



Meaningful Pathways

A program to support
adults with disability
exploring and
experiencing desired
career options

Final report for CAIF funding round 2015

Project funded by the Adult Community and Further Education Board



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1. The problem to be addressed

Many people with a disability, as well as their parents/support network, have aspirations of undertaking roles within the broader community, which may involve roles such as volunteering or paid work (part time or full time) in either an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) or in open employment.

Attaining their aspirational role within the community is often difficult for people with disability as they often encounter additional barriers. As a result, a common response is for them often to undertake “another course”. This may by itself provide valuable skills and/or experience but it does not really help them move closer towards their aspirational goal.

This project was needed to assist a longer term plan to be developed for a person with a disability, resulting in a planning tool that would become a blueprint for their “own individual journey” to their chosen goal, with combinations of a variety of interventions along the pathway that collectively led to and were designed to enable the goal to be achieved. In the absence of a “big picture life plan” being developed, achieving their goal may remain elusive despite their engagement in training activities such as ACFE programs being provided.

The NDIS will be rolled out over the next years and will involve life planning. However a) not all people with disability will be eligible for this and b) this will not eventuate for some of those who are eligible for some years. It is intended that the process developed in this project will dovetail neatly into the NDIS planning processes where appropriate

2. Consultation

The management team at Yooralla College undertook extensive consultation with people with a disability, and their support networks (within Yooralla, Victoria’s largest disability support provider, and to a lesser extent with other service providers).

The common thread that came through the consultation was that there was a lack of cohesion between the services that were available to a person with a disability, often resulting in their engagement in activities that “filled in their day” without necessarily being associated as part of a series of activities that would enable them to meet their end goal.

Planning for this client group was often short term, based around what they were going to do in the weeks or months ahead, rather than building a program that could build a set of interconnected services that would move them closer to their identified goal.

These findings have been reinforced by research reports from the ACE Disability Network (2006 and 2015). <http://www.acedisability.org.au/publications/> .

There was strong support amongst the support networks, particularly parents, for the development of a longer term educational and employment pathway plan for the person with a disability, with independence often being cited as a key achievement they would be seeking for their child. It was

strongly felt that a longer term plan, with appropriate reviews and evaluations, would lead to much better outcomes and key goals being achieved.

3. The Process

Introduction

A Project Steering group comprising practitioners and managers from ADE's, Yooralla College and a Hub (Day Service) was set up to direct the progress of the project.

The agreed approach was to use an action research model: that is, a cyclical process of plan, action, review, revised action. Thus the project was planned as follows:

- a) The report *Community Career Counselling* and the findings from this to form the theoretical basis of the project;
- b) A desktop search for tools and models with regard to career development and diagnostic testing which were already in the public domain and which might be trialled and/ or adapted for people with disability to be conducted;
- c) Where there was nothing suitable for adults with disability diagnostic tests to be devised using key understanding in numeracy and literacy. From these and the desktop search a package of trial tools (PAACH – Possibilities, Attainability, Action Planning and Checking) to be put together;
- d) Action research: the career development and diagnostic tool to be trialled firstly with a with a group of participants from two ADEs to create personality profiles, learning profiles and Action Plans and preliminary implementation stages were put in place. The results to be reviewed in light of participant, mentor and researcher observations. Modifications were then to be made and the trial recommenced with a second group of participants with higher support needs.

Project participants

The project was aimed at adults with disability whose impairments included cognitive and/or physical disability; who had low and high support needs and who had not yet experienced open employment but who had an expressed career goal (career not necessarily being paid employment but encompassing part time, volunteer and other unpaid roles).

The first round of participants worked at rural and suburban ADEs and had mild to moderate intellectual disability. Their mentors were their work supervisors. The second round of participants attended a suburban day centre. They all had high physical support needs and in one case an intellectual disability. Their mentors were support workers who had worked with them for some time.

Desktop research

- a) *Community Career Counselling: Enabling career guidance and learner choice for people with disability in adult education*. This report was researched and written by the project researcher for the ACFE Board in 2015 and formed the starting point for this project. The most relevant findings were that career guidance and learner choice required:

- i) Time: for choices to be made and explored, for networks to be built, for confidence to be built, for ideas to be re-formed,
- ii) In depth conversations over time in which the participants passions could be explored and developed,
- iii) Wrap around: which considered all aspects of the participants life including the social,
- iv) Confidence building,
- v) Experience of work,
- vi) The involvement of the right people,
- vii) Networking and advocacy.

- b) Further research was undertaken, firstly into career guidance. *The Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework Learn Local and VET* provided an initial framework for self-development and career exploration. Other Government sites such as the NDCO *Get ready! For Study and Work*, the *My Career Action Plan* and *Job Outlook Career Quiz* were also accessed. The first two provided some valuable ideas, while the third was thought to be aimed at people whose concepts and aspirations were outside the experience of most of the target group. Ideas from these were added to career concepts promoted by career development practitioners such as McCormick et al (2002); Amundson (1995), Poehnell & Amundson (2011); Bright & Pryor (2011) and the PATH Person Centred Planning tools of Pearpoint et al (2001). From this last both the pathway and the concept of a "circle of support" were adapted.

Since the quality of participant choice is a key ingredient of career planning, the principles of "It's My Choice" (Ramcharan et al, 2013) informed the process. This guide works from the premise that everyone has a right to make their own informed choices, and that the starting point for choice must be the wishes of the person concerned, but that these are made within the limits set by community norms, personal resources etc.

- c) Beyond career guidance, the project involved investigation of the participants' learning needs. For some participants, formal education was distant and in some cases had been minimal or been virtually non-existent. It was considered important to understand not only *what* a person didn't know (which could be tested using the ACF), but *why* they didn't know it: in other words to know, for instance, not only that a person couldn't calculate **3+4**, but whether this was because they had no concept of number beyond one or many, because they did not recognise the symbols **3**, **4** or **+** or because they had not been taught how to calculate.

A primary issue faced was that most diagnostic testing was aimed at school children. An interview with Dianna Seychell, Psychology Consultant at ACER produced *ACER Applied Reading Test* and *Test of Employment Entry Mathematics* neither of which were developed for people with disability (and were considered by mentors and teachers to be beyond the scope of participants) and *The Work Readiness Test* (Rowe, 1995) which was.

Of particular assistance was a study (Forster, 2009), which gave a comprehensive evaluation of diagnostic tools against set criteria including the capacity to identify gaps in a student's literacy and which gave a picture of a student's strength and weakness. This led the researcher a) to the *First Steps in Mathematics and Reading Development Maps* – part of a

series developed by Department of Education, WA which although written for primary school children provided the Key Understandings required for literacy and numeracy and b) to the Burt Word Recognition(1974) tests. Further anecdotal evidence from literacy teachers of people with disability led to the works of Marie Clay and the numerous tests developed from her work such as the *Informal Prose Inventory 3*, (Ayrey, 2008) and the Letter Sound Recognition Tests to be found on the internet such as

<https://www.scribd.com/document/76048044/Clay-Letter-Identification-Student-Sheet> .

Since the *Informal Prose Inventory* is under copyright, permission was sought and obtained from the author to use these texts in a form which could be used by people who were non-verbal.

- d) Using the above resources as guides further tools were developed and adapted for adults and for those who were non-verbal.

Action Research

1. Participants were selected by the Steering Group: the criteria being that they were people with disability who had expressed wishes for open employment and some ideas as to what kind of employment they required. Their ages ranged from mid-twenties to mid-forties. Participants were invited to participate in two groups: the first comprising people with mild disability; the second people with higher support needs.

Career Counselling research (Buckingham & Perry, 2015) suggests that ideally counsellors require time in which to know the participant and to gain their trust. In view of the timelines on the project and the difficulty in fitting interviews between feeding, and toileting timetables for some participants and time taken to reach participants in regional areas, time was always going to be problematic.

Therefore, in order to meet the time requirement, it was decided that each participant must have at least one mentor who had already spent a lot of time with them, knew them well and were trusted by them and who should be present with them at all interviews. It had been hoped that each participant could be supported by a “circle of support”, but in practice it was found that many adult with disability have very few natural supports available. Mentors, at this stage, were informed orally of their role.

The first trials

2. Three participants were chosen from regional and suburban ADE's. All participants had mild to moderate intellectual disability. They were asked to read or have read to them a consent form which they either signed themselves or it was signed for them by an authorised guardian.
3. A series of career development and choice tools (“Possibilities”) were developed from adaptations of the work of Pearpoint et al (2001); McCormick et al(2002); Amundson, (1995), Poehnell & Amundson, (2011) and the NDCO *Get ready!*
4. Participants were also asked for their current skills and qualifications, and special personal skills (normally provided by mentors since participants were too modest to expand on these characteristics).

5. A section was included on “Testing the Dream”: a tool developed by this project in light of the Career Counselling report which suggested a need to reconcile “unrealistic expectations” with “the soft bigotry of low expectations”(Graham Innes quoted in Buckingham & Perry, 2015). This tool did this by carefully teasing out career choices to reveal their essential elements.

Case Study 1

Joseph stated that his dream job was to be a racing car driver. This seemed to be a challenge given that he did not have a driving licence and had never driven a car. Using the “Testing the Dream” tool and other investigatory tools in PAACH it was revealed that it was not just cars which were Joseph’s passion, but any environment that offered him drama and excitement.

6. These tools were tested on each of the participants who attended interviews with their mentors. Changes were then made to tools in light of participant and/or mentor comments and the researcher’s own observations. At this point one participant dropped out because of illness.
7. A Work Readiness Test (ACER) was conducted for each participant. This proved to be a reasonable tool but although it could give a broad indication of the participants’ strengths and weakness it did not go into any depth.
8. A series of diagnostic literacy and numeracy tests (“ Attainability”) were either created or adapted from those sources already provided above. These comprised: a word recognition test; a running reading test, numeracy tests covering: number, measurement and money.
9. These tests were given an initial test with two additional participants from a local day centre who had widely differing literacy and numeracy abilities and modifications made according to the observations made from these trials
10. These tools were then tested again with the ADE participants and again tools were modified in light of participant and mentor comments
11. Action Plans were developed and discussed with participants; review dates were set and posted into Outlook to ensure they were remembered.

The second trials

1. Four participants with high support needs were chosen from a suburban day care centre. All are wheelchair users, two are non-verbal, and one has a diagnosed intellectual disability. Again consent forms were signed.
2. In line with findings from the first trial the role of the mentor was sent in written form to mentors. This included:
 - To know and be trusted by the participant,
 - To support participant during planning meetings,
 - To ensure the plan is what the participant wants and reflects their needs and aspirations,
 - To advise and work with the career planner,
 - To round up other supports/friends etc. as needed,

- To review according to the review dates and update the action plan.
3. Revised Possibilities tools were tested on each participant and further minor adjustments made.
 4. The Work Readiness Tool was conducted for each. This tool, while still useful, proved less helpful where participants were non-verbal as this impairment is not included. For example participants were asked about their communication skills and whereas all participants were able to communicate effectively the questions obviously had not considered a person who communicates only by eye movement and who therefore needs the support of someone able to read these.
 5. Diagnostic tests were augmented by a patterning test and were adapted to be able to be used by people who are non-verbal e.g. by using cards. Running reading was converted into comprehension tests at various levels using multiple choice questions and cards. They were then trialled with participants.
 6. Action plans were developed and discussed with participants; review dates were set and posted into Outlook to ensure they were remembered.

Note: Most participants in both rounds were interviewed three times for periods lasting one to two hours.

Case studies

Names and identifying details have been changed to protect privacy.

Case Study 2

Jim lives in a small country town. He is in his 40's and works for an ADE. He would like a proper job. His supervisor confirmed that he is reliable, works hard, is good at mechanical jobs and can pick up new tasks easily once shown, but he has anger management problems (for which he has had training) and would prefer to work alone.

He has very few natural supports within the community and spends his spare time watching television or going to the pub. His Work Readiness profile showed him to be capable of open employment with some support

His dream is to work for the local Shire in their parks and gardens but on investigation he would be prepared to do any job that allows him to work outdoors and on his own.

Because he lives in a rural area all of the jobs Jim would like require a driver's licence which he doesn't have. Although he is proficient in many practical skills he has no formal qualifications. He has a very low reading age, and reads almost solely by word shape recognition. He has attended literacy classes in the past but found it embarrassing because of his age and also boring since he had to wait so long to get the teacher's attention.

He has basic number skills but is unable to use a calculator.

An action plan was set up for Jim with a long term goal for him to work in farming or horticulture. Initial short term goals included use of a calculator and driving lessons, one on one literacy classes leading to a Cert II in Horticulture

Later interviews revealed that Jim has severe financial problems which are impacting on his ability to think forward and on his ability to get driving lessons. He has no one who would be willing to take him out. He also has relationship problems which preclude access to a car.

His Action Plan therefore needed to be adjusted to include financial and relationship counselling. At the last review Jim is now proficient with a calculator, he has seen a financial counsellor and steps have been made for him to see a rental advocate.

Case Study 3

Jodie has a dream of working as a barista in a coffee shop. She has a mild ID, is bright and chatty, in her early thirties, and lives independently. When not working at the local ADE she likes to go out with her numerous friends, or play cards at the local club. She has a lot of family and community support. She has a Cert II in Hospitality but no barista skills. Her social skills are excellent.

She reads and writes well. She has an understanding of basic numeracy but says she is bad at maths and doesn't like doing it. She feels that using a calculator is "cheating".

Jodie's Work Readiness profile showed that she was ready to undertake open employment with minimal support.

An Action Plan was developed for Jodie. Because she lives in a rural town no suitable training places were available locally. However she would be accepted at a training place in Melbourne and said that she could live with a relative while she was doing this. Her plan also included training in use of the calculator.

At the first review it was revealed that Jodie, after thinking about her plan, doesn't want to move to Melbourne. Her mentor confided that she felt that it was too big a move away from her home and friend even for a short time.

Jodie's plan was therefore revised with her and her mentor to look for volunteer work for her in a local coffee shop.

Case Study 4

Leo has a passion to design clothes. He has been interested in fashion since he was five years old and has developed a portfolio of designs with detailed descriptions and interpretations of the ideas behind them. Because he has cerebral palsy, uses a wheelchair and has limited hand movements he uses a "scribe" to depict his drawing to his specification. He is verbal but his speech is difficult to understand unless one knows him. He has in the past won a design prize, but is frustrated because there seems no way for him within his present day centre environment to progress. He speaks movingly about his ambitions and about his love of design and art.

Leo has never been formally taught to read but diagnostic testing using the card system developed for people who are non-verbal or have speech impediments showed that he had taught himself letters and their sounds and he is able to recognise a range of words through context and first letter recognition. He has an understanding of number and completed the patterning exercises with ease using the cards. His Work Readiness Profile showed that he was both trainable and employable but needed physical support.

The first step on his Action Plan was to attend a TAFE Fashion Design Open Night. Here he met and spoke to teachers who told him they would be happy to enrol him with support.

His mentor has agreed to support him though the course (she is also interested in design). The TAFE department has been recontacted and confirmed that he may enrol for 2017.

He will also enrol in a literacy class starting at his day centre in 2017.

His Action Plan has since been incorporated into his NDIS plan and he has expressed his excitement that his life now has a purpose and direction.

4. Changes made within the project

Action research is about change. Minor changes were made to the mode of interview (less formal as the process continued), the questions asked; extensions to diagnostic material to cover patterning and the form of documentation as the project progressed. Other changes were:

- The adaptation of diagnostic material to accommodate people who were non-verbal,
- Making sure that mentors were fully aware of their role and putting this in writing.

5. Issues identified by the project

1. Lack of natural supports in the community. The project was directed at *adults* with disability some of whom no longer had family to support them. For those that did, families were often already stretched so that mentors tended to be work supervisors and people in paid support roles. Although the level of commitment from some of these was outstanding, it points to the difficulty in finding sufficient people available to make sure plans could be implemented.
2. Lack of numeracy and literacy in participants, some of whom had reached adulthood with no formal teaching of these skills.
3. Lack of diagnostic tests available for adults with disability. These had to be developed for the project.
4. Time available for engaging with participants to fit in with their already designated timetables, and their support worker's work schedules.

6. What was learned?

1. The essential role of mentors. *Community Career Counselling* (Buckingham & Perry, 2015) emphasises the importance of time in the career development process – to develop trust with the participant and to be able to really know the participant. As already discussed, this amount of time is not often available. Hence the presence of a mentor who knew the participant well and had their trust could make up for this. For instance, without such a mentor it would be doubtful if Jim in Case Study 2 would have disclosed his financial and relationship problems.
Mentors were also important in being able to follow through with action plans and where appropriate ensure they became part of NDIS planning processes.
Fortunately, committed mentors were available at each stage.
2. The importance of getting the basic infrastructure of people's lives included beyond their career aspirations such as Jim's financial problems and his need to find answers to his transport difficulties.
3. The need to make steps very small and to find people who would support the participant at each step since many people with disability are unable to action steps without help. One of the issues we faced was the complete lack of family and community supports some people lived with, hence the need for dedicated mentors.

4. The need for regular review dates not necessarily aligned with step completion dates. Where it was understood that the plan would be looked at regularly there was less chance of it remaining at the bottom of a filing cabinet.
5. The need for flexibility. Stuff happens – people get sick, people change their minds, relationships and contexts change, so it was understood that plans would be reviewed and changed as often as was needed.
6. People with high support needs have career ambitions that are as deserving of recognition as those with lower or no support needs. The challenge was to find ways around the obstacles that having high support need present.

7. Did things go according to plan?

The biggest disruption to the project was the restructure within Yooralla. This included the closure of Yooralla College as a separate entity. Management changed and members of the Steering Group were no longer available.

However the effects of these changes were mitigated as follows:

- Pre planning had been extensive so that the project researcher had a clear pathway to follow,
- The project researcher remained in place and she had previously researched career development for people with disability and therefore understood the concepts and challenges,
- Because Yooralla is a large disability service, where prospective participants became unavailable because of organisational changes, others could be found within the organisation.

8. Outputs

The outputs from this project are as follows:

1. A career development pack (PAACH) incorporating instructions and guidelines for use, questions to ask with examples of replies, documentation for results and checklists,
2. A set of diagnostic tools including instructions and guidelines for use and covering literacy, numeracy and patterning,
3. A set of cards for use by people who are non-verbal,
4. This report.

These will all be available on the ACE DisAbility Network website (www.acedisability.org.au)

7. What we will do with the results?

1. The resulting package will be made available for use by other Learn Locals on the ACE DisAbility Network website (www.acedisability.org.au),

2. We are currently seeking funding to enable us to recruit and train career developers and mentors to operate the package with further participants.

10. Outstanding issues pertinent to ACFE

1. Literacy

“The role of literacy in the lives of people with intellectual disability has been marginalised” (Moni et al, 2011)

One of the observations of this project was not only the lack of basic literacy and numeracy in adults with an intellectual disability encountered but also in those with high needs physical disability. Some of these people had never been taught. Others had attended adult literacy classes and left because they had been embarrassed, they were bored or in one case they had been subject to bullying by other classmates.

This lack of literacy in people with intellectual and/or physical disability has also been noted in academic literature (Moni et al, 2011, Erickson, 2005, Carpenter & Readman, 2006).

Although there are a few jobs for which the ability to read and write are not essential, these tend to be very low level, casual jobs or in a supported employment environment. In most cases literacy and numeracy are key to employment, to social inclusion and to personal development.

As Moni et al (2011) point out in their study on literacy and adults with intellectual disability, post school educational opportunities for adults with disability are limited. The main post school options are programs offered by community organisations and small RTOs but their study showed literacy to be something included only at a rudimentary level. Other research (Buckingham, 2006) has shown that ideally literacy for people with intellectual disability should be timetabled for four – five days a week and preferably on a one to one basis.

Further as personal experience has shown and as Moni et al(2011) point out: there are very few texts appropriate for adults learning to read as opposed to primary school children.

Recommendations

That literacy and numeracy for people with disability be further resourced.

That texts appropriate or adults with disability be developed.

2. Career Development

One of the mentors in this project pointed out: it was the actual process of the project which allowed the participant to feel that someone was really listening and taking his aspirations seriously which was important and which gave a sense of purpose to life. As the research paper *Community Career Counselling*(Buckingham& Perry, 2006) and the work done on this project have shown, a community development approach (as opposed to a market based approach) to career development, where time, flexibility and in-depth knowledge of the participant are key considerations, is the most appropriate for people with disability and can a) allow them to move purposefully towards their goals and b) dovetail their action plans with NDIS planning

Recommendations

That career development though community development approaches be promoted.

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My Career Action Plan

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/careers/carframe/Pages/cap.aspx>

NDCO *Get ready! For Study and Work Top Tips for young people with disability*

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The Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework Learn Local and VET

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/careersframework>

Appendix

Tools purchased:

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