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From jobless to job ready:
Understanding transformational outcomes at Northern Futures

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From jobless to job ready:
understanding transformational outcomes at Northern Futures

Abstract:
Northern Futures delivers supported training and demand led employment programs to jobseekers living in Geelong's northern suburbs where unemployment rates are the highest in regional Victoria. This place-based collective impact model is highly collaborative and outcome-driven involving Jobactive agencies, education providers, the community sector, government and industry.

Embedded heavily in the Bridges out of Poverty framework, the programs connect the skills and aspirations of jobseekers with the needs and requirements of employers with an unrelenting focus on sustainable employment outcomes.

This paper will explore the transformational nature of the Northern Futures model through the recent study of Northern Futures programs: "The Heart of the Matter." These findings pay particular attention to the nature and quality of the experiential learning encountered by the trainees that leads to transformational outcomes at the personal and organisational level.

Northern Futures participants will share their personal experience of Northern Futures programs through video interviews, explaining how their lives changed as their focus shifted from the 'here and now' to the future, with all its hope and possibility. The video can be viewed at http://northernfuturesgeelong.net/

Key words: *unemployment programs; transformational learning; traineeships; inclusive workplaces*

Introduction

Northern Futures was conceived in 2007 as a direct response to the changing nature of the employment landscape of Geelong, Victoria. The then Norlane Neighbourhood House (now the Norlane Community Centre [NCC]), as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Program, and the Committee for Geelong, were the lead agents in both the conceptual development and its realisation as Northern Futures, a significant community resource. The Agency is housed in the Norlane Community Centre.

Corio and Norlane, northern suburbs of the regional city of Geelong, were once home to the families of workers from the booming manufacturing sector, in particular the wool and automotive industries; part of the manufacturing sector in decline since the late 1970s. This impacted on these suburbs and transformed a strong blue-collar, working class community into one where, today, families may have experienced several generations of joblessness with its associated social disadvantage, poverty and welfare dependency (Johnson, 2013). The rate of unemployment in Corio-Norlane is currently 17.1% - the highest in regional Victoria - compared to Geelong overall at 5.6%. (ABS. 2017).

The persistence of unemployment, resulting in multiple generations of long term unemployed people required a different solution to that offered by the traditional labour market programs (Bodsworth, 2015; Fowkes, 2011; Murphy, Murray, Chalmers, Martin, & Marston,

2011). The growth in the health and service sectors, advanced manufacturing and construction needed a different set of skills to those traditionally held by the workers of Corio and Norlane.

An innovative program of supported training and demand led employment placement was developed and delivered through a network of collaborative partnerships with Jobactive agencies, education providers, the health and community sector, government agencies and local industry (Benjamin, 2017; Johnson, 2017).

The Northern Futures collaboration includes local businesses and government instrumentalities. Not just as potential employers but as participating players;

- collaborating to identify skill shortages;
- provide matching skills training; and
- supportive pathways to sustainable jobs that match skills gained through training designed to meet identified skill shortages.

The Northern Futures partnership includes its staff, trainers from The Gordon TAFE, business, community organisations and government instrumentalities. These partners support the Northern Futures mission and function as a barometer of change in the employment and training needs of Geelong, working as a conduit for new opportunities in employment, training and funding for disadvantaged job seekers (Northern Futures, 2014).

The underpinning philosophy of Northern Futures has drawn upon work by Ruby Payne and associates who have published extensively on working with people experiencing poverty (Payne, 2012; DeVol, 2013; Payne, 2013; Payne 2013). Reference to this body of work referred to as 'the Bridges Out of Poverty approach' occurs throughout the interviews undertaken for this study and within Northern Futures' publications. It collectively provides insights and strategies for working with people experiencing social and economic disadvantage. It builds an understanding of behaviours and mindsets and explains why people from generational poverty need to learn the 'hidden rules' of the workplace to optimise their chance for success. In particular, *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin' By World* (De Vol, 2013) is used directly with the participants in the Northern Futures "Getting Ahead' program.

The Bridges Out of Poverty approach has drawn from an extensive literature on the transformative power of education in general and a specific body of literature addressing 'transformational and emancipatory learning'. In particular, Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1972) is referenced in the development of the ''Getting Ahead'' program (DeVol, 2013).

Objective

The objective of this study was to explore, understand and document the processes and outcomes of Northern Futures from the perspectives of the participants, individuals experiencing long term unemployment; and the perspectives of those involved with the partner organisations. The Northern Futures' objectives address place based (the postcode 3214) economic and social disadvantage; factors that are most personally experienced by individual jobseekers. The primary stated objective of Northern Futures is to — *Create supportive pathways into jobs that match the skills and aspirations of those residents not currently engaged in the workforce or who have been displaced from the workforce* (Northern Futures, 2014). This objective reflects a significant economic and social change agenda; at its heart, lie the aspirations and futures of individuals whose lives have been impacted by economic and social forces outside their control.

Method

As stated, the broad aim of the study was to document the processes deployed by the agency to achieve its objective and to tease out the factors that contributed to its transformational outcomes. A qualitative methodology, phenomenography, was chosen to enable the participant's thoughts and opinions to be collected in a methodical and rigorous way. Phenomenography is a research method designed to explore the different ways individuals experience a particular phenomenon and though analysis of the variations between the participant's own descriptions develop a picture of the phenomenon as a whole (Åkerlind, 2005; Bowden, 1996).

Sampling

Participants of Northern Futures who had achieved ongoing employment were approached by the Work and Learning Advisors (the agency's case managers) to determine their willingness to participate in the study; resulting in the recruitment of ten people, previously unemployed for more than twelve months, who had been in ongoing employment for more than 12 months. In addition, the Executive Officer introduced the researcher to a number of partners in the collaboration, resulting in the recruitment of seven members of employing organisations. Two of the TAFE trainers agreed to participate and all Work and Learning Advisors (WLA) were interviewed. All participants in the study received a plain English explanatory statement and

each signed 'consent to participate agreements', and agreed that their contribution, in a de-identified form, could be used in future publications and presentations.

Table 1: Number and type of interviewee

Interviewee	
Participants	10
Employers	7
Work & Learning Advisors	4
TAFE Trainers	2
Jobactive Manager	1
TOTAL	24

Data Collection

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide, the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed producing a verbatim (checked for accuracy) transcript. The transcripts provided the data for the study. The interview guide explored the individual's descriptions of their understanding of and experience of Northern Futures.

Data Analysis

In phenomenography, each account is a valid description of the phenomenon being studied. When these accounts are considered collectively, variations in the accounts become clear as some aspects are of more moment to the individual than others. Taken collectively, these variations provide a multi-perspective view of the phenomena (Northern Futures). The variations are sorted into groups of similar descriptions and these groups become categories of description, a term used to describe the outcomes of phenomenographic analysis. Four 'categories of description' emerged from the data:

Categories of Description

A. Transformational environment
B. Connectivity
C. Empowerment
D. Catalyst for change

Each of these categories of variation included particular aspects of the program, structural elements, that contributed to the achievement of Northern Futures' objective.

Table 2: Structural elements of the Categories of Description

Category of Description	Structural elements
Transformational Environment	• Individual case management of jobseekers by their Work & Learning Advisor • Support by Work & Learning Advisors across all parts of the journey • Group membership • 'Getting Ahead' Program • Transformational learning • Recognised achievement
Connectivity	• Work & Learning Advisors • TAFE Trainers • Industry partners • Workplace visits • Work experience • Traineeship programs • Relationships between Northern Futures & Workplaces
Empowerment	• Increase in self and social awareness • Recognition by self and others • Development of work readiness • Achievement of accredited vocational qualification
Catalyst for Change	• Achievement of sustainable employment for jobseekers experiencing multiple barriers • Northern Futures partners and their associates recognition of the systemic nature of unemployment and poverty • Receptive and supportive workplaces • Community and social change

These elements are described more fully below.

Results

Northern Futures:
It's a place where you can come, be retrained, learn about yourself, what you can do and give something a try. It is that you've got a support system there. It's just that way of building up yourself. You can make a difference in yourself, and give yourself the confidence. (Northern Futures Participant)

Although the study participants interacted with Northern Futures in different ways and had different roles in the organisation they all described similar understandings of the Northern Futures' phenomenon and so were treated as one group. The variations between the descriptions lay in the aspects of the experience they emphasised. For instance, all participants described transformational outcomes. The jobseekers applied the concept, of transformation/change, in relation to themselves and their experience of the process of participating in Northern Futures, the industry partners applied the concept to their observations of the trainees and to their own workplaces, the TAFE Trainers and Work & Learning Advisors applied the concept to both the jobseekers and to their own work with them. Exposure to the Bridges Out of Poverty framework was generally identified as a powerful influence to outcomes.

The transformational environment, described in different ways, was the overarching element and present in all interview transcripts. The participants described their own transformation and staff, trainers and workplace supervisors described their observations of the transformation. Each category of description contains the structural elements contributing to the transformation.

Transformational environment

> *"You can make a difference in yourself, and give yourself the confidence … that you can control your own destiny"*. (Northern Futures Participant)

Northern Futures participants encountered learning activities that encouraged them to recognise and value their own personal resources whilst they gained the additional skills they needed to secure sustainable employment. Jobseekers identified the continuity of their Work and Learning Advisor (case manager) and her appreciation of their individual circumstances, as important, membership of a group, and the attainment of a series of milestones were all seen by the participants as key to their achievements at Northern Futures. The holistic case management provided by the Work and Learning Advisors, combined with group activities that enhanced self-discovery, learning and capacity building were identified by the Work and Learning Advisors and the trainers as significant.

An intake interview between a Work and Learning Advisor and a jobseeker established a person-centred relationship and ensured that resources and opportunities were tailored to matched the abilities and aspirations of each individual. This initial conversation ensured the participant as ready and capable of benefiting from the training and employment focus of the

agency. The conversation lead to the development of a joint Learning Plan that was revisited regularly during the journey with Northern Futures. The Learning Plan usually started with undertaking the *'Getting Ahead'* program, incorporated in the Vocational Pathway Certificate 1 course; or commencement with one of the Certificate II or III vocational training courses. In one or two cases a participant started in an apprenticeship program.

The Getting Ahead Program, the starting point for many of the job seekers is a program designed by the Bridges Out of Poverty group (DeVol, 2013) and incorporated into the Employment Pathways Certificate I. The integrated program is designed to assist the jobseekers come to understand their personal circumstance, the community in which they live and broader social issues such as unemployment and poverty. The program encouraged participants to recognise their own personal resources and shift their thinking (from a negative to a positive mindset) before they undertook further accredited TAFE courses delivered at the Northern Futures site or moved into the workplace. The objective of all the courses was to develop confidence, competence, autonomy and awareness of social structures.

The *Getting Ahead* program aimed to transform jobseekers to 'co-investigators' who, as a group, explored their community, their lives and their life chances. The cohort developed a shared understanding of their lives, the factors that impacted upon them and explored the pathways available to them to create change in their lives. The outcomes of the participants' investigations are displayed on large sheets of paper around their meeting room. The process was group focussed. Class sizes were small and each cohort formed a small collaborative unit of work. The participants become energetic contributors to the discussion and growth in confidence, self-knowledge and understanding of their shared circumstance was visible to staff and trainers.

As one participant expressed it,

> *Getting Ahead* was different. It's really hard to explain.
> We were given this book called *Getting Ahead*. The book itself had a lot of stuff that talked about the low socio economics and Bridges out Poverty and stuff like that. Thinking about various things, things that we need to help us get by.
>
> And so there was a lot of thinking "How can we as being down here, start thinking about things that these kinds of people would think about? Because the people that are in the middle and further up, they have the resources to be comfortable enough to think about the 'what if?'. Whereas us, the people down in the low socioeconomic areas, generational poverty and stuff like that, they're always thinking in survival. So, they don't have the resources they need to think about the 'what if?' (Northern Futures Participant)

Connectivity

> They work with young people or disadvantaged people of all ages to secure a placement for them. They do that in partnership with businesses and organisations. That's a pipeline of opportunities. This approach is embedded in Northern Futures and in the local area. Northern Futures uses its structure of industry partnership to provide real opportunities for sustainable employment not just temporary work. (Employer Partner)

Local industries, the local TAFE, community organisations and local employment agencies were engaged in the formation of the agency and continue to contribute to the journey participants take from joblessness to job ready to ongoing employment, '*the pipe-line of opportunities'*.

> These partnerships are a foot in the door (to employers) they then train the clients, support the clients, do that wrap around thing, so we're supporting the clients, they're supporting the clients so the focus is employment. We're measuring success of employment outcomes, and that's what is achieved. (Jobactive Manager)

Local businesses and government departments identified skill shortages and shared their insights into the changing nature of workforce requirements. The Gordon TAFE provided courses that matched skill shortages and delivered the courses at Northern Futures; delivery at the local level was important as the TAFE campus is some distance from the Norlane Community Centre; public transport in this area is very poor and jobseekers do not have cars. Local employers provided work experience and took Northern Futures graduates into their traineeship and apprenticeship programs with the possibility of ongoing employment. The employers also hosted industry visits. These visits are a scheduled part of each of the vocational courses.

> The people we have, if they just applied for a job they would be highly unlikely to even get an interview. So, Northern Futures is helping these people get into the organisation and be successful. We've got many examples of people who've been extremely successful. They just do a fantastic job and the quality of candidates that we're getting now are fantastic. Northern Futures really has an understanding of what we're looking for. (Employer Partner)

Empowerment

> They push you at the beginning, but in the end, you start taking control, and then you realise that you can control your own destiny. The only person who can do that is yourself and they give you the tools, the knowledge and experience to actually do it. (Northern Futures Participant)

Classroom experiences in the vocational Certificate II and III courses were augmented by work place visits or job placements these provided opportunities for the trainees to observe the kinds of activities they may undertake in the future and what life was like in an authentic workplace. There was little didactic teaching within the accredited vocational courses as the courses are designed to be as 'hands on' as possible and discussion based. The site visits provided

opportunities for observing the use of the skills they were learning enabling a clearer understanding of the connection between theory and practice. These workplace observations grounded classroom discussion.

Collectively, the learning experiences — gaining knowledge of self, learning a set of vocational skills, contributing to the knowledge of the group, gaining an accredited certificate of training each contributed to the development of work readiness, an empowering process.

> They encourage people to take a broader perspective of themselves and on the job industry and move their mindset away from the mindset of the northern suburbs (Northern Futures Participant).

Catalyst for change

> We need to make sure that if somebody completes our courses they not only have jobs to go to but the workplace will be receptive and accommodating. We train the industry partners in the Bridges Out of Poverty approach. Once they understand that framework they are happy to take our graduates on board. Our partners agree that if someone successfully completes a Northern Futures training program there will be a job at the end. Once we make that connection, it is just moving forward. (Work & Learning Advisor)

In addition to the Bridges Out of Poverty approach permeating the practice of Northern Futures Staff and TAFE Trainers, industry partners were invited from time to time to attend Bridges Out of Poverty Workshops. These two-day programs were delivered by a trainer accredited by the Bridges Out of Poverty Consortium. These programs were also open to staff from other community organisations and intended to create a local climate of awareness of the approach.

> Through the agencies promotion of the Bridges Out of Poverty approach to the systems and organisations encountered by the unemployed there is a change in the way Northern Futures participants are received. At the same time, Northern Futures provides the resources the jobseekers need to arrive at a point where they can change something. Northern Futures a catalyst for change. (Employer Partner)

The primary objective of these workshops was to create an understanding of the difficulties encountered by this group of job seekers in obtaining sustainable employment and to develop partners prepared and willing to work in an encouraging and developmental manner with Northern Futures job seekers. Regular meetings between Work and Learning Advisors and participants and workplace supervisors take place. Some workplaces also provide an opportunity for the participants to meet together for mutual support. The aim is to deal with challenges as they arise before they become insurmountable.

> Even now I'm at work they've (Work and Learning Advisors) introduced us to other people that are going through the same thing, even though we might be doing different courses and being at different stages in our traineeships. It's kind of unconsciously brought together in our own little support network (Northern Futures Participant).

The majority of Northern Futures jobseekers entered the workplace via a traineeship after completing training at Northern Futures. Government subsidised traineeships are designed to provide a supported entry to the world of work. Employers who participate in a traineeship program are expected to provide training in their respective workplaces. Whilst Northern Futures employer partners provide ongoing training for their trainees this is not always the case.

Case Study

An example of Northern Futures as a catalyst for change was demonstrated through the relationship with a significant employer organisation. The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) headquarters in Geelong has been working with Northern Futures since 2009 and has developed a successful traineeship program. The program had been running for several years prior to forming a partnership with Northern Futures. In its first inception, the TAC Traineeship program, like many others, saw the employment of trainees as a way of meeting staff shortages at little or no cost to the organisation. Subsequently the focus was on assigning the trainee routine tasks regardless of their training potential. Trainees were dispersed throughout the organisation, viewed as temporary entry level workers and responsible to a specific area of work and manager.

The establishment of the Northern Futures Partnership led to the creation of a centralised structure with a designated staff member responsible for coordinating the training experiences of all trainees.

> Key to the success of our program was a focus on preparation of the staff that will work with the trainees. It is important they understand the need for trainees to feel welcomed and supported and are able to provide genuine training to get the best possible outcome from each rotation. (Employer Partner)

Since 2009, fifty-eight Northern Futures graduate have undertaken traineeships with the TAC. Thirty-three of these have gone on to continuing employment with the TAC, twenty have found continuing employment in organisations outside the TAC and two have gone on to further study.

Table 3: Destination of TAC trainees upon completion of their traineeship

Employed by the TAC	33
Employed outside the TAC	20
Gone on to further study	2
Unknown	3
Total trainees	**58**

> The requirements on teams that included trainees was quite onerous but was embraced across the TAC because staff enjoyed the privilege of helping a disadvantaged person grow in confidence and skills, then seeing them go on to build a career. Staff have developed a strong commitment and sense of ownership of the program.
> Northern Futures looks out for people, young, middle aged, trying to get into the workforce. They guide and support them into preparation for the workplace and they build the workplace's ability to deal with the person and their baggage. (Employer Partner)

Discussion

This study found the quality of the case management received, the type of education experienced and the receptivity of the work place all contributed to the transformational outcome experienced by the participants. The advocacy by Northern Futures of the Bridges Out of Poverty approach changed attitudes and practices of those who interacted with the participants.

Case management

Work and Learning Advisors and the TAFE Trainers embraced the "Bridges Out of Poverty approach and its influence was apparent in the case management and training practices adopted by these staff.

Educational experience

Whilst adult learning and experiential learning are not specifically mentioned by the trainers during the interviews, the trainees are engaged in experiential learning through the incorporation of their own experiences into class discussion and their work place visits.

The delivery of the courses within the community centre; by trainers from the Gordon TAFE; and including programed visits to local work sites are significant to the program's success. The trainees are engaged in active learning, given opportunities to construct new and personal understandings on their circumstances, of the social factors involved in unemployment and poverty and the world of work. These are all the elements of a constructivist and emancipatory approach to learning. Constructivism and emancipatory learning embrace a family of theories that all have in common the centrality of the learner's activity in creating meaning (Freire, 1972; Biggs, 1996; Crotty, 1998;). The centrality of group discussion and sense making is key to the Northern Futures educational experience.

Workplace climate

Finding your place in the workplace can be daunting for any new worker but for those with multiple barriers to employment it is especially difficult. The continuity of case management

across engagement, training and employment entry provided a supported and successful transition.

> The shock of actually starting work and being surrounded by people they perceived to be smarter than them was, in some cases, overwhelming. The simple act of including them in informal conversations and team banter went a long way to building the rapport necessary for trainees to relax enough to embrace their new tasks without being overwhelmed by anxiety and self-doubt. (Employer Partner)

The experience of Northern Futures in placing clients into traineeships has demonstrated that this is a valuable pathway into sustainable employment for the long term unemployed. The success that Northern Future's jobseekers experience is dependent on the quality of the traineeship program in any given workplace.

Conclusion

In summary, this study found continuity of effective case management across training and work experience; training targeted to meet the needs of local industries achieved sustainable employment outcomes. Educational provision that embraced a constructivist approach to program development enabled jobseekers to become capable, socially aware and productive workers and citizens. Preparation of the work place and careful selection of staff to mentor and support trainees are essential to successfully integrating new workers into the business, making a transition from trainee to productive worker possible.

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Breaking Through Barriers to Assist Young People who are Blind or have Low vision

to Transition to Adulthood and Prepare for Work

Paper presented at the National Employment Solutions Conference 2017

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Breaking Through Barriers to Assist Young People who are Blind or have Low vision to Transition to Adulthood and Prepare for Work

Abstract

Job seekers who are blind or have low vision are four times more likely to be unemployed compared to the general population (Vision Australia, 2012). To support young people who are blind or who have low vision and are transitioning from secondary education into employment, Vision Australia implemented a Pre-Employment Program (PEP) in February 2017. This offering of PEP was designed to accelerate personal development from adolescence to young adulthood and improve employment prospects of recent high school graduates in Queensland and Northern New South Wales, Australia. The original program was developed by Dr. Karen Wolffe (2011) to address barriers to employment, improve emotional resilience, build job skills and develop soft skills.

This paper discusses an evaluation of the program using Kirkpatrick's model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2007). The evaluation covers how PEP was contextualised for this demographic as well as the participant and organisational outcomes achieved. This includes a brief outline of the technology used to connect with participants located in regional and remote areas of Australia. Feedback from presenters, participants and stakeholders commended PEP for improving participants' hard skills, such as job search, job retention and career planning skills, as well as soft skills, including their communication and interpersonal skills. All participants achieved goals they set during the program. Micro-case studies and examples of these outcomes are presented.

Key Words: blind, low vision, job seekers, employment, transition.

Introduction

Vision Australia's series of Pre-Employment Programs (PEP) aims to improve employment prospects of people who are blind or who have low vision by addressing barriers to employment, improving emotional resilience, building employment skills and developing soft skills. The Pre-Employment Program is a structured learning package designed by Dr Karen Wolffe (2011) to address the employability needs of people with vision impairments. Training modules focus on self-awareness, self-assessment of assistive technology, communication skills, career resources, disability disclosure and labour market realities.

In early 2017, Vision Australia tailored the program to cater to young adults aged 17 to 25 years across Queensland and Northern New South Wales. PEP included more than 15 modules and was run full-time across four weeks, between 20 February and 17 March 2017.

This offering of PEP was evaluated using Kirkpatrick's Training Evaluation Model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2007). Kirkpatrick's model identifies four principles for training effectiveness. The three addressed by this paper are participant Reaction to training, participant learning and organisational results. The first principle, reaction, measures the degree to which the training is seen by participants as favourable, engaging and relevant to their jobs, in this case, job seeking. The second principle, learning, measures the extent to which participants have acquired intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment based on their participation in the training. Lastly, the results principle traditionally assumes training participants are employees and thus focuses on outcomes like improved quality and efficiency, and higher morale (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2007). For this training offering, however, participants were clients and therefore outcomes across the other three principles were not folded back into the organisation. As such, the authors have interpreted results for the organisation in terms of resource and technology learnings, which can be applied to future projects, and approaches, which had a positive impact on organisational culture.

Data Collection Methods

Survey of and Interviews with Key Stakeholders. Throughout the four weeks of the Pre-Employment Program (PEP), email feedback was obtained from 16 guest speakers, within one week of their presentation. They were asked for their reflections on the most personally rewarding aspects of their participation and any areas of discomfort they encountered. Further to this, at conclusion of the program, the four staff members who delivered PEP provided feedback, via face to face report, on their experiences. Due to their ongoing involvement, these staff members were able to follow the program closely, monitoring participants' development from inception to completion.

Online Participant Survey. An online post-participation survey was sent to participants one week after conclusion of PEP. Of the 14 individuals who completed PEP, five participants completed the survey. The survey asked participants to provide a rating on a three-point scale; excellent, average or needs improvement. When asked to rate PEP overall, including content, activities and presenters, 100% of respondents selected excellent. Respondents also provided ratings for content (excellent = 80%, average = 20%), activities (excellent = 100%), lead trainers (excellent = 100%), individual guest speakers and panellists

(excellent = 80%, average = 20%), schedule (excellent = 80%, average = 20%), accessibility of materials (excellent = 100%), availability of adaptive technology (excellent = 100%), and relevance (excellent = 100%). It also considered the most and least important components of the course for participants, what they learnt, what they would change, and if they would recommend the course to other Vision Australia clients (yes = 100%).

Participant Outcome Statements and Individualised Goal Attainment. Upon completion of PEP, all participants provided a verbal statement of the outcomes they had gained from participating. They were also engaged in a goal development process throughout PEP, and at its conclusion, finalised the goals they had attained as a result of their program participation.

Participant Post-Program Follow Up. One month post-PEP, emails were sent to all participants providing connections to other supports and resources and checking on their progress towards their employment goals. Participants were also contacted by phone, where possible.

Stakeholder Reactions

A review of stakeholder and participant reactions across the various data collection methods, revealed that PEP improved skills for job searching and realistic career planning. In post-participation surveys, participants stated that PEP allowed them to learn more about their work and career options, and to pick up strategies for securing jobs that interested them. Activities participants found most beneficial included role plays, mock interviews and feedback on their interview technique, as well as learning about SMARTA goals. Learning how to search for their desired jobs, write cover letters, build a resume, and assemble a portfolio of other helpful resources, were further strategies frequently mentioned as valuable.

Participant Learnings

The activities of PEP were related to gains for participants in terms of knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence and commitment, both within and adjacent to the employment space. While PEP was associated with embracing stepping stones to employment and participating in job activities, it also correlated with wider skills such as assisting adolescents to transition to adulthood, and enabling young people to build social connections.

Embracing Stepping Stones to Employment. At commencement of PEP, a small number of participants had limited experience of paid and volunteer employment but the majority of participants had no exposure to the workplace. As they were at the beginning of their job preparation, job seeking and work experience journeys, participants required familiarisation with the range of employment stepping stones available to them. Employment

stepping stones covered during PEP included compensatory skills training, tertiary education and volunteering.

Volunteering. PEP increased access to work experience and volunteer opportunities. By the conclusion of the program, five participants were either already involved or had a clear plan to become involved in volunteering. Volunteering activities undertaken included sitting on a panel as a client representative to recruit for a paediatric therapist position at a not for profit organisation; applying for volunteer positions in the helping professions; negotiating opportunities with providers to trial volunteer roles in the child care sector; and providing event support at local churches. These and ensuing volunteering activities are likely to generate and foster employability skills, and increase appeal and access to potential employers (Walsh and Black, 2015).

Studying. As a result of their PEP participation, four participants had new or renewed commitments to tertiary education. One participant, commencing her second year of a four-year university degree, explained that her PEP participation reframed the purpose of her studies in a way she found revitalizing. Another participant expanded the scope of his study plans to embrace a dual interest in the professional therapies and business. A third participant acknowledged that his intention to enter the field of digital media would only be realised if he attained a tertiary qualification, and signed up for a tertiary course in this field. A fourth participant's hitherto vague and varied interests resolved into a clear and actionable plan to enrol in a course at a specific university and become a Dietician. These participants, who PEP encouraged to begin or continue post-school study, are likely to enjoy improved job prospects with a probability of higher pay (Graduate Careers Australia, 2015; NCVER, 2014).

Working. A participant who actively sought volunteer and ad hoc paid jobs during high school used his PEP journey to clarify that he was ready to seek a full-time paid position. He achieved this goal in his career of choice within a month of completing PEP. In this way, exploring stepping stones to employment proved important to participants at all stages of employability, assisting them to consider the various options available to them and giving them dedicated space and supports to make new choices.

Transitioning From Adolescence to Young Adulthood. In addition to promoting employability and employment outcomes, PEP was concerned with fostering other affirmative outcomes associated with the target group's life stage. People who are blind or who have low vision and aged between 18 and 25 have historically been a challenging segment to engage in rehabilitation services. This may be partially due to this demographic occupying the gap between programs and policies designed to meet the needs of children

with vision impairments and those tailored towards adults with vision impairments (Groce, 2004). Targeting communication and engagement efforts can also be an uncertain business, as agency shifts from the parent to the young adult. Vision Australia trialled PEP as a transition program to accelerate the maturation of young people in assuming responsibility for self-advocacy and leveraging resources to achieve their goals.

The PEP model was ideal for this purpose primarily due to the concentrated group experience it provides. Group-based programs can assist those with vision impairments to develop skills and strategies to achieve independence (Sussman-Skalka, 2003), and foster self-efficacy (Brody et al., 1999). In addition to validating current coping methods (Rees, Saw, Lamoureux & Keeffe, 2007), group programs promote learning, reinforce activity levels and assist individuals to maintain a positive life outlook (Van Zandt, Van Zandt & Wang, 1994).

Prior to PEP, three participants were already engaged with Vision Australia services as adults. These participants interacted with the PEP recruitment process directly. In all other cases, participants' involvement in PEP was brokered by their parent, who had been the primary contact during their receipt of paediatric services. By the conclusion of PEP all participants were communicating directly and negotiating services independently. This was evident in the changeover of contact details on client records from the parent's details to the young adult's details.

Participants' outcome statements also reflected the shift. One participant described her journey towards autonomy: "When my mum enrolled me I was doubtful I'd learn anything, but it's been one of the best decisions I've made. On the first day, the meet and greet changed my perception to wanting to learn. I was grateful to meet other vision impaired people. My accident has in the past been a barrier to me relating to others, but here I have a sense of connection. I didn't have any prior knowledge about mock interviews and feedback. I didn't know how best to get an interview or much about goal setting. PEP has been character building. I want to be a writer and I've decided I'm going to research ideas and write a blog." This statement also demonstrates the wide-ranging benefits of PEP additional to promoting employment-related outcomes.

Developing Compensatory Skills. PEP increased engagement in Vision Australia services, leading to further opportunities to develop compensatory skills and confidence. Similarly to other group programs, PEP fostered an atmosphere conducive to trying new things (Green & Miyahara, 2007), encouraged participants to identify areas for personal and professional development, and motivated participants to pursue relevant rehabilitation

services (Horowitz, Leonard & Reinhardt, 2000). By the end of PEP, the majority of participants had used the program to move from passive engagement, where they deferred to their parents to access services on their behalf, to active engagement where they directly identified and committed to services that met their needs.

Participants articulated from PEP to a variety of Vision Australia services designed to support their goals across education, employment, independence and social inclusion. Examples of this include participants forming a self-organising teleconference group, meeting monthly on the weekend, and joining an e-mailing list to receive information about future events serving this dual O&M and social focus. Two participants signed up with Vision Australia's Employment Services, commencing fortnightly job seeking and job preparation sessions with an Employment Consultant. Three participants started with self-paced training in the use of access technology software such as screen readers and screen magnification. All of these areas of training are capacity building in ways that enhance employability.

Building Social Connections. During the recruitment phase of PEP, several participants or their parental representatives identified making friends as a major goal for participation. While socialising may appear a less weighty goal than preparing for work or gaining employment, studies show a strong relationship between perceived social support and well-being for people with vision impairments. Perceived social support is associated with increased satisfaction with life, and increased physical, psychological, economic and social well-being (Guerette & Smedema, 2011). PEP functioned as a peer support group, enabling participants to share experiences and build friendships (Horowitz, Leonard & Reinhardt, 2000), and participants opted to stay in touch via various communication modalities. Therefore, cumulative social and related benefits were achieved.

Absorbing Advice from Mentors and Potential Employers. Alongside their personal network, participants developed their professional networks as they met and shared conversations with a range of guest speakers. Guest speakers included professionals, from various fields, who have lived experience of vision impairment and were able to both normalise the challenges of working with vision impairment and model strategies to overcome these challenges (Cimarolli, Sussman-Skalka & Goodman, 2004). Exemplary employers also provided insights into how to navigate recruitment processes and impress as a candidate. Mentors and prospective employers invited participants to connect via professional networks, such as LinkedIn.

One PEP participant articulated the value she gained from spending time with peers and mentors: "I was hesitant about doing PEP. I had a heavy start to the year. But I'm so glad to have done it. For me it's been about making new friends and new contacts. Having new opportunities to socialise with other people who are a similar age and have similar goals has helped me to focus on how I move forward with my psychology studies into a career in paediatric counselling. One of my PEP highlights was hearing from guest speakers, other people who have a vision impairment, about their experiences studying and working as psychologists."

Organisational Results

In addition to positive individual client outcomes, PEP contributed to organisational outcomes in the form of insights and resources. This was achieved by piloting approaches novel to the organisation, documenting process and yielding practical and cultural learnings. While there are pros and cons associated with all possible approaches, some clear recommendations have emerged.

PEP in its original form is designed for delivery across three weeks face-to-face. This offering of PEP was extended to four weeks and delivered in a blended video conference and face-to-face mode. These adjustments allowed regional and remote participants to attend and provided a buffer of time to meet the needs of the large number of participants recruited across the different modes. The use of video conferencing resulted in greater diversity within the group, and allowed those participating via distance education to collaborate and network with others throughout training.

There is limited research on delivering face-to-face training concurrently with video conferencing. One study that has attempted a similar mode of delivery did not run the face-to-face and video conferencing groups simultaneously, and co-located distance participants (Locatis et al., 2006). However, the study's outcomes in relation to the use of video conferencing technology were similar to those achieved through PEP. Specifically, participants via distance found the technology non-obstructive, and the style and interactivity of the facilitator more important than the delivery method. The benefits discussed in the previous section regarding participants' learnings demonstrates that the blended mode was well-received by participants from both the face-to-face and video conference groups. It is recommended that pure video conference programs and those employing a blended mode are implemented widely across services but particularly with this demographic to attain similar participation levels and participant outcomes.

PEP involved partnerships with both internal and external stakeholders to ensure the program ran smoothly and delivered quality outcomes to participants. Internal collaborations included staff from Vision Australia's people and Culture department delivering sessions on the DISC behavioural profile, the communications Advisor interviewing PEP staff and participants for short internal podcasts, Workplace Health and Safety staff delivering a session on safe work practices on-site and when working from home, Orientation and Mobility Specialists providing individual and group training, Information systems Group (ISG) providing ad hoc video conferencing support, and the chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Board Members supporting mock interviews with expert feedback. Outcomes of these collaborations included increasing knowledge of and direct participation in Vision Australia's service to clients across back office departments, enabling support function expertise to directly benefit clients, increasing cooperation with and respect for colleagues and therefore minimising silo-effects, and adding to a rich and varied program experience for all stakeholders.

External stakeholders included potential employers as well as clients and other members of the blindness community. These stakeholders were engaged for individual presentations, interviews and panel discussions. Benefits associated with involving these stakeholders included insights harvested for participants, high levels of satisfaction for presenters, and relationship building between Vision Australia and the organisations represented by presenters. As such, it is recommended that the involvement of back office teams, leadership and external stakeholders be a key consideration when designing similar programs.

Conclusion

Overall, feedback from presenters, participants and stakeholders commended PEP for improving participants' hard and soft skills, and participants achieved the goals they set for their participation in the program. The organisation effectively trialled blended delivery and built internal and external partnerships to continue to deliver quality service outcomes towards a wider social impact.

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Newtown Cooperative Work Space

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Newtown Cooperative Workspace

ABSTRACT: *The Newtown Precinct Business Association delivers services for the Inner West Council under its Urban Centres Program. Aim of the NPBA is to assist business start-ups and home based businesses moving to the next level of commercialisation. In the Inner West of Sydney many young people are seeking to work for themselves and progress their skills acquired through tertiary education. The NPBA, facilitated by Council, has taken the bold step of leasing a property in King Street Newtown for ten years at a cost of $225K per annum. The Cooperative work space is being set up on solid best practice business principles which will enable it to be self-sufficient. Affordable work space will be provided for under $100 per week along with free mentoring and development workshops. Local employers (over 800) will be available to discuss employment opportunities for those who decide they would rather work with an organisation than start their own business or progress their existing home based business. The initiative targets creative industries but is not limited to just those industries. An in house studio will provide opportunities to develop marketing content for social media and web pages. The facility promises to provide a constant flow of employment opportunities for people seeking employment in the creative industries. There is also the opportunity to trial working together to see if it works as good rapport is essential for the success of small businesses. The centre will also increase the capacity of existing businesses which in turn will provide further employment opportunities.*
Keywords: Newtown, Cooperative, Inner West, small business, Urban Centres Program

Introduction

This paper looks at employment generation from the perspective of a local government based economic development practitioner. Economic development is a relatively new discipline which first emerged in the 1960's. The number one target at this time was business attraction; bringing employment opportunities to an area in the form of large corporations. It was colloquially referred to as "chasing smokestacks". By the 1980's closer examination of the data around employment generation evidenced that more jobs were created by small business than the top Fortune 500 companies. In fact, 85% of new jobs created were attributed to small business either through expansion or new start-ups. Small business development took over

from business attraction as the new economic development driver and in recent times this has been refined even further to a concentration on the creative and knowledge industries. The business incubator or accelerator is not a new concept and has been supported by industry and all levels of government as an effective small business development tool. The Newtown Cooperative Workspace provides a very interesting variation on an old theme.

The Environment

The Inner West Council is a recent amalgamation (May 2016) of the former local government areas of Ashfield, Leichhardt and Marrickville. It covers 35 square kilometres, has a population of just over 192,000 and sits right on the doorstep of the City of Sydney local government area. The former Marrickville Council set up a special rate in a number of its commercial business districts, one of which was Newtown/Enmore, with the aim of using the funds raised to market and promote the businesses in the respective areas. Known as the Urban Centres Program, the initiative utilised the services of a service provider to deliver against an agreed strategy from which devolved an agreed set of activities with measurable outcomes. The service provide for Newtown/Enmore is the Newtown Precinct Business Association (NPBA), an entity which formed over ten years ago to fill the void left by the defunct Newtown Chamber of Commerce. Complicating the program slightly for Newtown is the fact it is split down the middle by King Street with half being in the Inner West LGA and half being in City of Sydney LGA. Until recently City of Sydney matched the UCP funding under a Memorandum of Understanding between the two councils. Interestingly the employment generation project being discussed in this paper physically sits in City of Sydney but is an Inner West Council initiative.

Newtown is considered by most Sydneyites to be the epicentre for everything "hip and trendy". It has in abundance all of the necessary ingredients for creative industries to flourish; talented people, excellent public transport, latest technology and a tolerant and inclusive community.

The Project

The concept of the Newtown Cooperative Workspace was first raised at an NPBA strategic planning day in 2016. The committee members identified a need for affordable office space with support services to cater for the growing demand by local emerging businesses and home based businesses seeking to move to the next level of commercialisation. The NPBA is fortunate in that it has a very capable and forward thinking coordinator who facilitated the strategic planning sessions along with council's economic development unit. The sessions indicated that the start-up businesses and other emerging businesses had the capability to develop business ideas but not the resources to progress to actually setting up a commercial enterprise.

Having canvassed very thoroughly the needs of the businesses those needs were then matched to the ability to pay to develop a model for a cooperative work space.

The final result is the Newtown Cooperative Workspace which, when fully occupied, will not only be self-sustaining but will generate a small surplus for reinvestment into ancillary projects. The facility will provide office accommodation from as little as $95 per week, free workshops, Internet/Wi-Fi, access to a studio to develop marketing/promotional videos and other media, and mentoring services. It will also deal cooperatively with other requirements such as printing and insurances.

Employment Generation

The Cooperative is looking at initiatives such as JobGetter to spread the word and it also has in place extensive data bases of local businesses, highly effective websites and social media and very organic network opportunities.

It is anticipated that employment will be created through the facilitation of start-up businesses, placing people who originally thought about starting a business into existing businesses and linking employment enquiry to prospective employers.

Key Success Factors

* It is demand driven, responding to measurable identified needs

* The Cooperative is being run by local businesses for the benefit of local business.

* Although it is a not for profit it is run on commercial business principles and does not rely on subsidises, grant funding or sponsorship.

* Council does not fund the Cooperative, it pays a fee under a service agreement and the Cooperative is just one of the deliverables under that agreement.

* Set-up funding is being provided from UCP reserves for the Newtown precinct which are to be paid back into the reserve once the centre is up and running

* The NPBA has a ten year lease for which it is responsible and its committee members have provided the bank guarantee.

Rethinking Advocacy on Ageing and Work

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ABSTRACT: *Concerns about increasing welfare costs and shortfalls of labour supply have brought with them calls to prolong working lives. However, current Australian public policy is inadequate if the nation wishes to make the best use of its ageing workforce. Present approaches to both public policy and advocacy have the potential to be harmful in terms of their response to age barriers in society. A piecemeal set of measures lacking legitimacy have emerged, with objectives that lack a road-map for how they will be achieved. Present policy efforts to prolong working lives may also stigmatise those who retire from the paid workforce as no longer pulling their weight in a society where being retired is increasingly viewed as a kind of unemployment. This chapter challenges the basis of efforts to tackle issues of ageing and work, offering a set of principles that aim to overcome contradictions and disjunctions present in current advocacy.*

Keywords: *Older workers, age discrimination, advocacy, employment policy*

Introduction

Among the developed and, increasingly the developing nations, population ageing has led to concerns about the sustainability of social welfare systems and future labour supply. According to the United Nations population ageing 'is poised to become one of the most significant social transformations of the twenty-first century' (United Nations, 2015, p. 1). The Australian Treasury predicts that Australia will experience a substantial change in the composition of its population by 2054-2055 resulting in a greater proportion of the population aged over 65, a fall in rates of labour force participation and a fall in the number of people aged 15-to-64 for every person aged 65-and-over (Department of Treasury, 2015). However, it should be noted that while much Australian commentary regarding population ageing echoes that of other advanced economies our demographics are different, largely due to high immigration rates of young adults (McDonald, 2016). The issue certainly requires consideration and planning but there is no justification for any kind of state of emergency and ever longer working may not be an inevitability.

The Productivity Commission (2013) suggests that, as a consequence of this demographic shift, there may be a shortfall of workers, leading to falling productivity and reduced economic growth, and that, as a result, the sustainability of the social security system may be threatened. The emphasis of Australian government policy has been on pushing out the age of retirement. Longer working lives are considered to benefit both society and individuals

with, for instance, research purporting to demonstrate a relationship between employment at older ages and a worker's well-being (Staudinger et al, 2016). In recent years governments have implemented a raft of reforms aimed at encouraging people to retire later and employers to hire older workers. Meanwhile, advocacy groups have enthusiastically promoted the working longer agenda.

This chapter begins by considering Australian older workers' changing place in the labour market and how they compare with their counterparts in other OECD countries. The emergence of public policy aimed at prolonging working lives is also described. Following this, the present advocacy approach on age and work is described and critiqued before a set of principles for guiding advocacy is proposed.

Changing patterns of work and retirement

Older workers' status has undergone a rapid transformation. As can be seen in Table 1, which presents a scorecard for Australian older workers' participation in the labour market prepared by the OECD, Australia's employment rate for those aged 55-64 compares favourably with the OECD average. This jumped markedly between 2005 and 2015 from 54 per cent to 62 per cent. Likewise, the employment rate for the 65-69 age group compares favourably with the OECD average. Elsewhere in the scorecard, Australian older workers' retention and hiring rates also exceed the OECD average and Australia's effective exit age - at 65.6 for men and 63.4 for women - exceeds the OECD average.

In terms of their unemployment rate and incidence of long-term unemployment Australian older workers also compare favourably with their OECD counterparts. However, they are somewhat more likely to describe themselves as unemployed and marginally attached workers.

In recent years, notwithstanding this upward trajectory in terms of employment participation, Australian governments have continued to emphasise the challenge of low labour force participation among older people, with the Intergenerational Report of 2010 advocating increasing their participation rate from 58.9 per cent in 2008 to 67 per cent by 2049-50 (Department of Treasury, 2010).

Table 1 Older workers scoreboard, 2005, 2007 and 2015, Australia, EU and OECD

	Australia			OECD		
	2005	2007	2015	2005	2007	2015
Employment						
-- Employment rate, 55-64 (% of the age group)	53.5	56.5	62.1	51.7	53.5	58.1
of which 55-59	62.8	66.4	70.3	61.8	63.2	67.6
60-64	41.3	44.8	53.0	39.1	41.5	47.5
-- Gender gap in employment, 55-64 (ratio women/men)	0.68	0.72	0.80	0.67	0.68	0.75
-- Employment rate, 65-69 (% of the age group)	16.9	20.2	25.1	19.8	20.9	24.9
Job quality						
-- Incidence of part-time work, 55-64 (% of total employment)	24.2	24.3	24.8	17.4	17.7	17.7
-- Incidence of temporary work[a], 55-64 (% of employees)	4.6	6.1	5.1	8.8	9.0	8.0
-- Incidence of self-employment, 55-64 (% of total employment)	19.8	18.7	15.4	38.8	37.4	33.3
-- Full-time[b, c] earnings, 55-64 relative to 25-54 (ratio)	0.98	0.97	1.23	1.09	1.10	1.11
Dynamics						
-- Retention rate[g], after 60 (% of employees t-5)	47.3	49.4	55.3	38.9	44.4	48.6
-- Hiring rate[d], 55-64 (% of employees)	10.6	11.5	9.2	8.7	9.1	8.8
-- Effective labour force exit age[e] (years) Men	63.7	64.3	65.6	63.5	63.8	64.7
Women	61.5	62.1	63.4	62.0	62.4	63.3
Unemployment						
-- Unemployment rate, 55-64 (% of the labour force)	3.4	2.7	4.3	4.6	4.0	4.9
-- Incidence of long-term[f] unemployment, 55-64 (% of total unemployment)	39.3	30.7	35.7	44.9	43.9	46.8
-- Unemployed and marginally attached workers[g], 55-64 (% of the age group)	1.9	6.0	5.5	3.4	3.1	3.9
Employability						
-- Share of 55-64 with tertiary education (% of the age group)	23.8	26.6	33.9	19.7	20.4	26.0
-- Participation in training[i], 55-64						
Absolute (% of all employed in the age group)	-	-	50.5	-	-	41.2
Relative to employed persons aged 25-54 (ratio)	-	-	0.83	-	-	0.78

a) Years 2004, 2007 and 2013; b) Mean gross weekly earnings. Year 2015 refers to 2014; c) The EU22 average comprises 12 EU countries for 2005 and 15 countries for years 2007 and 2015. The OECD average comprises 24 countries for 2005 and 27 countries for years 2007 and 2015; d) Employees aged 55-64 with job tenure of less than one year as a percentage of total employees. Years 2004, 2007 and 2014; e) Effective exit age over the five-year periods 2000-05, 2002-07 and 2010-15. The effective exit age (also called the effective age of retirement) is calculated as a weighted average of the exit ages of each five-year age cohort, starting with the cohort aged 40-44 at the first date, using absolute changes in the labour force participation rate of each cohort as weights; f) Unemployed for more than one year; g) Persons neither employed, nor actively looking for work, but willing to work and available for taking a job during the survey reference week. No data available for 2005. Year 2015 refers to 2014.

Source: OECD estimations from the OECD Employment Database, the OECD Earnings Distribution Database, the OECD Education Database and the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).

Australian public policy towards older workers is in line with that of other industrialised nations (Vargas, et al, 2013). Over the last decade a raft of supply and demand side measures have been implemented aimed at boosting older workers' labour force participation. Recently, there has been a particular focus on age discrimination in the labour market. The age at which the Age Pension can be accessed has been increased and superannuation preservation ages have also been increased. Recent Coalition public policy aimed at overcoming age barriers include the Restart wage subsidy scheme which is an attempt to incentivise employers to recruit older workers. This scheme, as with Labor's wage subsidy scheme, the Jobs Bonus, which it replaced, has had minimal success. The Corporate Champions scheme, also implemented by the previous Labor administration, was also focused on labour demand, being aimed at implementing and disseminating good practice in the employment of older workers (Taylor, Earl and McLoughlin, 2016).

Present conceptions of the role of older labour are typified by the *Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability* (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016) which focused on investigating the nature and extent of age discrimination affecting those aged over 50, and putting forward recommendations for how to respond. Of significance, the inquiry concluded that age discrimination was 'ongoing and a common occurrence in the Australian workforce' (p. 60), an assertion that is challenged by data analysis reported later in this chapter.

The limited nature of the terms of reference of this inquiry meant that broader questions concerning the relationship between age and work were not addressed. Notable was the inquiry's exclusion of much of the workforce - those aged under 50. Thus, the terms of the debate have been narrowly constructed, to the detriment of public debate and policy. Both older and younger workers experience discrimination of different kinds, which have different impacts on their labour market experiences. While the old have been considered as disadvantaged, the young unemployed have sometimes been stigmatised as being work-shy. For instance, the Abbott-Turnbull Government's first budget proposed a six-month waiting period for the dole to apply to all job seekers aged under 30 under its Stronger Participation Incentives for Job Seekers Under 30 measure (Hockey, 2014).

Noting the presence of ageism in public policy is important given policymakers' present interest in the welfare of older workers. To date, for instance, the activities of the recently established position of Age Discrimination Commissioner have almost exclusively focused on issues of older workers' employment. Thus, present policy and advocacy appear to be firmly embedded in societal constructions regarding age and ageing and, somewhat ironically, need

to become more 'age aware' in order to be effective. The terms 'ageism' and 'age discrimination' have been co-opted by older people's advocacy organisations and public policymakers as only applying to 'older people' or 'mature age', to use the popular and ageist Australian vernacular, but there is no reason why they should not apply to people of any age.

Without consideration of issues of age and work from a lifecourse perspective - for instance, to consider youth as a life stage that is dense in terms of the occurrence and frequency of life events and an impressionable period for the formation of beliefs and orientations (Alwin, 2012) - in the age debate, it is impossible to properly address issues of older workers' employment. This theme is developed in the chapter.

A critique of present older worker advocacy

Present age advocacy faces major problems. First, tackling issues of older workers' employment starts with a definitional problem. There is a lack of clarity about what the age threshold is for becoming an 'older worker', rendering it practically useless as a platform on which to build public policy. A range of ages has been offered between 40 and 64 (Australian Institute of Management, 2013). Additionally, there is the problem of how to manage the intersection of age with other characteristics such as gender or occupational group (Australian Computer Society/Deloitte Access Economics, 2016; Duncan and Loretto, 2004). Matters are further complicated by there being different conceptualisations of ageing, with chronological age only one way of describing the process (Schalk et al, 2010). There is a need for an approach that does not assume all people in a given age category are alike, while recognising that to the extent they are, this categorical similarity or likeness is a social construct and not something inherent to an individual.

The intention here is not to propose a new definition of what is an older worker - a futile endeavour - but to question whether anything is to be gained by devising employment programs targeting particular age groups. Instead policy, while cognisant that one group might be more prone to certain forms of disadvantage than another, might nonetheless proceed on the basis that programs defined in terms of individual need, that are not age-based at all or at least not solely, may serve workers and society better. As noted by the OECD, schemes broadly targeted at older workers may be inefficient and displace other workers and moreover, due to older workers' diversity, risk being high cost blunt instruments with small net employment effects which may in fact reinforce negative attitudes among employers (OECD, 2006).

On top of public policies that segment young and old, proponents of segmenting the labour market according to the 'generation' of a worker have found a ready business audience.

However, research has failed to demonstrate the supposed attributes of different generations (Parry and Urwin, 2011) and notably, even where differences in certain workplace behaviours have been observed statistical effect sizes are small, meaning that employers need to be cautious in implementing strategies that emphasise the supposed unique values and characteristics of different generations rather than applying general strategies to all employees (Becton et al, 2014). Finally, it seems implausible that, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality and place of birth, people would demonstrate the same attitudes, values and preferences because they happen to have been born within a few years of each other. It is likely that within-group differences outweigh generational differences (Thomas et al, 2014).

Deploying ageism in order to counter ageism

In both the workplace and in public policy there is evidence of stereotypes about older and younger workers. Numerous studies have considered employer age stereotypes. For instance, a recent review (Posthuma and Campion, 2009) identified common stereotypes of older workers as being poor performers, change resistant, having less ability to learn, having a shorter tenure, being expensive to employ, and being more dependable. While concern has often been expressed about the influence of such stereotypes on employer behaviour little attention has been paid to the role they play when advocacy and public policy are being formulated. Both, it seems, are prone to draw on ageist stereotypes in their efforts counter ageism.

Ironically, advocates often apply pejorative stereotypes about younger workers in support of older workers. As part of the so-called business case for hiring older workers, employers are being advised to recognise their supposed 'loyalty', 'reliability' and 'experience'. Thus, according to the former Commissioner for Age and Disability Discrimination and Ambassador for Mature Age Employment: 'Mature workers are reliable, flexible and ready to contribute from day one. As well as bringing a lifetime of experience to your business, mature workers are also great mentors to other staff' (Ryan, 2016). However, deploying such age stereotypes may be doing more harm than good.

The research is equivocal: chronological age does not predict job performance, although there appear to be small yet positive statistical relationships between age and some job attributes (Ng and Feldman, 2008). Added to this, research indicates that there is often greater variation, in job performance terms, between people of the same age than people of different ages (Warr, 1993). That these findings point to the limited role age plays in the workplace suggests that a preferable starting point would be to assume that age and job performance demonstrate little or no practically useful relationship.
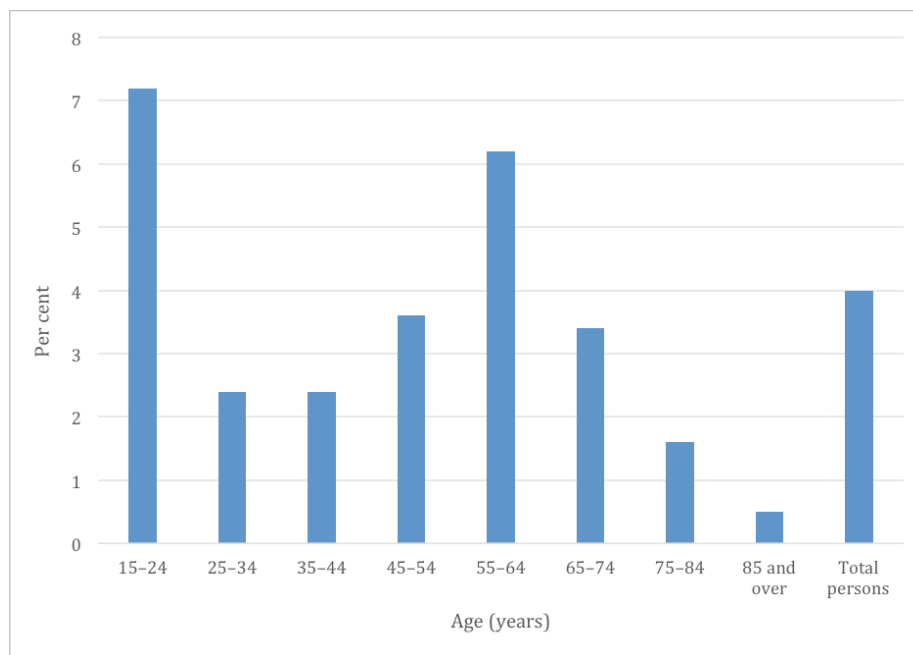
Moreover, older workers are being advocating for in terms of attributes that do not matter so much to employers. Research indicates that older workers are rated more highly on qualities considered less important by employers. It has been found that employers perceived the advantages of older workers in terms of their soft qualities (e.g. organisational commitment and reliability), whereas those of younger workers were primarily in terms of their hard qualities (e.g. willingness to learn new technology) (van Dalen et al, 2010). Importantly, hard qualities were given greater weight than soft qualities in productivity evaluations. This finding has important implications for efforts to overcome age discrimination, indicating that present advocacy, grounded in age stereotypes, may be entrenching labour market age barriers.

Furthermore, it is far from clear that age-based stereotypes are an important influence on employer behaviour. While there is a view that workplace policies are influenced by norms and representations of age and age stereotypes, an alternative perspective is that age is rarely considered by management, and while policies and programs may affect young and old differently these are largely what sociologists describe as 'unintended consequences' (Marshall and Taylor, 2005). Thus, an advocacy approach that focuses on tackling age stereotypes may be overstating their importance.

The extent of ageism may be exaggerated

Advocates might have a stronger case for focusing on measures aimed at tackling ageist behaviours it if they were to define the problem more broadly. Analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Social Survey 2014 carried out by the authors indicates that it is those aged 15-24 who are somewhat more likely to report experiences of age discrimination compared with those aged 55-64. However, as can be seen in Figure 1, among those aged 15-24 just over seven per cent reported an experience of age discrimination, compared with just over six per cent of those aged 55-64. People of other ages reported rather fewer experiences of age discrimination. Exaggerated claims for the prevalence of age discrimination may invite the risk that growing older is characterised in pejorative terms (Taylor and Earl, 2016) with the potential for adverse consequences for an individual's sense of identity and self-worth and societal perceptions of growing older.

Figure 1 Reported experiences of age discrimination by age group

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Social Survey 2014

Robots don't dream of retirement

Advocacy has been largely uncritical of recent public policy on age and work - accepting the present orthodoxy around the notion of working longer - and is based on a flawed premise that work is necessarily available and good for older people. It is contestable whether this is a realistic goal for all workers, raising the question as to what happens to those who, for whatever reason, are either unable or unwilling to remain in the paid labour force, for instance if they have caring responsibilities, cannot find work or are forced to exit due to a health condition. More generally, with the present debate framed as it is, those who retire from the paid workforce may be stigmatised as no longer pulling their weight in a society where this status is being recast as a kind of unemployment (Taylor and Earl, 2016).

The Australian labour market will undergo substantial changes as we are confronted by what has been called the fourth industrial revolution - driven by artificial intelligence and robots. A report by the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) (2015) found that around 40 per cent of current jobs in Australia are at high risk of automation in the next 15 years. This statistic highlights the significance of this issue for the future of the Australian economy and society. However, if older workers are considered, the impact is even more dramatic.

According to analysis carried out by the authors, 15 years from now, in 2031, of the roughly five million Australian workers currently aged between 35 and 50, 49 per cent will be in occupations highly likely to have been automated (Table 2). This means that, by 2031, up to two and a half million older workers may have been made redundant due to automation, potentially representing a major economic and social challenge.

Table 2 Workers by major Australia and New Zealand Classification of Occupations (ANZCO) category who will be between 50 and 65 in 2031 and the risk of their jobs being replaced by automation (Figures calculated by the author using ABS statistics on ANZSCO groups by age and CEDA estimates of likelihood of automation)

Major group (ANZSCO)	Category	Older workers ('000s)	Risk of automation	Jobs at risk
Managers	Non-routine cognitive	789.3	0.14	110,000
Professionals	Non-routine cognitive	1443.2	0.24	346,000
Technicians and Trades Workers	Routine manual	703.6	0.67	471,000
Community and Personal Service Workers	Non-routine manual	460.4	0.37	170,000
Clerical and Administrative Workers	Routine cognitive	737.0	0.74	545,000
Sales Workers	Routine cognitive	280.2	0.64	179,000
Machinery Operators and Drivers	Routine manual	364.6	0.89	324,000
Labourers	Routine manual	398.2	0.89	354,000
Total		5176.5	0.48	2,499,000

Towards a new advocacy on age and work

There are, therefore, important contradictions and disjunctions in terms of present advocacy on age and work, meaning that an alternative approach to tackling labour market age barriers is required. The principles of this new approach are now outlined.

A lifecourse perspective on age equality

Age discrimination needs to be considered in broader terms, as potentially being experienced across a working life. Thus, age discrimination encountered at an early age may potentially have adverse consequences for a person's career. Addressing this issue may also reduce the likelihood of ageist attitudes being internalised, and carried into adult life. In addition, a broader view of age equality would necessarily consider the issue of older people as potential perpetrators, not only victims, of ageism. Therefore, the promotion of generational solidarity as opposed to difference is warranted. Also, in an era when young people are being told not to expect jobs for life there is also a need to construct labour market support mechanisms and welfare systems that respond to this shift and not to continue to rely on an outmoded, male-breadwinner notion of the lifecourse.

Removing ageism from age advocacy

The argument that 'older is better' does not stand scrutiny. Replacing it with the more accurate 'age does not matter' has important implications for practice. Here, spurious and ageist arguments for the supposed greater abilities of older (or younger) workers are replaced by the specification that employment decisions based on age will inevitably be highly unreliable and result in poor management decision making.

Such logic may also be applied to that of age-based social policy such as employment schemes specifically devised for the over 50s or measures directly addressing the under 30s. Perversely, being singled out for particular attention may amplify societal views of older people as disadvantaged and younger people as lazy and, thus, further entrench pejorative views. Added to this is the unfounded notion that ageism is endemic in society. Such a perspective seems, curiously given the apparent intention of advocates to challenge age barriers, to consider growing older to be a uniformly negative experience, with implications for societal views of ageing and older people.

Further is the issue of pro-older worker arguments that emphasise attributes of older people that are least valued by employers. This suggests that the business case for promoting older labour is likely to be a weak one in the minds of employers.

A critical stance on working longer

Finally, we need to consider the universal efficacy of a pro-work approach. The premise that working longer is achievable for all, is universally beneficial and is necessarily desired by the majority of older people is questionable. Simplistic arguments for the 'right to work' may make older people's advocacy the unwitting bedfellow of a strong policy push to extend working lives in order to reduce welfare costs.

There is little consideration of what non-employment means in terms of advocacy frameworks that promote 'active', 'productive' or 'successful' ageing (Taylor and Earl, 2016). The availability and quality of paid work and how those not in work will build and maintain a sense of identity are issues of importance for ageing in Australia that have received little consideration. People are being asked to work for longer without a clear sense of what this means and whether this is a realistic proposition. There are almost no support structures for people considering their options.

The dignity of retirement for those in certain occupational groups for whom continued paid work is a near impossibility is also being overlooked. While the case for working longer has been strongly made, some form of retirement may be more acceptable than long-term unemployment. Replacing the identity derived from paid employment may be key for wellbeing.

That a productive ageing need not mean paid work and that retirement need not mean unproductivity is recognised by older people, but this reality has not been acknowledged in public policy which is still likely to be concerned with standard measures of 'dependency' that do not currently recognise such participation in their calculation. Policies aimed at enabling the participation, in its broadest sense, of older people may increase Australia's overall productive capacity and hence its GDP.

Conclusions

Population ageing has brought with it calls to prolong working lives. Apparent economic imperatives of responding to supposed looming social welfare and labour supply crises have resulted in an almost unanimous position that working later is a social and individual good. However, presently, Australian public policy concerning this issue does not offer a convincing case to either employers or workers.

The working-longer mantra may ring hollow to many of today's older workers who are unable to countenance working much beyond the age of 60, let alone 70. Support systems for those who do want to continue working are currently inadequate and an alternative vision of

what ageing means for those who cannot does not exist. Recent Australian policy efforts have achieved little. Elsewhere however, policies have met with some success (Taylor, 2003). Tomorrow's older workers, facing a dramatically altering employment landscape, will need refashioned learning and employment systems and an altered welfare state if they are to make a successful transition to old age. This chapter has put forward a framework for a new advocacy on ageing and work, a central tenet of which is that a universalist approach when considering age and work overcomes important disjunctions and contradictions present in current conceptualisations of what needs to be done in order to respond effectively to labour market age barriers.

Paramount is for policymaking that aims for age neutral approaches that emphasise the broad unimportance of age as a determinant of the potentiality of workers. Better may be general measures that seek to support all people in transition, for instance, in entry to work, job loss and re-entry to work, based on the assumption that the needs of young and old are not much different. The targeted implementation of age-group specific measures may be warranted in certain circumstances but this requires careful consideration.

Relatively low rates of labour force participation among older workers cannot simply be reduced to the lack of work incentives at older ages but are also a consequence of, for instance, a lack of in-career training opportunities and a failure to anticipate the consequence of arduous working conditions (Erhel, 2007). Added to this, the increasing fragmentation of working lives points to the need for policies which permit the individualisation of choices. Such policies 'modify the traditional public policy approach, centred on certain phases of life or certain age groups, by introducing a global approach, giving individuals certain rights, resources and services enabling them to be the authors of their own lifecourses' (Erhel, 2007, p. 150).

On top of this, the tendency of older people's advocates to describe issues affecting what it considers is its constituency in narrow and emotive terms risks perverse outcomes. The irony is that older people may not be well served by approaches lacking such 'age awareness'. While much of present policy is focused on advocating for an older worker's right not to be discriminated against there may be advantages in greater policy efforts aimed at promoting generational solidarity. In the popular discourse and in some scholarly research there has been a tendency to consider young and old as being in competition. Yet, as has been emphasised by the OECD (2006) among others, the employment rates of old and young are generally in step. Thus, both will benefit from efforts to promote their employment.

People do not have a clear sense of what working longer means and whether it is a realistic proposition. Narrow conceptions of what it means to be productive are clouding the actual and potential contributions of older people to society. Older people already significantly contribute to the fabric of the nation's social and economic life. Policies aimed at acknowledging and expanding the scope of this participation beyond paid work have the potential to alter the tone of the debate about an ageing Australia from being about conflict and risk to being about solidarity and opportunity. Importantly, for older people themselves, placing a value on their contribution may help them maintain a positive sense of identity and fulfilment into old age.

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Enhancing Inclusivity at Work Through Mindfulness

Diversity starts with catching out our judging. It starts with not judging others. It is much bigger than being inclusive based on gender, culture, age or sexual preference.   And Diversity matters! It not only leads to better decision making but also to more creativity and when it comes to gender diversity there is an increase is psychological safety which Google have found to be fundamental to teams being productive.

We all judge each other (and ourselves) all the time, it is how our minds work. The mind is constantly sorting the world into: "I like" "I don't like" and "I don't care". On that basis the mind also makes some mammoth generalisations. Seeing a man, a Chinese person, an old person, or whoever doing something and the mind tends towards general conclusions about 'those' people. The mind does this to help us sort out this overwhelmingly confusing world, and to sort out what is dangerous and what is pleasant. If based on one interaction with a lion I conclude that all lions are dangerous, that helps me survive. It is just that we tend to over do this, particularly when it comes to people…

This is one of the reasons being truly inclusive is such a huge challenge. We have to override our biology.

We sort people out in "I like" "I don't like" and "I don't care" based on our survival drive but also based on inputs we have had early on in our lives. We have all ingested our culture's stories around gender, people from different countries, of different age and what constitutes 'nice', decent' and 'good' versus 'not nice', or 'horrible people'.

In this early influence there tends to be a dominant story, one that is the most defining cultural story. Our judging or liking and not liking sits in relation to this dominant story and of course the input from our family and those close to us. This early forming of stereotypes along with our inbuilt survival mechanisms becomes instrumental for us navigating the world.

This works both for our internal judging of ourselves and our judging of others. The result is we see others through a filter of stereotypes. There is nothing inherently wrong with stereotypes just that there is much more diversity within groups than there is sameness. Stereotyping leads to labelling, we see 'others' under labels and don't see them for the human being that they are and the uniqueness of that.

The more stressed we are, the more we simply function in the reactive fast way of processing which is the one with all the stereotypes! This leads us to becoming less tolerant of anyone different, and adding to that, empathy drops when we are stressed which means we care even less for others.

Even though as Dan Siegel mentions there is no such thing as "immaculate perception", mindfulness enables a perception of the world that is less high-jacked by our survival drive and our past. This is one of the ways that mindfulness helps us move towards being more inclusive.

Naturally by reducing our stress we also increase our ability to not judge and to be empathetic and mindfulness is shown to significantly reduce stress.

Secondly the more mindful we become the more 'objective' we become or the less we see the world through our stereotypes. Herndon's (2008) study showed a positive correlation between mindfulness and the tendency towards **external encoding,** making us less subject to internal biases.

Early detection of the internal preferences is another way that mindfulness helps us catch out our "like" or "dislikes". The body reacts before conscious thought. You know this when you hear a loud noise and the body jumps. Mindfulness starts by training us to become more aware of what is going on within the body. In this way, we can sense that little preference before it grows further through thoughts.

It can sometimes be easier to catch out our negative judgment than catching ourselves, in excluding actions such as through feeling in sync or liking someone. Yet this is probably one of the most common and subtle ways of reducing diversity. An example of this is when we get excited about seeing someone, and we forget or ignore others who are around. This often happens when we have something in common like a shared interest.

Practicing mindfulness also enables us to shift more towards compassion, towards feeling compassion for everyone. This is based on the understanding that we are interconnected and interdependent, that we are all little human beings with the same fears and desires. This gives us the willingness and want to include as well as the desired to catch ourselves out when we may not be.

Diversity is of course also about policies, structures, role-models and interventions that reflect non judging and inclusivity. We need to organizationally represent the changes that we are seeking, ensuring that those with the bigger gap between how they see themselves and the dominant story are given the tools, the support and encouragement to shine. To be at the table and to claim their place without hesitation and the relentless voice of 'not being good enough'.

Diversity is really about becoming more human and humane, it is embracing that we can be more than biological creatures that function in 'like', 'don't like' and 'don't care', 'in' groups and 'out' groups, that we can function with an open mind and heart and be kindly curious about our fellow human.

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Making the most of JobAccess to drive disability employment

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Presentation at the

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Making the most of JobAccess to drive disability employment

ABSTRACT: *One in five Australians lives with disability[1], representing a significant percentage of the population. However, when it comes to employment, this vast pool of talent remains largely untapped.*

From an employer perspective, some may feel they lack the skills or experience to employ a person with disability, be concerned about potential costs, or just simply are not aware of the huge potential of disability employment.

This is where JobAccess comes in.

Funded by the Australian Government, JobAccess is the multi award-winning national hub for workplace and employment information for people with disability, employers and service providers.

Recognised internationally for its innovative approach to disability employment, JobAccess brings together a wide range of resources including a website, dedicated advice service, the Employment Assistance Fund for workplace modifications and training, and the Employer Engagement team providing free and practical support to employers to become disability confident.

In this interactive workshop, attendees will learn about the many benefits of employing people with disability and how JobAccess works in partnership with employers on tailored disability employment strategies. They will participate in an introductory disability awareness training session involving case studies and practical exercises designed to increase disability confidence and competence, and explore how to make small but important changes in the workplace towards becoming disability confident.

What is JobAccess?

JobAccess is the national hub for workplace and employment information for people with disability, employers and service providers.

Created by the Australian Government, it brings together the information and resources that can 'drive disability employment'. Along with a website (www.jobaccess.gov.au) and telephone advice line (1800 464 800), JobAccess also includes the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) and an employer engagement service - the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator (NDRC).

Why employ a person with disability?

One in five Australians now lives with disability[1]. However a lack of awareness, exposure and understanding can cause people with disability to be overlooked for employment opportunities. With Australia's ageing population and significant skill shortages in many industries, competitive employers are taking advantage of this untapped potential while also ensuring their team best reflects the community in which it operates.

Like all employees, people with disability bring a range of skills, abilities and qualifications to the workplace and work in a wide range of jobs. Australian and international studies have also proven people with disability to be reliable and productive employees, with lower recruitment, insurance cover and compensation costs and higher retention rates[2,3].

What is the Employment Assistance Fund?

The Employment Assistance Fund helps people with disability who are about to start a job or who are currently working.

A JobAccess Adviser can coordinate a free workplace assessment to advise on workplace modifications and support which may be eligible for reimbursement through the EAF:

- Adjustments / special equipment for the physical workplace

- Modifications to work vehicles

- Information and communication devices

- Auslan interpreting

- Specialist services for employees with specific learning disorders and mental health conditions

- Disability awareness/ deafness awareness/ mental health first aid training.

Don't forget – not all people with disability require workplace modifications, and some are low or no cost at all, and easy to implement.

What is the Employer Engagement service?

The National Disability Recruitment Co-ordinator is the employer engagement service of JobAccess, designed to help larger employers build their disability knowledge and skills, and access the talents of people with disability.

How can JobAccess support employers with disability employment?

1. *Enter into a free, formal partnership with JobAccess*

Over a period of 12 months, employers will receive a range of services tailored to individual business needs, and ongoing support through our alumni programme.

2. *JobAccess vacancy development and distribution service*

We can help you develop job vacancies targeted at people with disability and then broadcast these vacancies for free to the national network of Disability Employment Services. These Services have thousands of candidates with a wide range of qualifications, skills and experiences to fit your vacancy. To share a vacancy, email **jobs.ndrc@workfocus.com**

3. *Attend a JobAccess employer seminar*

JobAccess seminars are designed to help employers begin or further their efforts in employing people with disability. You can learn more about the benefits of employing people with

disability as well as where you can go for help. This includes a wide range of Australian Government support services such as Disability Employment Services, Wage Subsidies (where special workplace arrangements are created so that employers can pay wages to a person with disability based on how productive they are in their job) and the Supported Wage System (where employers can negotiate a wage subsidy with Disability Employment Services). Register your interest in attending a seminar at **gettingtoyes.ndrc@workfocus.com**

For more information on JobAccess, go to www.jobaccess.gov.au **or call 1800 464 800 to speak with a Professional Adviser.**

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