Annual Report

2025–2026



Disability Employment AUSTRALIA

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Cover image: DEA IEA Policy Manager Sally Karandrews shares a joke with Professor Alastair McEwin AM at the 2026 DEA Conference in Adelaide.

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MEMBER STORY

MatchWorks

Aimee's Journey to Sustainable Employment

When Aimee first connected with MatchWorks Geelong in 2025, she was motivated to find work, but needed the right guidance, encouragement and opportunities to help her achieve her goals.

Working closely with Employment Consultant Andrew, Aimee began exploring her interests, identifying suitable career options and building her confidence. Through tailored support, including interview preparation and presentation coaching, she developed the skills and self-belief needed to take the next step towards employment.

As part of her journey, Aimee was introduced to Employment Engagement Partner Brendan, who worked with local employers to find a role that matched her strengths and aspirations.

In December 2025, Brendan successfully reverse-marketed Aimee to Medsalv, helping secure a position aligned with her employment goals.

Based in Geelong, Medsalv diverts single-use medical devices from landfill by using remanufacturing processes to clean and test them and then re-provide them for further use.

Believing that hospitals can reduce the waste they send to landfills by up to 92.8%, Medsalv is helping the healthcare industry break its commitment to the linear economy and switch to a more sustainable, circular model.

That commitment to sustainability extends to Medsalv's use of clean energy and social employment practices.

MatchWorks worked with Medsalv to negotiate a wage subsidy to support Aimee's transition into the workplace and set her up for success.

Starting a new job can be daunting, but the MatchWorks team continued to provide support every step of the way. Employment Consultant Andrew and Post Placement Support Consultant Rebecca worked together to ensure Aimee had the assistance she needed to thrive in her new role as a Remanufacturing Technician.

Rebecca supported Aimee throughout the onboarding process, helping with uniform requirements, conducting regular check-ins and facilitating a referral to MatchWorks' Health and Wellbeing team. This personalised approach allowed Aimee to access additional strategies and coaching to support her wellbeing, maintain motivation and adapt to the routine of employment.

Over time, Aimee's confidence continued to grow. Through ongoing workplace support, wellbeing coaching and collaboration with her employer, she strengthened her communication skills, increased her productivity and became more comfortable in the workplace. A workplace visit also helped identify ways to refine her routine and further support her long-term success.



Reflecting on her employment journey, Aimee shared:

"My confidence has grown so much, and that is thanks to the supportive team I work with and knowing I can also go to MatchWorks for assistance and speak to my mentors."

Today, Aimee has successfully achieved six months in employment and continues to build on her success. She has progressed from a Level 1 to a Level 2 position at Medsalv and remains engaged with Health and Wellbeing services to support her ongoing personal and professional growth.

Aimee's story highlights the impact of tailored employment support, strong employer partnerships and holistic wellbeing services. By working together to create a plan, build confidence and provide ongoing encouragement, MatchWorks helped Aimee achieve sustainable employment and a brighter future.

Scan the QR code to watch our *Finding the right job: Employment success with MatchWorks* video.

DEA Board



Mathew McIntyre
Chair
Meridia (The Disability Trust)



John Gibbons
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The Personnel Group



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Peter Bacon
Secretary
DEA CEO

About Disability Employment Australia

Disability Employment Australia (DEA) is the national leadership body for disability employment in Australia.

We bring together service providers, policymakers, employers, researchers and people with lived experience to increase employment opportunities for people with disability and improve the systems that support them.

Employment is one of the most powerful drivers of economic participation, independence, connection and choice. Yet people with disability continue to face substantial barriers to entering, remaining in and progressing through the labour market. DEA works to identify and overcome those barriers through advocacy, policy development, sector leadership and practical improvement.

For more than 30 years, DEA has played a central role in the development of Australia's disability employment system. We represent organisations that deliver employment and vocational supports across Inclusive Employment Australia, NDIS employment services, social enterprises and community-based programs, while also working with governments, employers, researchers and other stakeholders to drive reform.

Policy and advocacy are central to our work. DEA has helped shape many of the major reforms in disability employment over the past three decades, including the transition from block to case-based funding, the uncapping of Disability Employment Services, contributions to the National Disability Employment Strategy, and engagement with both the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review.

More recently, DEA's advocacy contributed to above-inflation funding increases for Inclusive Employment Australia and the National Panel of Assessors, additional transition supports for providers, and improvements to employment services funding models.

As Australia's only specialist peak body for disability employment, DEA combines deep sector expertise, practical experience and evidence-informed policy leadership to strengthen employment outcomes for people with disability and build a more inclusive labour market.

MEMBER STORY

Maxima

Teamwork makes the dream work at Department of Health WA

For more than seven years, Maxima has supported a dedicated team of admin support officers living with disability who work within the Department of Health in East Perth, Western Australia. The team of seven provides vital behind-the-scenes support that helps the department run smoothly, taking on a variety of administrative and operational tasks.

From binding and laminating to guillotining, data entry, packing campaign materials, scanning, and ushering visitors, their work touches almost every corner of the department. They're often the friendly faces greeting interview candidates or the steady hands ensuring that time-sensitive projects are delivered with care and accuracy. Helen Frantom, Manager, Information Services at the Department of Health WA, allocates the group's day-to-day work. Maxima employment support partners Tahlia Robinson-Solczaniuk and Amanda Boardman manage the team.

'Everyone brings something different,' Tahlia says. 'We match tasks to what people do well, but we also give them opportunities to learn new skills. It's not just about getting the work done – it's about challenging the team and helping them grow.' David, Roland, and Geoff – three long-serving team members – between them have more than 40 years of combined service.

David enjoys the structure and pace of the work, and the strong relationships the team has built with department staff. 'It's a great place to work with great people, and I've learnt a lot of new skills. Maxima has been really supportive and helpful,' he says. Outside of work, David channels his precision and focus on hosting video game tournaments and playing snooker.

Roland, who uses a wheelchair, is known for his sharp eye for detail – and his sense of humour. His careful approach ensures that data entry tasks are completed to a high standard and away from work, he is learning how to build websites.

Roland recalls a time when he had fallen from his wheelchair at home and couldn't get help right away. When he didn't arrive for work, Tahlia noticed and called to check in. 'It's just another thing that work gives you,' Roland said. 'People were expecting me – and when I didn't turn up, they put out the call for help. It's nice to know I was missed.'

Geoff, a keen tenpin bowler who often travels across the country to compete in National tournaments, recently



Roland, David, Maxima's Tahlia Robinson-Solczaniuk, and Geoff at the Department of Health WA office

tried his hand at ushering. His role was to greet interview candidates in reception and make them feel comfortable as he guided them to their interview location. 'I was pretty nervous to start with,' he said. 'But it really helped my confidence and Mum noticed that it helped me come out of my shell.'

Tahlia says the role she and Amanda play is all about supporting independence. 'Each team member has different strengths, and we work together to figure out who's best suited to each job,' she says. 'Our role is to shape the day, not to do the work. We're there to offer guidance and to make sure everyone has the chance to learn and enjoy what they do.'

Having the team based in the department's open-plan environment has also had benefits beyond the work itself. 'People see and get to know the team,' Helen says. 'They appreciate that there's a person on the other end of their request, not just an anonymous admin service. The team brings energy, connection and a great sense of purpose to the workplace.'

'They add more than just clerical support – they've become an important part of the team and a living example of what inclusive employment looks like in action. The success of the Department of Health's admin support team is an enduring example of how inclusion and teamwork can transform a workplace. When people are valued for their abilities and supported to thrive, everyone benefits: the individuals, their colleagues, and the wider community.

Report from the Chair



Mathew McIntyre,
DEA Chair

As I reflect on the past 12 months, it is clear that 2026 has been a significant year for DEA and the broader disability employment sector. Following the implementation of Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA), our sector has continued to navigate one of the most substantial periods of reform in its history. While change of this scale brings challenges, it also presents a unique opportunity to strengthen the support available to people with disability pursuing meaningful employment.

The transition to IEA has required resilience from providers, employers, participants, and the workforce that underpins our sector. Many organisations have focused on embedding new service models, supporting participants through change, and adapting to new operating environments. Despite these challenges, I remain optimistic about the future and encouraged by the commitment demonstrated across the country to ensuring IEA delivers on its purpose.

Throughout this period, DEA's advocacy has focused on supporting members through implementation, sharing best practice, and ensuring the voices of providers, employers and people with disability remain central to policy discussions. The collaboration and commitment shown by our members and sector throughout this transition has been one of the sector's greatest strengths.

A particular highlight has been the continued growth of the Centre for Inclusive Employment. As a consortium partner, DEA is proud to help advance the evidence base for disability employment and support innovation, research and professional practice across our sector.

Our commitment to professionalisation has also continued to gain momentum. The Professional Membership Program and MDEA designation are increasingly recognised as important markers of professionalism and capability, helping to build a highly skilled workforce equipped to deliver quality outcomes for participants.

This year's DEA Conference in Adelaide once again brought together leaders, practitioners, policymakers, employers and people with lived experience from across Australia. Most importantly, we continue to ensure the voices of people with disability are at the centre of conversations about the future of employment services, strengthening both our sector and our organisation.

While much of the year's focus has been on implementation, we must not lose sight of why this sector exists. Every day, our sector supports people with disability to build skills, gain confidence and achieve their employment aspirations. The impact of this work extends far beyond employment outcomes, helping create more inclusive workplaces, stronger communities and greater economic participation.

To our members, thank you for your professionalism, resilience and dedication during a period of significant change. Your commitment continues to demonstrate the strength and value of our sector.

I would also like to thank my fellow Directors and the DEA team for their leadership, expertise and unwavering commitment. Together, we have strengthened DEA's voice and influence during a critical period for disability employment in Australia.

As we look ahead, I am confident that DEA is well positioned to support the next chapter of our sector's development. Together, we have an opportunity to build a stronger, more professional and more inclusive disability employment ecosystem that delivers lasting benefits for people with disability, employers and the broader community.

Mathew McIntyre
Chair
Disability Employment Australia

MEMBER STORY

Castle Personnel

Kai's passion for sport serves up opportunities for others



At 20 years old, Kai is already building a future in the sport he loves. Kai, who is short statured, works part-time at the Newcastle Community Tennis Centre in Broadmeadow while studying a Bachelor of Business (Sports Management) online. He's also a talented tennis player, a passionate advocate for inclusion in sport and is helping to grow opportunities for people with disability through para-standing tennis.

After being referred to Castle around a year ago, Kai has worked with Employment Success Officer Catherine, who has supported him with resumes, job applications and workplace guidance, helping Kai build confidence and continue progressing towards his career goals.

Kai manages administrative responsibilities at the tennis centre, coordinates bookings and communications, but wants to work towards a more substantial role, ideally in sport. His ambition is clear.

"I would love to be part of a big sporting body and work in disability programs," Kai said. "Mainly tennis, but also AFL, cricket, something like that."

For Kai, tennis has opened doors to leadership opportunities, community involvement and meaningful work. He's completed the Tennis NSW Future Leaders Program, gone on to mentor future participants and serves on the Tennis NSW Youth Advisory Group.

In 2024, Kai and his father worked with Tennis Australia to help establish an affiliated structure for para-standing tennis before hosting the inaugural Oceania Championships alongside the Australian Open in Melbourne.

Building on that momentum, they successfully pitched the City of Newcastle to support the growth of the sport locally, leading to Newcastle's first Para-Standing Tennis Come and Try Day.

For anyone who may be unsure about pursuing employment or asking for support, Kai's advice is simple:

"Just be yourself. There will be jobs out there for you."

Through his work, study and advocacy, Kai is proving that when people are given the right opportunities, they can create positive change not only for themselves but for their whole community.

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. We thank the 2025-2026 organisational members listed below for their support this year.

- 4gr
- Ability Options
- Ability Works
- AKG Australia
- AMES Australia
- Aon
- APM EMPLOYMENT SERVICES
- Asuria
- Australian Foundation for Disability
- Australian Refugee Association
- Autism Association of Western Australia
- Back2Work
- Bamara
- Barkuma
- Barossa Enterprises
- BEST Employment
- Best Lives
- BIZLINK
- Bounce Global
- Breakthru
- BuddyNote (Leading Directions)
- BUSY Ability
- Campbell Page
- Castle
- Chapter 1 Employment
- Civic Disability Services
- CoAct
- Community Bridging Services
- Community Solutions
- Community Transitions (OARS)
- Connecting Futures
- CPL
- CVGT Employment
- Deaf Children Australia
- Disability Employment Australia
- Edge Employment Solutions
- Eighty9 Limited
- embarc Employment
- Endeavour Foundation
- Enterprise & Training Company Ltd (ETC)
- EPIC Assist
- Fighting Chance Australia
- Flourish Australia
- Full Support
- genU
- genU Training
- gforce
- Good Sammy Enterprises
- Greenacres Disability Services
- headspace
- Help Enterprises
- Humanitygroup
- IDEAL Placements
- Impact Community Services
- Intelife Group Limited
- Interact Australia
- IntoWork Australia
- Jigsaw Australia Group Pty Ltd
- Job Prospects
- Jobfind
- Jobmatch Employment
- Jobsupport
- Key Community Group
- Kimberley Personnel
- LEAD
- MatchWorks
- Maxima
- Maximus Australia
- MEGT
- Mission Australia
- MS Queensland
- MSWA
- MTC FutureReady
- Multiple Solutions
- Nexus Human Services
- NOVA Employment
- NT Industry Training Bureau (YouthWorxNT)
- OCTEC
- Omnia Inclusive
- Opendoor
- ORS Group
- Ostara Australia
- Personnel Group
- Populi Solutions
- Prime Super
- ProActiv People
- Prospert
- Real Futures
- Settlement Services International
- Sign For Work
- Sonder Care Limited
- Status
- Sureway employment and training
- SYC
- The Disability Trust
- The Flagstaff Group
- The Salvation Army
- Torwood Recruitment
- Training Alliance Group Australia Pty Ltd
- Tursa Employment & Training
- uLaunch
- VERTO
- VisAbility
- Vision Australia
- WISE
- Workways Australia
- Yooralla
- Yourtown

MEMBER STORY

Acciona & CVGT

What employers can learn from ACCIONA



For many employers, inclusive employment sounds like the right thing to do, but questions quickly follow. Will it work in our environment? Will it add pressure to managers? Will we have the right support?

At global infrastructure company ACCIONA, those questions were answered not in theory, but in practice.

Through the Inclusive Employment Australia program, CVGT Employment provides free support to help employers attract, recruit and retain employees with disability, injury, or health condition. By partnering with CVGT Employment, ACCIONA has shown that inclusive employment, when done properly, strengthens teams, builds capability and creates lasting value for both employees and the organisation.

Through its inclusive employment efforts, ACCIONA welcomed two employees, Letitia and Owen, into meaningful paid roles. Both employees live with Down syndrome. Like many capable job seekers with disability, they had the motivation to work but needed the right structure, the right environment and the right support to succeed long term.

From the employer's perspective, the focus was clear from the start. Roles needed to be well defined, expectations practical and support available without creating dependence. For ACCIONA the benefits have extended well beyond the two roles themselves. Managers and colleagues describe a noticeable shift in workplace culture. Communication improves, people become more thoughtful about how they support each other and teams grow more connected.

Supervisors have also noted that inclusive employment builds leadership confidence. Managers learn to focus on capability rather than assumptions and to deal with difference in a practical, respectful way. These skills strengthen organisations well beyond any one program.

From an operational point of view, reliability and consistency matter. Both Letitia and Owen bring structure to their roles, arrive on time and take pride in their work.

Letitia has developed strong office skills over time. She confidently uses email, spreadsheets and internal systems. She asks questions when needed and follows set routines that help her succeed.

Owen works in a more handson role and thrives on task variety and social connection. He talks openly about enjoying work, earning money and being part of a team.

This experience offers clear lessons for employers considering inclusive employment.

- First, choose the right roles. Inclusion works best when roles are designed with intention and clarity.
- Second, work with the right partner. A strong support provider reduces risk, builds confidence and helps everyone succeed.
- Third, allow support to evolve. Early investment leads to longterm independence.
- Finally, recognise the broader value. Inclusive employment strengthens culture, builds leadership capability and aligns organisations with the values that today's workforce increasingly expects.

For employers, inclusive employment is no longer just a social commitment. It is a way to build stronger, more capable and more future focused teams.

Business Partners

DEA is proud to collaborate with a select group of organisations that have supported our work in service of the disability employment sector this year.

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. Visit **AON**.

Purpose-built for IEA and backed by sector expertise, our RFFR-accredited platform supports enterprise organisations and local providers. BuddyNote underpins and simplifies core operations, with reliable tools for outcome tracking, ongoing support management, and reporting that your teams can depend on every day.
Discover more about **BuddyNote**.

The Centre for Inclusive Employment provides resources, tools and training to help providers deliver quality employment services and supports to both people with disability and employers. The Centre collaborates with people with disability, employment service providers and programs, employers, researchers and others to bring evidence-informed practice into employment service systems. Supporting providers and other stakeholders with practical, evidence-based resources that will continue to expand and evolve, the Centre is helping to build stronger services and open more pathways to meaningful work for people with disability.
Visit the **Centre for Inclusive Employment**.

genU Training is a national Registered Training Organisation specialising in the disability and inclusive employment sector. It offers nationally recognised qualifications, short courses, and microcredentials for learners of all abilities — from professional development that strengthens service delivery to training that helps jobseekers build skills for lasting employment. As a registered not-for-profit and certified social enterprise, genU Training reinvests its surplus back into the community through national disability support provider, genU. Partnering with genU Training helps organisations meet their social procurement goals while supporting inclusive employment and stronger communities. Working closely with peak bodies, government, and industry leaders, genU Training develops tailored programs that strengthen workforce capability across the disability employment sector. Its focus on best practice and person-centred learning ensures providers and jobseekers alike have the best chance of success. Visit **genU Training**.

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. Visit **Prime Super**.

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'.**

MEMBER STORY

AKG

Catherine lands her dream role at Big W

People with disability face disproportionate barriers to employment. But persistence, combined with the right advocacy, can bridge the gap between capable candidates and employers willing to employ inclusively.

Catherine, an Inclusive Employment Australia customer at AKG, had a path to work that wasn't a straight line. Over two years, she completed multiple interviews and work trials, but she faced rejection after rejection.

Catherine never gave up, and she built her skills through volunteering at the Salvation Army and the local pool. That experience eventually became a paid lifeguard role. But she still had her sights set on retail.

When an opportunity with Big W presented itself, our team were excited to put Catherine forward. However, we recognised that the video interview format wasn't ideal as it didn't allow Catherine's personality to shine through. So, we advocated for an in-person conversation instead.

We took Catherine into the store to meet the managers so that they could assess Catherine directly. Catherine nailed her interview!

Our team being there also meant we could reassure the employer on supports available and provide context. Big W's managers knew exactly what their store needed, and we knew exactly what Catherine could do. We worked together to build a role around Catherine's strengths.

Today, Catherine is thriving at Big W and still lifeguarding part-time. We're incredibly proud because her story shows what's possible when we build the path together.



CEO Report

It is hard to think of another year quite like 2025–26 for disability employment. Inclusive Employment Australia finally went live after years of consultation, policy development, and procurement. The NDIS entered another period of significant reform. Providers found themselves navigating new contracts, new systems, changing funding arrangements, workforce pressures, and a considerable amount of uncertainty.



Peter Bacon, DEA CEO

For many organisations, this was a genuinely difficult year.

Some providers won new business and expanded. Others lost contracts, saw longstanding relationships disrupted, or had to rebuild trust with participants and employers in entirely new areas. Many experienced cashflow pressure, referral issues, reporting gaps, system faults, and concerns about longer-term viability.

Yet throughout all of this, providers continued helping people with disability prepare for work, find jobs, and sustain employment.

That achievement deserves recognition. As does the sector's contribution to DES, which delivered more than 275,000 26-week outcomes over seven years. Each of these outcomes contains a human, a story, and real meaning. We should remember that.

Throughout the year DEA focused on two broad priorities. The first was helping members navigate the transition to Inclusive Employment Australia and advocating for improvements where the system was not working as intended.
The second was continuing to build the evidence, capability and relationships needed to strengthen disability employment over the longer term.

Supporting the transition to Inclusive Employment Australia

The move from Disability Employment Services to Inclusive Employment Australia represents the biggest change to specialist disability employment services in many years.

DEA supported the overall direction of reform and broadly welcomed important elements of the new service design. The stronger emphasis on meaningful engagement and participant experience is an improvement on DES, where too much of the system could become transactional when caseloads, compliance and outcome pressure took over.

However, it was clear from very early on that the transition was creating significant challenges for many providers. Throughout the year DEA worked closely with members to identify and escalate problems relating to referrals, caseloads, participant transfers, reporting, outcome claims, payment arrangements, and system functionality. We collected evidence from providers across the country and worked directly with DSS to secure fixes and improvements.

This advocacy contributed to the correction of a number of significant system faults. It also helped ensure provider concerns were being heard at senior levels of government during a period when many organisations were under considerable pressure.

Financial sustainability was another major focus. DEA continued to advocate on funding adequacy, cashflow pressures, caseload shortfalls, and market stability. This included successful advocacy for a second advance payment arrangement as well as continued engagement regarding the Participant Investment Funding Model, indexation, funding settings, and provider viability.

DEA also invested significant effort in shaping the new Performance Framework. This remains a critical area of work. Our focus has been on transparency, fairness, and ensuring that any framework measures what matters rather than simply measuring what is easy.

There remains much more work to do in this area.

Advocating for the ecosystem, including NDIS

Perhaps the biggest shift within DEA during 2025–26 has been the continued broadening of our focus beyond any single employment program.

Inclusive Employment Australia remains critically important. It is the central specialist employment service for people with disability, and we will continue to advocate strongly for its success.

At the same time, it has become increasingly obvious that employment outcomes are shaped by much more than one program.

Many of our members operate across both IEA and the NDIS. Participants move between systems throughout their lives. Families do not organise their lives around government program boundaries. Employers certainly do not.

This reality has driven a substantial expansion of DEA's work in the NDIS employment space.

During the year we strengthened our engagement with the NDIA, established a dedicated NDIS Policy Manager role, undertook extensive co-design work with members, and continued development of our NDIS employment policy agenda.

The Blended Transitions project has been an important part of this work. Led by Dr Ann Nevile, the project has explored how employment supports funded through the NDIS and IEA can work together more effectively to create clearer pathways into work.

The project has reinforced a simple but important idea: people experience their lives as a whole. Systems often do not.

Much of our future policy work will continue to focus on bringing greater coherence to areas such as school-to-work transitions, Supported Employment reform, Finding and Keeping a Job supports, and the broader interface between employment, disability support, and employers.

Building evidence, capability and collaboration

One of the strongest themes to emerge this year was the sector's appetite for learning, collaboration, and practical support. The establishment of the Centre for Inclusive Employment has been a major development. DEA is proud to be a consortium partner and has worked closely with the Centre to ensure research, evidence, and practice improvement activities remain grounded in the realities faced by providers and participants.

Perhaps the most visible example of this has been Fundamentals for Inclusive Employment. Delivered in partnership with the Centre for Inclusive Employment and genU Training, the program has achieved remarkable reach across the sector. More than 3,000 people enrolled during the year, helping establish a shared foundation for quality practice across IEA providers. The response has demonstrated a strong desire across the workforce for practical, evidence-informed professional development.

Beyond Fundamentals, DEA worked alongside the Centre to deliver an extensive program of capability-building and engagement activities.

Our Lunch and Learn series continued to grow, bringing together practitioners, researchers, employers, and lived-experience voices to explore topics ranging from employer engagement and workplace adjustments through to intellectual disability, sensory inclusion, psychosocial safety, and evidence-based practice.

The DEA Conference was another clear highlight and a real success. It brought the sector together at an important moment, giving members the chance to step back from the immediate pressure of transition and focus on practice, evidence, policy, and where disability employment needs to head next.

The 2025 Leaders' Forum in Melbourne also helped set the tone for the year, giving sector leaders a focused space to test ideas, compare experience, and build the relationships needed for more serious collaboration.

The first intake of the Emerging Leaders Network was another highlight. Leadership development has often been overlooked within disability employment, despite the critical role that frontline managers and emerging leaders play in shaping organisational culture and service quality. The Network brought together emerging leaders from around the country through workshops, mentoring, peer learning, and leadership development activities. The response was overwhelmingly positive and reinforced the importance of investing in the next generation of sector leadership.

This was the first year DEA ran Collaboration Forums, with events held in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, and Western Australia. They have set the table for more formal and substantial collaboration work over the next year. While each forum reflected its local context, similar themes emerged wherever we went: stronger collaboration, improved pathways between systems, better employer engagement, clearer service navigation, and less fragmentation.

What became increasingly clear throughout these discussions is that many of the challenges facing participants cannot be solved by individual organisations working in isolation. The work of the sector depends on relationships. Relationships between providers. Relationships between programs. Relationships between governments, employers, communities, and people with disability themselves. That collaboration has become increasingly important as disability employment grows more complex.

The Specific Cohort Providers Community of Practice has been another strong example of this. During the year the Community of Practice continued to grow, including two successful in-person meetings. Providers used the forum to share experience, discuss emerging challenges, and contribute to collective advocacy on issues affecting specialist cohorts.

Strengthening DEA's own capacity

This was also a year of important internal movement for DEA. I want to thank our staff for the quality and commitment of their work through a period that placed substantial demands on a small team. I also want to thank our Board for its guidance and support, and particularly our Chair, Mat McIntyre, for his steady leadership during a complex year.

The appointment of Simon Rowberry as Deputy CEO was especially significant. Simon has brought additional capability, capacity, and discipline to DEA's work, strengthening our ability to deliver for members and to take on the more substantial policy, collaboration, and capability-building agenda now in front of us.

I also want to acknowledge Kelly Treloar, who left DEA during the year after making an important contribution as NDIS Policy Manager. Kelly helped establish a stronger foundation for DEA's NDIS employment work. We were very pleased to welcome Renae Hartmann into the role, bringing strong capability and judgement to an area of growing importance for members.

Looking ahead

While much of the year was spent responding to immediate challenges, DEA has also been laying foundations for the future.

The development of our benchmarking work, the expansion of collaboration activities, growing engagement in NDIS employment, the establishment of the Centre for Inclusive Employment, the growth of workforce capability initiatives, and the launch of the DEA Papers all point towards a broader ambition.

- We want policy to be informed by evidence rather than assumption.
- We want providers to have better opportunities to learn from one another.
- We want disability employment discussions to focus on outcomes, capability, employer demand, and system design rather than simply administration.
- Most of all, we want employment to become a more ordinary part of life for many more people with disability.

The sector has achieved a great deal over recent years. At the same time, many barriers remain stubbornly entrenched.

The year ahead is unlikely to be any quieter than the one that has just passed. But if 2025–26 demonstrated anything, it is that this sector is resilient, committed, and capable of continuing to push forward through difficult circumstances.

On behalf of DEA, I would like to thank our members, partners, Board, staff, and the many people with disability who continue to shape and challenge our thinking.

We have achieved a lot. Now we need to achieve more.

DEA Professional Members

The DEA Professional Membership Program drives and formally recognises best practice in disability employment. These members have met the CPD requirements for Professional Member MDEA status for the current year. In doing so, they have earned the right to use the post-nominals, MDEA – a symbol of their commitment to continuing professional development and operational best practice.

- Kim Abbott
- Teresa Allen
- Delvene Baillie
- Melainie Baker
- Rebecca Beaumont
- David Best
- Kelly Best
- Jamie Bowes
- Ulanda Cannon
- Susan Chamma
- Tori Christian
- Hayley Coleridge
- David Coles
- Amanda Dalby
- Olivia D'Heureux
- Gabbi Drinic
- Kirsty Ebb
- Tracey Edwards
- Glenn Erskine
- Penny Evans
- Laura Feber
- Emma Fitzsimons
- Dan Gavin
- Brett Granger
- Belinda Green
- Matt Greensill
- Tara Groom
- Nat Haraida
- Chloe Hayward
- James Herbertson
- Felicity Hill
- Ross Hill
- Aaron Hoare
- Don Intine
- Bec Jackson
- Rebecca Jamieson
- Umair Janoo
- Lily Jin
- Taylah Jones
- Tania Jovanovska
- Tracy Keenan
- Mark Kenny
- Jorja Knight
- Michelle Kruger
- Lachlan Leatham
- Peter Lee
- Gregor Mackie
- Rachael Mae
- Joshua Maher
- Kelly Mason
- Janelle Maxey
- Tim McAlister
- Jake McDonald
- Stacey McKeand
- Scott McLarty
- Karl Melvin
- Safiah Mohideen
- Amanda Moyle
- James Mulligan-Brunell
- Nish Muraledharan
- Kim Murphy
- Jill Nash
- Ariana Nepe-McClutchie
- Karen Newman
- Kristy-Anne Obst
- Simone O'Neill
- Jessica Parker
- Corina Parr
- Robert Pears
- Kelly Perkins
- Fiona Quilkey
- Karin Ridgeway
- Sharna Rowley
- Brendan Scott
- Scott Smith
- Alison Stubbs
- Melissa Sutton
- Brad Thomas
- Micheal Thornely
- Wendy Todd
- Kristen Towers
- Amanda Ward
- Anthony Waters
- Lee Woodbridge
- Alexander Wright
- Serena Wright
- Steve Wyborn
- Matt Yorke
- Chris Young
- Alan Zana

The following people have been accorded honorary MDEA status for their enduring contribution to DEA and the disability employment sector:

- Peter Baume
- Freddie Brincat
- Suzanne Colbert AM
- Dr Jenny Crosbie
- Donna Faulkner
- John Gibbons
- Nicole Grainger-Marsh
- Viv Gugger
- Arvind Gupta
- Rick Kane
- Greg Lewis
- Lucy Macali
- Alastair McEwin AM
- Mathew McIntyre
- Keryl Neville
- Trevor Parmenter AM
- Karen Rainbow
- Vivienne Riches
- Peter Tanner
- Mick White
- Ashley Williams
- Martin Wren

Disability Employment AUSTRALIA

MEMBER STORY

APM

APM employment services

Kayla's experience helps her win 'stable' employment

Kayla always knew she wanted to work with animals, but living in the small town of Lowood, with limited transport and few local job opportunities, made that dream feel out of reach.

Living with an intellectual disability, she wasn't sure what kind of work would suit her, or how to get started.

That changed when she connected with APM Employment Services through their outreach office.

Employment Consultant Twahnee met with Kayla and her support worker and committed herself to helping the young job seeker in finding a role that matched her strengths and passions.

During their first meeting, Kayla mentioned she had previous experience working at a stable and even held a stable hand licence. That detail sparked a memory for Twahnee: another member of the APM team had a contact at H4C Stables in Ipswich. She reached out, and soon Kayla had an interview lined up.

With her licence and experience, Kayla was offered a position at H4C Stables in Booval.

APM helped her prepare by providing appropriate work clothing and coordinating with her support team to ensure employment was included in her NDIS plan.

Transport was a challenge, but thanks to collaboration between her support workers and the H4C team, a reliable plan was put in place. The job turned out to be a perfect fit.

Kayla quickly bonded with the horses, especially one named Wrapped in Pink - or "Pink" for short. Her confidence soared. Mick, one of the owners, praised Kayla's successful start at the stable.

"She's absolutely fantastic with them. She's the only one we've got that we can confidently let her enter by herself and handle them on her own."



Now, Kayla looks forward to every shift.

She's more outgoing, self-assured, and thriving in a role that brings her joy.

"Kayla has just hit her 13 weeks in employment milestone and continues to smash her goals with H4C," Twahnee said.

Mick added, "She's just so good. Kayla's got the experience and such a great rapport with the horses. She's an absolute pleasure to have here."

With her future looking bright, Kayla is focused on continuing her work with the horses she loves.

DEA's work with the Centre for Inclusive Employment

Centre for Inclusive Employment

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, the Centre for Inclusive Employment provides resources, tools and training to help providers deliver quality employment services and supports to people with disability and to employers.

DEA is part of the consortium that delivers the work of the Centre and has been a key partner throughout its development.

In the past 12 months, DEA has delivered several projects with the Centre. With shared goals of increasing the professional capacity of the disability employment sector, our work on the following projects has been substantial.

Disability Employment Fundamentals

Now bedded down as the cornerstone of training in the sector, DEA and genU Training have facilitated the uptake of Fundamentals which has seen more than 2,500 course completions across the sector, with all of those training places funded by the Centre.

Specific Cohort Providers Community of Practice

Recognising the demand for training and collaboration tailored for providers specialising in employment support for specific cohorts, we have convened regular in-person and online sessions for this small but deeply committed group. Subjects and speakers have included everything from expert presenters to operational and policy updates and collaborative workshops.



Lunch & Learn Fortnightly Webinars

The runaway engagement success of the Centre's first year, these popular webinars have introduced attendees to topics ranging across ongoing support, workplace modifications, understanding neurodiversity, sensory workplace design, arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, evidence-based practice and more.

Emerging Leaders' Network

Developed to formalise leadership training for up-and-coming managers, the Emerging Leaders Network brings together small groups of managers and team leaders from across Australia who are committed to developing their leadership skills and connecting with peers. Over six months, participants take part in leadership training, in-person workshops, and expert-led webinars designed to strengthen their ability to lead teams and deliver positive outcomes in the workplace.

Disability Employment AUSTRALIA

MEMBER STORY

Bamara

Kiara achieves her goal, with persistence and the right support

Kiara, a First Nations woman living with disability in Tamworth, joined the Inclusive Employment Australia program in November 2025, seeking support from Bamara to help her find a role that truly suited her skills and goals.

After searching for work for some time without any follow-through, Kiara's confidence had taken a hit. Despite this, she remained highly motivated and determined to keep going.

When she connected with Inclusive Employment Australia Mentor Stephanie at Bamara's Tamworth office, they immediately began working together to find her the right work environment and a fulfilling role.

To prepare Kiara for employment, Steph supported her through pre-employment requirements such as obtaining her Working With Children Check, sourcing appropriate interview clothing, and organising work shoes.

Steph remained available as often as Kiara needed, scheduling more frequent appointments to check in, providing consistent support, and helping Kiara to rebuild her confidence.

Having previously completed her Certificate III in Business Administration, Kiara expressed a strong interest in administrative work. When an opportunity arose to work in administration at a local medical service, she eagerly applied.

Following the interview, Kiara visited the Tamworth office to debrief, her demeanour already filled with hope and excitement.

Soon after, Kiara was offered an administrative position and has been thriving in her role since December 2025.

"Steph's support pushed me toward something I've wanted to do for a while. This achievement means a lot to me," Kiara said. Now settled into a positive and supportive work environment, Kiara's confidence has soared, and her outlook for the future has grown brighter.

"I'm incredibly proud of Kiara. From when I first met her to where she is now, she has taken control of her life and found a role that truly suits her. She'll make so many new connections, and this is going to be a great thing for her," Steph said.



MEMBER STORY

Chapter 1 Employment

Justin contributes now while planning for the future

When Josh and Justin first met, it was through a mutual friend. Spinal Life introduced them; Chapter 1 Employment has worked closely with the team there for around four years, connecting people with disability with employers who genuinely value them.

Spinal Life had already done a lot of groundwork, helping Justin get ready for work, but Justin didn't yet have an employment support provider. Josh stepped in to help him navigate that process, together with Mylestones, who provided excellent support. Justin was soon ready to start his job search.

Josh took the time to get to know what Justin really wanted. Long term, Justin dreamed of working as a counsellor, helping others the way people had helped him. But for now, he just wanted the chance to work somewhere doing good in the world.

That's when our team reached out to Annie, executive director of Lovewell Cafe and Lovewell Foundation, a for-purpose business providing support, services and hope to vulnerable women rebuilding their lives. It didn't take long for one conversation to turn into an opportunity.

Today, Justin works as an admin assistant at Lovewell. Just three months in, Annie says he's an exceptional employee. "He's completed what I thought was six months of work in just a few weeks," she says. He's since taken on new challenges too, including designing menus in Canva and partnering with Lovewell's social worker to build a network of referral partners and support materials for the women in the program.

Justin's parents, Lean and Kuh, couldn't be prouder. They've watched their son grow more confident since starting this role.

For Justin, this job means more than a paycheck. "I love being an employee who's contributing to the economy," he says.

He's already looking ahead, saving and planning for his long-term goal of becoming a counsellor.



2026 DEA Conference

This year's DEA Conference was one for the cricket tragics. From 15-17 June, more than 300 disability employment providers, training providers, academics and more with expertise and lived experience descended on the iconic Adelaide Oval for the Conference, themed ***Building a more inclusive Australia.***

The pre-Conference agenda included an in-person session of the Specific Cohort Providers Community of Practice before the lively networking at the traditional Welcome Reception on Monday evening.

On Tuesday morning, the Conference proper opened with a free yoga class for the early birds, and fabulous coffee for the rest of us.

Following an official welcome to country, the emcee dream team Elly Desmarchelier and Wayne Herbert got proceedings underway with charming rapport and canny commentary on the issues challenging the sector.

Six months after the beginning of Inclusive Employment Australia, providers were keen to get the lay of the land and the agenda for Day One provided it, straight from the source. The Hon Minister Tanya Plibersek MP, Minister for Social Services joined us in Adelaide to deliver the opening keynote, followed by DSS Secretary, Michael Lye.

After morning tea, Matt Wright made the case for reforming the DSP and a panel of people with diverse experiences and perspectives debated the proposal.

DEA CEO Peter Bacon laid out what needs to change if the system is to deliver better outcomes at scale, and DEA regular Callam Pickering looked at how trends are shaping work.

After lunch, our breakout streams examined very different topics: Neuroinclusion, Evidence to Practice – Developing Sustainable Jobs for People with Disability and Co-designing the Future.

We closed out the day with Dr Ann Nevile presenting her Blended Transition findings and DEA IEA Policy Manager Sally Karandrews interviewing Hall of Famer Alastair McEwin AM – an astute and humorous conversation.

The Gala Dinner, with host Wayne Herbert resplendent in a jacket of gold teardrop sequins, honoured delegates receiving medals for their years of service to the disability employment sector, presented our third DEA Awards and DEA Chair Mat McIntyre inducted David Coles and Keryl Neville into the DEA Hall of Fame.

Our final day opened with Laura Davis from BASE sharing their success embedding supported employment at scale.

The day's comprehensive agenda saw reflective and inquisitive presentations and panel sessions from voices across the sector and beyond, examining numerous issues:

- **Panel session: How could the Supported Employment Quality Framework apply to Australia?**
- **A Disability Dialogue about Inclusion within Providers**
- **Creating a 'pull' in disability employment: a focus on the demand side**
- **Panel session: Future developments on the 'demand side'**
- **Ability Roundtable – IEA Program Benchmarking**

The breakouts dived deep into some complex topics, ranging from getting engagement right, to reframing disability employment problems to enable practice improvement and perspectives for employers.

The exhibition area, right outside the plenary with a view across the oval itself and boasting access to the grandstand seating, was a big drawcard. Suppliers and delegates were catching up between formal sessions, networking, getting into the exhibitor activities, grabbing coffee, phone charging and more.

The 2026 DEA Conference was made possible with the support from our sponsors and exhibitors, chief among them diamond sponsor the Centre for Inclusive Employment, returning platinum sponsor genU Training, and gold sponsors Aon, BuddyNote, Prime Super and Prospert.












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DEA Hall of Fame







Each year the Disability Employment Australia, Hall of Fame Award recognises the outstanding contributions individuals have made to disability employment policy and practice.

The 2026 inductees into the DEA Hall of Fame are Keryl Neville and David Coles. Keryl and David were inducted at the 2026 DEA Conference Gala Dinner at the Adelaide Oval in June this year.

Happily, we were privileged to have several other Hall of Fame inductees present, including Suzanne Colbert AM GAICD, Dr Jenny Crosbie, Garry Davison, Lucy Macali and Alastair McEwin AM.

Our first new inductee, David Coles built a strong reputation for his leadership in service delivery, stakeholder engagement, governance, and strategic policy development.

His work focuses on creating person-directed employment pathways that support people with disability to build confidence, independence, and meaningful long-term employment outcomes.

Throughout his career, he has held senior operational and executive roles across Australia, including Employment Plus, Job Prospects, Barkuma and EPIC Assist. He has also contributed extensively to sector leadership through Disability Employment Australia (DEA), serving as Chair, Director, and Governance Committee Chair over multiple terms.

In addition to his formal roles, he is a long-time supporter of DEA's mission, always the first to register for our events, quietly working behind the scenes and emphatically advocating for the sector.

He currently works with EPIC Assist as Project Coordinator for Far North Queensland and Policy Officer, assisting the EPIC CEO and leadership team with strategic insights.

Our other new Hall of Famer, Keryl Neville, grew up with a family who also were committed to employment rights for people with a disability.

She is the Chief Executive Officer of LEAD Disability Services, an organisation based in Canberra, dedicated to empowering people with disability through employment, vocational training, inclusion, and community engagement. With a degree in Occupational Therapy and over three decades of experience in the sector, she brings a rare blend of clinical insight, strategic leadership, and deep compassion to her work.

Since the early 1990s, she has led LEAD's transformation into one of Australia's most respected disability service providers, championing person-centred approaches and advocating for employment equity.

Her influence extends beyond national borders through her involvement with the *International Initiative of Disability Leaders now known as Global Leadership Exchange (GLE)*, and through international work exchanges in Alaska, Auckland, Manchester, and San Francisco.

She has served on numerous boards and steering committees, including the Board of the *World Association of Supported Employment*, and *Disability Employment Australia*, where she has held roles as Chair, Vice Chair, and Treasurer.

Widely recognised for her unwavering belief that employment should be accessible to all, she continues to shape national and international conversations around disability employment, inclusion, and social justice.

It is with great pride that we welcomed David and Keryl to the DEA Hall of Fame.

MEMBER STORY

4gr

Early intervention helps Stephen create a strong future

Stephen, an athletic and determined young man from Geelong, has recently commenced an apprenticeship after engaging with 4gr Customised Employment Specialists through his NDIS employment support funding.

Completing his schooling at Armstrong Creek School, early and intentional transition planning played a key role in supporting Stephen's pathway from school into meaningful employment. Beginning this work well before he finished Year 12 created the opportunity to build Stephen's confidence, develop practical work readiness skills, and explore opportunities aligned with his strengths and interests.

Stephen, a proud young man from the Wathaurong community, is supported by his grandparents, who are his primary carers. Their guidance and deep commitment to his future have been central to his journey.

As with many families navigating today's employment and training systems, the processes and pathways can feel complex and ever-changing.

Through early intervention and collaborative planning, 4gr's Employment Mentor, Rachael, worked alongside Stephen and his grandparents to ensure information was clear, decisions were shared, and everyone felt confident and supported in moving toward his goals.

4gr's customised employment approach focused on recognising Stephen's abilities, aspirations and cultural identity; not just identifying a job but establishing a sustainable and meaningful career pathway. Working alongside Stephen, his family, school and broader support team, this transition was built on a strong belief in his potential, ensuring he remained at the centre of every decision about his future.



Now undertaking his apprenticeship, Stephen is gaining industry skills, independence and confidence, while continuing to be supported by those who know him best. His journey reflects the impact of early intervention, strong family support, and customised capacity building employment supports that honour both individual strengths and community connection.

The 2026 DEA Awards

Honouring excellence in disability employment

For the third year, in 2026 the DEA Awards recognised some of the incredible work happening across the disability employment sector. Each award acknowledges a different contribution, but all reflect the values of inclusion, commitment, and quality employment outcomes for people with disability. The quality of nominations this year was outstanding across DEA's four award categories, and deciding the winners was exceptionally difficult.





Prospert Inclusive Employment Specialist Award

This award recognises an outstanding disability employment frontline worker who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to participant-led employer engagement and to delivering the highest quality service, going above and beyond in their work supporting people with disability into meaningful employment.

The Award was presented by Paul Diviny FIEP, Founder and Director of Prospert.

AWARD WINNER

Alayna Whiteside from VERTO

FINALIST

Sarah Moon from AKG

genU Training IEA Participant Award

This award celebrates a participant who has demonstrated commitment, growth, and achievement through training and employment, someone who has achieved amazing things on their journey to a fulfilling career.

The Award was presented by proud sponsors, Dan Gavin and Nikki Noack from genU Training, and accepted by emcee Wayne Herbert on behalf of Cory Johnson.

AWARD WINNER

Cory Johnson from Best Lives

FINALIST

Dylan Brown from EMBARC





Erin Carey Employer Partnership Award

Named in honour of Erin Carey, who was a fierce champion for people with disability and remarkable leader in the in the Employment Services industry, this award recognises a strong and sustained partnership between an employer and an IEA practitioner who have collaborated to create high quality, sustainable employment outcomes.

The Award was presented by one of its judges, sector luminary and DEA Hall of Famer Suzanne Colbert AM GAICD.

AWARD WINNER

Umair Janoo from WISE Employment
for their work with Don Intine from Programmed Skilled Workforce

FINALISTS

Rebecca Beaumont from Jobedge (ASURIA AUSTRALIA)
for their work with Rob Gordon from Adelaide Active Rehab and Therapy

Thao Huynh from Sureway Employment and Training
for their work with Maria Yuen, Aston Lucas Gourmet

Prime Super Emerging Leader Award

Brand new in 2026, the Prime Super Emerging Leader award recognises a leader early in their management career who has demonstrated exceptional initiative, innovation and influence and has actively worked to improve outcomes for disability employment participants. The Award showcases the qualities, skills and experience that together exemplify the best professional practice in our sector.

The Award was presented by Gil Sebbag from Prime Super.

AWARD WINNER

James Mulligan-Brunell from Breakthru

FINALISTS

Felicity Hill from CoAct Connect + Impact Community Services

Jack Franklin from Endeavour Foundation

DEA Leaders' Forum and Collaboration Forum events

DEA's twice-yearly Leaders' Forum events are single day conferences with a focus on policy, collaboration and networking. Attracting senior leaders, these member-only events provide essential updates and fresh ideas and the opportunity to catch up and swap ideas and experiences.

In November 2025, members joined us at Melbourne Town Hall for a day of keynotes, lightning rounds, workshops and some inspiration in the form of music from DJ Ha, pianist extraordinaire who recently came to prominence on the ABC TV program *The Piano*.

The day was rounded out by the DEA Annual General Meeting which included the announcement of the new Board at that time. Mathew McIntyre (The Disability Trust) was re-elected as Chair, John Gibbons (The Personnel Group) was elected Vice Chair and Ashley Williams (Real Futures) was elected as Treasurer.

In March 2026, the team hit the road for a series of Collaboration Forum Events preceded by Emerging Leaders' Network sessions. New staff Simon Rowberry (Deputy CEO) and Renae Hartmann (NDIS Policy Manager) joined Peter and Sally to facilitate the world café sessions along with representatives from DSS, NDIA, CIE and our industry partners. We were delighted to see a strong turnout in each city from Brisbane to Perth, Sydney, and finally, Melbourne.









MEMBER STORY

WISE

Paul walked in with a job ad and walked out with a career

When Paul walked into the WISE Employment office in Dandenong, he had a job ad in hand and a goal in mind. He'd spotted a role on Seek with Compnow — an IT company he admired — and told the WISE team, "This is the job I'd love."

It wasn't just a hopeful moment. It was the next step in a long journey that began when Paul was three years old.

Growing up in Melbourne, Paul was diagnosed with a developmental delay that made speech and communication difficult. He was quiet, shy, and found it hard to express himself. But he never let that stop him.

"I never allowed my challenges to stop me from looking ahead," Paul says. "I was always surrounded by supportive teachers, great family and friends."

Paul's passion for technology led him to study cyber security. He completed a Certificate IV and then went on to finish an Advanced Diploma. He loved learning and he loved computers but turning that into paid work was harder than expected. Job interviews were tough. Finding the right role felt just out of reach.

That's where Souzan Asfour, Head of Employer Engagement at WISE Employment, came in.

"What inspired me to support Paul was his passion and his determination to work within the IT industry," Souzan says. "When I first met him, he was noticeably nervous and shy. Although he possessed the necessary skill set, it was clear that he struggled with self-doubt. This came across in conversations, particularly during job interviews, where he had difficulty articulating his thoughts in a way that clearly demonstrated his ability."

To better prepare him, Souzan conducted practice interviews and involved Paul's family every step of the way, ensuring he felt supported throughout the process.

His first interview with Compnow, a national IT company with more than 500 employees across Australia, didn't go to plan. The role was customer-facing and while Paul had the right skills, he wasn't ready for that type of work.

But no one gave up. Souzan stayed connected with the Compnow team, Paul kept practising and his parents were always there to offer support.

Six months after he first walked into WISE Employment, Paul started in a newly scoped position as a Deployment Technician. His focus is on supporting Australia Post by managing incoming and outgoing devices —



completing orders for brand new and refurbished tech, scanning and recording returned assets, and preparing them for refurbishment or retirement. He also communicates directly with the Australia Post team to keep everything running smoothly.

"What I love most is the people I work with. Everyone's supportive, the culture is really positive, and I enjoy helping out where I can," Paul says. "I also get to work with some really cool technology, and the instructions are clear, so I always know what needs to be done. I like the challenge too—it keeps me sharp."

Paul enjoys the hands-on side of the job and the rhythm of the work. The space suits his focus, and over time, he's built confidence in how he operates.

Now six months into the role, Paul says he's feeling good about how far he's come and what's ahead.

"Never give up. If you need help, ask for help. There's people willing to help you out and support you," he says.

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