WORKING LIVES

People with disability share their experiences of finding, gaining and sustaining work

Discussion Paper SEPTEMBER 2020





People with disability from across the genU community have shared their experiences of employment in a range of different settings to help compile the "Working Lives" Discussion Paper, and respond to the Issues Paper on Employment published by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability in May 2020.

The Working Lives Discussion Paper explores the experiences of people with disability as they participate in mainstream employment, supported employment or community-based enterprises, work experience programs and in the search for work.

The experiences in the Working Lives Discussion Paper were principally captured from the divisions and branches of genU focused on supporting people with disability to find or maintain work, namely Business Enterprises, Employment Pathways (NDIS funded individual employment support and SLES) and MatchWorks Disability Employment Service (DES). The opportunity to contribute was also extended across the genU Ability services division.

People with disability were invited to share their experiences through a multi-faceted approach that recognised the diverse literacy and communication abilities of the genU community and consisted of:

- * the Employment Experience of People with Disability Online Survey
- focus groups
- the designated Disability Royal Commission email address for genU (disabilityroyalcommission@genu.org.au)
- * telephone survey with Employment Pathway clients, and
- * the opportunity for private and confidential discussion with the genU Ability Executive General Managers.

Further details on the engagement approaches are provided in Appendix B of this Discussion Paper. Information was also gathered from the 2019 Business Enterprise Service Evaluations, completed annually by supported employees.

genU sincerely thanks everyone who shared the challenges and triumphs of their employment journeys. We trust these experiences will contribute to strengthening the services and supports that help enable people with disability to work, and ultimately, increase the participation of people with disability in the Australian workforce.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

genU compiled the Working Lives Discussion Paper in response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and its aim to better understand the experiences of people with disability in a range of employment settings.

The research methods used to compile this paper sought to capture a range of employment experiences. However, a significant proportion of the experiences captured in this paper are from supported employment or work experience programs. This is likely due to supported employment and work experience being areas of service delivery for genU, and the ready access to supported employees and work experience participants this allows.

MatchWorks DES jobseekers were included in the audience for this research, however no response was obtained from this cohort, and is why no reference is made to the experience of DES jobseekers throughout this paper.

The Working Lives Discussion Paper shows:

- People with disability employed on a casual or part-time basis would like to work more
- Supported employees from genU Business Enterprises (supported employment) have a 97% or higher satisfaction rate with:
 - · how their rights as workers are upheld
 - their participation and inclusion at work,
 - · individual outcomes and,
 - access to services, feedback and complaint opportunities
- Financial independence and skill development are the most prominent reasons for people with disability having employment, regardless of whether this is supported or mainstream employment
- The challenges people with disability encounter in finding and maintaining employment are frequently attributed to employers (or potential employers) having low levels of disability awareness
- A relatively low complaint rate exists amongst people with disability when they experience violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation or discrimination at work
- People with disability who access genU Employment Pathways gained new skills, greater confidence and an increased understanding of what is expected of them at work
- People with disability recognise that they bring different abilities to the workplace, and advocate for these abilities to be seen simply as "different" not "less" and that they are qentitled to equal employment opportunities.

It will become evident in reading this paper that a number of respondents have experienced instances of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation or discrimination at work.

Where a respondent could be identified, genU managers or support staff have followed up on the person's wellbeing and access to supports.

1. The Employment Experience of People with Disability Online Survey





Responses from ISS, Participate Employment Pathways, Support Coordination & Business Enterprises

The Employment Experience of People with Disability Online Survey was structured to establish the education level, current employment status and demographics (Appendix A) of all respondents, and then asked respondents questions based on their current employment status.

1.1 Education level

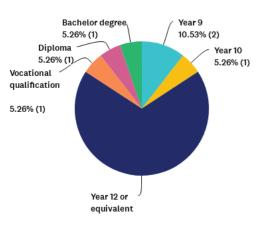


Figure 1.1.1 shows the education levels that respondents have obtained.

Sixty-eight per cent of respondents had completed education to a year 12 level or equivalent.

Figure 1.1.1: Education level of respondents

1.2 Employment status

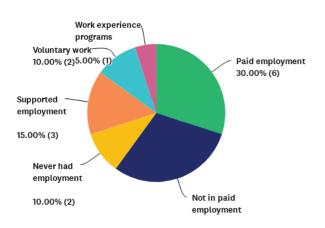


Figure 1.2.1: Employment status of respondents

Figure 1.2.1 presents the current employment status of respondents. The number of respondents in paid employment and not in paid employment was equal with 30% each. Other employment statuses were:

- Supported employment (15%)
- Voluntary work (10%)
- Work experience (5%) and
- Never had employment (10%)

1.3 Services or supports used by people with disability to help gain employment

Employment supports funded through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) were identified as the support or service that respondents most commonly accessed to assist in gaining employment. A further 27% of respondents specified they had used NDIS School Leaver Employment Supports to gain employment.

Service or Support Usage	Usage Percentage
NDIS Funded Supports	40%
NDIS School Leaver Employment Support	27%
Disability Employment Service (DES)	20%
Other employment supports (i.e. mentor, traineeships, apprenticeships)	20%

Figure 1.3.1: Services or supports used to gain employment *Respondents were able to select multiple services or supports

RecruitAbility, JobAccess and jobactive were also offered as possible services or supports, however were not selected as options that had been utilised.

75% of respondents had used services or supports to assist them to gain employment.

1.4 Challenges experienced while trying to gain employment

Many people with disability report experiencing a wide range of challenges while trying to gain employment, from social prejudices and biases to inaccessible workplaces.

Sixty-seven per cent of respondents to the Employment Experience of People with Disability Online Survey said they had experienced challenges in finding and maintaining employment.

The five most significant challenges respondents experienced while trying to gain employment were:

- Low levels of disability awareness from potential employers (50%)
- Lack of support to find employment (43%)
- Difficulty in accessing skills training and education (36%)
- Health issues (29%)
- Other challenges or barriers (29%).

These were identified as the "need for constant supervision and understanding which is only available in supported employment" and a "lack of communication between previous provider to employers".

Ten per cent of respondents reported experiencing no challenges.

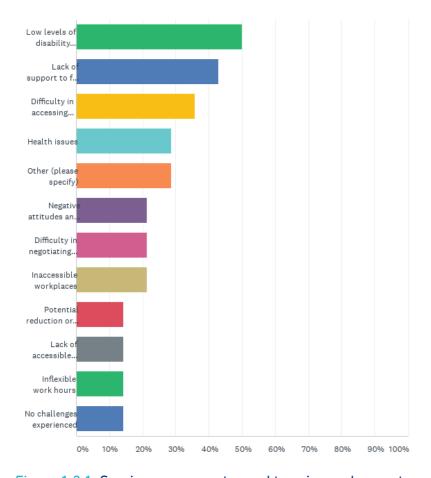
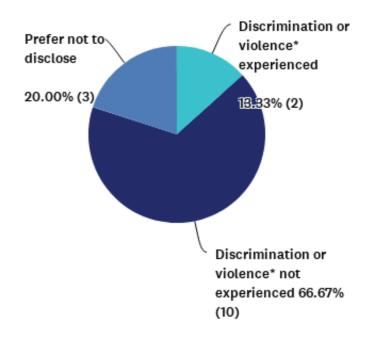


Figure 1.3.1: Services or supports used to gain employment *Respondents were able to select multiple services or supports



The most significant challenge or barrier respondents experienced in searching for, gaining and maintaining employment was a low level of disability awareness from potential employers.

1.5 Experiences of discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation at work



Only 1 respondent
who had experienced
discrimination, violence,
abuse, neglect or
exploitation made a formal
complaint, and this
was to their workplace

Figure 1.5. Discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation experienced by respondents in their employment

*For the clarity of the chart labels, the term "violence" is inclusive of acts of abuse, neglect or exploitation

"Bullying; had to handle this myself. Employer was not interested.

Discrimination as the employer did not want to learn about my

condition or was against my condition".

"Forced to do heavy, normal person (damaging work) and told if I don't turn up, sacked. Legally handled by being forced to resign, stating ill health".

"Getting put down for my disability".

^{**}Responses received from 15 out of the 20 respondents for this question.

1.6 Responses from people with disability in paid employment

1.6.1 Basis of Employment

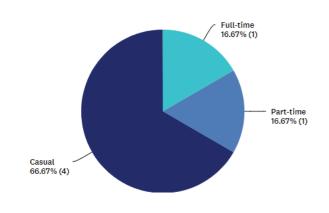


Figure 1.6.1: The basis on which respondents are employed.

Sixty-eight per cent of respondents were employed on a casual basis. An equal number of respondents were employed full or part time (17%).

80% of respondents working on a casual or part-time basis would like more hours

1.6.2 What employment means to people and their lifestyle

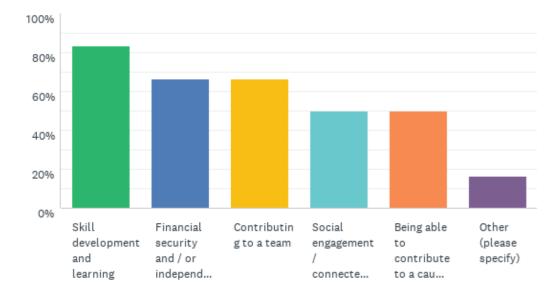


Figure 1.6.2: The impact employment has on respondents and their lifestyles. Respondents who responded with "other" specified a satisfaction with their employer as a positive impact.



50% of respondents felt their salaries were equitable to those of their peers*

(*50% were unsure of the equitability of their salaries)

1.6.3 Equitable opportunities for professional development and career growth

Respondents were asked a series of questions to help gauge whether employees with disability have the same opportunities for professional development and/or career growth as their peers.

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Do you have opportunities for training at work?	67%	33%	0%
Do you have a mentor at work?	50%	33%	17%
Is information always accessible for you at work?	50%	33%	17%
Do you have regular catch ups with your supervisor?	83%	17%	0%
Are there opportunities for professional development?	33%	50%	17%
Are there opportunities forcareer growth?	17%	67%	17%
Do you have access to employment supports / reasonable adjustments?	67%	17%	17%
Do you feel 'included' in your workplace and that you are part of the team?	83%	17%	0%

Figure 1.6.3: Respondents perceptions on their opportunities for professional development and/or career opportunities.

1.7 Responses from people with disability who are currently unemployed

1.7.1 Reasons why people with disability feel they are unemployed

Reason Response	Percentage
Not enough jobs available	43%
Lack of support to work	43%
Issues with transport or travel	43%
Inability to find the right job	14%
Health issues / not well enough to work	14%

Figure 1.7.1: Reasons for unemployment. Respondents were able to provide multiple reasons

In addition to the reasons for unemployment listed in Figure 3.1.1, seventy-one per cent of respondents provided additional reasons for their unemployment which related to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the reluctance of employers to employ people with disability.

"No one wants to employ someone with needs / restrictions".

-Survey Respondent

1.7.2 Barriers people with disability encountered when trying to find employment

Barriers Response	Percentage		
Low levels of disability awareness from potential employers	57 %		
Negative attitudes and behaviours from potential employers	29%		
Difficulty accessing skills training and education	29%		
Lack of support to find employment	29%		
Inaccessible workplaces	14%		

Figure 1.7.2: Barriers respondents encountered while trying to find employment. Respondents were able to provide multiple barriers

Respondents identified that they needed the following supports to assist them find employment:

- "Flexibility [and] open minded employers"
- "Just extra time, simple instructions and one-on-one initially"

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1.8 Responses from people with disability who are currently doing work experience or voluntary work

1.8.1 Gains made through work experience or voluntary work

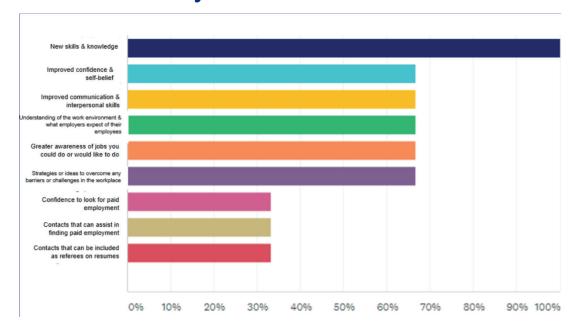


Figure 1.8.1: The attributes and resources respondents have gained through work experience or voluntary work

All respondents participating in work experience or voluntary work indicated that these activities had assisted them to gain new skills and knowledge.

Sixty-seven per cent also said work experience or voluntary work had provided:

- improved confidence and self-belief
- improved communication and interpersonal skills
- an understanding of the work environment and what employers expect of their employees
- a greater awareness of the jobs they could do or would like to do, and
- strategies or ideas to overcome any barriers or challenges in the workplace.

Workplaces can make work experience and voluntary work more accessible by:

- Being patient
- * Communicating to people so that we understand, in a positive manner
- Helping people with disabilities to feel important and valued and not putting us out the back so we are not seen" - Survey respondent

1.8.2 The promotion of work experience or voluntary work as a pathway for people with disability to enter the paid workforce

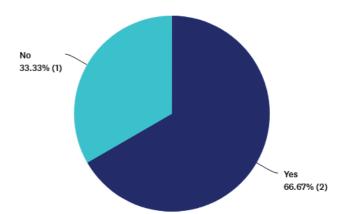


Figure 1.8.2: presents how respondents answered when asked whether they thought work experience or voluntary work should be promoted more as a way for people with disability to enter the paid workforce.

Figure 1.8.2: Whether or not work experience orvoluntary work should be promoted as a wayto enter the paid workforce

Respondents provided the following validations for their responses:

"I think the first few days, it is ok to volunteer, however if you like the position and the employer agrees you are doing good work, you should be paid; not exploited and be used for free labour".

"It does not matter if you have a disability or not, it should be the same pay for everyone".

"Less discrimination and more equal pay; not all people with a disability have to do work that is less equal than abled people, we should be treated as equals".

- Survey Respondent

2. Focus Group with genU Business Enterprise workers



5 workers



7 key discussion questions

1/2 hour discussion

2.1 Why do you like coming to work?

- Able to socialise with the "people we work with while at work"
- genU Business Enterprises is a "friendly place" and a "good place" to work
- Able to "do different jobs"
- Have "plenty of support here"
- Workers expressed they were "happy" to still have jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Is there anything you would like to change about work?

• The "boxes on the truck are very heavy" and a worker expressed that they "would like help with the boxes".

2.3 Would you like the opportunity to work in other areas of genU or try different jobs?

• One worker said that they "would like to be a supervisor" and has "trained people on the job".

"We are a bunch of happy people. We have our moments some days; some good days and some bad days like any workplace.

We get along alright". - genU Business Enterprise worker

2.4 What would you do if you did not work?

- Sit at home
- School drop-offs and pick-ups with their child
- Watch "The Bold and The Beautiful" and the News
- Shop
- Gardening
- All workers would consider voluntary work or training courses if they were available
- Some workers said they may require one-on-one support to complete training courses.

2.5 Why do you think it is sometimes difficult for people with disability to get a job?

- "People shy away from people with disabilities"
- "A lot of people don't know how to handle people with disabilities"
- People's own perception of themselves as someone with disability;
 "how to accept not being able to do a job as well as someone who hasn't got a disability"
- A "person with a disability may not be able to do the job in the same way" to other workers
- Transport was described as "a big one [issue]" in terms of being a barrier to people with disability gaining and maintaining employment.

People with disability as workers or potential workers:

- "are capable of doing jobs but may take longer to process" tasks
- "can be better at some jobs than others"
- have "feeling[s] of being judged"
- "look normal but can still be judged", and
- sometimes "need simple instructions for at task".

3. Analysis of genU Business Enterprises Service Evaluations



200 workers



9 years: average length of employment



177 evaluations

An analysis of the 2019 Business Enterprise Service Evaluations was undertaken to deliver a greater insight into the experiences of the supported workers employed at genU Business Enterprises. These evaluations were utilised in the delivery of this Discussion Paper due to the currency of their completion, their ability to deliver the information that was deemed necessary to produce this discussion paper, and the COVID-19 pandemic which restricted access to supported workers.

Thirty-nine per cent of workers who completed the evaluations independently, while the remaining 61% were supported by a genU Business Enterprises staff member.

3.1 Location of workers across Business Enterprises

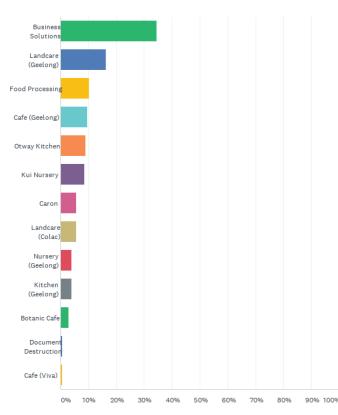


Figure 3.1: The genU Business Enterprise workplaces of workers who participated in the 2019 service evaluations

3.2 Evaluation Outcomes Worker rights



100% said staff treated them with respect



99% felt their voice is valued

Participation and inclusion



99% said staff listen when they participate in meetings and suggest improvements



100% felt part of the team

Individual outcomes



99% said working it genU Business Enterprises helped them to reach their work goals



100% felt they had developed new skills while working at genU Business Enterprises

Feedback and complaints



100% said they knew who they could talk to if they had feedback or a complaint



100% said staff followed up on their concerns

Service access



97% said genU provides information in a way they can understand



99% said their workplace is fully accessible for their individual needs

Service management



100% said their supervisor supported them in the workplace



99% felt management has a good understanding of their individual needs

General information



would tell a friend genU is a good place to work



99% thought they would continue to work at genU Business Enterprises voice is valued

3.3 The overall level of happiness supported workers have with their employment at and service provision from genU Business Enterprise





4. The Employment Experience of People with Disability Telephone Survey





47 surveys conducted

Section four of the **Working Lives Discussion Paper** has been structured around the questions asked during the telephone surveys conducted with genU Employment Pathways clients.

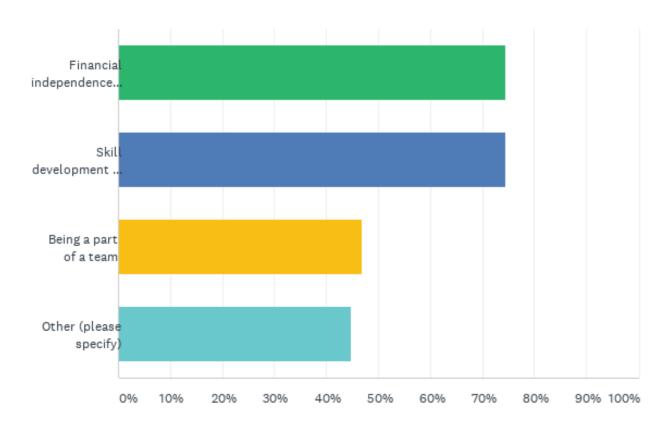


Figure 4.1.1: Reasons survey respondents provided on why it is important for them to gain employment

Financial independence (74%) and skill development (74%) were rated equally important reasons amongst respondents for gaining employment. Belonging to a team was a lesser reason for gaining work with 47% of respondents identifying this as an important factor. Forty-five per cent of respondents provided "other" reasons for why gaining employment was important, including:

- participating in an activity during the day instead of being at home;
 "interaction with the outside world"
- meeting new people / increases in social skills / provides social interaction
- having a "purpose in life [and] physical and emotional independence"
- "helping out the family"
- building relationships with colleagues and assisting customers
- opportunity to be accountable for something
- contributes to greater independence and confidence
- a pathway towards living independently
- mental stimulation; "gets your mind going"
- "keeps me out of trouble".

4.2 What have you gained through previous jobs, work experience or voluntary work?

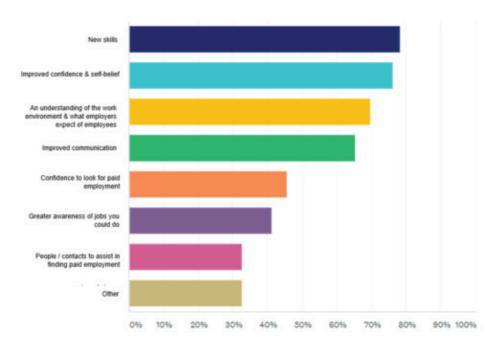


Figure 4.2.1: The gains survey respondents have made through previous jobs, work experience or voluntary work

The most substantial gains that respondents identified as having made through their previous jobs, work experience or voluntary work included the development of new skills (78%), improved confidence and self-belief (76%) and a greater understanding of the work environment and employer's expectations of their employees (70%).

Thirty-three per cent of respondents identified "other" gains made through previous jobs, work experience or voluntary work, including:

- improved team work skills
- increased initiative and problem-solving skills
- improved attention to detail, focus and punctuality
- increased confidence in seeking / asking for help
- enhanced customer service skills
- increased sense of responsibility
- increased motivation to perform well and "do my best"
- greater independence
- an understanding of work safety practices
- decreased anxiety around work tasks
- friendships
- life experience and hands-on learning
- being a part of the community.

Respondents talk about their gains:

"Getting better at asking for help; learning how to problem-solve, being more independent, learning to relax and be more patient.

Better at handling different situations".

"Independent life skills. Part of mainstream and modelling appropriate behaviours. Special ed environments reinforce low expectations and lowers potential".

"Feeling less anxious. Building on my employment skills. Being a part of a good work environment"

"Staying focused on my job. Completing one task at a time helped my confidence levels. I enjoy being at work and out of the house. I like being kept busy and doing the work".

4.3 Have you ever experienced any violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation in the workplace?

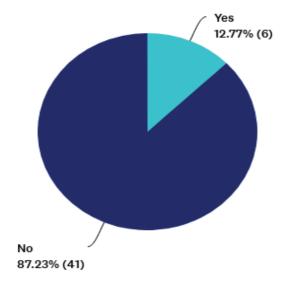


Figure 4.3.1: Respondents experience of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation in the workplace.

Eighty-seven per cent of survey respondents indicated that they had not experienced any violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation in their workplaces.

The next part of the Working
Lives Discussion Paper covers
the experiences of the 13% of
respondents who had
experienced violence, abuse,
neglect or exploitation at work.

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"Less opportunity for abuse in mainstream employment settings.

People need to focus on decreasing learned reliance and give opportunity to try".

- Survey respondent

4.4 Can you tell a bit about what you experienced and how it was handled?

"Previously, before becoming a genU participant, I experienced paid part-time work at a take-away restaurant. The store manager was relatively rude to me, complaining about my work ethic. If I didn't clean something correctly, he would tell me off. I didn't feel comfortable continuing work in this environment as I would regularly get told off".

"Manager was nasty and treated her like a child. She would often be angry and swear at her. She would hide in the bathroom in tears to get away from her. Participant told family members who complained to the organisation but it was never addressed".

"While completing work experience at a supermarket, a customer verbally abused her. Participant feels she required more support".

"A customer in a workplace verbally abused me over a special that wasn't being run anymore. I was polite during the whole experience. Another customer asked management to fire me because he asked a question I didn't know and I was a new employee at the time. It made me feel upset".

"Another employee threw a box at her and swore at her. WorkSafe came to investigate after a complaint was lodged. She feels she was given an unfair dismissal after this incident".

"Exploitation - employer told him to do more than what his responsibilities called for and beyond the hours he was volunteering to work. No complaint was lodged because he didn't realise it was exploitation at the time".

These experiences have been published as captured by genU Employment Pathways staff.



40% of respondents who had experienced violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in the workplace made a formal complaint.

5. Focus Group on the Employment Experiences of People with Disability



1 participant from genU Employment Pathways

The Focus Group on the Employment Experiences of People with Disability was open to all genU Ability and MatchWorks Disability Employment Services (DES) clients. One client from genU Employment Pathways was the only participant in this Focus Group. A summary of the discussions that took place with this client follows.

The client was completing work experience through genU Employment Pathways and funded by the NDIS. The client had commenced their services with Employment Pathways in May 2020 and hoped that their participation in work experience would lead to them finding paid employment. The client felt "good" about the prospect of eventually getting paid work.

The client thought they had learnt new skills during work experience. They had felt "nervous" on their first day of work experience, however "the second time I was confident to do it with some people supporting me".

The client said they had applied for jobs at a supermarket, but "I never get it, I always get rejected". When asked whether anyone had provided support with the online job applications for the supermarket, the client said they did not require any support.

At the time of the focus group discussion, the client was under stage four restrictions in Melbourne due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work experience had been suspended due to these restrictions. The client was occupying their time with online courses, and was trialling the genU Gamer program on the day of this discussion.

The client described Employment Pathways as a "good service".

Appendix A — Demographic information

THE EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY ONLINE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Gender	Percentage	
Male	54%	
Female	46%	

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Torres Strait Islander	Percentage	
Yes	0%	
No	100%	

Culturally and

Linguistically Diverse	Percentage	
Yes	15%	
No	85%	

LGBTIQA+	Percentage	
Yes	0%	
No	92%	
Prefer not to indicate	8%	

Disability	Percentage	
Intellectual Disability	67%	
Learning Disability	50%	
Physical Disability	25%	
Cognitive Disability	25%	
Neurological Disability	25%	
Sensory Disability	25%	
Mental Illness	25%	
Psychosocial Disability	8%	
Other*	8%	
Prefer not to indicate	8%	

^{*}Other – William's Syndrome

genU Services Accessed	Percentage	
Employment Pathways	82%	
Individual Support Services	27%	
Support Coordination	27%	
Participate	18%	
Business Enterprises	18%	
Other*	18%	
Shared and Respite Living	0%	
Mental Health Services	0%	
MatchWorks DES	0%	

BUSINESS ENTERPRISES FOCUS GROUP AND SERVICE EVALUATIONS PARTICIPANTS

Gender	Percentage
Male	61%
Female	39%

Age	Percentage
Under 20	0%
20 - 29	10%
30 – 34	11%
35 – 39	14%
40 – 44	15%
45 – 49	15%
50 – 54	9%
55 – 59	13%
60 – 64	6%
65+	2%

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	Percentage	
Yes	1%	
No	69%	
Not provided	31%	

Disability	Percentage
Intellectual Disability – Other	38%
Intellectual Disability – Autism	11%
Intellectual Disability – Down Syndrome	7 %
Intellectual Disability (incl. Down Syndrome)	7 %
Psychiatric Disability	5%
Intellectual Disability – Asperger's Syndrome	4%
Autism (including Asperger's Syndrome)	3%
Physical Disability	2%
Intellectual Disability – Fragile X	2%
Acquired Brain Injury	1%
Other*	1%
Not provided	18%

^{*}Not specified

Duration of employment at genU Business Enterprises	Percentage
Less than 1 year	3%
1 year to less than 2 years	10%
2 years to less than 5 years	22%
5 years to less than 10 years	31%
10 years to less than 15 years	14%
More than 15 years	11%
More than 20 years	5%
More than 25 years	4%

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY TELEPHONE SURVEY RESPONDENTS (EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS CLIENTS)

Gender	Percentage
Male	62%
Female	38%

Age	Percentage	
Under 20	26%	
20 - 29	57%	
30 – 34	6%	
35 – 39	4%	
40 – 44	0%	
45 – 49	0%	
50 – 54	2%	
55 – 59	0%	
60 – 64	0%	
65+	0%	
Prefer not to say	2%	

Aboriginal and/or

Torres Strait Islander	Percentage	
Yes	3%	
No	95%	

^{*}A further 3% of respondents identified as having a CALD background

Disability	Percentage
Autism Spectrum Disorder	48%
Intellectual Disability	44%
Physical Disability	8%
Learning Disability	6%
Neurological Disability	6%
Cognitive Disability	4%
Sensory Disability	2%
Mental Illness	2%
Psychosocial Disability	0%
Immunological	0%
Prefer not to indicate	4%
Other*	12%

^{*}Other – specified as Developmental Delay, ADHD and ABI

Appendix B

Engagement Methods



The Your Feedback on your Employment Experience flyer (adjacent) was used to promote the opportunity for people with disability (or their families or significant others) in paid work, supported employment or a community-based enterprise, work experience, voluntary work or looking for work to share their experiences with genU.

FLYER DISTRIBUTION

Email	Distribution Number
Individual Support Services	85
Employment Pathways	264
MatchWorks	7000 (approx)

^{*}Flyer was also distributed to all genU Ability Managers for promoting/circulating

Social Media

Impact

Facebook

4.2k views 19 likes



For further information on this discussion paper, please contact: Jacqui McKim
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