

Roundtable 3: Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihood

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Most people with intellectual disability who are in the workforce take part in workshops or factories that only hire people with disability – known as segregated employment. Often, they are told there are no other options. There are approximately 20,000 people working in segregated employment and approximately 75% of these have intellectual disability. Very few people in segregated employment transition to open employment. People in segregated employment are also often paid well below the minimum wage.

There is strong evidence that people with intellectual disability can work within open employment and that open employment leads to better outcomes than segregated employment.

However, even in open employment people with intellectual disability are often under employed and under paid, and the opportunities and supports for people to get a good job at a good wage are hard to find.

My experience has been that I felt that often the company policy didn't turn into a caring work place. I sometimes felt that I was just there to tick a box. which is unfair.

People with disability have the right to work on an equal basis with others in open employment.

Inclusive employment leads to better outcomes for people with disability, yet that is not what most people with intellectual disability in Australia experience.

I have always found it hard to look for jobs that I know I can do – we need more employers to see the value in offering people like me real jobs with proper wages in a supportive workplace.

We believe that by improving pathways to open employment and providing the right supports and information, we will see a transformation of the sector.

What do we want to see?

1. A transition to a fair wage system

People with disabilities should be paid a fair a proper wage for their work, and related welfare and support systems redesigned to support this.

2. Improved support for employers to ensure people with intellectual disability can be included in their workplaces

Employers need to be supported with information and training to ensure that they can support people with intellectual disabilities in the workplace. The community perception of

what it means to employ someone with a disability in their organisation needs to be improved.

I worked for a very large international company with great inclusion policies. However, the reality was that I had very little support and the staff really did not understand why I was there. Companies say that they are inclusive, but they need to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

3. Better support for the transition from school into open employment.

Often schools use segregated employment as 'work placements' for students with intellectual disability. This limits their ability to develop workplace skills and to fully explore their options. Work experience should be provided within open employment for all students.

4. An 'open employment first' approach to disability supports.

Disability supports should focus on building skills to support transition to open employment. Supports to participate in segregated employment should only be considered after all other options have been explored. This includes long-term support within the workplace and support for more specialised Disability Employment Support providers

5. Support to transition from segregated to open employment

Segregated employment providers should be supported to grow their capacity to build the skills of people to transition to open employment, and the providers should become more inclusive. The Australian Government has recently announced further support to both providers and advocacy organisations to support this.

For example, I would love to have my own business where I can help people be their best. I have a passion for helping people, and I know I have a lot of the skills to do it. It would be really good if there was support to help people like me set up our own businesses and be more independent.

Australia's recent Disability Royal Commission supported many of these areas, recommending a reform of disability employment supports, developing a roadmap to open employment and raising subminimum wages.

Conclusion

Everyone has a right to a meaningful job in a supportive environment. The more people like me have these opportunities, the more independent we become, and the richer society becomes. Our rights, our passions and our dreams are the same as everyone else's.

In Australia and across the world we can achieve more to improve employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability. We want to work with people so that we can get to a world where people with intellectual disability have the same opportunities as everyone else in the workplace and in life.