Transcript

National Disability Insurance Agency

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Let’s talk about work

**Presented by:**

**Matt Wright**

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**Panellists:**

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Daniel Crowley
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[*Opening visual of slide with text saying ‘Let’s talk about work’, ‘National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)’, ‘ndis’, ‘Delivered by the National Disability Insurance Agency’*]

[The visuals during this webinar are of the presenter and panellists seated on stage, together with an Auslan interpreter in the top right corner]

**Matt Wright:**

Hello, and welcome to the NDIA’s *Let’s talk about work* webinar. I’m Matt Wright. I’m deaf and using technology to be part of today’s proceeding.

I’d like to start with an acknowledgment of the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet, and pay my respects to their Elders both past and present.

And it’s also great to have two Auslan interpreters here today ensuring that people from my community will not miss out. Thank you.

You can join the conversation by submitting online questions and comments. We have a dedicated team that are ready to take your questions.

I’d like to now introduce our expert panel. We’re very fortunate to have Ken Baker, a strategic advisor on employment at the NDIA. Ken was NDS’s CEO for over 18 years, and has a distinguished career in the disability sector.

Also on the panel is Jeannie Hodges, our employment expert, who also has a long history in the disability sector, particularly the Commonwealth rehab service.

We have two people who know all about getting and keeping a job from firsthand experience. Luke Nelson, an NDIS participant. Luke works at Valid, an advocacy service for people with disability, and is a public speaker on disability rights. And Daniel Crowley, who has started his career at Parliament House, accessing supports through the NDIS and also through the DES system.

Finally, Daniel’s support worker Rachel Keir. Rachel has both a critical role not only as Daniel’s support on the job, but in giving people with disability a voice. And Daniel and Rachel will be teaming up to answer questions that they’re provided today.

Welcome all. Ken, I’d like to start with you. It’s often been said that people with disability shouldn’t be working. They should be safely at home or separated from things like employment, because we’re only setting us up to fail.

**Ken Baker:**

I understand wanting to protect people who are vulnerable from the stresses and strains and pressures of the workplace, but in truth, the benefits of work far outweigh the risks. And those benefits of course include economic security. People in work are much less likely to be living in poverty than people who are unemployed. But the benefits extend well beyond economic security. Work is central to our sense of who we are as an adult, our definition of identity. Work is an important source of social networks, of friendship, an important source of purpose, of status, and indeed of health and wellbeing.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons released a statement just a couple of years ago based on extensive research, which concluded that despite the fact that accidents may occur at work, that overall work is a great contributor to people’s health and wellbeing, and that long periods out of work typically have a detrimental impact on people’s health and wellbeing.

So, if we’re committed to people’s social inclusion and their economic security and their health and wellbeing, as I think we are, we should want more people with disability to be in employment. We know at present that the picture for the last couple of decades has been reasonably bleak, that the workforce participation rate for people with disability generally has been low and static. And for people with severe disability, which is really the group I guess on which the NDIS is focused, the workforce participation rate has actually dropped. So that’s a fairly bleak scenario that the NDIS has inherited, and now our commitment is to ensuring that people with disability do get the support, the opportunities, and have the confidence to gain employment and maintain employment.

**Matt Wright:**

So great point. So Jeannie, I’d like to know what the NDIA is doing to support people with disability to get a job.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Yeah. Thanks Matt. I think to start with just saying that, you know, we recognise that all Australians have a right to work, and that includes people with disability. And so there are some things that the NDIA can help with along that journey. I think the first thing is that we really need to have conversations about work. Today we’ve got a webinar called *Let’s talk about work*, and so we really want to have more conversations with people about work. So we want people to come to their planning conversations and be prepared to think about work, to tell us about their interests, to tell us about their aspirations. And perhaps out of those conversations someone will develop a goal. So it might be an employment goal or a goal that leads towards employment. And so once that’s in the plan, that gives us a whole lot of things to talk about how people will achieve those goals.

Essentially what the NDIA local area coordinators and our planners will have a discussion about, is around the sort of supports that people might need to achieve that goal. And it’s the same with any goals in the plan. So first of all we might have a conversation around who are the people in your life, what we call the informal supports, who can help you. For example, we know that one great way of getting a job is using your own networks.

The other thing we’ll talk to you about is what’s in the community. So, what are some of the state services, what are some of the community things that can help you achieve your goals? So for example, we know volunteering is a really good way to actually start the journey towards employment.

We’ll also talk to people about other things that are available to achieve their employment goal, and that includes what we call mainstream services. So they’re services that are available to everyone in Australia, regardless of ability or disability. And so one thing we will talk about particularly is a service called disability employment supports or services. That’s a Commonwealth service, and it’s available to all people with disability who are experiencing barriers in getting work. And so we’ll talk about the services that that particular program offers, and we can help people connect with the providers of that program, if that’s the right pathway for them.

And finally, we will talk about what the NDIA can do to support in terms of funding. So if there are things that the NDIA can do that none of those other things will help or will complement, we’ll talk to you about what funding is available to enable people to reach their employment goal.

I think this is a great opportunity Matt, and I’d like to take it, to introduce a particular thing we’re launching today, which is a booklet called *Let’s talk about work*. I mentioned at the beginning one of the things we really need to start doing which will make a big difference we’re hoping, is about coming to the conversations and being prepared and enabled to talk more about work. And so this particular booklet – and I’m going to hold it up here – is called *Let’s talk about work*. This is going to be available after the webinar.

But essentially we recognise, and we’ve heard from our participants, they want more time to plan and think about their planning conversation. The pathway booklets help with that too. So we want people to use this booklet to tell us about their thoughts about work, their interests, their aspirations, and what supports they think they might need to get to work. Bring this along to a planning conversation so we can ensure that people have the right supports at the right time to help them to achieve their goal.

**Matt Wright:**

Thanks Jeannie. So disability employment service is an NDIA employment support. Tell me in a nutshell who does what.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Okay. So I think that this is something that we would work through in a planning conversation Matt. And I mentioned about disability employment services, one of the services available to people. I think sometimes when people are starting on their journey, when they’re thinking about work, it takes them time to understand who they are as a person and as a worker, the skills they can bring to a workplace, and the steps that they might need to take to get there.

And so for the NDIA, I think our role starts with those conversations, and it starts with helping you to discover and explore what are the things about me that I can contribute to a workforce? What are the skills and the capabilities I can bring? What are the things that I know I’m going to be good at, and what are the things that I might need a little more help to do?

What we can also do is enable experiences that help people better understand the best sort of employment circumstances for them. So what sort of supports are you likely to need in the workplace? What does it look like? What are the things that are going to help you? What are the things that are going to be difficult for you? A lot of those things need to be discovered and explored perhaps before people start active job seeking. So in a sense, we’ve got a key role at the NDIA to understand the sort of things that are capacity building to help you get to a point where you can really well engage with the DES system, and their expertise is engaging with employers, helping you understand the right sort of job for you and making those connections.

So that’s one thing that we can do that’s different from the disability employment services.

**Matt Wright:**

Thanks Jeannie. Now Luke, I’d like to bring you in at this point. You’ve been working for a while now. Tell us a bit about how you started your employment journey and your current role.

**Luke Nelson:**

Sure. No worries. I was lucky enough to start in a volunteer role that has gradually turned into paid work and also some volunteer work with a whole bunch of organisations, but primarily I work for an organisation called Valid. And also my role is about talking to the community and educating about the expectations and helping people realise that we can work together to build a future for people. We can make sure that everyone has a chance to be employable, because everyone is employable, whether they have a disability or not. And that’s just amazing. I love my job.

**Matt Wright:**

Luke, I wanted to ask you about when you started. There are a couple of basic things that it’s hard to get used to, like getting up in the morning and getting to work and changing your routine a bit. Do you want to take us through some of those experiences?

**Luke Nelson:**

When I started with work, the worst part about it was I had to be there on time, and I had to get up at six o’clock in the morning or five o’clock or whatever, and I went ‘Oh my goodness’. And also just learning about the disability sector and learning about disability issues, and basically learning in a meeting when to actually sit back and actually listen instead of talking all the time. Because when I was 19, I was naïve and I thought I knew everything, as we all do. But I had some great mentors and some great people beside me to lead me through the wonderful path that is my job today.

**Matt Wright:**

Yeah. That’s a great example that you bring up. So your boss sat you down after a particular meeting and gave you some feedback around that you were now a worker and you were moving from the position of being able to talk and say whatever you like to sitting back and listening. And what happened at the very next meeting after you got that feedback?

**Luke Nelson:**

I didn’t say anything, and people looked at me and went ‘You know you can talk. You know that’. I went ‘I know, but I really want to just listen’. And it was actually better, because I just went ‘This is easy’. Now I know.

**Matt Wright:**

Terrific. Luke, I want to take you back to 2012. It was a big year for you.

**Luke Nelson:**

It certainly was.

**Matt Wright:**

So you got the job at Valid, and a few other things happened during that year.

**Luke Nelson:**

Yeah. I found out that I was actually getting a job with Valid, and also I found out that I – well, when I say found out, I decided to move out of home, which shocked my parents no end. And that was a big decision for me, because I needed some help and some guidance to actually work out what I was going to do in terms of funding. So we sat around the table and we worked it all out. And it was quite a daunting experience, but I got through it, and it was great.

**Matt Wright:**

Terrific. Ken talked about the importance of those social connections before, and work is often a ticket to some of those social connections. You found that you lost a couple of friends along the way when you started working, and probably gained a few friends that were working at the time.

**Luke Nelson:**

I lost I think three friends, because they couldn’t see the value of working. They couldn’t see the worth of working. But I gained some amazing friends who have now been my friends for – well, they’ll be friends for life. But they’re not only my bosses, they’ve become my personal friends. And it was just amazing. And if I can just pick up, for me it’s about self-worth also. I love going to work. I feel like Richard Branson every time I’m up here or doing something to change people’s perspective. It’s just amazing.

**Matt Wright:**

We also had a chat Luke about office politics, and how you’ve managed that along the way. Do you want to give everyone a bit of a snapshot into your personal philosophy?

**Luke Nelson:**

Basically, if you don’t like me, that’s fine. If you don’t like what I stand for, feel free to just say it to my face, and that’s fine. I’m not afraid to say what I believe, which is all people with disability should be given a chance to work if they want to, or to be included in anything they want to do, anything. But I have come across people in the past who go ‘That’s a bit radical for me. It’s a bit out there’. And I used to really care about that. I used to really care about what people thought, because I thought I had to be liked, I had to be really respected and liked in this job when I started. Where now I go ‘No’. I go ‘It’s all about the people, what they want to do, and upholding people’s rights’. That’s what it’s all about.

**Matt Wright:**

That’s some fabulous learning along the way. I’m now going to switch over to Daniel. Daniel, do you want to tell us about your job and what you do?

**Daniel Crowley:**

Basically I’m in the visitor service sort of area in Parliament House, and part of a new team that’s going to be kind of replacing part of the securities role, where they check people in and give them visitor cards. And usually people sign them in, and then those people have to supervise them so they can’t go in certain areas. Yeah. I’ll be printing tickets off on computers and stuff, so I won’t be talking to anyone much, but I have had some instances where people have asked me and I’ve helped them.

**Matt Wright:**

Terrific. Now Daniel, I understand you’re a bit of a movie buff, as am I, but Parliament House has a unique benefit that you can actually see movies before they come out across Australia. Is that right?

**Daniel Crowley:**

It’s true.

**Matt Wright:**

And you were able to see Aquaman or something recently?

**Daniel Crowley:**

Yeah. I saw it about a month-ish before anyone in the world, or at least Australia I think. Yeah.

**Matt Wright:**

What are the things you like about your job?

**Daniel Crowley:**

I guess because it’s kind of low maintenance in terms of it’s not very demanding for me. But it also just gives me space as well. That too. I mean the people there give me space as well too.

**Matt Wright:**

And you mentioned that your co-workers are very supportive as well, and that’s a really critical factor with getting a start. Yep.

**Daniel Crowley:**

Yeah.

**Matt Wright:**

Terrific.

**Daniel Crowley:**

They’re all very supportive and helpful. Very welcoming.

**Matt Wright:**

Great. Alright. We might now go to our online questions. Question one comes from Carolyn.

*Q: How are participants supported to explore their employment options? Is there careers counselling?*

Jeannie, I might go to you on this.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Yeah. Sure. So I think that relates a little bit back to my earlier comments around some people need some time to really explore that, and might need a fairly intensive sort of time to do that. So certainly we mentioned the disability employment services. That’s part of their role as well, is to talk to people about their interests and the things that they’ve had experience in and the things they’d be good at.

But sometimes people need a bit more than that. Sometimes people need to actually experience what it feels like in a workplace and how to understand what work means for me, and to really test those skills and to really try it. So the school leaver employment supports is a really good example of giving students and young people the opportunity to try to develop a sense of identity of themselves as workers. And so sometimes it could be the disability employment services that will do that vocational work, but sometimes the NDIS can complement that by doing some deeper work where it’s needed for people to take the time they need.

**Matt Wright:**

But Jeannie, often people with disability don’t get the same opportunities as everybody else. Often in other schools students are counselled on employment and their aspirations at Year 8, 9 and 10, and people with disability, it’s often a conversation that happens at Year 12 or afterwards.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Yes. No. That’s true Matt. And I think that one of the things that we recognise as the NDIA, that we’ve got a lot of other services and supports and programs that we need to work with to really get a great environment for people to think about work and to start work. And one of the important things is education. So I know that education and one of the benefits of the NDIS is education are starting to realise the extra opportunities that the NDIS brings to students and young people. And so I think that the schools are really focused on how they have quality conversations with their students around career planning, and really understand the options that there are.

But we do recognise again Matt that there are some younger students, and it is important to start that work experience and that work conversation early. So we’re really interested in looking at what that would look like for younger people, to really start developing that vocational goal earlier, so by the time they get to Year 12 they sort of understand a bit about themselves as a person. So not doing what education does, but complementing what education does, where it’s needed, to help develop that identity as a future worker.

**Matt Wright:**

Great. Thanks Jeannie. So the next question is Pat asks:

*Q: Can the government enforce quotas or provide initiatives for organisations and businesses to employ people with disability?*

I’m going to go to Ken.

**Ken Baker:**

Well I think government’s powers for non-government organisations and the private sector are probably limited. It could impose quotas on its own agencies if it chose to. There has been discussion about setting targets, which is a softer version of that. I think my own view is that it’s useful for any organisation to set a target. If they don’t set a target for themselves, then they don’t know whether they’re making progress. And so I think we need to be careful of quotas, because they can have counter-productive effects. But if an organisation – and it doesn’t matter whether it’s within government or outside of government – can develop a commitment to employing a diverse workforce, which includes people with disability, then I think it’s sensible for that organisation to set a target to know how they’re progressing against their own ambitions.

**Matt Wright:**

It’s an interesting case study isn’t it Ken, that the NDIA workforce is about 13 percent people with disability. And with the right ethos and effort, it absolutely can be achieved that people with disability can make up a significant part of your workforce.

**Ken Baker:**

Certainly. And organisations that are savvy, organisations that are progressive, understand that they’ll be more competitive if they employ a workforce that reflects the general population. They’ll get ideas for more diverse sources, they’ll reflect their customer base. I think all these insights are very, very important, that we disseminate these insights within the business world and indeed within government.

**Matt Wright:**

The next question comes in.

*Q: OH&S seems to be a big barrier for people with disability to get work.*

I might throw this to Jeannie.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

So I think this is one of the things that needs a little myth busting as well Matt. I think there’s sometimes a perception in the community that a person with disability in the workplace perhaps poses a greater threat to themselves or to the business itself. I can’t come up with any stats on that at the moment, but my sense tells me that with the right person in the right job with the right supports, there is no further risk to anyone than anyone in that workplace. It’s about having the right things in place. And that’s a responsibility, as with all of us, for an employee to take responsibility for their own health and safety, but as employers, to make sure you’re looking after the health and safety of all your employees.

And there are certainly many government services that also support employers to understand what they might need to do to cater for any additional needs in the workplace. So the Job Access is a really good site to go to, to understand what’s available for employers to make sure that they’re doing what’s right for them and their employees.

**Matt Wright:**

Thank you Jeannie. The next question comes in from Addie.

*Q: Daniel, how did you get your job? Was it through an agency or did someone help you find something that suited you?*

**Daniel Crowley:**

Well it started out, including Rachel, they were going through, sending job applications and stuff, and through my interest in film they sent one to the National Film and Sound Archive. And there I worked alongside Chris Kennedy, who’s sometimes on the ABC radio, and I worked under him sort of in the way that I do now, but I guess a little bit closer.

And then once that was over, I seemed to make a good impression on him. I don’t know how.

He left the archive and went to new Parliament House, and then once there was a new job opening I guess – because he was creating the new team – he offered me it, specifically me, which was awesome.

**Rachel Keir:**

Is it alright if I just elaborate on the beginning a little bit?

**Daniel Crowley:**

Fine.

**Rachel Keir:**

So Daniel was signed up with our SLES program with Job Centre Australia, and through that we do work experience. So when he said the National Film and Sound Archive, that was the work experience. And then from there, we got great feedback. He did really well. We kept that connection with Chris. We sort of asked him every couple of months or so is there any other opportunities. He said ‘We’ll keep Daniel in mind. Absolutely’. And yeah, one day he gets a message and something had come up, and it all just sort of fit together from there.

**Matt Wright:**

Great. Next question comes from Sally, and she asks:

*Q: The NDIS is working to support people with disability in work, but carers also need support in terms of flexible workplaces.*

I might throw this to Ken.

**Ken Baker:**

Well I completely agree with that Sally. And important to remember there are around 860,000 Australians whose primary work it is to care for a family member, support a family member who has a disability. And this work typically doesn’t stick to business hours. It runs around the clock. It’s seven days a week, and it’s unpaid work. And this is an enormous contribution these people are making.

As a consequence, the workforce participation rate of primary carers in Australia is really quite low. It’s around 55 percent. Whereas the general workforce participation rate is more like 80, or above 80 percent. And the median income of this group also is substantially below the general population. So I think the NDIS can provide significant opportunities to generate not only work for people with disability, but to free up time for family carers to either expand their paid work or to re-enter the paid workforce. And Australia would benefit. They would benefit enormously from that, and so would Australia as well. Australia would benefit from having more of the carers able to participate more in the paid workforce.

**Matt Wright:**

Great. Thanks Ken. Our next question is Carolyn asks:

*Q: Can students in their final year at school start accessing programs such as SLES to smooth the transition?*

I’ll throw this to Jeannie.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Yeah. Great that we’re getting some questions about the School Leaver Employment Supports, or SLES. I think Daniel started his journey with that, and work experience was a really good opportunity for you to try and learn.

**Daniel Crowley:**

During Year 12 I think that I actually joined it, or at least I started.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Yeah. So look, there are a couple of things available to Year 12 students, and I mentioned disability employment services and supports. They actually also have a program that’s available for students leaving in Year 12. And again it comes down to what the person needs at the particular time. So if students have a reasonably good idea of themselves, what they’re good at, had an opportunity to test their work skills, they might go straight on to what’s called an eligible school leaver program in Year 12, but many students exiting school, and unfortunately particularly students with disability, they haven’t had the opportunity to even learn basic things like catching public transport safely. They haven’t had opportunities of really quality work experiences at school that really develop their understanding of who they are and what they’d be good at.

So this is when School Leaver Employment Supports is a funding initiative that’s available to young people to really develop their self and sense of identity as a future worker. And then once they’ve got through those sorts of steps and got those really strong foundation skills, knowing what it means to be a worker, knowing what an employer expects of you, then you can go through to the disability employment supports in a really seamless way, and they can take you on that next step of the journey. And yes, those sorts of things can start during the final months of Year 12, because it’s important to have a really good transition. It’s such an important thing for young people, and all young people, to have opportunities for further education or work after school. That’s the normal expectation, and it shouldn’t be any different for young people with disability.

**Matt Wright:**

Great. Thanks Jeannie. Evie asks:

*Q: Please can you give clear examples of what the CB finding a job at NDIS plan can be used for?*

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Alright. So yes, to explain to others who might not have had that, CB means capacity building, and there’s a particular capacity building budget called finding and keeping a job. And so there are supports that we can have under that capacity building budget, and School Leaver Employment Supports is one of them.

So it’s all about the things I’ve been talking about, helping people understand their skills, their aspirations, getting them ready and prepared to be part of the workforce. I should also mention that there are other things funded under that budget Matt, and one of the things that’s currently funded under there is support for people who are likely to need more ongoing or permanent support once they’ve got a job. And so sometimes that’s called supported employment. And at the moment typically what happens is that many people are receiving those supports in an Australian Disability Enterprise, or an ADE. So they’re businesses that are set up, and most of their employees have disability. And so they deliver supports and services to people to be able to engage in work in a really safe way.

One of the fantastic opportunities for the NDIA that Ken brings to us is that there are probably more options and more choices for people who need that longer term support in a workplace. So while at the moment people continue to have choice to work in an ADE, there are lots of opportunities for people to get those supports in a whole range of workplaces, including in a regular workplace.

I might mention Matt at this point, there’s a great example of this on our website, which people can go to after the webinar. If you have a look and look for a video about Victoria, it shows a young woman who’s working at the Anglesea Café, and she’s actually working there with a support worker at the moment while she learns the job and gets her confidence up, and that support will slowly fade out as Victoria becomes more confident. That’s a great example of a different way that people can use their supports in a different sort of work environment.

**Matt Wright:**

I’m glad you raised ADE Jeannie, because it can be quite a sensitive topic. And I think we all have a vision that people with disability can be part of the mainstream workforce in open employment, but we’re in a situation now where some people at the moment aren’t getting those types of opportunities. And Ken, therefore there is a place in the employment landscape for ADEs and also open employment.

**Ken Baker:**

Yes. I agree. I think two important points about Australian Disability Enterprises. One is that they currently provide jobs to 20,000 people who under current circumstances would really struggle I think to find and maintain jobs in the open workforce. That may change over time with different models of support. But that’s very important to recognise they provide 20,000 jobs, and if they didn’t exist, those 20,000 jobs wouldn’t exist. And while some of those 20,000 people may be able to make a transition to open employment, I think at present many of them wouldn’t. The jobs in open employment aren’t there. So for them, the only option would be unemployment, and I think that would be a very bad outcome for everyone.

The second key point is the NDIS. One of the great things about the NDIS is that it allows people to vote with their feet. So this is both I think an important statement, that if people continue to choose to work at Australian Disability Enterprises, then Australian Disability Enterprises have a future. It is also a challenge I think for Australian Disability Enterprises to make sure that the opportunities they’re offering, the jobs they’re offering, the career paths they’re offering, the training they’re offering, are attractive enough so that people with disability continue to vote with their feet and say ‘In the options I have, that’s my preference’. And I think there will be definitely enterprises that will do that, will continue to offer a greater diversity of opportunities and jobs to people, and if there are some that don’t, they’ll disappear because people won’t want to work there.

**Matt Wright:**

I think the flip side Ken is that people with disability envisage a society where all people with disability can be part of the mainstream workplace like everybody else, and if one were to acquire a disability, that they wouldn’t necessarily have to go to another place or a different place. So you could stay in your current workplace, and maybe your role would change, but everyone could be part of the mainstream workplace.

Jeannie, I also think there’s an important point about informed choice here.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Yeah. You’re absolutely right Matt. And I think probably before the NDIA there were fairly limited choices for people who needed that sort of ongoing support in a workplace that was over and above the disability employment supports or services systems. So we’re talking about participants who perhaps need extra supervision, extra mentoring, extra coaching in the workplace, sometimes on a daily basis.

And so before the NDIA, unless you were very creative and very bold and courageous and managed your own funding, really an Australian Disability Enterprise was the only choice for you. And before the NDIA, there was limited number of places available. So I think what we’re trying to do is encourage more people with significant disability, those with higher support needs, to think about work, to talk about work, and to see what the options are.

The NDIA funding is just funding in your plan, and people have choice around how they use that funding. People may choose to use that funding at somewhere like an Australian Disability Enterprise. But we’re seeing some great examples of people who are choosing to use it in a different way. I mentioned the video about Victoria. I talk to lots of parents who are doing some fantastic things to use their supports in a different way. And so they are in regular workplaces, and they have the opportunity to use the funding in their plan for the extra things that might be needed, that’s above what the employer should be doing and above what the natural supports in the workplace offer. And sometimes that’s needed to help people sustain a job, particularly in the early stages of working when you’re learning about that employment place.

So I’m very excited about the opportunities that the NDIS brings to having more people go into more diverse workplaces. And I think Ken’s right. I think there’s a whole cultural shift that needs to happen to make sure those opportunities can be realised, particularly with employers who now have the opportunity to harness a whole new workforce of participants that might have support needs, higher support needs than they perhaps have employed before, but they’ve got money in their plan to help them do that and achieve that, and that’s a really exciting opportunity.

**Matt Wright:**

I want to bring the conversation back to Luke and Daniel for a sec, in terms of now you’ve been doing these particular roles, has that kind of changed your perspective, and what’s your outlook and what are you looking forward to next in terms of your career? So I’ll start with you Luke.

**Luke Nelson:**

I think for me, in terms of looking for next challenges, I think I want to continue working with the NDIA and working with people around what we can do to build the workforce around disability. Because you give us the tools and we’ll build it. And in terms of the career path, I wouldn’t choose anything else. I wouldn’t choose anything else. I think about – I was just talking to my support worker last night about it. If you’d said to me years ago when I was at school that I’d be doing this, I’d say you’re mad. So the NDIS has given me the freedom to do this job, and I’m eternally grateful for it, because I’m able to talk to people and better their lives as well as change the system. So it’s fantastic.

**Matt Wright:**

Terrific. Alright. Daniel?

**Daniel Crowley:**

I’ve honestly got no clue at this point. Like you said, I would never have imagined that I would be working at Parliament House in the small sort of area that I’m in. It’s not that important in the grand scheme of things, but it’s that I’m there.

I’m currently just happy where I am right now honestly. I don’t have any sort of ideas of where to go next, because I honestly just got started.

Yeah. Sorry.

**Matt Wright:**

Thanks very much. So I’m going to go back to our online questions. So Tim asks:

*Q: Is there currently or are there plans to introduce a similar support to SLES for people over the age of 22, to encourage people to be able to fulfil an eight hour DES criteria to start to consider engaging in vocational opportunities?*

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Do you want me to answer that one Matt? Yeah. Great question. I think we probably started with the School Leaver Employment Supports because we knew that that’s such an important transition point, and if we can help young people on that pathway early, that’s a great place to start. So we have put our attention and focus on that as a beginning.

I think the scheme’s moving through in an evolutionary way, and we’re now looking at the sorts of things that we can build and grow and the opportunities for people. And that includes looking at what are the supports needed for people who are older, who have goals and aspirations. So absolutely what I’d love people to start with is using the booklet that I talked about earlier, and I’m going to show it again, to bring that along to your planning conversations so we can start that conversation. And so no matter what age you are, we’ll go through that process that I talked about, talking about your interests, finding what supports you need, going through understanding who can help you with those supports, and putting money in your plan, if that’s what’s needed, to take you on the next step.

And so while we haven’t got something perhaps as defined and well known as School Leaver Employment Supports, it’s absolutely available now. And what we’re talking about now and what we’re going to do, and do well over the next few months, is really equip our staff to better understand the opportunities and how they can plan with people successfully.

**Matt Wright:**

Terrific. Ken, the participation rate for people with disability hasn’t changed in the last two decades. How can we improve this?

**Ken Baker:**

Yes. Well this is the million dollar question really. I guess if it had been easy to reverse that trend, then it would have been done, because I think successive governments have had that as a commitment, to do that. Clearly though I guess what it does require is there’s not one single thing to do, it requires a multitude of things to happen. And if I could just I suppose think about three. And this is based upon evidence that has been collected internationally on that very important stage of life where a young person makes a transition from school, hopefully to employment, and it is a critical stage of life, because if a person doesn’t connect with work after they leave school, then it gets increasingly difficult for them to connect with work.

So we do know from the evidence internationally that expectations are very important. So it’s the expectations of the young person, but because they’re in their formative years, really important, the expectations of the people around them, their teachers, their family, their friends, community, employers and others. And historically it’s just the case that their expectations have been too low of people with disability’s capacity to work with the right support and the right opportunity. So in general I think we need to lift those expectations and build the confidence of young people that they can work.

The second thing, which is echoing a point Jeannie made earlier, is that in a way the earlier we start the better. We can’t wait until a young person has exited school. We need to begin while they’re still at school, I think preferably as soon as they reach working age at school. Start to connect them with work experience, career counselling, after school jobs. All of this will help shape their ambitions, hone their skills, give them a realistic sense of what work means, what jobs they might like, what they can do, what they can’t do, so when they leave school they’re really ready to engage directly with employment.

And the third critical piece I think – and this is not an exhaustive list by any means – is collaboration. There are many stakeholders that need to have a part in the pathway from school to work for a young person – the disability employment service, the school, the teacher, the family, the VET trainers, maybe apprenticeship centres, employers, maybe local government – and if they’re all on the same page, working on concert, making sure that pathway to work is as easy and as seamless as it can be, then the young person is more likely to make that transition successfully.

**Matt Wright:**

Because Ken, we often fall into the trap of looking for simplistic solutions. So I’ve heard often that we might blame employers for not hiring enough people with disability, or discrimination. And it’s not to say that those aren’t important factors, but there are a range of really important factors that have led to us being in this situation. And really, if it was an easy solve we would have done it two decades ago.

**Ken Baker:**

That’s right.

**Matt Wright:**

Alright. I’m going to go to our online questions again. Andy Cat asks:

*Q: As a mature aged woman with a disability, can the NDIS help my employment prospects, taking into consideration not only my disability, but the ageism that is rampant and out there?*

Alright. I might throw that to Jeannie.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Sure. Absolutely. I think again, start the conversation. And so part of our role is having that conversation and helping identify the right sorts of supports that a person might need to be able to start that journey back to work or to work for the first time as a mature age.

In terms of ageism, I mean that’s something that all people with or without disability may face. And when Ken talked about the other things that we need to have in concert, this is part of that. It’s about discrimination generally in the workplace. So we need all the players to get on board with this.

In relation to a mature aged worker, again it comes back to a conversation about the supports that are needed. And if a mature aged worker has had something happen in their life or perhaps never had work and they really need support to be able to build their capability and their capacity, sometimes even just to have a really slow start that then can be built on month on month, that’s some places where the agency might be able to help with funding. And again, part of the role of the local area coordinator is to know about the services and supports in the community, and also to connect them with and help them understand what a disability employment service can provide for them at the right time.

**Matt Wright:**

But it’s a difficult one in terms of the ageism. There are perceptions around people with disability and people with age, and it’s probably a whole of community effort needed there.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Absolutely. I guess it would be very nice to get to a point with a person with disability that the reason that they were perhaps struggling was more just because of ageism and no other factors. So with the right supports and the right job at the right time, that shouldn’t be a barrier to someone entering the workforce or getting work. But unfortunately ageism and other discrimination still happens in the workplace, and we’ve all got a role to play in removing that as well, not just disability.

**Matt Wright:**

Alright. Elizia asks:

*Q: Of the two panel participants, could they state clearly what supports the NDIS has funded for them within their plans to support employment?*

So I’ll start with Luke.

**Luke Nelson:**

Thank you for your question. Basically I need a support worker to come with me to a lot of these events, so they’ve funded my support worker to come with me. But also I’ve been able to travel. I’ve been all over Melbourne, a lot of times to different places in Australia. I’ve employed private support workers now that the NDIS has helped me do. Because something that I’ll just say, is with my work and my work schedule, it’s been very difficult to find support workers that are very flexible. And flexibility for me is key, because of the amount of work that I do and the amount of opportunities I have. That’s the biggest thing. And in terms of also keeping myself fit for employment so that I don’t get tired easy and that, I am able to go to hydro and do gym and all that through NDIS funding.

**Matt Wright:**

You make a great point about support workers. And I sought Daniel’s permission, so I’m going to throw this over to Rachel. So Rachel, you’re very passionate about the type of work you do and the support that you provide to people. Do you want to just tell us a little bit about the experience of being a support worker?

**Rachel Keir:**

So as you said, yes, I’m extremely passionate about my job. I consider myself quite a hard worker. So I find that in this role I can put time and energy into my job, and I can see the results and how they impact someone’s life. And I really love that about my job. But also I was thinking actually on my way here, I love every day at work. These guys, they make me laugh. They make the eight hours fly. I don’t think I’ve ever had a day at Job Centre where I haven’t laughed or had just a positive conversation with somebody. And it really makes it all worth it. And then when you see results like Daniel’s, it’s really inspiring.

**Matt Wright:**

Fabulous. Alright. I’m going to come back to you now Daniel, in terms of the supports and how it’s provided some assistance for you as well.

**Daniel Crowley:**

Is this basically what they’ve been funding sort of thing? Right.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Daniel, could I ask you – I’m pretty sure that you started off with the School Leaver Employment Supports funding. So did that happen just after you left school? Tell us a little bit about what started you with that.

**Daniel Crowley:**

There was a section, when I went to school, for helping students who needed extra help with any sort of learning, and through that they mentioned SLES. That was I think a new thing at the time. And I went to an open day sort of thing, tried it out, joined it, and by the end of my school years I was part of it. Yeah.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Great.

**Rachel Keir:**

And then also Daniel signed up with our independent living skills as well. So we work on things – I remember you saying you wanted to move out of home one day – so how to rent a home, budgeting, insurance as well, like all those things that we all sort of just pick up along the way. Learning about how to do all that and how to balance that with a job as well.

**Daniel Crowley:**

The stuff that should be in school.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

I think I might add there Matt, I think – I’ve talked a little bit with Daniel and Rachel, and I’ve also spoken with your dad. And so I think it’s a really great example where Daniel had parents that really were supportive of Daniel working, really encouraged him, and had very strong expectations that, like all kids, you’re going to go and get a job. And so it was a really important thing in the family. And I think the School Leaver Employment Supports I think was the first step around sort of building confidence that you can actually work and the sorts of things that you’d need.

And then Daniel you went on to engage with a disability employment service. So having done that and the next step in actually getting a job, now that particular program is supporting you to get yourself really confident at work and to be there for you if issues arise, or if you have any challenges they can support you. So I think it’s a really nice combination that we talked about. There’s lot of things that contribute to the end goal. It’s family, it’s community, it’s the right supports at the right time. And I think congratulations. You’re a great example of that all coming together, both of you.

**Rachel Keir:**

As you said, the combination. So it’s really great, because I’ve worked with Daniel through the SLES program and now he’s transitioned to our DES. And it is a great combination, because we can work on those skills, and then as he’s sort of moved through, we knew what his interests were, we knew where his strengths were, what kind of work was suitable and what sort of work environment you wanted. So it does work together really well, and the outcome has been really great.

**Luke Nelson:**

And that shows me good support workers working together.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Yeah. It’s really critical. It’s great point Luke. And I think that’s a great point, to say that it’s so important that when people have funding in their plans to use, to make sure you’re connecting with the right providers who are going to help you get what you need to get. And so sometimes people forget that they can actually change providers. So one of the fantastic things about the NDIS is it puts people with disability right in the driver’s seat. Choice and control really means that I have some choice around how I use those funds. I can control who I purchase those supports from. And if they’re not working for me, just like any other consumer you can go ‘Actually, I need to make a change, because this isn’t working for me’.

So I love to see that happen. I’ve been with the scheme for over six years now Matt, and that’s been one of the most exciting things, is to see people with disability very firmly in the driver’s seat.

**Matt Wright:**

Ken, this is a critical issue around support workers isn’t it, because we need people who are incredibly motivated, very respectful in their interactions, have great interpersonal skills. And clearly Rachel is that type of person, but it’s very difficult to find that across the board in such large numbers.

**Ken Baker:**

Well that’s true Matt. But certainly as you say, I think we need more people like Rachel. And we know that essentially in broad terms the NDIS doubles the funding for disability support across Australia, and it will need to double the workforce to provide that support. And there are other sectors, allied sectors if you like, like aged care, that are growing also at a significant rate, so the competition for workers at present is quite acute. And the last thing we want are the wrong sorts of workers, so it’s important that selection processes have a lot of integrity to ensure that the people who are coming into these really important roles where they’re often working unsupervised with people with disability, that they’re the right people who have the right attitudes, the right values, the right orientation, that their communication skills are very good.

Because I think in the NDIS listening is so important, listening to what preferences, to what interests, to what goals the person with disability is communicating. And they may be communicating in all sorts of at times obscure ways, but very important to listen to that. And these are really important skills that not everyone has.

So in general I think training is critical, but values and attitudes are just as important, and you really can’t, I don’t think, teach those underlying values. You need to recruit people with them. But that is certainly a big challenge for the sector at present.

**Jeannie Hodges:**

I think Matt, could I add on to that, particularly in relation to employment, that we know that many of our participants have intellectual disability and autism, and evidence will tell us through the time that there are particular ways of supporting people in employment with intellectual disability and autism that work better. And typically that looks like putting people into real workplaces with great support to have an opportunity to try and learn in a real environment. Sitting in a classroom often doesn’t work.

And so it is about good relationships, but it’s also about choosing providers that actually know how to do it well. And sometimes it takes a little bit of time to find one who has those results. And there’s nothing wrong with asking a provider, saying what are the results? what outcomes do you get for people? How many people in the last year that you’ve helped have gone on to get a job? You’re okay to ask those questions, because you’ve got the money.

**Ken Baker:**

Can I just add too Matt in terms of the workforce issue, I think something that the mental health sector has done reasonably well is develop a role around peer support, which is people with mental health conditions who then have particular insights into the support needs of other people with mental health conditions. And with training – it is important they get the training – but they can be very effective workers. And probably the disability sector broadly is using this model in some sections, but could use it more broadly. So there could be new jobs opening up for people with disability in the disability support sector.

**Matt Wright:**

Fantastic. Thanks Ken for that point. Tim asks:

*Q: A major disincentive for employers in the SLES is that there’s no financial incentive to the employer to employ a SLES participant. It’s largely a work experience program.*

Jeannie?

**Jeannie Hodges:**

Yeah. Thanks Matt. Yes. And it’s probably important to go back to the intent of the School Leaver Employment Supports. It’s all about helping a person discover themselves and to discover what they’re good at, and to give them real experience in the workplace to try and test. So the work experience is actually probably one of the most fundamental things that we would expect to happen.

Now sometimes things might happen and a person actually as a result of that gets offered work while they’re still in the School Leaver Employment Supports and using those services, and that’s fantastic. I think the School Leaver Employment Supports – one of the things that we would hope to see as an outcome of that is people’s confidence and capability and capacity grow, that they can engage with a disability employment service. And it’s the disability employment service program that has the extra things like wage subsidies and employer incentives and skilled people who know about work and know about employers that can do that part of the job.

So if people in School Leaver Employment Supports are well on the way in the journey to getting a job, it’s really important that that provider connects them with a DES at the right time. There are going to be people who come from School Leaver Employment Supports where it’s decided that they actually need higher levels of support in the workplace. Then a DES, that’s perhaps not their role to do. So we talked about those that might need some ongoing work. So if that’s part of what’s discovered during this process of learning about myself and what I need, it could be that a DES may not be involved and that that person may go on to get supports in the workplace, and potentially that funding can come through a plan to enable that to happen.

But we’re working really closely with the Department of Social Services who administer the DES program, and we’re aware of these things, and we’re having conversations around making sure that all people with disability, no matter what services they access, have equal access to some of the things that can help.

**Matt Wright:**

Terrific. Thanks Jeannie. This next question I’ll throw to Ken. Claire asks:

*Q: What’s available for someone who’s 40 who has finding and keeping a job funding?*

**Ken Baker:**

What’s available for someone who’s 40? I think it’s the same thing as the sorts of things that Jeannie was talking about earlier. So support to look around and connect with an employer. So I don’t think it should differ according to your age. That support is available whatever your age might be.

**Matt Wright:**

Terrific. Luke, I wanted to ask you, I’m sure that there’d be a number of people with disability tuning in today, and what’s the first step that they could take to be like Luke and do the same types of things in terms of getting a job?

**Luke Nelson:**

I think you need to find out what your passion is, what drives you. This for me was a complete fluke, and I just ran with it. I just went this is something that really fits me. So say for example if your passion is – and you have to be realistic about this. You have to be realistic. If your passion is to work on a farm for example, then take that to your planning discussion. Talk to the NDIS and be part of building your own future and be part of that conversation. And sit down with the NDIS representative and say to them ‘I want to work on a farm,’ or ‘I want to work in a café’. And work with them and build your future.

**Matt Wright:**

Terrific. I’d also say the same for Daniel. There would be a number of people with disability. Just what are the first couple of steps that you took that made this a reality?

**Daniel Crowley:**

I think you said it best honestly. I can’t really add to that one sorry.

**Matt Wright:**

Alright. I think that that’s all we have time for. I’d like to thank our wonderful panellists here today for being here and for your answers to the questions. And thank you all for your contribution. Goodbye, and I’ll see you at the next one. Thank you.

[*Closing visual of slide text saying ‘Questions?’, ‘ndis’, ‘Visit:* [*www.ndis.gov.au*](http://www.ndis.gov.au)*’, ‘Phone: 1800 800 110’, ‘8am-8pm eastern standard time weekdays’, ‘Email:* *enquiries@ndis.gov.au**’, Like us on Facebook’, ‘Follow us on Twitter @NDIS’*]

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