

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AUSTRALIA

# Annual Report

2023-2024



Disability  
Employment  
AUSTRALIA

# Contents

|                                                      |       |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Member Story – Ostara Australia .....                | 3     |
| DEA Board .....                                      | 4     |
| About Disability Employment Australia .....          | 4     |
| Member Story – Barkuma .....                         | 5     |
| Report from the Chair .....                          | 6     |
| Member Story – WISE Employment .....                 | 7     |
| DEA Members .....                                    | 8     |
| Member Story – Maxima .....                          | 9     |
| Our Business Partners .....                          | 10    |
| Member Story – CVGT Employment .....                 | 11    |
| Report from the Chief Executive Officer .....        | 12-14 |
| Member Story – Real Futures .....                    | 15    |
| DEA Strategy 2024-2025 .....                         | 16    |
| Member Story – uLaunch .....                         | 17    |
| DEA Conference .....                                 | 18-19 |
| DEA Hall of Fame 2024 .....                          | 20    |
| Inaugural DEA Awards .....                           | 21    |
| DEA Leaders' Forum Events and 2023 AGM Wrap-up ..... | 22    |
| Member Story – Castle .....                          | 23    |
| DEA Training .....                                   | 24    |
| Member Story – Edge Employment Solutions .....       | 25    |

## Disability Employment Australia

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**Cover image:** Author and advocate Sonny Wise delivers a dynamic keynote at DEA's 2024 Conference.

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# Alannah

## From Recovery to Leadership – A Journey of Growth and Opportunity

When Alannah first connected with Ostara Australia, she was facing a challenging period in her life. At just 23 years old, she had been living with anxiety and had undergone major surgery, which had kept her out of the workforce for two years. Relocating to Port Macquarie, Alannah was seeking a fresh start, determined to rebuild her confidence and pursue a meaningful career.

Alannah's path back into the workforce began when she met Renne, her Employment Consultant at Ostara Australia. Renne saw Alannah's potential from the start and worked closely with her to build up her confidence and explore her career options. Together, they crafted a strong resume and discussed how retail could be the ideal stepping stone for Alannah to reconnect with the working world.

Renne's personal connection with a local retail employer, Connor Menswear, proved to be a game-changer. Through this network, Renne secured Alannah an interview at Connor, and it wasn't long before the store saw what Renne had already noticed, Alannah's potential. She was hired, initially working a few shifts per week. Slowly but surely, Alannah's hours increased as her confidence grew, and she embraced the challenges of retail with determination and enthusiasm.

Today, Alannah is training to become the Store Manager at Connor. From those early, tentative steps into part-time retail, she has blossomed into a leader, taking on full-time responsibilities and preparing to manage her own store. Alannah's journey is a testament to her resilience and determination. Retail has not only given her financial stability but also allowed her to connect with people, build friendships, and rediscover her confidence.

"Employment has given me the freedom to be myself and connect with people. I've made great friendships, and my mental health has improved tremendously," Alannah shares with pride. The customer service aspect of her role has been particularly healing for her, as interacting with others and making customers smile brings her a deep sense of satisfaction and joy.

Ostara's support didn't end with landing her the job. Renne and the team have been by Alannah's side throughout her journey, providing Post-Placement Support (PPS) and ongoing check-ins to ensure she continues to thrive. Ostara also supported her in



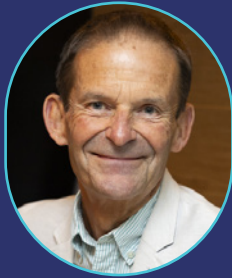
completing a First Aid Certification, further equipping her for her growing role at Connor. Weekly appointments with Renne became an anchor for Alannah as she navigated her career progression.

But Alannah's story doesn't stop here. Now that she is training for a leadership role, she is eager to give back. Alannah is passionate about paying it forward and has expressed her desire to hire more participants from Ostara Australia. As someone who has experienced the life-changing impact of support and employment, Alannah wants to create similar opportunities for others who may be facing their own barriers to employment. She understands firsthand how vital it is to have an employer and support system that believes in you.

"I would recommend Ostara to anyone who needs that extra bit of help," Alannah says. "They've been wonderful, and I'm forever grateful for their guidance and support. Now, as I step into this new role, I want to help others find the same confidence and success that I've found."

Alannah's story is not just one of personal success, it's a story of empowerment, resilience, and leadership. From overcoming her mental health struggles to rising through the ranks in her career, Alannah exemplifies the profound impact that meaningful employment and strong support systems.

# DEA Board



**David Coles**  
**Chair**

Regional Coordinator/  
Policy Advisor,  
EPIC Assist



**Keryl Neville**  
**Vice Chair**

CEO,  
LEAD Disability Services



**Thérèse Campbell**  
**Director**

Director Government &  
Stakeholder Relations,  
MedHealth



**Mark Chaffey**  
**Director**

Chief Operating Officer -  
Employment & Marketing,  
Ability Options



**Tracey Fraser**  
**Director**

General Manager,  
Growth and Innovation,  
Personnel Group



**Mat McIntyre**  
**Treasurer**

The Disability Trust



**Karen Rainbow**  
**Director**

CEO,  
Employment Services,  
APM



**Peter Bacon**  
**Secretary**

CEO,  
DEA

## About Disability Employment Australia

Disability Employment Australia (DEA) is the country's peak body for Australia's disability employment sector. Representing providers of disability employment services, we are devoted to the purpose of helping people living with disability to find meaningful, productive, and fulfilling work.

We are committed to confronting and challenging the exclusion of people with disability, including within the workforce and workplace. Everyone should have the chance to be fully involved with their community and control over their own life choices. Participation in the open labour market is a crucial factor in realising these goals and we are dedicated to this cause.

For more than a quarter of a century, we have been a leader in the disability employment sector; our membership encompasses 70% of the sector's providers and over 92% of the caseload. 80% of DEA's members are not-for-profit and deliver a range of services including the Disability Employment Service (DES), NDIS, social enterprise, and community-based programs.

Policy and advocacy are core elements of DEA's work. Previously, DEA has worked with government over critical changes and developments, including moving from block to case-based funding; developing the participant assessment model; uncapping DES; establishing a Disability Employment Hall of Fame; advocating for a National Disability Employment Strategy; and contributing to the Disability Royal Commission and NDIS Review.

As the country's pre-eminent peak body for disability employment, we represent a group of members with deep experience and outstanding expertise in delivering specialist services for people with disability.

DEA has a responsibility to foster excellence, innovation, and flexibility of service within DES and to promote disability employment more widely. We support our members to achieve best practice service provision, and advise, advocate, train, inform, and organise events to strengthen and promote the sector.

## MEMBER STORY

# BARKUMA



## Supported into open employment, Matt finds autonomy and flexibility in a new career

Early in 2020, Matt embarked on his journey with Barkuma Commercial Services as a Supported Employee. Over time, he honed his skills, working across various parts of Barkuma's commercial enterprise, including food packaging, wheelbarrow assembly, and joining the landscaping crew. His dedication led to a role as a peer supervisor, gaining his forklift license, and eventually, a position operating the forklift in the factory.

In early 2023, Matt chose to pursue Open Employment with Barkuma's Disability Employment Service providing guidance. He balanced his role in Barkuma Commercial Services while collaborating with his DES Job Coordinator to enhance his open employment prospects.

"I started in February 2020, working on different projects and earning my forklift license. Recently, I started working for a landscaping team with the support of my Barkuma job coordinator, Gregor. He helps me with Centrelink, my reports, and learning my new job", Matt shares.

Come April 2024, Matt's perseverance paid off when he secured a Gardening Assistant role within a small team tasked with maintaining the green spaces for a popular

fast-food chain. This position, offering 24 hours of work weekly, allowed him to resign from Barkuma Commercial Services, marking a full transition into the open labour market. Matt now relishes the autonomy and flexibility his current position offers, ensuring the upkeep of gardens at various locations.

Gregor, his Barkuma job coordinator, outlines their approach to employment matchmaking: "We begin by understanding what our clients might enjoy and where their strengths lie. We then reach out to our network of employers or find work experience opportunities that align with their interests and skills. Whether they excel in hands-on tasks or more creative roles, we tailor our approach to each individual. Our goal is to identify a role that they will both enjoy and excel in. Once we find the right fit, we set them up for success by providing the necessary support and resources to thrive in their new position."

This journey was made possible through the combined support of Barkuma Commercial Services and DES, leveraging the skills Matt had developed over four years to identify the ideal job match.



# Report from the Chair



David Coles,  
DEA Chair

that Quality will be at the centre. While we would argue DES Providers have always provided high quality service it is refreshing to have quality as a measurable focus for both participants and providers.

The new Specialist Disability Employment Program is a genuine attempt to recognise the uniqueness of a true disability employment program. There is a lot to like in what the government has developed. We welcome the significant reduction of ESAs for participants. It is very clear this is a specialist program encouraging specialist providers who can reach out to wider areas. We did have reservations about the nomenclature questioning why all providers are not recognised as specialists in disability employment although this has now been largely addressed. We are encouraged with the renewed acknowledgement disability employment is an ongoing support program. The shift from mutual obligation to mutual respect and trust allows providers to shift from being the policeman! I particularly applaud the opening of eligibility to 0-7 benchmark and non allowee participants. We are closer to being able to be an employment program for everybody with a disability. Also, the planned reduction in ESA provider market saturation is welcome in concept but brings potential disruption to both participants and providers. The funding of the program was a serious concern and DEA (with NDS) commissioned a detailed report and analysis of the true costs of providing a disability program allowing the funding concerns submission to be supported with hard and current data rather than anecdotal commentary. The government has taken notice of the report and the many submissions and refocused the funding while also increasing the contract length to five years.

I am proud to say DEA has been loud and bold in communicating the views of members to government and going above and beyond in efforts to ensure the new program is as fair as possible to all stakeholders.

Another year draws to a close with 2024 being, as is becoming more common, anything but a 'normal' year! The government has developed and introduced their Reform Agenda and the sector will have gone to market for a place in the new program by the time this Annual Report hits the streets. Minister Rishworth has been quite clear in driving the new agenda

Peter and his team have worked tirelessly all year producing detailed submissions and data backed analysis to drive the discussion. I cannot emphasise highly enough the enormous workload the team absorbs and delivers on. May I lead you all in the deserved recognition of Charlotte, Sasha, David, Hanif, George and CEO Peter. A special mention for Sally who stepped into the big shoes of David during his recent break. Their work will not end with the tender or with the start of the new program in July 25. The work is ongoing and is our commitment to the sector. It has been very refreshing to see the collegiate approach taken by the peaks and DEA have proven to be the natural leader. The department (DSS) have also shown themselves as truly open to dialogue and willing to consider any reasonable contributions. We value this highly and encourages us to be truly solution focused.

Peter has led DEA to successfully bid for the 2027 World Association for Supported Employment (WASE) International Conference to be held in Brisbane. This is a huge achievement and will be an exciting opportunity to bring the world to Australia to share knowledge and best practice in disability employment. Work has started on the planning of the conference and while the task is huge, DEA have the full support of the Queensland Government. We also have the proven and welcome expertise of Conference Works to bring this amazing show to fruition.

The Federal Government has committed to a Centre of Excellence for Disability Employment in response to the Disability Royal Commission. DEA have long championed the need for such a centre and will take a strong interest in its introduction and development. DEA with genU have been working together to develop specific training and micro credentials for disability employment professionals to grow their skill base and specificity in disability employment. This work is a natural fit for the new centre.

I want to express my gratitude to all stakeholders and contributors who allow DEA to do the important work that we do. Importantly, my thanks go to you, the members of DEA, for supporting us as your peak body and for the work you and your teams do to contribute to the employment of people with disability in Australia. In addition, my thanks to the thousands of people with disability who trust you to support them in achieving their employment goals. Finally, to DEA's dedicated team and the Board, who have contributed to the organisation's success - your unwavering commitment to disability employment is truly commendable.

# Jennie's journey

## From nervous beginnings to award-winning success

**W**hen Jennie Garland first connected with WISE Employment in July 2023, she wasn't sure if she could get back into the workforce. Having never worked before and dealing with severe PTSD, Jennie's confidence was low. But with WISE's help, she turned her life around, securing a job and even winning an award for her efforts.

### Challenge accepted

From the moment Jennie met her Employment Consultant, Mieke Bacon, it was clear she was struggling. "She knew she needed to take the first step towards her future but just didn't know how," Mieke shared. "After a few appointments and deep discussions (and a few tears), it was obvious she was made to be a support worker."

With Mieke's support, Jennie worked on building a resume, exploring career options, and enrolling in a Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability). The paperwork and processes were overwhelming, but WISE staff reassured Jennie every step of the way. "She needed that extra level of personal support due to her poor confidence and PTSD," Mieke said. "But with a lot of encouragement, she started to believe in herself."

### A foot in the door

Jennie's big break came when she attended a networking event through her training provider, Avidity Training and Development. It was there that she secured an interview with Possability, a company supporting people with disability. Even though Jennie was nervous, WISE staff encouraged her, reminding her of her strengths.

After the interview, Jennie was offered a role as a Support Professional at Possability. WISE continued to help her through the onboarding process, ensuring she was comfortable with all the paperwork and requirements.

Reflecting on Jennie's progress, Mieke said, "Watching her grow into a wonderful support worker who cherishes the relationships she's building with her clients has been an honour."

### An unexpected win

Not only did Jennie secure a job, but she was also nominated for the 2024 Tasmanian Training Awards in the category Work & Training Equity Vocational Student of the Year. Though she didn't think she had a chance, Jennie's hard work and determination paid off — she won the award!

"I never thought I would win," Jennie said. "I am no longer feeling like I am not good enough. It's my time to start believing in myself."

Mieke was thrilled for Jennie. "She finally stepped out of the shadows and became the person we all knew she could be," she shared.

### Bring it on

Jennie now feels optimistic about what's ahead. She's excited to keep helping others and making a positive difference in people's lives. "I am here today to prove that at fifty odd, you can still go back to school and improve your life," Jennie shared, "and this has not only changed my life, but it has also made my life."



# Membership

Disability Employment Australia is first and foremost a membership organisation. We exist to represent, support and resource our members to build a diverse and vibrant workforce across Australia. Below is a list of our 2023–2024 members.

- » Ability Options Limited
- » Ability Works Australia\*
- » AMES Australia
- » Asuria Australia
- » atWork Australia
- » Australian Foundation for Disability (AFFORD)\*
- » Autism Association of Western Australia Inc
- » Back2Work Health Specialists
- » Barkuma\*
- » BEST Employment Ltd
- » BIZLINK Inc
- » Bounce Global
- » Breakthru Ltd
- » Campbell Page
- » Castle Personnel Services\*
- » Chapter 1 Employment (Incentive Employment Pty Ltd)
- » Choice Passion Life
- » Community Bridging Services Inc (CBS)
- » CVGT Employment
- » Disability Services Australia
- » Edge Employment Solutions
- » Enterprise & Training Company Ltd
- » EPIC Assist
- » Flourish Australia
- » Forrest Personnel Ltd
- » gforce employment + recruitment
- » Gold Coast Employment Support Service Inc
- » headspace
- » Ideal Placements
- » Institute of Capacity Building (ICB)
- » Interact Australia
- » IntoWork Australia
- » Job Futures Ltd (CoAct)
- » Jobfind
- » Jobsupport
- » Key Employment
- » Kimberley Personnel Inc
- » LEAD Employment
- » Links Community Services (Jobmatch Employment)
- » MADEC
- » MatchWorks
- » MAX Employment
- » Maxima Group
- » MEGT (Australia) Ltd
- » Mission Australia
- » MTC Australia
- » My Pathway
- » Nexus Human Services
- » NOVA Employment
- » OCTEC Limited
- » Omnia Inclusive Employment Solutions
- » Ostara Australia
- » Outlook Employment
- » Palladium International Pty Ltd
- » Personnel Group (The)
- » Populi Solutions
- » ProActiv People\*
- » Real Futures Pty Ltd\*
- » Salvation Army Employment Plus (The)
- » Sarina Russo Job Access\*
- » Scope
- » Serendipity (WA) Pty Ltd trading as APM
- » Settlement Services International
- » Sign for Work Employment (Deaf Children Australia)
- » Status Works Ltd
- » Sureway Employment and Training
- » SYC Ltd
- » The Disability Trust
- » The MS Society of SA and NT Inc (Multiple Solutions)
- » Tursa Employment and Training
- » uLaunch
- » UnitingCare Community Employment Service
- » VERTO
- » Westgate Community Initiatives Group Ltd (WCIG)
- » WISE Employment Ltd
- » Workways Australia
- » Yooralla
- » Your Future Employment Pty Ltd \*

\* joined in FY24–25

## Paul finds sanctuary in conservation

Paul, a Maxima Disability Employment Services (DES) customer, found a new career path after surviving a life-altering heart attack at 45 years old. The heart attack placed him in the rare 1% of survivors, leaving him with physical and emotional challenges. Realising that his previous work as a qualified trade mechanic and plasterer was no longer feasible, Paul began his search for a new direction in life.

Paul's journey to a new career began when he was referred to Maxima from Services Australia, following a period with another provider from 2021 to 2023. Maxima's team approach uses discovery principles and is thorough to ensure that customers don't need to retell their story when working with other members of the team and the process is smoother and comprehensive.

When Paul arrived at Maxima, he met with Employment Consultant Janine for his initial appointment. Recognising Paul's need for a career that suited his new lifestyle, Janine quickly connected him with Business Development Consultant (BDC) Janelle.

Janelle asked Paul about his hobbies, exploring potential industries that could align with his interests to ensure he would enjoy his work and find it sustainable. They discussed his daily life, goals, caring responsibilities, and the barriers he faced.

It was during this conversation that Paul lit up as he talked about his passion for native Australian flora. He had been doing self-directed learning on the subject and had even been transforming his property by planting rare native plants. Hearing this, Janelle and Paul began exploring options for traineeships in conservation and ecosystem management. Paul was particularly keen on the idea of a traineeship, where he could learn on the job.

After their first application didn't work out, Paul's perseverance paid off when Janelle connected with Kylie, the Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW) Project Coordinator & Team Leader at Communitify.

Paul was referred to Communitify and was accepted into the program. And it has been a game-changer. He's been learning valuable skills like identifying weeds and native plants, managing ecosystems, and even spotting wildlife in their natural habitats. One of his most memorable moments was the day he spotted three koalas, each with their young, nestled high in the trees. "There were days I didn't think I'd find a new path," Paul reflects, "but when I'm out here, I know this is where I'm meant to be."

Mark, Paul's Employment Support Consultant at Maxima, provided weekly contact during the first four weeks of the traineeship, transitioning to fortnightly calls as he settled in. Paul knows he can reach out to Maxima anytime he needs assistance. During their appointments, Mark checks in on how work is going, how Paul's health is holding up, and if there are any concerns in his personal life that might affect his employment. Paul appreciates the ongoing support, knowing that he's not alone on this journey.

Beyond the technical skills, the traineeship has allowed Paul to connect with a wonderfully diverse group of people, forming bonds over shared experiences and a collective love for nature. The camaraderie he's found has been as healing as the work itself, reminding him that he's not alone on this journey. And in a field that brings him joy every day, Paul has discovered that sometimes, life's most unexpected turns lead us exactly where we're meant to be.



## CEO REPORT

# Chief Executive Officer



Peter Bacon, DEA CEO

**M**y first full year as CEO of DEA has certainly been eventful, and we will get to those events, but I want to take stock of where we are now when it comes to disability employment in Australia.

### The Context

The first thing to say is that we can stop beating ourselves up when it comes to international comparisons. That OECD league table that we always see wheeled out is now 14 years old. Give it a couple of years, and it'll be learning to drive. It's always been nigh on impossible to make proper data comparisons anyway – not least because we only refresh our disability data here once every few years (which is certainly a problem).

So, we should really judge progress on our own terms. Is Australia moving in the right direction? For years, this question has been hard to determine, and DES bore the brunt of arguments that disability employment was stagnating. But now we have an answer, provided by the recent Survey on Disability, Ageing, and Carers – which demonstrates that unemployment for people with disability has plummeted from over 10% to 7.5% and that the economic participant rate has risen from 52% to over 60%. This is stunning progress and testament to the hard work of DEA's members, as well as the persistence, resilience, and abundant talents of Australians with disability.

However, it isn't enough. It can never be enough while people with disability are denied the opportunity to achieve perfectly reasonable aspirations because of ableism, lack of accessibility, and low expectations. The Disability Royal Commission set this out in exacting and harrowing detail, and while we have received a government response to that Commission's recommendations, we still await systematic and structural change commensurate with the size of the gauntlet that has been laid down.

Since moving to Australia eight years ago, I have been struck by the opportunity that Australia has in so many regards. It is financially rich but has a population size that is not so large that change is impossible. Thanks to its continued attractiveness to migrants, it has a projected dependency ratio (i.e. working population vs

non-working population) that is better than almost any other developed countries. It has abundant natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, and is geographically well positioned to access many of the world's largest and fastest growing economies. It has a robust (compulsory) democracy, rule of law, and is home to the world's oldest continuing civilisation. It also has a self-ascribed mythology of being the country of the 'Fair Go'. This differs from the 'American Dream' which speaks to rugged individualism and self-determinism in that it captures the notion of a community where everyone has a chance to build a good life for themselves – an egalitarian ideal.

When it comes to people with disability, we continue to fall well short of this ideal. As I often say, the hard bigotry of ableism begets the soft bigotry of low expectations. This is evident in the leeway the government gives to employers not to engage with disability employment – a tacit acknowledgement that the 'too hard basket' is an acceptable place to put people with disability. It is **not**. DEA will continue to prosecute this case vigorously with government and members can expect to see more action in this area over the coming year.

Within this context, DEA members have continued to produce strong results, with the Disability Employment Service (DES) once again exceeding its government KPIs and over 37,405 people achieving 26-week outcomes. Within that number, there are lives forever changed and countless amazing stories of people and providers working together to achieve great things. This is despite continuing increases in the burden and complexity of bureaucracy imposed on providers, artificial constraints placed on the national caseload size, and real-terms reductions in funding of over 20% over the past five years.

### Disability Employment Reforms

The critique of DES has rarely, if ever, been on quantitative grounds. Rather, under Minister Rishworth's leadership, the direction has been to rebalance the quantitative and qualitative, both through the introduction of the Quality Framework in July 2023 and in the Reform agenda, which will culminate in the launch of the new Specialist Disability Employment Program in July 2025.

DEA has broadly welcomed this direction, while seeking to work with government to make sure design and implementation are reasonable and deliverable. Certainly, we are delighted by the extension in eligibility

to people with an assessed future work capacity of less than eight hours, for which we have argued for many years. Other positive changes include the tailoring of mutual obligations, the merger of DMS and ESS, flexible and intensive services, and a more viable market for Specific-Cohort providers.

We also credit the government for listening with an open mind to DEA's concerns over the Exposure Draft (backed, as they were, by substantial evidence and analysis) and welcome the 16.5% increase to outcome funding and increase in the new contract's duration from three to five years. We hope that these improvements are seen by our members as considerable justification for their continued investment in DEA as their industry Peak Body.

The net result is a program which DEA believes is deliverable for providers, with strategic objectives, service design, management frameworks, and a pricing model which are reasonably well aligned. With the return of market shares, and funding in place for at least the next five years, DEA is confident that providers – both existing and new – have the stability and security they need to thrive and to invest in raising the bar ever higher. DEA will play our part in this.

### **Raising the Bar in Practitioner Skills**

Over the last year, we have rolled out our Fundamentals for DES microcredential, in partnership with GenU Training. Development was a significant piece of work, with co-design from a reference group of providers, input from DSS, and review from people with lived experience. The microcredential has now been adopted by a quarter of DES providers, with ever more providers now achieving the Gold Standard (awarded when >75% of frontline staff have completed Fundamentals). We are pleased to have received excellent feedback for this training package and are now looking forward to launching our new Disability Employment Fundamentals for NDIS microcredential (with NDS as a key partner) in early 2025.

We are also excited about the potential of the new Disability Employment Centre of Excellence, due to launch in early 2025. DEA has been advocating for this initiative since at least 2017, so are delighted to see it come to fruition. It will be a place for collaboration, and a driver for evidence-based best practice. While we do not know which organisation or consortium will be selected to take this forward, DEA will be enthusiastic supporters of this purpose.

This will dovetail with our newly-launched Professional Members Program, which assigns points to continuing professional development activities within the disability employment sector. We are pleased that DSS has not mandated Certificate-level training, as we believe this more flexible route is the way to go, recognising that there are many potential paths for practitioners to build their skills. We look forward to engaging with members on this project in the year ahead.

The extension of eligibility to participants with an assessed work capacity of under eight hours is another impetus for professional capability, and we can expect to see a greater proportion of participants with intellectual disability on SDEP. There are many successful evidence-based practices out there and DEA will aim to connect as many providers to this information as possible.

### **Integration with wider Disability Services Ecosystem**

This also speaks to the point that SDEP should be better integrated with the full ecosystem of disability supports and services than DES has been. This is not an easy task necessarily. Government itself struggles to work across silos and its NDIS/DES pilot has so far only signed up 20 participants. Much of this task will fall to providers, although they would be considerably helped in this task if government were to make clear how the two are supposed to work together. DEA will continue to advocate on this point.

However, we cannot read either the Disability Royal Commission Final Report or the NDIS Review and fail to conclude that specialist disability employment services are a critical part of the disability ecosystem. As such, all providers must have governance arrangements, leadership, co-design, and operations which centre the voice of people with disability. This is an expectation that has been conveyed through the recent procurement process. DEA welcomes this and we know that our members do too. DES/SDEP is a disability service which provides specialist support to people with disability to secure and retain employment, not an employment service tweaked for people with disability. This must be the basis from which we move forward.

Correspondingly, this means that government must consider where DES/SDEP sit in that ecosystem. For example, is it a Foundational Support? DEA will be suggesting that it is within the current consultation process for Foundational Supports – and that it should

in fact be the default setting for people with disability who require employment support (noting that there are still nearly 200,000 people with disability on the Workforce Australia caseload). And does a medical model-driven, Services Australia-administered gateway provide an appropriately person-centred and efficient front door to support? Not in our view, at least in its current state.

It is DEA's intention to play a stronger hand when it comes to NDIS Employment Supports in future, noting that we can play a prominent role in ensuring that the ecosystem works together more seamlessly and that the policy settings in both NDIS and DES/SDEP enable ever more people with disability to fulfil their potential through fulfilling working lives. You can expect to see us much more active in this area.

### DEA – a successful year, but much more to do

We are proud of what we have achieved over the last year. Highlights include:

- » Successfully working with members and government to achieve significant improvements in the SDEP specification, between the Exposure Draft and the Request for Tender. We can confidently say we were instrumental in this process, particularly through the financial analysis we provided in alliance with Insight First and NDS. The increases to outcome funding and extension to contract duration were highly material and will provide a much stronger bedrock for the delivery of the new program.
- » Receiving excellent feedback from members through our DEA Annual Members Survey including an average overall rating of 8.1 for member satisfaction, representing a steady improvement on the (already very respectable) figure of 7.9 last year.
- » Submitting a vast array of policy papers including a major response to the Disability Royal Commission Final Report, many papers on DES/SDEP Reforms, analyses of new DES Quality and Performance Frameworks, the proposed Disability Employment Centre of Excellence, Future of Supported Employment, the Disability Inclusion Act and the NDIS Review. We were gratified to receive an average rating of 8.6 for our Policy and Advocacy in our Members Survey.

- » Hosting an Annual Conference in Melbourne in June which was attended by more than 400 delegates (the highest since our records began), with an average rating of 4.6/5 from attendees.
- » Achieving a breakeven financial result and a major improvement in our assets/liabilities, which reversed a trend of several years.
- » Increasing membership from 60 at the start of the financial year to 78 now.
- » Rolling out our new Disability Employment Fundamentals for DES microcredential, in partnership with GenU Training.
- » Launching the new DEA website, as part of a transformation of our technological capability.
- » Increasing our social media following by 20%.

We are just a small team, and I must thank my colleagues David, Sally, Hanif, Sash, Charlotte and George for all their hard work in making the above achievements happen. Their work ethic and cheerfulness alike have been unstinting, and I am extremely grateful to be part of such a harmonious, committed, and knowledgeable crew.

Likewise, I must of course note the contribution of the DEA Board, who have provided me with invaluable support, guidance and wise counsel over the last couple of years. They represent the best of our industry and have ensured that we are never anything less than intrinsically connected to our members, as well as robustly governed. I would particularly like to thank our outgoing Board Directors Thérèse Campbell (who also served as Chair for several years), Tracey Fraser and Mark Chaffey. They have made a significant and lasting contribution both to DEA and to the sector, and will be missed.

While we can be proud of the year we have just had, we know that there is much to do in future. To return to where this piece started – there are still too many people with disability who could achieve so much more with the right support. We are heartened that momentum is positive and the winds of change are in our favour and will continue to work with absolute commitment to that purpose.

## MEMBER STORY

# CVGT Employment



## Adam's long road back to meaningful work

For many years, Adam struggled with his body. Injuries and mobility issues made life tough, while discrimination because of his disabilities meant finding work was difficult. But now, with CVGT Employment's support, Adam is in stable work, learning new things every day.

Fighting pain, depression and discrimination had been a hard road to go down. Before being injured, Adam worked as a beef slaughterman, in retail, and in security.

"After my injuries I was unable to work and was told that I required a double spinal and double hip surgery," he says.

"I worked on myself by changing my diet, lifestyle, and whole way of life.

"I lost 60kg in about 12 months, which helped my mobility to be able to exercise more and strengthen the muscles in my back which meant that I could get around easier.

"After waiting for eight years for the surgery, I had enough of sitting around. With the support of CVGT Employment I started looking for work again."

As part of the Wodonga Parents Next and Disability Employment Services programs, Adam worked with CVGT Employment consultants Josh and Dimitti. Together, during regular meetings, they developed Adam's resume and applied for jobs.

The Wodonga employment services team also pitched Adam's skills directly to employers – and it was this approach that delivered a breakthrough.

"We came across John and Grant at Wholesale Butcher, who were fantastic right from the get-go," Adam says.

"We chatted with them in the store, and they asked Dimitti to send over information and by the next day, I had a job offer."

John and Grant were impressed with Adam's previous meat work experience and comforted by their previous collaborations with CVGT Employment.

"Adam has a good personality and is happy to work flexible hours," they say.

"No task is an issue – he's always happy to do it.

"CVGT Employment screens people to ensure they're suitable for our work, while also organising wage subsidies and providing continued support to us and Adam."

The role has proved a great fit for Adam, who loves getting up early for work each day after enduring so many years of frustration.

"I'm learning new things every day, and they are happy to teach me," he says.

"I enjoy working with all the staff, everyone is friendly and easy to get along with. I couldn't work with a better group of people."

John and Grant are more than happy to encourage other business owners to diversify their workforce and employ people with a disability.

"It's great to help someone back into the workforce and see them develop," they say.



## Business Partners

DEA's partners are dedicated supporters who seek to provide our members with excellent services and be part of the goal to achieve continuous improvement in employment outcomes for people with disability.



The Aon Not For Profit (NFP) team brings over 30 years' experience within the Not for Profit and Disability Employment communities. We are on hand to provide technical expertise to Disability Employment Service providers and will assist to protect them from risks as well as provide educational material and resources.



Prime Super members like to choose how we support them. Many members develop a trusted relationship with a super specialist over time. Whatever your super needs, we're here for you. You can download the app, explore our website, and use the online tools and calculators. Or call us on 1800 675 839 Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm. A quick chat can make a big difference—book a time in a super specialist's diary at [primesuper.com.au](https://primesuper.com.au). For a Product Disclosure Statement and Target Market Determination call 1800 675 839 or visit [primesuper.com.au/pds](https://primesuper.com.au/pds). Prime Super Pty Ltd ABN 81 067 241 016 AFSL 219723 RSE L0000277 (Trustee), Prime Super ABN 60 562 335 823 RN 1000276.



Prospert believes in quality employment services for job seekers and employers, partnering with organisations to create sustainable work opportunities. As a boutique professional services firm, we offer business transformation, strategic planning, operational improvements, tender management, learning and development and more. We specialise in programs like Disability Employment Service and Workforce Australia, bringing global best practices to our clients. Our name reflects our commitment: your organisation will 'PROSPer from our exPERTise.'



ReadyTech is a leading provider of innovative technology offering next-generation and mission-critical software.

With over 25 years of experience, ReadyTech is Australia's premium management technology provider for Disability Employment Services. Our flagship solution, Job Ready, aims to foster employment outcomes for people with a disability. An engaging user experience driven by AI to help DES providers achieve the best practice outcomes in attraction, placement and retention, empowering individuals, and businesses. To learn more about ReadyTech and how we're strengthening Australian's workforce visit [//readytech.io/DEA](https://readytech.io/DEA)

## MEMBER STORY

# Real Futures



## Malcolm is thriving in 'Meet and Greet' role at Kmart

### Meet Malcolm

Malcolm Walalgie has embarked on an exciting new career as a 'Meet and Greet' at Kmart in Geraldton.

Malcolm is a friendly and energetic person who is in a wheelchair due to his cerebral palsy. Since joining the Real Futures Disability Employment Service (DES) he's been working with Christopher Collins, our DES Employment Development Specialist.

Together, they identified that a Meet and Greet role would be the perfect fit for Malcolm's skills and personality.

After perfecting his resume, Chris and Malcolm approached the local Geraldton Kmart and Bunnings to see if they had any openings.

Kmart was keen to meet Malcolm, so he and Chris headed into the store to meet the Manager, Deni, and learn more about the application process.

Chris then supported Malcolm to complete the job application and prepare for a potential interview.

### From Interview to Job Offer

After submitting his application, Malcolm was pleased to be asked back in to have a formal interview with Deni.

Deni was very impressed and progressed him to the next stage, which involved a full tour of the store and a run-through of where Malcolm would be working.

Happy with that, Malcolm came back to the store to complete stage one of Kmart's onboarding. Chris was by his side assisting and encouraging him throughout this whole process.

Success! A week later, Malcolm received a formal offer of employment and excitedly accepted the role!

Before he could begin, he needed to complete his onboarding which he did with Chris in the Real Futures office.

Malcolm hit a small barrier when he discovered his phone wasn't able to download the Authenticator app that Kmart uses for their payroll. Our DES Manager Ashley Williams quickly solved this by providing Malcolm with a new phone.



### Loving His New Gig

On his first day at work, Malcolm had Chris coming along to cheer him on.

It's safe to say that he loved it and was disappointed that he had the next day off!

Kmart Geraldton is committed to supporting Malcolm as he embarks on his career with them. As he is their first employee that is a wheelchair user, they did not have appropriate staff facilities.

We're pleased to share that the store is now in the process of building an accessible bathroom for Malcolm and any future employees that may need it.

Real Futures is excited to build a partnership with Kmart and connect them with quality employees going forward.

A big thank you to Chris for being Malcolm's number 1 fan and making sure we found a fulfilling, sustainable career for him!

# Strategy Review

## HOW WE MET GOALS THIS YEAR

DEA's vision is 'all people with disability to achieve their employment potential'. Our purpose in this is to 'drive increased economic participation for people with disability, through advocating for more effective policy and better designed employment supports'. To achieve this purpose, our work is structured around six strategic pillars – progress against which is set out below.

### 1. Strengthen DEA so we can Strengthen the Sector

- » Overall levels of members satisfaction are high. The 2024 Members Survey gives an average overall rating of 8.1 for member satisfaction, representing a steady improvement on the figure of 7.9 last year.
- » The financial situation has improved, with DEA making a small surplus in FY 2023/4.
- » Membership has improved from 60 to 77 organisations. 92% of the DES caseload is supported by DEA members.
- » Launched new DEA website.
- » New Commercial Partnerships including Prosperit and ReadyTech.
- » Our social media strategy added over 2000 followers over the last year.

### 2. Address Disability Employment in all its Dimensions

- » Major policy submissions to reviews including NDIS and Supported Employment.
- » Wider disability employment issues formed a major part of our Disability Royal Commission response, with gamechangers including a policy focus on the 'demand side'.
- » Achieved a rating of 7.1 in the 2024 Members Survey for 'Advancing the cause of disability employment to employers and society in general', improving on a rating of 6.9 the previous year.

### 3. Advocate for more effective policy

- » Advocacy led to significant improvements to SDEP RFT, including funding increases and longer contract duration.
- » A vast array of high-quality submissions including: Disability Royal Commission Final Report; NDIS Review; Supported Employment Review; NDIS List of Supports; Review of Australia's Disability Strategy; multiple Quality and Performance Framework Consultations.
- » Achieved a rating of 8.6 for Policy and Advocacy in the 2024 Members Survey, compared to 7.9 last year.

### 4. Build best-in-class partnerships and collaboration

- » Strategic partnership with GenU Training to co-develop Disability Employment Fundamentals suite.
- » Worked with DROs and fellow Peaks to form the 'Voice of the Participant' Group, which has – among other things – put in a joint response to the SDEP Exposure Draft.
- » Joint submission with Inclusion Australia for review of Australia's Disability Strategy.
- » Collaborative project with NDS on DES Financials, delivered by Insight First.

### 5. Establishing DEA as a 'Centre for Disability Employment Excellence'

- » The new Fundamentals for DES Microcredential has been rolled out to more than a quarter of DES providers.
- » Received a 7.9 for spreading and capturing best practice in disability employment in the 2024 Members Survey, compared to a 7.0 rating last year.
- » Joined consortium bid for Centre of Excellence, awaiting result.
- » Launching new Professional Members Program and delivered Practitioners' Forum at June Conference.
- » Started development on new Fundamentals for NDIS microcredential, in partnership with GenU Training and NDS.

### 6. Keep our members informed of policy and forthcoming events

- » Received an 8.8 in the 2024 members survey for bringing about networking opportunities for members, representing a solid improvement on the 8.2 rating in 2023.
- » Attendance of 400+ at Annual Conference – the highest since records began.
- » Held well-received Leaders' Forum events in Adelaide (with Minister as keynote) and Sydney.
- » Received 8.4 for 'keeping members informed of policy'.

## MEMBER STORY

# uLaunch



## Roselyn embraces a newfound confidence

At 61, Roselyn faced significant barriers to employment, living with mental health issues, physical pain, and social isolation. Having withdrawn from social interactions for years, she was unsure of her career trajectory and needed help finding a new employment path.

Roselyn was eligible for disability employment services, and through referral to uLaunch from Centrelink, she connected with Leigh and the uLaunch Mount Gravatt team.

From the initial meeting, Leigh recognised that individual capacity building would be essential in helping Roselyn overcome her social isolation. Leigh and the team worked together to build Roselyn's confidence, communication skills and social engagement.

With each session, Roselyn's social skills improved. Roselyn started to overcome her isolation grip, building a trusted relationship with Leigh and the uLaunch team. It took time, patience, and regular meetings but with ongoing support, Roselyn began to open up to Leigh and the team. Together they worked to identify Roselyn's strengths, career goals and aspirations.

With trust and rapport established, Leigh discovered that Roselyn's strengths and passion could be channelled into a new career opportunity through an internship, working as a Lifestyle Assistant in Aged Care through uLaunch's partnership with the All Abilities Job Match program.

Despite being hesitant on whether she was suitable for the internship, Roselyn was determined to give it a fair go and embraced the new opportunity.

Over the 12 weeks, Roselyn went from strength to strength, developing her skills and overcoming the barriers that held her from succeeding in employment. With continuous support from Leigh and the uLaunch team, Roselyn completed the internship, and her capabilities did not go unnoticed. Roselyn was offered a permanent part-time position in the same role after completing the internship where she continues to thrive.

To support Roselyn in her new role, uLaunch assisted with pre-employment onboarding checks for NDIS worker screening, Working with Children Check and fuel expenses. uLaunch also assisted with payment for education enrolment fees for Roselyn's Cert IV in Leisure and Health.



This will not only help with career advancement but ensure that Roselyn can sustain employment until retirement.

Reporting a newfound confidence and outlook, Roselyn is dedicated to raising awareness of how hiring people with disabilities can have positive outcomes for employers.

Through ongoing involvement with the All Abilities Job Match program, she continues to advocate for people facing similar barriers to employment. Her journey is a statement of how personalised support and strategic partnerships can have a lasting impact, helping someone living with disability unlock their potential and achieve long-term employment success.

# DEA's 2024 Conference

**H**ardy souls descended on Melbourne in winter for the Disability Employment Australia Annual Conference at the Grand Hyatt Hotel on 11-13 June.

In a year heavy with policy issues and anticipation of change, we expanded the program to include a Tender Readiness Workshop and a Practitioners' Forum on Tuesday, ahead of the evening's Welcome Reception. Hosted by the ever-gracious Wayne Herbert, the Practitioners' Forum included a terrific panel session and a keynote from Paralympian champion Matt Levy OAM.

The Tender Readiness Workshop included invaluable financial analysis from Tim Flowers and hard-won tips and advice from DEA CEO Peter Bacon, Darren Coppin from Azurum and Malene Rohde from Prospert.

Emceed by DEA favourite Brett de Hoedt, the Conference presentations and panel sessions dug into key topics, including:

- » What do good quality jobs look like for People with Disabilities?
- » Getting workplace adjustments out of the "too hard" basket.
- » A systemic change approach: explore and improve school to work transition for young people with disability.
- » Partnering with employers.
- » New tools for commissioning services for complex clients.
- » Shaping the workforce of tomorrow.
- » Building employer confidence to recruit and retain employees with communication disability and low literacy.
- » Diversity Pathways: co-designing an accessible and inclusive workplace with employers and people with cognitive disability in the hospitality and retail industries.
- » Brokering employment pathways from Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE) to the mainstream labour market.
- » IncludeAbility – ensuring equality in employment.

» Celebrating Abilities: The Focus on Ability Short Film Festival.

Wednesday was full of abundance, including Julian Hill MP – the Government's most free-wheeling speaker – who talked us through reforms to the disability employment system to support more Australians living with disability into work.

We also had an update on the Australian economy in 2024, labour market movements, trends and indicators for disability employment from Callam Pickering, and Alastair McEwin AM reflected on the Disability Royal Commission, pondering what did we learn, and later returned to the stage for a Q&A with Wayne Herbert and Yenn Purkis. We also heard from Balendran Thavarajah, CEO of GetMee telling his powerful refugee story that took him from Sri Lanka to Australia.

At the Gala Dinner, we honoured delegates receiving medals for their years of service to the DES sector, presented the first ever DEA Awards and DEA Chair David Coles inducted Dr Jenny Crosbie into the DEA Hall of Fame.

Day Three started with yoga for the more enlightened and coffee for the rest of us before we dug into DES reform with Kellie Spence from DSS and a couple of terrific panels.

But the universal highlight was author and advocate Sonny Wise. Their rigorous and engaging guide to creating neurodivergent inclusive workplaces surprised and delighted the room.

We wrapped up our three epic days with a thoughtful keynote from Lisa Cox on why visibility of disability matters.

It was a huge event and an epic undertaking, made possible with the support of our sponsors and exhibitors, chief among them the platinum sponsor genU Training, gold sponsors Aon, Prime Super, Prospert and ReadyTech and silver sponsor AutogenAI.





# Hall of Fame 2024

## Dr Jenny Crosbie

**T**he Disability Employment Australia – Hall of Fame Award recognises excellence and lifelong commitment to the evolution of disability employment in Australia at a multi-state, national or international level.

### The 2024 inductee into the DEA Hall of Fame is Dr Jenny Crosbie.

Dr Jenny Crosbie is currently the Principal Industry Research Fellow at the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University. She has also held research positions at the Brotherhood of St Lawrence, Deakin University and University of Melbourne.

Jenny's career has focused on supporting people with disability to be included in community life for over 35 years, in a variety of research, advocacy and practice roles.

Jenny has a particular interest in understanding and

addressing barriers to economic participation that young people with intellectual disability face, in particular barriers at the system level, which limit opportunities available.

Jenny's vast research reconceptualises thinking about economic participation and employment for young people with intellectual disability and identifies factors that promote their inclusion in community-based economic participation roles.

Jenny has been a long-time mentor to the disability and employment sector and has been a consistent supporter of the DES sector and Disability Employment Australia. She has very strong focus on the promotion of best practice from DES providers and ran a DES service early in her career in the 2000's. Jenny was also the first appointed Executive Officer of Disability Employment Australia (then known ACE).



## THE AWARDS

# The inaugural DEA Awards

Honouring excellence in disability employment



**T**his year we were delighted to launch a new suite of awards recognising excellence and commitment to disability employment.

The right of people with disability to pursue and be engaged in meaningful, fairly paid employment being at the core of everything we do at DEA, and these inaugural Awards recognised the three essential components of effective and rewarding disability employment.

Our partners stepped up to support the program and experts from across the sector contributed their time and wisdom to find the best of the applications.

We received many more applications than we had dared to expect. They were consistently of an exceptional quality and a testament to the great work being done in the disability employment sector by participants, practitioners and employers alike.

Announcing the results at the DEA Conference 2024 Gala Dinner, we were so glad so many of the finalists were able to make the trip to Melbourne to be acknowledged by their peers.

### **The Prime Super Employer Award**

This award acknowledges an organisation that has exemplified an outstanding commitment to the inclusion of people with disability in rewarding, open and ongoing employment.

It recognised the benefits to everyone when employers diversify their staff and build a culture of inclusion and belonging in their workplaces.

The award went to Michael Betteridge from NRMA Marine, nominated by Jessica Cullen from Asuria.

The other finalists were Tracy Lonie from Ventia, nominated by Alison Neibling from Mission Australia and Vivek Bhure from VB Store, nominated by Steve Carder from AtWork Australia.

### **The genU Training Participant Award**

This award recognises a participant who has achieved amazing things on their journey to a fulfilling career, whether they have found the right job yet, are just starting in work, or have been working for years.

The award went to the outstanding Kim Barrett, who was nominated by Jessica Cullen from Asuria.

The other finalists were Andrew Radford, nominated by Rebecca McIntyre from The Disability Trust and Dan Carney, nominated by Diane McNamara from Omnia Inclusive.

### **Rex Eagle Practitioner Award, sponsored by Prospert**

Named for disability employment luminary Rex Eagle, this award recognises a disability employment frontline worker who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to participant-led employer engagement and to delivering service of the highest quality.

It showcases the qualities, skills and experience that together exemplify the best professional practice in our sector.

The award went to Crystal Meyer, nominated by Marion Paulden, Enterprise & Training Company Ltd.

The other finalists were Leslie Lowe from Bizlink, nominated by Tara Doyle and Peter Rath from Verto, nominated by Julie Burgmann.

# DEA Leaders' Forum events and 2023 AGM

**D**EA holds two members-only, Leaders' Forum events throughout the year. We held one in November 2023 in Adelaide which coincided with our AGM, and a second one in March 2024, in Sydney. Both of these events were face-to-face events and featured some sensational presentations.

The Forum in November included the latest developments in the disability employment sector and discussion around the implementation of the DES Quality Framework. This included a riveting presentation from the Hon Amanda Rishworth, Minister for Social Services.

This was followed by an address from Robyn Shannon, Deputy Secretary, Disability and Carers, DSS and Lisa Paul, Co-Chair, Independent Review of the NDIS who gave an update on the recommendations from this very important work.

Another highlight of this event was the 'Diversity and Representation in Organisations' panel. This was an excellent discussion from both People with Disability, Advocacy Groups and DES providers about the importance of diversity and how to increase representation in DES provider organisations. Four different DES participants delved into their journeys to employment and discussed the support they received from their providers.

The November meeting concluded with the DEA Annual General Meeting and results of the Board election were communicated. David Coles was elected as Chair and Keryl Neville was elected as the Vice Chair. Mathew McIntyre was elected as Treasurer.

- » David Coles: elected Chair
- » Keryl Neville: elected Vice Chair
- » Mathew McIntyre: elected Treasurer
- » Thérèse Campbell: Board Director
- » Karen Rainbow: Board director
- » Tracey Fraser: Board director
- » Mark Chaffey: Board director
- » Peter Bacon: DEA CEO, appointed Secretary.

The March 2024 Leaders' Forum was held in Sydney. Wayne Herbert from Lead Employment facilitated the whole event efficiently with personal anecdotes and thoughtful questions. The day opened with a very important Panel Discussion titled 'Reflections on the recommendations of the DRC and a turning point for exclusion'. Panellists included Academics, People with Disability and DES provider representation and included



analytical discussion of the Disability Sector in a post DRC world.

The day also included presentations from Mary Hawkins from the NDIA employment supports and Dr Jenny Crosbie discussed 'Evidence Based Employment Supports for People with Significant Disability'. DEA CEO, Peter Bacon presented his reflection and achievements following his first 12 months in the position.

The day concluded with two interactive presentations from DES provider CEO John Gibbons and Andrew Marty discussing 'Provider Best Practice via Diversity Census', followed by Andrea Comastri, Co-founder and CEO of Hotel Etico discussing the story of Hotel Etico and the payment of award wages for all PWD employees.

## MEMBER STORY

# Adversity to Advocacy



## Ian's Mentorship Role Shaping Future Leaders

Ian Clements is a Castle Disability Employment Services participant who has landed his dream job as a youth worker at Top Blokes Foundation, a youth mental health charity dedicated to supporting boys and young men to live healthy and safe lives.

At Top Blokes, Ian mentors boys aged 13 to 17, guiding them through crucial aspects of life and helping them develop into responsible young men. "I love my job. Every week is different," Ian says.

Ian, who is a 40-year-old from Dungog, NSW, is blind in both eyes. His life took a drastic turn at age 21 when he was wounded by a bullet that struck his face. The injury led to the loss of his left eye and damaged the optic nerve in his right eye, resulting in total blindness. Ian adapted remarkably well to this major life shift, and he credits Vision Australia and Guide Dogs Australia for their support to learn new life skills.

Originally aspiring to become a tattoo artist, Ian's blindness forced him to reconsider his career path. Ian hadn't completed high school, so he returned to finish his education. Determined to make a positive impact, he decided to focus on community service, particularly working with young people. He completed a Certificate IV in Youth Work, a Diploma in Community Services, and a Diploma in Child and Youth Family Intervention, setting himself up for a career in this sector.

### A new path with Castle

Ian began working with blind and vision-impaired students at a local high school, supporting and mentoring them, but after the students graduated Ian found himself unemployed. Unhappy with the support from his then-employment provider, a friend recommended Castle. In 2021, Ian switched to Castle, where he found the support and encouragement he needed.

"I'd never interviewed for a job before, had never done a job interview before coming to Castle," Ian says, as he remembers he was initially very nervous about employment opportunities.

"Losing my sight, I didn't know what I was capable of. The staff at Castle aimed higher for me than I thought I would be capable of – they believed in me."

The Castle team recognised Ian's potential to thrive. As part of his job readiness support, they introduced Ian to the recruitment process and helped him practise by doing mock interviews.

### Finding a home at Top Blokes Foundation

With Castle's help, Ian secured a position at Top Blokes Foundation. The organisation's young, energetic and inclusive culture resonated with Ian, who sees himself there for the long term.

Ian's work at Top Blokes involves delivering workshops on topics like healthy masculinity, relationships, sexual health, mental health and anger management. He mentors students in high schools, helping them develop life skills not typically covered in the school curriculum.

### The impact of Ian's work

Casey Payne, Ian's case officer at Castle, says:

"It's been a pleasure to see Ian's true passion for work and to notice his increasing confidence. This role gives Ian an outlet for his genuine, creative and quick-witted personality to shine."



# DEA Training

## Setting the Gold Standard



Hanif Mohamed,  
DEA Training Manager

**T**his year we consolidated our commitment to elevating competency across our sector by recognising the skills in our DES workforce. We began with the *Disability Employment Fundamentals for DES* microcredential, developed in partnership with GenU Training. This is the first of several industry-informed microcredentials, with the next being *Disability Employment Fundamentals for NDIS*, available in early 2025.

We are delighted to see several providers who operate at different scales increasingly commit to staff professional development over the past year. These organisations ensured that 75% or more of their team members completed *Disability Employment Fundamentals for DES*, earning DEA Gold Provider status for their organisation.

We warmly congratulate organisations meeting the 2024 Gold Standard, including:

- » MTC Australia
- » Edge Employment Solutions
- » Real Futures Pty Ltd
- » ProActiv People Solutions Pty Ltd
- » Settlement Services International (SSI)
- » The Disability Trust.

### Raising the bar in 2025

Completion of *Disability Employment Fundamentals for DES* not only recognises organisational competency, but also serves as a significant stepping stone for learners to achieve individual recognition as DEA Professional Members in 2025 and beyond.

DEA has been laying the groundwork for the **DEA Professional Membership Program (the 'PMP')**, which will be the framework under which all DEA training courses and professional development activities will sit, including those of our partners. The PMP will be managed and

accessed through the new DEA website. Participants will attain and maintain DEA Professional Member status by accruing the requisite number of continuing professional development ('CPD') points in a given calendar year, earned through engagement with courses or events listed in the PMP.

Becoming a 'DEA Professional Member' offers unique benefits and privileges, including (but not limited to):

- » Recognition of professional development by achieving DEA Professional Member status (including a shareable Certificate of Qualification).
- » Permission to use the post-nominal letters 'MDEA' alongside your name, signifying Professional Membership with DEA.
- » Access to exclusive training endorsed by the peak body for disability employment and exclusive networking events.
- » Targeted communication of sector news, DEA updates, and new training offerings.

If you lead training and professional development at your organisation and want a detailed walk-through of the PMP, including eligibility requirements, DEA Professional Member qualification requirements, and the user experience on the DEA website, please reach out to me at [hanif.mohamed@disabilityemployment.org.au](mailto:hanif.mohamed@disabilityemployment.org.au)

Training providers and event partners can include their approved courses or events in the PMP by submitting a proposal to DEA and requesting an assessment of suitability.

The PMP will drive our industry towards practical professional standards, ensuring consistent, high-quality services for clients in the disability employment sector, without the need for overly onerous qualifications.

Here's to raising the bar together in 2025 and beyond!

# Edge Employment

## A Fundamental recognition of outstanding organisational competency

**T**his year Edge Employment Solutions, one of Western Australia's first employment providers for people with disability, achieved organisational competency as a DEA Gold Standard Provider (2024).

The award acknowledges an outstanding commitment to building organisational competency.

The team at Edge Employment Solutions have achieved this special status as a DEA Gold Standard Provider (2024) because they met the criteria of 75% uptake across their DES workforce.

Edge and other eligible organisations can share their Gold Standard Provider badge to promote their achievement across their online and social media platforms.

Edge Employment Solutions Chief Executive Officer Pippa Cebis welcomed the new achievement:

*"We truly believe that giving our frontline staff the training provided within DES Fundamentals we position ourselves to be able to offer the quality service that our participants deserve in their employment journey".*

Edge Employment Solutions' DES Operations Manager, Dave Scragg elaborated:

*"All our staff were invested in this training right from the start and the content gave them the confidence to continue to change lives through employment. We see this training as an organisation not just in investing in our staff but also benefiting our participants".*

Edge was established in 1984 with a vision to build an inclusive and accepting society through the power of employment. They are proud to lead by example too, with 32% of Edge employees having lived experience as people with disability.

Our warmest congratulations Chief Executive Officer Pippa Cebis, DES Operations Manager Dave Scragg and the team at Edge Employment Solutions.



# Deliver quality service and improve your client experience.

Build your skills and knowledge  
to deliver outstanding person  
centre services.



**Fundamentals for DES** brings together industry best practice and the most current information to ensure your workforce can service in alignment with the Quality Framework.

Co-designed with DES providers.  
**Endorsed by Disability Employment Australia.**  
Delivered by genU Training



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