



Down Syndrome  
Australia

## Information for families of people with Down syndrome

People with Down syndrome have the right to work, and are entitled to support to find and keep a job. Families can play a vital role in helping people with Down syndrome find employment and help them get the support they may need.

This resource contains information, ideas and tips to help families know about people's rights, the possibilities regarding employment and the supports that are available to help with finding and keeping a job.

As with any major life change or transition, looking for and starting work brings changes and new challenges for the person and their family. This resource aims to give you some information and help to make the transition smoother and more positive for everyone.

There is an employment resource for people with Down syndrome too, and it is also available in Easy Read format. These have been designed to help you and your family member work together through the practical steps to employment. There's also a resource for employers and an FAQ resource. It's a good idea to read through those resources too, to get a good understanding of all the aspects of employment for people with Down syndrome.

## Why employment is so important

### What are the rights of people with Down syndrome in relation to employment?

Having a job is important to us all. It's where we get to contribute our skills, meet people and make friends, and earn a wage to help us have the life we want. Employment also gives us a chance to learn new things, increase our self-esteem through pride in our work, and gives a sense of belonging and purpose. People with Down syndrome gain all these as well as a greater sense of independence and of being included and valued.

### Barriers to employment

People with Down syndrome do face barriers to employment. But these are mostly due to community beliefs, low expectations and how the formal employment support systems work, rather than the actual abilities of people with Down syndrome to be valued and contributing members of the workforce.

As parents, we may worry about whether our family member is able to work in open employment, and may only know about the traditional segregated 'sheltered' employment options, usually called 'supported employment' or ADEs. Often, families are told that this will be best for their son or daughter, and may not know about the range of other possibilities and support available.

We may also worry about a number of other aspects regarding employment such as:

- difficulties finding appropriate jobs
- possible discrimination might be an issue
- inaccessible workplaces and inflexible work conditions
- getting the right support to find and keep a job
- getting to and from work
- concerns about how having a job could affect the Disability Support Pension.

It may seem that it will be very hard. However, the benefits are great, and being equipped with the information in these resources will help you to support your family member through the process.

### **What employment options are available?**

As well as traditional supported employment, people with Down syndrome are now employed in various other employment options. This includes open employment, but some have their own micro-enterprises, sometimes also called a micro-business. Some people also get involved in community volunteering, and many people have a mix of different employment and involvement. They also use a range of supports to help them find these roles and for ongoing support in their jobs.

#### **Open employment**

Many people with Down syndrome are already successfully working in a range of different jobs. Some examples include people working in:

- cafés
- a gardening business
- local grocery store
- childcare
- department store
- administration in an office environment
- public service roles.

Plus, many other roles that are made possible with the right match and good support. People get support from family, friends and more formal support such as through a Disability Employment Service (DES) or NDIS funded support staff.

#### **Micro-enterprise**

A micro-enterprise is a very small business, usually run by one person. People get help to run the business. More people with disabilities, including Down syndrome, are setting up micro-enterprises as an alternative to other employment, because they offer the chance for work that might be hard to get otherwise.

A micro-enterprise is also a great way for people to use their interests and skills to create work. Some examples of micro-enterprises include making and selling things e.g. chopping boards, paintings or craftwork, or tie-dyed socks and selling online. Or making dog biscuits or cakes to sell at markets. Other examples include dog-walking, delivery services and confidential shredding.

People get support to set up and run their micro-enterprises in a range of ways. This includes family, friends, and NDIS funded support staff.

#### **Social enterprise**

Social enterprises are businesses that are set up to address a social, community or environmental issue. They are commercially viable businesses that operate to achieve a social outcome rather than return a profit to shareholders. Some families of people with Down syndrome are starting small social enterprises to create employment opportunities.

Some examples of social enterprises are:

- A family started a floristry business and the family member with Down syndrome delivers the arrangements to homes and businesses. The business has expanded and now provides employment to other people with intellectual disabilities.
- A business that makes and sells donuts at markets around the region was started to provide employment to a person with Down syndrome. The business expanded and hires both people with Down syndrome and people who don't have a disability.

#### **Community volunteering**

Many people with Down syndrome work in volunteer roles.

Volunteering can be a great way to meet people and contribute in a meaningful way to your local community.

Volunteering can also be a great way for a person with Down syndrome to develop their skills and experience, which may lead to employment in the future. It's also a good way to try a job to see if it's a good fit. Again, family, friends and support workers could help find a position and support a person to be a volunteer, and when the time is right, supporting the transition to paid work.

### Support to get job-ready

Families can play a key role in helping their family member get ready for the workforce. Some of this might be helping the person to learn and practise some skills in everyday life. Sometimes it might involve helping them take part in some further education or training to develop knowledge and skills to work.

Most school students do some work experience from Year 10, supported by their school, but for students with Down syndrome, they sometimes find the options offered are very limited, and focused on a path towards more traditional supported employment. Sometimes, parents find that they are able to find more suitable work experience opportunities themselves. They do this by asking their contacts and by looking at what is in their local area that their family member might like to try. When this happens, the school should provide some support to the host employer you have found.

Some schools may be involved in the Ticket to Work Program which aims to make sure students with disabilities get work experience and skills training opportunities as they transition from school, to increase their employment success. You can find more information here: [www.tickettowork.org.au](http://www.tickettowork.org.au)

The NDIS has also set up some supports specifically for young people who are leaving school to help them transition into employment. School Leavers Employment Supports (SLES) provides individualised supports to students with disabilities in Year 12 and for up to two years after finishing Year 12. SLES is about giving young people the skills and confidence to move from school to employment. Supports can include help with work experience, job skills training and transport training. The NDIS works with education departments to help students transition into SLES or other employment supports.

You can find more information about the NDIS and employment at: [www.ndis.gov.au/medias/documents/he9/h63/8800552615966/Factsheet-MainstreamInterfaces-Employment.pdf](http://www.ndis.gov.au/medias/documents/he9/h63/8800552615966/Factsheet-MainstreamInterfaces-Employment.pdf)

Post-school vocational education and training opportunities can vary depending on where you live and what is available to suit different needs and interests. In some areas, TAFE or other training programs may be able to help with developing skills for employment. This could include certificate courses or other courses that help the person develop skills in an area of interest.

Work placements and internships are time-limited ways of trying out a job to see if it's a good fit, and to learn skills in the person's area of interest. Usually, these positions are unpaid, but some internships may include payment. As with volunteering though, it's important to be aware of people's rights when they are doing unpaid work, so they aren't exploited. You can find more information about these rights at Fair Work Australia [www.fairwork.gov.au](http://www.fairwork.gov.au)

### Support to find and keep a job

There are various kinds of support to help people with Down syndrome find and keep employment. Disability Employment Services (DES) are funded through the Australian Government to help people with a disability find work in open employment. DES also provide some support to help people settle in to the job and then some ongoing periodic support. They can also advise and help employers to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace. If you want to use a DES, Centrelink will refer you to have an assessment, as you need to be able to work at least 8 hours a week to get DES support. Some DES specialise in supporting people with intellectual disability, getting better outcomes, so ask them when you are choosing a DES provider. Recent changes to the DES program means DES now need to work with people to make a plan showing how they will help them prepare for, find, and keep work. This is an opportunity to make sure the DES will provide the level of support the person needs, including when they are in a job.

A person's NDIS plan could include supports to build confidence and skills in particular areas that will assist with employment. The NDIS will fund reasonable and necessary employment supports that are beyond the responsibilities of employment services and employers.

This includes assisting people who are not eligible for Disability Employment Services (DES) through:

- helping them build their skills and capacity to be in employment
- help to find and keep a job

- personal care or assistance with transport
- assistive technology the person might need
- supported employment, such as services offered by Australian Disability Enterprises.

Adults of all ages can ask for supports such as these to help them find and keep a job.

If your family member is having difficulty finding a job, or if it is going to be difficult to access open employment, think about using Customised Employment. Customised Employment is a way of giving people considerable help to work out the things they are good at, matching them with an employer who needs their skills to do a particular piece of work, and making sure they get ongoing support. Sometimes, people might even be supported to set up a micro-enterprise doing things they are good at. You may be able to use NDIS funding or other support to access this or ask the disability service providers in your area if they can help you with Customised Employment.

### Strategies to succeed

We suggest you use the Getting Job-ready employment resource for people with Down syndrome and work gradually through the practical steps to employment together with your family member.

However, here's a summary of some of the practical ways that families could help throughout the process. Remember though, that you can get help with much of this from the more formal supports already mentioned.

#### Thinking about employment

- Help the person work out what kind of work they would like to do and how that matches with their skills.
- Talk with them about whether volunteer work or training might help with finding the right job.
- Help them identify jobs they wouldn't like to do.

#### Looking for a job

- Identify possible job opportunities in the community.
- Work with the person on how they will get to and from work.
- Assist them to put together their resume/CV.
- Research Disability Employment Services (DES) in your area

and make contact to discuss the services they provide.

- See if there are supports available through the NDIS to help build skills regarding employment.
- Talk with major employers in your area to see if any of them are interested in employing a person with Down syndrome.

#### Support in the workplace

- Talk with the person and the employer about any reasonable adjustments that will help the person to do their job.
- Support the person to practise things they may need to do at work.
- Advise and assist the employer about communicating with the person with Down syndrome (e.g. providing visual aids to help the person with Down syndrome fulfil their tasks).
- Support the person if they experience any concerns or stress about things at work and develop strategies to help them manage in situations that cause stress.
- If you any have concerns about discrimination or poor treatment in the workplace you should first speak with the employer. You can raise serious concerns with the Fair Work Commission or Human Rights Commission if you believe discrimination is taking place.

### For more information:

#### Help from Down syndrome associations

Down Syndrome Australia and the state and territory Down syndrome organisations are the experts on Down syndrome and a wealth of information you can tap into. Some run information workshops and can provide individual sessions and provide advice for your organisation on including and supporting people with Down syndrome.

Start here by looking at the Down Syndrome Australia website, including the Easy Read section, (to see what it looks like). The resource section contains a lot of downloadable information. You can also go from the DSA website to your state organisation to see what information and supports they can help you with. [www.downsyndrome.org.au](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au)

Down Syndrome Australia Community Inclusion Toolkit  
[www.communityinclusion.org.au](http://www.communityinclusion.org.au)

## Other helpful information:

**WA Disability Employment Toolkit** – produced by the WA government, most of this information is applicable across Australia.

[www.disability.wa.gov.au/business-and-government/business-and-government/employing-people-with-disability---disability-services-commission-disability-wa/disability-employment-toolkit/](http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/business-and-government/business-and-government/employing-people-with-disability---disability-services-commission-disability-wa/disability-employment-toolkit/)

## Australian Network on Disability

A national, membership based, organisation that supports organisations to advance the inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of business.

Find it at [www.and.org.au](http://www.and.org.au) or [info@and.org.au](mailto:info@and.org.au) or call 1300 363 645

## Fair Work Commission

National workplace relations tribunal – awards, agreements, other workplace matters.

Find it at [www.fwc.gov.au](http://www.fwc.gov.au) or call the toll-free 24 hour helpline for employers on 1300 462 957

## Fair Work Ombudsman

Separate from Fair Work Australia. Information and advice about workplace rights and obligations. Handy calculators for wages and leave. Find it at [www.fairwork.gov.au](http://www.fairwork.gov.au) or call 13 13 94

## Job Access

Information hub for people with disability and employers.

Workplace solutions including workplace modifications. You can find information on DES providers here.

Find it at [www.jobaccess.gov.au](http://www.jobaccess.gov.au) or call 1800 464 800

