LivedX Series:
What Young People Said

Financial Security and Employment

cyda

Children and Young People
with Disability Australia

Overview

Young people with disability are one of the most disadvantaged cohorts in the labour market, experiencing discrimination and exclusion on the dual basis of age and disability. To understand the experiences and perspectives of young people with disability in employment, CYDA hosted a consultation with nine participants in September 2021. The consultation was co-designed by an internal working group of young disabled people.

Young people participating in the consultation shared their perspectives and experiences, identifying significant barriers to meaningful employment, which for many started in high school. These included low expectations, poor attitudes by employers and employment service provider staff, and overall inaccessibility and inflexibility in the labour market.

In addition to identifying barriers, young people shared ideas and solutions to improve employment outcomes for their cohort. These included improved accountability systems, greater education and training for both young people with disability, and employers and employment service provider staff, and improved and increased pathways to aid young people to gain meaningful employment.

Recommendations

1. The Australian Government must protect the employment rights of young people

This includes:

- Introducing Disability Standards for Employment to clarify the obligations of employers under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. These Standards should include a clear definition of what constitutes a reasonable adjustment, with examples for employers of varying scope and across different industries
- Increasing funding to the Australian Human Rights Commission to support greater accountability and consequences for cases of employment discrimination.

2. Governments at all levels should invest in the enablers of successful employment service outcomes

Governments should listen to what young people from the CYDA community recommend, to provide effective employment support. This includes:

- Person-centred practice and holistic approaches to service delivery prioritising the employment aspirations of service users

- Increase disability awareness among service providers and employers
- Focus on transition from school and provide earlier employment support to young people
- Develop clear mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement, ensuring that the experiences of people with disability remain at the heart of Employment Service practice
- Place-based and community focused service delivery.

3. **The Australian Government should ensure service contracts, funding models, and Key Performance Indicators of employment programs address systemic barriers to employment and incentivise supporting the needs of individual jobseekers**

This includes:

- Providing sufficient and up-front funding to support young jobseekers to overcome systemic barriers in the labour market
- Ensuring caseloads allow service providers to deliver personalised supports and demand-based activities, such as building employer networks
- Incorporating participant experiences and feedback as a measure of success
- Formally measuring and recognising human capital development as a service offering
- Recognising and building on the diverse strengths and employment barriers of different community settings
- Introduce initiatives and quotas to support the employment of people with disability within employment programs.

4. **Governments at all levels should deliver consistent post-school transition supports for students with disability in line with priority area two[1] of the *Employ My Ability* Disability Employment Strategy[2]**

- The Australian Government should commission a review of funding arrangements in all states and territories for school and post school programs for students with disability
- Together with state and territory education departments, the Australian Government should develop and implement a nationally consistent post school transition supports framework.

---

[1] Building employment skills, experience, and confidence of young people with disability: Ensuring young people with disability are supported to obtain work and careers of their choice.

[2] Commonwealth of Australia. (2021). Available at: Employ My Ability (dss.gov.au)

This framework should:

- Include the core requirements of quality post school transition support as outlined in *Post School Transition: The Experiences of Students with Disability*, including beginning conversations and support in year nine
- Be evidence-based and outcomes orientated
- Include 'high-expectations' information resources for families and students with disability about post school options, application processes, and funding and subsidies available
- Be adequately resourced
- Include resources and follow up supports and programs for young people no longer in school
- Include a strategy and linkages between schools and outside stakeholders, such as TAFEs, universities, and disability organisations
- Include data collection mechanisms that measure uptake, implementation, and outcomes of post school transition programs
- Include information about young people's employment rights.

5. Tertiary institutions should support students with disability to transition into employment post qualification

This includes ensuring career counsellors:

- Understand employability challenges students with disability face
- Have adequate knowledge of disability
- Have connections with disability-confident organisations that will support graduates with disability
- Understand what government services and supports are available to support students and graduates with disability.

About Children and Young People with Disability Australia

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 to 25 years. CYDA has an extensive national membership of more than 5,000 young people with disability, families, and caregivers of children with disability, and advocacy and community organisations.

Our vision is that children and young people with disability are valued and living empowered lives with equality of opportunity; and our purpose is to ensure governments, communities, and families are empowering children and young people with disability to fully exercise their rights and aspirations.

CYDA's Youth Council is a group of 12 young disabled people that engage in CYDA's projects and provide lived expertise. The primary focus of the council this term has been on its two working groups: LivedX and NDIS In Control My/Our Way. Additionally, the members have undertaken professional development in media and governance.

Background to the LivedX consultations

The LivedX consultations were designed to capture the Lived-Experience and Lived-Expertise of young people with disability on topics and issues they value and deemed important. The series brought together young people from around Australia to share their insights, experiences and ideas for a future that embraces young people with disability and enables them to thrive.

The project is a component of CYDA's Our Voices Our Visions: Youth Advocacy project and is funded by the Youth Advocacy Support Grant from the Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

There were seven sessions held over the course of seven months in 2021 covering:

- Inclusion
- Decision making
- Employment
- Tertiary education: university
- Tertiary education: TAFE and Vocational Education and Training
- LGBTQIA+[3] people with disability: community
- LGBTQIA+ people with disability: healthcare

---

[3] LGBTQIA+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Aromantic/Asexual, with the '+' being an umbrella for all other gender, sexual, and romantic minorities. Detailed definitions available at: Your guide to words and definitions in the LGBTQIA+ community (minus18.org.au)

A total of 63 participants attended across the sessions. There was representation from many different disabilities, age (15-29) and all states and territories except Northern Territory. Participants included LGBTQIA+ people, people of colour, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, people who speak a language other than English at home, and people who are living in regional, rural, or remote areas.

These consultations have been synthesised into a series of five papers:

- Tertiary Education and Learning
- **Financial Security and Employment**
- Healthcare Settings for LGBTQIA+ Youth with Disability
- Community Spaces for LGBTQIA+ Youth with Disability
- Inclusion and Decision Making

LivedX has been designed by and for young disabled people. Co-design with young people was integral to this project and consequently LivedX was steered by a working group of the Youth Council.

This policy paper series was written by members of the working group[4], who also participated in the consultation design, topic selection and facilitation, and conducted the data analysis. The working group was supported by Policy and Research team staff, however as a principle, the decisions were made by the young people involved.

Background on financial security and employment for young people with disability

Young people with disability are one of the most disadvantaged cohorts in the labour market. They experience intersectional and systemic oppression on account of their status as both young people and people with disability, meaning the barriers they face in finding quality and stable work are complex and multi-faceted. This disadvantage is then compounded by additional factors, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, or living in a regional or rural area.

Recent data shows this group is more than three times as likely to be unemployed than older adults[5] with disability (24.7 per cent compared to 7.9 per cent).[6] Additionally, young people with disability are also close to three times more likely to be

---

[4] With the exception of the *Inclusion and Decision Making* paper, which was written by Policy and Research team staff, however, it was shaped and approved by working group members

[5] Aged 26-64 years old

[6] AIHW. (2020). *People with disability.* Available at: People with disability in Australia (aihw.gov.au)

underemployed[7] – meaning they have the capacity and desire to work more hours than they are currently employed for.

As a young person entering the labour force, their ability to participate is impacted by a range of external factors. These include the decrease in entry-level roles, decrease in wage growth, increase in professionalised occupations and the larger cohort of older workers[8] remaining in the workforce.

As people with disability, this group are also more disadvantaged because of the systemic discrimination and lack of reasonable adjustments that enable disabled people to participate on an equal basis to their non-disabled peers in the labour market.

Young people with disability's perspective on financial security and employment

CYDA has reviewed, analysed, and collated the participants' ideas into five key themes that emerged throughout the consultations.

Key theme	Theme description
Identity	How young people with disability define themselves
Enablers	The factors that enable or support young people with disability to live the lives they would like to live
Barriers	The factors that inhibit or prevent young people with disability to live the lives they would like to live
Solutions	How organisations, government, and the community can contribute to the greater social movement young people with disability want to see in the world
Social Movement	How organisations, government, and the community can contribute to the greater social movement young people with disability want to see in the world

---

[7] 23.1% rate of underemployment compared to 8.3% of older adults with disability; AIHW (2020)

[8] AIHW. (2021). *Older Australians: Employment and work.* Available at: Older Australians (aihw.gov.au)

What young people said

Identity

The use of an intersectional understanding of identity is key when considering how best to engage young disabled people in employment. Many of the young people emphasised the difficulty of securing safe employment, not only due to being disabled, but due to their intersecting gender identity and sexuality.

> *"Often, you're viewed as like just a disabled person – which I am a disabled person, and happy to be seen that way – but when I'm also like, 'Well, I'm also trans, and I'm also gay, and I need a workplace that is affirming of those parts of my identities', it's just like is too complex, and too overwhelming for other people to handle, and then support."*

Young people emphasised the importance of being considered in their entirety, recounting times where only one aspect of their identity or disability was considered:

> *"I'm in a wheelchair and so people then give you jobs that would be accessible for wheelchair users, not taking into account that I had dyslexia as well. So I can't work at a cashier because I just can't do money and numbers, so I think they don't often take a whole picture of who you are and your experiences."*

Regional barriers were also discussed, noting that it was "*definitely harder to work*" in regional areas in comparison to a metro area.

Enablers

From the consultation it was clear that there are few enablers currently empowering young people to work. However, those that do enable young people with disability to work are invaluable. Proactive support for people with disability was the most significant enabler for young people across all stages of employment.

For job searching, "*clear commitment to diversity and inclusion on workplace websites*", "*Q and A sections on websites that cover work leave policy, and work flexibility*", and statements, such as "*we are disability friendly*", or "*we strongly encourage people with disabilities to apply*" were all said to be enablers for participation.

Additionally, interviewers who provide "*an accessibility map for the office and the interview space*", "*multiple ways to submit CV/interview*", and send the interview questions beforehand were held up as examples of good practice.

> *"We had our [interview] questions already given to us about what they would ask us, so we could just set it out really calmly and know what we wanted to say but they also made such a welcoming environment so that we were able to just be ourselves and speak our truth."*

Finally, these proactive supports must continue once employment has been secured to truly enable young people to thrive in employment.

> *"With [my employer], I found that they were very open […]. They say, 'If you need any help, just let us know. We're happy to accommodate for you'."*

> *"They even provided me with a buddy, and a mentor, knowing that this is my first job, and it's just good to have. Especially being young. You need a mentor."*

Barriers

Unfortunately, barriers were a persistent theme throughout the consultation. Employment barriers sadly began in high school for many:

> *"One [career support] that didn't necessarily work for me – was school and education associated employment. Like a career counsellor, or whatever, because they're […] not only not disability informed, but actively like ableist[9] a lot of the time. And very much follow kind of traditional pathways, which is not something a lot of disabled people can access."*

> *"There was no sort of option for teenagers – disabled teenagers who wanted to have the same, you know, like part-time casual work experiences as able-bodied peers. You had to wait until you were 18, at least where I'm from to access that sort of support."*

Many participants reported a range of negative experiences with Disability Employment Services (DES), ranging from the service being "*incredibly ableist*", "*really hit or miss*", and having low expectations.

> *"The Disability Employment Services, I found that they were just happy to give me money. And I was for a long time, for the […] first few months after I finished Uni, I was looking for a job. I wasn't really encouraged to keep pursuing for a job, [or] see what is current. I had to push myself."*

---

[9] 'Ableism' describes the process of negatively stereotyping individuals or groups on the basis of a perceived 'difference'/ disability and, often, discriminating based on such stereotypes at individual and systemic levels

Low expectations were also pervasive within other career services:

> "[Career services] just didn't have contacts for clinical professional roles. They wanted to offer sort of part-time work, or they wanted to offer things at the supermarket and things like that, which are fantastic avenues but coming out of my Masters, I wanted full-time permanent employment in my field."

The participants had a lot to say about the barriers they experienced with DES, however it should be noted that these barriers are not limited to DES and are instead emblematic of the general attitudes and barriers young people face finding employment.

> "I think they just kind of lumped disabled people together. They didn't really see their diversity, and what levels of disability were like. [...] the employment service wasn't tailored to me."

> "I found that they pigeon-holed my disability. As an autistic person, some autistic people are great at handling large chunks of data and sorting through data sheets. Which is awesome. The DES I accessed only offered these kinds of jobs for autistic people, ignoring that it isn't something I'm interested in/doesn't fit into my career aspirations."

> "I just think my issue that they try to help people with disabilities, but they just have no training, and they just have no awareness."

> "In my experience, the DES operators are quite ableist. And just try and fill a box without seeing me as a person with interests, needs, and passions. One DES recommend[ed] that I work in a call centre, despite me being situational mute in social settings."

Lack of flexibility in the labour market was another significant barrier for young people, from "*the need to be able to pick up 15 kilos in a job description when you're in an office*", to being refused part-time employment because the hours aren't flexible.

> "[My friend] doesn't just need part-time, she needs reduced hours within the part-time days as well [but employers] are still expecting an eight-hour workday."

One participant explained that their long-term employment had been impacted by unplanned hospital visits, doctor appointments and therapies. After being unable to accept all the shifts they'd been offered, their boss stopped giving them shifts:

> "I think for me maintaining [a] job, if anything, is harder than getting a job."

Young people also detailed many accounts where unfounded assumptions had impacted their employment opportunities.

> *"I was advised to choose a course that wouldn't require a face-to-face interview as I was unlikely to get through the interview process as a person in a wheelchair".*

> *"Sometimes I struggle in workplaces. When [employers] look at my resume, and they look at all of my work samples, they have a particular idea of how I function, and that that can change daily, or even throughout the day. So, I'm able to do things to a high standard some of the time, but not all of the time."*

One young person described how despite being accepted into multiple programs in response to emails they had sent seeking employment, once they disclosed that they were in a wheelchair, those offers were revoked:

> *"The whole thing went really well. And then at the very end, I'm like, 'I know I didn't really mention this in my resume, but I am in a wheelchair. I hope this doesn't change much'. And then they're like, 'Oh, I'm really sorry. You need to have this core ability – like a certain level of ability'."*

Inaccessibility was also a key theme preventing young people from working, or at the very least making it very difficult.

> *"I was denied a job because the physical space did not fit my wheelchair."*

> *"When [job advertisements] ask for contact details, if they only ask for a phone number, and don't give you the chance to enter an email address, or your preferred method of communication."*

One young person, who drives a wheelchair-adapted vehicle and needs an accessible parking space, was told that the accessible spaces in the carpark were only allowed to be used by clients and patients, not staff.

Overall, participants made clear that attitudes towards people with disability need to be changed.

> *"Sometimes [with internships] they're like, 'Oh, well, a disabled person couldn't do it'. Rather than, 'I could do it, with a couple of adjustments'."*

> *"In HR, disabled people are viewed as a liability, non-asset, or diversity."*

Solutions

Accountability was a major theme when discussing solutions to the barriers that limit engagement in employment among consultation participants.

> *"I think they need something that's going to be accountable for the decision-makers […] make it an obligation within workplaces that they meet accessibility requirements or anti-discrimination policies for hiring. […] Build in the culture on top of that, but I do think we need that sort of legal accountability as a starting point."*

> *"Something that could be really valuable is regular assessments of Disability Employment Services […] actually having the government paying a disabled person to enter a Disability Employment Service and try to use the service. And then provide feedback on how it was."*

Pathways were another area that young people identified as crucial to employment outcomes, including more work experience and internships for people with disability, such as those provided by *Australian Network on Disability*. Schools were also highlighted as a key opportunity to provide young people with employment pathways.

Education is vital to empowering young people to work. Young people emphasised the importance of being taught their rights and noted that employers should be the ones providing that information to encourage employers to be accountable. Examples of reasonable adjustments and access needs that employers should be able to support need to be readily available to support young people in self advocacy.

Training and education around disability should be provided to all who interact with young people, including DES providers and employers. A public education campaign would also go some way to challenging the harmful and limiting stereotypes that young disabled people come up against in the workforce.

> *"I think the kind of messaging that our mainstream disability organisations like the NDIS can do better [is] to give meaningful experiences and showcase disabled people in professional roles […] I think the way we show disability should reflect the way we want disability to look in the workplace."*

Sustainability of employment is also crucial for young people, by providing not only "*longer contracts*" and "*more security*" but also considering accessibility and support as an ongoing process, not just an onboarding one.

> *"[Employers should not be] viewing how they make things accessible [in] just the first two weeks when they're setting you up and they're giving you your access needs. It's a continued process to keep us actually meaningfully engaged and show that they're continuing to commit to us."*

Social Movement

Having disabled people in leadership roles is key to breaking down the barriers faced by young people in securing employment. This is especially important for roles designed to support and advise young people.

> *"[We should be] ensuring that all, as much as possible, employers and organisers of disability employment services, and disability specific roles are disabled."*

Disability leadership should be the goal of all employers, just as we have seen for cisgender[10] female leadership.

> *"To ensure that it's meaningful employment, there needs to be a commitment to disabled leadership at all levels of the organisation, not just casual contractors. There needs to be the ability for disabled people to move up and take on more responsibility."*

Young people also stressed that accountability processes, such as accessibility auditing, should be led by them and crucially, this must be work that is remunerated.

> *"I think the key thing is that we're the ones determining all of this. It's not a government – it's not a government employee. It's not a disability employment service. It's not an employer. It's disabled young people. And there is meaningful paid scope for us to provide feedback and that to be listened to."*

Finally, cultural changes relating to how disability is valued and understood are pivotal to the success of young people.

> *"You can say that you value diversity, but you've actually got to back it up, and actually have values around that, and actually have a culture around that."*

---

[10] "Someone who is not transgender or gender diverse, and who identifies with the sex they were assigned by doctors at birth. Sometimes written as 'cis' for short." Your guide to words and definitions in the LGBTQIA+ community (minus18.org.au)

Where to from here?

Participating in employment supports a person to contribute their skills and talents to society, be independent, meet new people, develop new skills, and explore new interests. In line with the perspectives of young people who participated in this consultation, CYDA recommends the following:

1. The Australian Government must protect the employment rights of young people

This includes:

- Introducing Disability Standards for Employment to clarify the obligations of employers under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. These Standards should include a clear definition of what constitutes a reasonable adjustment, with examples for employers of varying scope and across different industries
- Increasing funding to the Australian Human Rights Commission to support greater accountability and consequences for cases of employment discrimination.

2. Governments at all levels should invest in the enablers of successful employment service outcomes

Governments should listen to what young people from the CYDA community recommend, to provide effective employment support. This includes:

- Person-centred practice and holistic approaches to service delivery prioritising the employment aspirations of service users
- Increase disability awareness among service providers and employers
- Focus on transition from school and provide earlier employment support to young people
- Develop clear mechanisms for feedback and continuous improvement, ensuring that the experiences of people with disability remain at the heart of Employment Service practice and;
- Place-based and community focused service delivery.

3. The Australian Government should ensure service contracts, funding models, and Key Performance Indicators of employment programs address systemic barriers to employment and incentivise supporting the needs of individual jobseekers

This includes:

- Providing sufficient and up-front funding to support young jobseekers to overcome systemic barriers in the labour market
- Ensuring caseloads allow service providers to deliver personalised supports and demand-based activities, such as building employer networks
- Incorporating participant experiences and feedback as a measure of success
- Formally measuring and recognising human capital development as a service offering
- Recognising and building on the diverse strengths and employment barriers of different community settings
- Introduce initiatives and quotas to support the employment of people with disability within employment programs.

4. Governments at all levels should deliver consistent post-school transition supports for students with disability in line with priority area two[11] of the *Employ My Ability* Disability Employment Strategy[12]

- The Australian Government should commission a review of funding arrangements in all states and territories for school and post school programs for students with disability
- Together with state and territory education departments, the Australian Government should develop and implement a nationally consistent post school transition supports framework. This framework should:
  - Include the core requirements of quality post school transition support as outlined in *Post School Transition: The Experiences of Students with Disability*, including beginning conversations and support in year nine
  - Be evidence-based and outcomes orientated
  - Include 'high-expectations' information resources for families and students with disability about post school options, application processes, and funding and subsidies available
  - Be adequately resourced

---

[11] Building employment skills, experience and confidence of young people with disability: Ensuring young people with disability are supported to obtain work and careers of their choice

[12] Commonwealth of Australia. (2021). Available at: Employ My Ability (dss.gov.au)

- Include resources and follow up supports and programs for young people no longer in school
- Include a strategy and linkages between schools and outside stakeholders, such as TAFEs, universities, and disability organisations
- Include data collection mechanisms that measure uptake, implementation, and outcomes of post school transition programs
- Include information about young people's employment rights.

5. Tertiary institutions should support students with disability to transition into employment post qualification

This includes ensuring career counsellors:

- Understand employability challenges students with disability face
- Have adequate knowledge of disability
- Have connections with disability-confident organisations that will support graduates with disability
- Understand what government services and supports are available to support students and graduates with disability.