment service. It is a key feature of those services that are achieving the best employment outcomes for people with significant intellectual disability.

Work experience while still at secondary school is pivotal to achieving open employment as an adult

We know that paid employment while in school directly relates to integrated employment in adulthood and, therefore, there must be a more coordinated and pronounced legislative statement about paid employment for students while they are still under special education entitlement in the public schools.⁵²

The importance of inclusion and community-based instruction leads to a core conclusion about the design of models of *school to work transition*. That is, students need to have increasing opportunities for work experiences throughout secondary schooling, which ultimately should be a major component of their final year of secondary school.

This emphasis will of course be guided by the goals and choices of the students and their families. The clear message from the research, however, is that an evolving focus upon employment during secondary school sets the foundation for the early development of skills and behaviours that are relevant for adult work roles after graduation.

The research points strongly to the importance of work experience for youth with disability while at school as a central factor in the success of open employment after graduation. Luecking, following 20 years of developing and evaluating school to work approaches, writes:

Since the mid 1980s, research has shown that youth with disabilities who participate in work experiences, especially paid work, while in secondary school are significantly more likely to hold jobs after they exit school than those who do not have these experiences. Simply stated, youth benefit from frequent and continuous exposure to real work environments throughout the secondary school years and beyond.

This same body of research has also demonstrated that work experiences during secondary school years are valuable for any youth with a disability, regardless of his or her primary disability label, race, gender, relative need for accommodation support, or any other

*descriptive characteristic.*⁵³

Luecking's research findings are timely and pertinent in pointing parents, educators and governments to pivotal activities for youth with disability in preparation for employment after school graduation. Work experience, including career explorations, job shadowing, internships, cooperative work placements, service learning, unpaid work and paid work (the *gold standard* of work experience), are important school-to-work activities that increase the likelihood of youth with disability to get and keep a job as adults.⁵⁴

A critical outcome of such an approach is the establishment of a strong connection to employment. This may take the form of a career pathway with links to employment opportunities and open employment assistance to continue supporting the employment goal after graduation.

Employers - Essential Partners

*Work experience is important for students to get exposure to the world of work. And work experience can only happen if there are employers who are willing to include young people.*⁵⁵

It is important to recognise the positive involvement of employers in the employment of people with intellectual disability. Many employers have employed jobseekers with intellectual disability and have publicly acknowledged the positive benefits that have accrued to jobseekers, co-workers, customers and the profit of the enterprise.⁵⁶

There is a growing body of evidence on why employers agree to include youth with disability in work experience or as employees. A central message to schools and employment providers is that *it is more effective to appeal to employer's self interest than it is to appeal to their potential altruistic interest in helping youth.*⁵⁷ Specifically, this means demonstrating how the inclusion of a worker will meet a specific business need.

The research indicates that disability is not the primary reason for hiring. Instead, the findings suggest that a valued contribution to an enterprise relegates disability in importance to the employer. Gold noted, over 30 years ago, in his competence/deviance hypothesis, that *the more competence an individual has, the more deviance will be tolerated in him by others.*⁵⁸ Recent research appears to confirm that it is the strengths of a jobseeker matched with the needs of a business that is key in setting up work experience and successful job placements. These findings stress the importance of school and employment personnel to understand the needs of business and industry in order to understand what employers want and need. Partnerships must emphasise how this will benefit the employers.⁵⁹

As long-term ongoing support for employees with intellectual disability is evidence-based practice, success of work experience and ultimately career employment, will require a maintenance of support and service to employers that is responsive and effective in meeting changing circumstances for the employee and the employer.

Service Collaboration and Cooperation - And Models That Work

*Effective transition planning and service provision depend on functional linkages between school and adult service agencies.*⁶⁰

The goal of open employment for students with intellectual disability requires collaboration and cooperation with employment and adult services before graduation.

The pathway from school-to-work crosses the boundaries of education and employment sectors. Open employment and adult agencies should be fundamental partners with schools and families in the planning and implementation of a school-to-work curriculum before graduation, and ongoing employment and adult support after graduation.

An early and strong collaboration offers the opportunity for shared resources and specialist knowledge of employment assistance to be shared across the education and employment sectors.⁶¹

The research provides some good examples of collaborative and cooperative models between students, parents, schools, employment and adult services, and employers.

The Transition Service Integration Model (TSIM)⁶²

This USA model integrates the resources and expertise of schools, employment and adult services. The three sectors work in partnership during the student's last year of school to develop a paid job and inclusive community activities when not working. The model provides services to enable students to secure open employment and access to non-work community environment prior to graduation. Post graduation employment assistance and non-work support is secured to continue after graduation. The result of the TSIM over 5 years between 1998 and 2002, of 293 students with severe intellectual disability, was an open employment outcome of 60%. The average wage was US \$6.20 and an average of 14 hours of work per week.

Bridges

This USA model was developed by the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities (MFPD) and has assisted 15, 000 students since 1989. The model which operates in several major cities in the US provides initial career counseling and job search, placement in a paid position with training and support and post placement follow-up support. Students from a range of primary disability groups are referred by teachers. The program has a job placement rate of 68%-90% with 75% of the youth completing 90 days on the job.

The South Australian State Transition Program

This Australian model creates a partnership between open employment, schools, vocational education providers, parents and relevant State and Commonwealth departments. As with TSIM above, the STP operates over the last year of school providing vocational education, training and work experience. The results of the STP for 335 students with intellectual, physical and learning disability, was an open employment outcome of approximately 41%.⁶³ We should acknowledge the key coordination role that PE Adelaide, a Commonwealth-funded employment service, had in the achievement of these employment outcomes.

The NSW Transition To Work (TTW) Model

This Australian model is not a collaboration with the school sector. It is a model which gives school leavers after graduation the choice of a *transition to work* program — school leavers who would otherwise enter State day programs after graduation. The program for 2004 and 2005 achieved an average open employment outcome of 34%.⁶⁴

It is important, however, to note the performance of one particular service within the NSW TTW program. *Jobsupport* for 2004 and 2005 achieved an open employment outcome rate of 70% for school leavers with moderate to severe intellectual disability with average

weekly wages of \$243 and 18 hours of work per week. Jobsupport is a Commonwealth-funded employment service which also operates a NSW-funded TTW service, *Community Work Options (CWO)*. CWO gives school leavers with intellectual disability extra help before they attempt paid employment, by providing them with successful work experience and by addressing issues that are preventing their acceptance by an open employment service.

The substantive results achieved by *Jobsupport* suggest that linking school leavers to high quality open employment service is a critical factor. One cannot help but wonder what the effect on these results would be if the school leavers had been provided similar experiences and training before graduation.

Quality Open Employment Service

As suggested above, quality open employment service is a critical element of an effective school to work transition model. The employment service carries the responsibility for ongoing support to ensure continued participation in employment and career development.

The research points to some key competencies that are linked to employment outcomes. These include practices of job development, systematic instruction on the job and long-term ongoing support to both the employee and employer.

It is this fidelity with the research evidence that is essential to quality employment service. These practices are however becoming increasingly rare rather than ubiquitous among service personnel. There is an urgent need to implement a national plan of training and technical assistance so that evidence-based practice may be fostered throughout the employment service sector.

For people with intellectual disability, successful outcomes require an understanding of key employment assistance research findings.

Job development

Typical recruitment practices (résumés, job matching and job descriptions) do not work for this group and act as barriers to their inclusion in the workforce. Best practice requires the development of jobs that meet the needs of employers and which match the strengths of jobseekers. This requires employment services to get to know the business, and determine a match between business needs and the strengths of jobseekers — demonstrating to business how existing job descriptions and organisation structures can be modified to include disadvantaged jobseekers is critical.⁶⁵

On-the-job training

Dr Marc Gold's research (1967-1976), demonstrating that people with intellectual disability could assemble complex bicycle brakes at productivity rates equal to people without disability, changed the focus from inability on the part of the jobseeker to learn to that of our capacity to teach job skills.

Research found that systematic training on-the-job, using applied behaviour analysis, was significantly superior in outcomes compared to off-site training due to the weak ability of people with intellectual impairment to transfer skills across settings.⁶⁶

Ongoing support

Ongoing support to the employee and employer is critical to maintaining long-term

employment success. The smallest change in employment circumstances (change of job duties, supervisor or co-workers) can quickly lead to a loss of competency, confidence and ultimately job loss, unless these changes are managed carefully. Ongoing support acts as a monitoring process to ensure that the job continues to meet the needs of the employer and the employee.

Putting it all together

This paper has provided an overview of the pieces of practice that contribute to the pathway of a student with intellectual disability from school to open employment. Transition to work success indicates that these evidence-based pieces are interrelated but not sufficient on their own.

Theme One - High Expectations

Having high expectations that a young person with intellectual disability will, like other students, make their way from school to real work is a fundamental value and belief — a belief that must permeate the efforts and strategy of students, parents, educators and employment service personnel.

Theme Two - An Early and Long-Term Perspective

Early development and education is critical to success as an adult. Brain science and early educational research provides strong evidence that the decisions and interventions we make now have a long-term impact. School to work transition is yet another period of early intervention whereby parents and educators can begin to plan and do things that we know have a positive impact of future participation in the workforce. Work experience while still at school is pivotal and linked to successful employment after graduation.

Theme Three - Inclusion and Natural Settings

Learning needs to take place in typical, natural, inclusive settings where children and people without disability hang out – regular classrooms, community settings and regular workplaces. These settings provide the basis for the most powerful and adaptive skill development. The implication for secondary school curriculum is that inclusive classroom-based education is necessary but not sufficient. Community-based instruction and instruction on-the-job are critical elements of a complete secondary curriculum to prepare youth with intellectual disability for open employment success.

Theme Four - Collaboration across Home, School, Employment/Adult services and Employers

Parents, teachers and employment agencies must work together across professional and purview boundaries to ensure a seamless transition from school to work. Each partner in this collaboration is required to play an important role that contains its own set of quality requirements. Transition planning at secondary school should occur well before graduation.

Theme Five - Successful models of school to work for people with intellectual disability have high fidelity in a combination of evidence-based practices

Research finds that a combination of inclusive settings, community-based training and on-the-job training are potent predictors of post-school employment for students with severe disability, regardless of intellectual functioning.⁶⁷ Success is not due to one thing alone but the combination of a number of evidence-based practices.

Policy Recommendation

That the Commonwealth seek to legislate the requirement of secondary education authorities to provide transition services to students with intellectual disability. To ensure that all students with intellectual disability have available to them an education to prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.

Such a legal requirement of secondary school authorities exists in the United States through Public Law 108-446 – Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.

Improving the quality of secondary education for students with disability should be perceived as an essential part of our national policy on social inclusion, the education revolution policy of the current Commonwealth government, and in fulfilling our obligations under the United Nations' disability rights instrument.

The law should require secondary school authorities to begin providing transition services to students with disability no later than 16 years of age. Providing effective transition services to promote successful post-school employment or education is an important measure of accountability for young people with intellectual disability and their families.

(Endnotes)

- ¹ Parent comment made on ACA on Channel Nine, December 2008
- ² There were exceptions, but these were few. For people with moderate, severe and profound intellectual disability, open employment was not considered feasible.
- ³ Models of service that continue today. These models are characterised by the grouping of people with disability in association with a belief that they cannot work in open employment. This model has gone by many names, including sheltered workshops, business services, disability enterprises.
- ⁴ Bellamy, T., Rhodes, L., Bourbeau, P., Mank, D. (1982). *Mental Retardation Services in Sheltered Workshops and Day Activity Programs: Consumer Outcomes and Policy Alternatives*. Paper Presented at the National Working Conference on Vocational Services and Employment Opportunities, President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, and the Association for Retarded Citizens, Madison Wisconsin, March 1982. See pages 3-6.
- ⁵ See Bellamy et al (1982), cited above; and Wehman, P. (1982). *Competitive Employment. New Horizons for Severely Disabled Individuals*. Paul H Brookes Publishers: Baltimore & London, see foreword and p. 6.
- ⁶ Clarke, A. M. & Clarke, A. D. B. (eds.). (1958). *Mental Deficiency. The Changing Outlook*. The Free Press: Glencoe, Illinois. Gold, M. (1972). Stimulus Factors in Skill Training of Retarded Adolescents on a Complex Assembly Task: Acquisition, Transfer, and Retention. (1972). *Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 76, 517-526.
- ⁷ Wehman, P. (1988). *Transition From School To Work*. Paul H Brookes: Baltimore. p. 6
- ⁸ The Employment Training Program of the University of Washington at <http://depts.washington.edu/etp/history.shtml>. Mark Moss, J. M., Dineen, J. P., & Ford, L. H. (1986). University of Washington's Employment Training Program, in *Competitive Employment: Issues and Strategies* (Ed. Rusch, F.R.). Paul H. Brookes: Baltimore:
- ⁹ Commonwealth of Australia. (1985). *New Directions. Report of the Handicapped Programs Review*. AGPS: Canberra. Principles And Objectives Of The Disability Services Act 1986. Schedule. Commonwealth of Australia Gazette. No.S 118. Tuesday, 9 June 1987.
- ¹⁰ For example: *Jobsupport Incorporated* in Sydney, Australia was funded by the Disability Services Act 1986 to demonstrate that people with moderate to severe intellectual disability could be employed

in open employment. This employment agency has had substantial success and is today rated by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) as operating four 5-star services. A rating that is rare and unique. With an average employment outcome rate of 75%, this service demonstrates that fidelity with the research evidence, open employment for people with significant intellectual disability is realistic and happening.

- ¹¹ It is difficult to glean the actual participation of people with intellectual disability in open employment due to the reporting formats and choices of Australian government data. *AIHW Bulletin 67* combines people with learning difficulty with people with intellectual disability; the *CSTDA data cube* doesn't separate open employment data from sheltered workshop participation, and the *FHCSIA Disability Services Census* has chosen not to publish *on the books* data of open consumer and employees since 2003, and now reports trends by combining intellectual disability with autism and specific learning difficulties. For this paper, we have had to be creative in presenting data. While accuracy cannot be assured, we do think that the data presented in the paper does at least give a general picture of the size of the issue.
- ¹² Chart 1 has drawn its figures from the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Data Cube*. We have split the AIHW data cube figure for *employment* into open employment and segregated workshops utilising the *FHCSIA 2007 Disability Services Census Report*. These figures do not add up to the AIHW figure for *employment* and are only used to be indicative of the size of participation. The open employment figure is likely to be inflated due to the definition being used by FHCSIA.
- ¹³ 30.9% in 2001 - to 18.4% in 2007. It was 48% in 1997, and is down 30% in ten years. *The Case Based Funding Evaluation (2007)* shows that the intellectual disability population was 13.5% of the cohort of jobseekers entering into the program from July to December 2005.
- ¹⁴ Figures drawn from the Commonwealth *Disability Services Census Reports*
- ¹⁵ Figures drawn from the Commonwealth *Disability Services Census Reports*
- ¹⁶ Figures drawn from the Commonwealth *Disability Services Census Reports*
- ¹⁷ Gillard, J. & Wong, P. (Election, 2007). *An Australian Social Inclusion agenda*.
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