



## **Executive Summary**

# **Transitions to Employment of Australian Young People with Disability and the Ticket to Work Initiative**

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## Executive Summary

'School to work' transition refers to the critical socio-economic life changing period between approximately 15 to 24 years of age – a period when young individuals develop and build skills, based on their initial education and training that helps them become productive members of the society (World Bank, 2009).

Australian young people with disability are currently not successfully transitioning from school into further training or employment; a factor that is an indicator of long term, and often life-long, disadvantage. In Australia, young people with disability are more likely to drop out of school early, be excluded from the labour force, have fewer educational qualifications, experience poverty and be socially isolated.

During school transition young people often encounter great uncertainties and tremendous developmental challenges. These issues may be made more stressful by the presence of a disability, thereby increasing the risk of social exclusion amongst those young people who are transitioning and have a disability (Yu, 2009; Blacher, 2001; Dewson et al., 2004; Lichtenstein, 1998; Winn and Hay, 2009).

Improving transition outcomes can deliver a number of benefits as increasing the number of persons with disability in employment can contribute to mitigating some of the labour force effects imposed by an ageing population, can reduce pension dependency and improve individuals' overall financial, inclusion and wellbeing status.

### Research Report

The Report is centred on an exploration of transition from school to work within the context of young people with disability. It provides youth disability data, explores what factors and elements comprise 'good transition' for this cohort and examines the benefit of utilising 'transition oriented' networked partnerships to achieve positive outcomes. It outlines methods and approaches utilised by Ticket to Work and the outcomes achieved. This report draws upon a mix of Australian and international data, as well as primary data drawn from Ticket to Work participants (103 individuals who participated in interviews or a focus group).

### Ticket to Work

Ticket to Work is an initiative that was borne out of an awareness that Australian young people with disability were not successfully transitioning to employment from school and the need to provide targeted support to minimise long term disadvantage. Ticket to Work is underpinned by a philosophy that 'every young person with disability is entitled to participate in the community, source appropriate employment and be socially included' and that to achieve this, a localised partnership network-driven approach increases the likelihood of achieving this philosophical goal. Ticket to Work aims to improve post-school transitions of young people with disability, not only for the benefit of the individual but also for the benefit of our wider society and economy.

Before piloting Ticket to Work in 2011 scoping research was undertaken, evaluating models and approaches to improve outcomes for young people with disability (particularly those with intellectual disability). Four key features and issues emerged:

1. There is a pervasive culture of low expectation and lack of opportunities for Australian students with disability, particularly in relation to genuine sustainable employment; a view sometimes held by the young people themselves, parents, employers, educators and governments.
2. That participation while as school in career development, work experience, accredited training and completing secondary school are among the most significant indicators of post-school success for young people with disability.
3. That young people with disability who exit school with a job are more likely to maintain a positive career trajectory than those who do not.

4. That locally-based cross-sectoral partnership networks, which bring together expertise from an array of sectors (education, industry, disability, employment, training, youth), are able to create opportunities for young people with disability and their local community.

These four key elements influenced Ticket to Work's development, structure and overall model (Wakeford and Waugh, 2010).

### **Ticket to Work Structure**

Ticket to Work's structure is a simple one; a national overarching body (National Ticket to Work Network or the 'National Network') that oversees and supports many local partnership networks ('Local Ticket to Work Networks' or 'Local Networks') operating across Australia.

The National Network works with local communities wanting to establish their own Local Ticket to Work Network and provides support, accreditation, resources, strategies and practices aimed at producing optimal employment and career achievement for young people with disability.

The Local Networks bring together a range of partners in local regions who work together to provide young people with access to career development, workplace preparation, work experience, vocational skills and Australian School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (ASbATs). Essentially each Local Network supports young people with disability to participate in the same 'typical' transition to employment activities that their non-disabled peers generally partake in as a matter of course. The Local Networks use their combined skills and resources to ensure these activities are provided in a supportive manner that reflects the individual needs of students.

### **Ticket to Work Outcomes**

In 2013 Ticket to Work received modest funding, through the National Disability Employment initiative (NDEI) from the Department of Social Services (DSS), for seven months to expand the model nationally. The funding allowed for the employment of a National Manager. In this short period of time Ticket to Work achieved significant outcomes: 99 young people commencing an ASbAT; over 200 students participating in work experience and workplace preparation activities; and, over 180 employers and 93 schools engaged.

The outcomes achieved are substantial yet with only 40 per cent of the Local Ticket to Work Networks just establishing and the other 60 per cent in partnership development or consideration stage, it is clear that with further investment even more opportunities could be created.

Of the young people who had completed their Ticket to Work ASbAT and were surveyed, 86 per cent have continued in ongoing open employment with the remaining 14 per cent currently in vocational education.

It has been shown that Ticket to Work does deliver results for young people with disability, particularly those with intellectual disability. Ticket to Work is well placed to play a significant role in turning around the intractably low-level of post-school employment rates currently experienced by Australian youth with disability.

### **Australian Young People with Disability and their Transitions**

Data pertaining to Australian young people with disability and their transition outcomes reveals that:

- This cohort is a substantial, and seemingly increasing, one. In 2012, 7.8 per cent of young people had a disability; increasing from 6.6 per cent in 2009 (ABS, 2012)
- 62 per cent were *not* fully engaged in work or study (ABS, 2012)
- Only 38 per cent had completed Year 12 or its equivalent (ABS, 2012).
- Only half of all students with severe disability progress past Year 10 at school (ABS, 2012)

Young people with disability are at particular risk of being caught in the welfare dependency trap with over 10 per cent of Disability Support Pension (DSP) recipients under the age of 30 (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011).

## **‘Employment First’ Approach**

In Australia many of our policies and practices encourage a young people with significant disability to transition to non-vocational pathways or sub minimal wages in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE) rather than open employment pathways. Once in these settings individuals rarely move on to open employment.

Many other regions around the world have taken the different approach and implemented ‘Employment First’; that being the idea that employment in integrated settings within the community should be the priority service option, no matter the severity of the disability.

In the United States, Disability Employment Services (DES) equivalent organisations work with schools to provide ‘pre-employment transition services’ to all students with disabilities and the young people must try open employment. It also mandated that DES equivalent providers must dedicate at least 15 per cent of their government funding to help those with disabilities transition from school to work. Individuals with disabilities that do go to day service or ADE equivalent settings usually cannot do so until age 24 and even then they must receive career counseling and be informed about open employment opportunities.

## **Transition Modelling and Ticket to Work**

Previous research has shown that quickly moving youth into real jobs that are well-matched to their interests and have growth potential positively impacts on job retention (Cook et al., 2005; Luecking et al., 2000). Put simply, the best way to get someone ‘job ready’ is to get them into a job. Work placement accompanied with supported training in a real world context is preferable, that ‘place and train’ is more successful than a ‘train and place’ model (Meadows, 2012).

With this in mind, resources can be better utilised by training the person in the specific role, for a specific employer and on-the-job; rather than spending time ‘waiting’ for someone to becoming ‘work ready’, or developing skills that may or may not be transferrable to a particulate role. This method also works to support the needs of employers as implementing a ‘demand-led’ approach to employment; which begins with the need of the employer and works backwards to involve that employer in the design and delivery of the training (on-the-job accredited training, mentoring, DES support).

Ticket to Work takes the ‘place and train’ approach, working with the employer to design and implement the ‘right’ supports and training for that particular placement or job.

*“Employment used to be aimed at those ‘top edge’ students particularly for those that can read and write. What we are now doing is moving that down the IQ scale, these kids do have employability skills ... It means that those students that used to do training and recreation programs at day services once leaving school can consider paid and volunteer employment also. It’s a real recognition of what they can do and that they are all employable.” (Principal, special school)*

## **‘Good Transition’ Activities**

By introducing and offering a range of authentic experiences and ‘good transition’ activities during the final years of schooling, Ticket to Work assists young people to develop skills, confidence, training and exposure to potential career pathways before they leave school. It empowers the young person and their family with knowledge to make sound decisions regarding post-school pathways and build connections with mainstream and disability-specific organisations that can assist them into the future. Ticket to Work aims to challenge and change the culture of low expectations and increase aspirations as the earlier young people gain access to experiences and to support networks that positively influence their views of themselves as workers and active citizens, the better the long term outcomes will be.

These ‘Good Transition’ activities include:

1. **Career development and workplace preparation:** Young people with disability require opportunities for self-determination, effective decision making processes, and ‘experience must precede choice’. What is clear is that career development should not and cannot just be the domain of schools.

2. **Work experience:** Ticket to Work research, evaluation and stakeholder discussions attest to important and positive role that work experience can play in improving the transition outcomes of student with disability. Consistently research has found that the most prominent factors to be associated with successful post-school employment outcomes are paid and unpaid work experiences during the last years of secondary school as well the completion of a high school (Luecking 2009).
3. **Vocational education:** Completing a Vocational Education and Training qualification not only helps people with a disability to find work, it increases their chances of sustaining employment into the future.
4. **Australian School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (ASbATs):** ASbATs, combine the mix of employment, vocational education whilst still in school and often students leave secondary education with a job that they are interested in. Economic outcomes from participation in Traineeships and Apprenticeships has found to included high workforce participation, employment and income rates, comparable to similarly aged Australians without disability. (Cocks and Thoresen 2013)
5. **After school jobs:** Research has shown that participation in part-time work whilst still at school greatly increases levels of full-time employment and substantially lower unemployment post-school. Ticket to Work does not support placement in after school job as DES guidelines do not currently permit this activity.

*“I believe Ticket to work really is the best way to go. It gives kids the work ethic and experience they need; in essence it teaches them how to work. I also think that having that transition from ASbAT into work once they finish school is the best pathway for our students. If they don’t go down that pathway they sometimes get lost and never find work. I think showing them the seamless transition from school to work is probably the best method. We are seeing that happen with our students, more and more. We have more students involved in paid employment than we’ve ever had and that’s really impressive.” (Teacher, special school)*

### **The Partnership Approach**

The poor post-school labour force outcomes experienced by the vast majority of Australian young people with disability suggests that the interface between the school system and employment system needs investigation. Interagency collaboration is viewed as a key component in any transition process for without it the preparation of students for the post-school world becomes problematic. (Meadows 2012)

Ticket to Work is indeed predicated on this notion and recognises that to improve outcomes for young people with disability a partnership-driven, multi-sectoral approach is required. Partnerships comprised of schools, employers, employment services, disability agencies and youth services do create more pathways opportunities for young people collectively than they do if working individually or discretely.

Ticket to Work encourages partners to work beyond ‘just’ what they are funded for and step outside of the sector that they represent to look at the issue of youth transition needs in a cross-sectoral manner. In doing so, these partnership networks can innovatively explore what is needed in their local community and how they can combine their skills, knowledge and resources to develop strategies, structures and approaches aimed at providing a seamless transition to employment for their local students with disability. The grass-roots nature of Local Ticket to Work Networks means that each differ from one another; whether that is the composition or the strategies and activities they are rolling out for young people and employers in their region.

### **Partnership Challenges**

“Good collaboration requires high levels of connectivity, trust, and sharing of resources and staff. It can be high risk but produce excellent outcomes for students as good collaboration can result in more closely accommodating to student needs, skill levels and learning styles” (Meadows, 2012).

Partnership and cross-sectoral collaboration has presented some difficulties for Local Ticket to Work Networks. For some individuals and organisations, partnership-driven approaches to delivering support can seem new and foreign. Where partners have wholeheartedly engaged with Ticket to Work we have witnessed impressive numbers of young people commencing in their transition to employment pathways in a short period of time.

Disability Employment Services (DES) providers play a very critical role within the Ticket to Work model. However, in some regions engaging DES providers in Ticket to Work has been problematic. Some of these issues have included commercial in confidence concerns, DES guideline restrictions (real or imagined), contractual restraints, lack of belief that this young cohort can succeed in work, concern that participation will negatively affect future tender ability, restrictions on the type of support funded, high staff turnover and the DES guidelines not in line with ASbAT guidelines.

Schools could also be a barrier to developing Ticket to Work. Some schools possess a culture of protectiveness and low expectations that Local Networks had to address and others had previous negative experiences in partnerships (particularly with DES providers) which limited their willingness to engage.

Whilst the establishment of Local Ticket to Work Networks presented some challenges, having access to the National Network has greatly assisting in addressing challenges or difficulties, particularly as Local Networks could connect with one another and share experiences and strategies.

### **Braiding and Blending Funding**

It is recognised that the complexity of transition and open employment preparation for young people is such that it requires cross-jurisdiction and collaborative service provision that at times must be facilitated through flexible and responsive funding approaches. Yet this approach is difficult in Australia with the division between state and federal government and funding restrictions that do not encourage collaboration.

“People with a disability are under-represented in employment, but they are under-represented in vocational educational and training systems and that this situation is exacerbated by poor links between state-administered disability school and post-school programs, and Commonwealth-funded disability employment options” (Meadow, 2009). To overcome this issue, some countries have initiated ‘blending and braiding strategies’ which allow for funds to be used in more flexible, coordinated and sustainable ways that encourage collaboration and partnerships.

Ticket to Work believes that strategies and policies that encourage partnerships and linked-up or flow-through models can deliver effective school-to-work transitions for this cohort of young people.

*“Including the DES and the Apprenticeship Centre at the table we are all able to gain a broader understanding of the ASbAT funding available and discuss various funding models available thus making it more beneficial for employers.” (Local Ticket to Work Network member)*

### **Ticket to Work Participant Findings**

Employers, parents, Local Networks, schools and of course the young people themselves were interviewed as part of this research report. The feedback and findings are very encouraging. All stakeholders saw significant improvement in the skills, confidence and building of employment pathways amongst young people involved in Ticket to Work.

**Young people** saw their involvement in Ticket to Work as something that had provided them with skill development and workplace awareness. Many identified this to be the case because they were engaged in an industry or role that they were interested in and provided for on-the-job, rather than classroom, learning. Young people noted that their independence, confidence and their support networks increased. Nearly all surveyed young people felt that participation in Ticket to Work has improved their employment prospects and were feeling positive about their futures post-school.

*“I was sad about leaving school but now I feel positive about the future because I am sure I will get a job after I leave school because I know what working means.” (Student)*

**Parents and Carers** were overwhelmed by the opportunities and outcomes that Ticket to Work has provided for their child, themselves as a parent and their wider family. Parents acknowledged that the Ticket to Work model was an ideal one that ensured they and their child was supported and that the structure facilitated responsiveness if issues arose. One hundred per cent of surveyed parents/carers felt that Ticket to Work was improving their child's employment opportunities and has made them feel more positive about their child finishing school, and 90 per cent noted improvements in their child's independence.

*"I wouldn't know what to do without this program because it's helped my son a lot. I was worried he won't get a job in the future or be independent but with this program I now feel more confident he will."* (Parent)

**Schools** advised that Ticket to Work was playing a role in changing school community culture and felt more comfortable and confident about students' (particularly those with intellectual disability) capacities to enter into employment pathways. Ticket to Work was also recognised as a model that easily connects schools to external providers offering support, advice and knowledge from their respective sectors. Furthermore, the partnership approach meant that schools could rely on others to provide wrap-around support to their students whilst they were undertaking Ticket to Work activities.

*"For a long time special schools dwelled on developing 'life skills' and now we say 'work', 'careers' and 'inclusion in the community' is the main thing we do. These are the words we use in Ticket to Work meetings and now we are all using those words with our students, and the students are using those words with us too."* (Teacher, Special School)

**Employers** indicated that participation in Ticket to Work benefited workplace efficiency, increased productivity, demonstrated their community commitment and increased workplace morale. Many employers also noted that participation in Ticket to Work "introduces them to young people that are loyal, enthusiastic, productive and grateful for the opportunity".

*"It has benefited the business because with the ASbAT students they have been so productive since they are so enthusiastic about their training and the work they do so it brings a level of productivity to the whole team. Other team members (those without disability) must be inspired by the ASbAT students and so it has established good role modelling and if they can do it (person with intellectual disability) then the other members can too."* (Employer)

**Local Ticket to Work Networks** saw themselves as effecting positive employment and transition outcomes for young people with disability in their local regions. Local Network members saw their partnership as delivering positive outcomes for all stakeholders, contributing to positive systemic changes, meeting local community needs and bringing together an array of partners representing a diverse range of sectors.

*"We've found the partnership model absolutely invaluable due to the amount of knowledge each partner holds. If something falls through one of the partners can offer assistance or feedback and the support is called upon in this sense,"*  
(Local Ticket to Work Network Member)

Employers, parents, schools and the young people themselves saw an increase in a range of skills and positive attitudes through participation in Ticket to Work; a great result given that many of the young people had just started in their ASbATs or work experience when interviews took place. It was also noted that these positive skills and attitudes were being transferred into the home and school settings. Through exposure to employment during school with a supportive network, the young people involved in Ticket to Work saw their self perception change - they could see themselves as workers and could recognise their own potential.

As part of the evaluation young people involved in Ticket to Work were asked "In 10 years time what would you like to have achieved in your life?". Ninety-eight per cent of all young respondents said that 'Having a good job' was the primary life achievement they would like to have attained in the coming ten years. This response indicates that these young people are no different from their peers without disability. It is indicative that young

people with disability, and particularly ones that have been exposed to employment whilst in school, not only see labour force participation in their future but it is their number one goal.

## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

This report evidences that the current transition to employment support systems are, by and large, failing Australian young people with disability and condemning these young people to a marginalised and dependant life with reduced opportunity for social and economic participation.

Many of our young people, who could become active members of the Australian workforce, are dissuaded from doing so because of low employment expectations, limited or no exposure to genuine employment experience or career development.

This report articulates that there is huge potential to improve the long-term outcomes of young people with disabilities, particularly with our current understanding on how best to achieve positive post-school transition outcomes including:

- The importance of preparation for work (career development)
- The importance of transition points
- The importance of collaboration and partnerships
- The importance of exposure to real work
- The development of quality frameworks and evidence-based practice.

Ticket to Work has shown it does deliver results for young people with disability, it also demonstrated its ability and capacity to coordinate efforts, galvanise local resolve and provides an architecture for spotlighting and promoting strategies and practices that produce optimal employment and career achievement for young people with disability.

*“It is time we stop the soft discrimination of our young people with disability through low expectations and ignoring the aspiration. Ticket to Work represents a great model for bringing together communities to ensure that these young people have every opportunity for a positive life beyond school” (Local Ticket to Work Member)*



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