THE CREATIVITY OF SUCCESS:

DISABILITY
IN THE CLASSROOM AND THE WORKPLACE
A GUIDE FOR PRIVATE TRAINING ORGANISATIONS
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THE CREATIVITY OF SUCCESS:
DISABILITY IN THE CLASSROOM AND THE WORKPLACE
HOW DO YOU RESPOND WHEN A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY WANTS TO ENROL IN ONE OF YOUR COURSES?

A Organise a meeting with an enrolment staff member who is trained in inclusive practices to help work through the student’s career choices and identify any support needs;

B Get in touch with your local National Disability Coordination Officer to arrange a coordinated solution for the student, drawing on a range of locally available resources;

C Send them off to a public institution?

If you answered ‘C’, you are missing out on a valuable client segment. Providing training solutions to students with a disability is not hard. It’s certainly no harder than customising solutions for business clients, but many private registered training organisations (RTOs) lack confidence in this area.

‘Expect the unexpected’ is a useful guiding theme for RTOs. People who have a disability live with the consequences of their disability every day. Their disability is not a source of surprise to them. However, they routinely encounter the surprise, shock, agitation and anxiety of other people in response to their disability. This mismatch of daily realities is a source of frustration for people with a disability on the one hand, and for educators and employers on the other.

But what does successful training look like? Certainly, getting a job is important because:

- We all value our financial independence. We all want to be useful. We all want to enjoy a sense of belonging – as part of a community, an organisation, a group of common interests.
- Access to work in return for fair pay is not only a basic human right, but it also makes us feel like valued participants in our society.

At the same time, defining and achieving success is a very personal task. For some people with a disability, success might be the achievement of a Certificate 2 in their chosen area of interest even if they never get a job as a result. Nevertheless, we still have a responsibility to help, guide and facilitate the pathways to achieving the learning, training and vocational goals of people with a disability from all walks of life across all fields of enterprise.

That’s why we are delighted that the Australian Council for Private Education and Training is tackling this issue in vocational education and training and the workplace. This booklet will help RTOs overcome their uncertainties and discover that while having the right resources at the right time can be instrumental to the student’s success, providing training for people with a disability is mostly common sense. Read this booklet, then get out there and talk with your colleagues within and outside the VET sector about what you’ve learnt. Find out the resources and support that already exist in your area and share the knowledge. Before long, you will enjoy the benefits that arise from making the best decisions for both your business and for people with a disability.

KAY GANLEY
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This publication is part of a broader disability project being run by ACPET to promote the vocational training needs and employment skills of people who have a disability – sensory, physical, intellectual, or mental wellbeing – by applying the following principles:

- **Innovation** in professional development, to expand the disability knowledge base of RTOs;
- **Collaboration** to support the responsibility and initiative of students with a disability;
- **Leadership and Advocacy** through improved information, support and brokerage.

Given that 18% of Australians have a disability, it is fair to assume that a significant proportion of current and potential VET students have a disability. Many of these people already attend private RTOs and no doubt many more want to. But for some of these people, their disability affects their ability to access services and information and participate in learning, often causing unnecessary frustration and isolation.

RTOs do not want unhappy customers, and so most will want their services to be inclusive. Besides, RTOs are obliged by legislation to make their services accessible – the Disability Standards for Education and the AQTF Standards both oblige VET services to provide people with a disability the same respect, rights and access as other people in the community.

Armed with the right information, you can avoid much anxiety and time and effort in trying to find out how to do the right thing and the best thing for your business as well as for your students and prospective students.

The point to keep in mind is that providing training services to people with a disability is not necessarily a specialised field of enterprise and nor is it something that only TAFE is equipped to do. In fact, it usually just requires a willingness to talk openly with students and staff and knowing where to go if and when help is required. It’s mostly common sense. Private RTOs are highly adept at tailoring training solutions for business clients. Designing solutions for students and clients with a disability is comparable in cost and ease. It’s all part of providing a quality service.

This booklet will help you respond to your customers. Because everyone is different and every RTO is different, there is no one way to make services inclusive – it’s all about the interaction between the individual and the RTO. But we can give you a starting point. In the following pages, you will find some common dilemmas and solutions, some useful online resources and some case studies to give you further ideas on how to keep your customers happy. Ultimately we hope to generate discussion and collaboration amongst ACPET members so that in the future any tricky issues can be nutted out with support from informal networks of interested people in your local area.
MARKETING TO PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY
AN UNTAPPED MARKET

As nearly one in five Australians has a disability, smart organisations are looking for ways to improve their confidence and capability in providing services to this untapped market.

In recruiting new students, training organisations need to consider this market and design their marketing strategies so that their message reaches this audience.

After all, it would be a shame to miss out on helping to educate the next Thomas Edison (learning disability), Buzz Aldren (depression), Isaac Newton (epilepsy) or Frida Kahlo (physical disabilities).

MAKE INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE

The Disability Discrimination Act says that education and training providers need to treat prospective students with a disability on the same basis as prospective students without a disability.

This means training providers need to have information available in a variety of formats, for example print, online, audio. This ensures information is accessible to everybody and potential students can make informed choices.

Your website is a particularly important way for many people with a disability to find out about your offerings. But if documents are published only in PDF format, for example, some people will not be able to read what you have to say. Publish the same content in HTML, Microsoft Word or RTF on your websites so that people with a vision impairment can translate information using their assistive software.

For other ideas on making your website accessible see the Web Accessibility Initiative.

http://www.w3.org/WAI/

It is well worth reviewing all your marketing resources for any unintentional barriers. Provide alternative options such as audio and use plain English, short sentences, clear headings, no jargon, and pictures or diagrams where appropriate. This will project your marketing messages to a much wider range of people.

IN ONE YEAR, THEY REPORTED:

275% increase in accessible room night bookings;
260% increase in revenue from accessible room bookings;
400% increase in internet bookings.

NEARLY ONE IN FIVE

Australians has a disability
GET CREATIVE ABOUT MARKETING

Letting people know that you have taken action to improve their access is a crucial part of your marketing strategy. By publicising that your organisation supports accessibility to all people, potential students with a disability will perceive that they are welcome to participate in your programs. Promote the support services or adaptations you have (or you can access) and any other features that make your facilities receptive to people with a disability.

Your ‘front of house’ personnel are critical in creating a welcoming first impression to potential students. The booklet, *Welcoming Customers with a Disability*, is a valuable resource for all people who deal with customers whether face-to-face, by phone or electronically. It contains communication and etiquette essentials, as well as tips on how to provide outstanding customer service to customers with any type of disability. You can download this booklet from the Australian Employers Network on Disability at:

http://www.employersnetworkondisability.com.au

Think about new places to advertise your programs to reach this new audience. Consider advertising through disability publications such as Link Magazine, or at disability conferences such as the annual Pathways Conference which focuses on the participation of students with a disability in post compulsory education.

Make connections with disability organisations which can promote your services for you and help with any support needs. A good start would be to get in touch with local members of the Disability Employment Network – organisations that provide support for people while they are training and looking for a job.


Finally, make sure that your marketing and communication people are on board. This article might start them thinking in new and creative ways – *What Marketers Should Know about People with Disabilities*.

http://disability-marketing.com/newsroom/diversityInc.php4

WALK THE TALK

This advice has focused mainly on just one of the six Ps of marketing – promotion. Obviously, the other 5 Ps – people, product, place, price, processes – need to back up your communication strategy. In the following pages you will find some specific ways you can make your services accessible during enrolment; training and assessment; and transition to employment.

When embarking on this new marketing direction, remember that like any other market segment it will take time for word to get around and for people to try a new service. It is important to persist and also to recognise that changes made to attract people with a disability inconvenience no-one and benefit many more than just the target group.

PROMOTION

PEOPLE

PRODUCT

PLACE

PRICE

PROCESSES
Sarah James is an 18-year-old woman who has always wanted to work in a hair and beauty salon. Sarah also has a mild intellectual disability. And while her family was keen to foster her ambition, her mother was hesitant about approaching a local RTO. Would they welcome Sarah? Would they be able to manage her learning needs?

An information brochure provided by the RTO did indeed sound promising – the RTO clearly stated its commitment to principles of access and equity, and openly welcomed applications from students with disabilities. However knowing that talking the talk is only part of what is needed to make the placement of a student with a disability successful, Sarah’s mother decided to make contact.

The woman who answered the phone didn’t miss a beat when Sarah’s mother mentioned her daughter’s disability. “We’ve had three students with intellectual disabilities complete the course and all are working in local salons,” she told her, “washing hair, sweeping the floor and making cups of tea.” Encouraged, Sarah’s mother suggested Sarah make an appointment.

Sarah came home and told her mother the woman who’d interviewed her had been very welcoming, and had told her the trainers would have access to modified resources to help her learn the language and communication skills she would need to work in a salon. Similarly, the woman had been impressed by Sarah – with her determination and her preparedness, noting she had brought documents relating to her prior learning experiences.

Sarah successfully completed the course and is now working three days a week in a salon where she is a valued employee. The salon makes a point of telling the RTO that…

“Sarah benefits them in so many ways – with many customers returning to have their hair done and say hello!”

Sarah’s Choice – How a Welcoming and Inclusive Marketing Strategy Can Be an Advantage

The following is a fictitious case study based on a compilation of similar real-world incidents as reported by agencies such as the Endeavour Foundation and private RTOs.
ENROLLING
PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY IN TRAINING PROGRAMS

ENROLMENT: DECISION TIME FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

When a person with a disability decides they want to enrol in one of your courses, they are faced with the question of whether to tell you about their disability or not. Some people will because they know they need to seek information and support. But many others are fearful about disclosing their disability, believing they may be discriminated against, denied a place in the course, or attract curiosity. Because there is still a perceived stigma, especially with ‘hidden disabilities’ like mental illness, a high proportion of students do not disclose their disability.

It is helpful for you as a training provider to find out about a student’s disability and any particular requirements at the time of enrolment so that you can plan for any adjustments that might be needed.

All enrolment forms should include a question relating to disability. Students should be invited, but not required to disclose any disabilities they may have. You may wish to ask students at this point to indicate on the form if they expect to need any adjustments. They will need to have information about the academic and practical requirements of each course so they can consider their needs in relation to their disability and their chosen course. It is also important to clearly state that all personal information is handled in a confidential manner.

For further information, see this website which discusses the rights and responsibilities of educators in relation to enrolment and disclosure of disability.


WHAT STUDENTS MIGHT WANT TO KNOW AT ENROLMENT TIME

Students will have different requirements, depending on their disability, what support systems they already have in place and what course they are enrolling in. Some of the questions they may want to discuss at enrolment are outlined below.

ALL STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY

To which staff members should I introduce myself?

What evidence do you require of my disability?

What help can I get with exams and assessments?

Are there any scholarships available for students with a disability?

STUDENTS WITH A MOBILITY IMPAIRMENT

Who do I see to get a disability parking permit?

Are there wheelchair accessible toilets?

What is the access to buildings like?

STUDENTS WHO HAVE A VISION IMPAIRMENT

How will I arrange to have course notes provided to me in a format that suits my needs?

Are campus maps available in Braille, large print or online?
STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR HAVE A HEARING IMPAIRMENT

Are Auslan interpreters available?
How do I make arrangements for note-takers in my class?

STUDENTS WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY

What learning support is available?
What alternative assessment formats may be available?
Are note-takers provided if I need one?

STUDENTS WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

What do I do when I need a break?
Are there rooms available for some privacy?

STUDENTS WITH A CHRONIC MEDICAL CONDITION

What exam arrangements can be made if I am unable to sit for an exam?
How do I make arrangements for assignments if I am unable to complete them on time?

Adapted from Considering Tertiary Education, Mature Study Program, University of South Australia.

HOW YOU CAN MAKE THE PROCESS RUN SMOOTHLY

There are things your organisation can do to make the enrolment process fairer and beneficial for both the organisation and the student.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- Take care in designing and wording forms to ensure they are easy to understand and fill out, are available in alternative formats, including the option to enrol via your website; and offer help in filling out forms;
- Keep records of the types of enquiries received from students with a disability to help prepare responses for enrolling students;
- Encourage staff to nominate for a position of Disability Liaison Officer. Provide appropriate training and ensure this person is on-hand to help enrolling students identify their support needs and to coordinate relevant support;
- Train administrative staff in understanding and implementing non-discriminatory practices.

Have a look at what other training providers have done to make their enrolment processes more inclusive. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission publishes Disability Discrimination Act Action plans from hundreds of education and training providers.


THINK ABOUT

what you and your organisation can do to improve your enrolment processes
Caleb Boerma is a 17-year old trainee who is planning to enroll in an information technology course. Currently, Caleb’s main interest is networking and secure data transfer, while in his spare time he enjoys computer gaming. Caleb also has cerebral palsy and is hesitant about disclosing his disability to the RTO.

According to Caleb, people often assume that his diagnosis of cerebral palsy automatically means he is also less intellectually able and less capable than other young men his own age. While his cerebral palsy only affects his mobility, he is concerned that disclosing his condition on an enrolment form could mean he won’t be accepted by the RTO into the information technology training course.

Caleb’s reluctance to disclose also stems from his upbringing, his parents refusing to allow him to use his cerebral palsy as an excuse for not doing something. And over the years he has learnt to manage his disability by forgetting his CP label and focusing on what he can do rather than what he can’t do.

To Caleb’s relief, the enrolment form doesn’t insist he disclose any disability, but rather invites him to be open about any adjustments or assistance he might need. However, despite the informality and the reassurance all information will be treated in confidence Caleb elects not to tick the box.

Fortunately, at his interview the RTO staff member knows to tread respectfully. It is only after making sure Caleb and his parents understand he has been accepted into the course that he asks whether Caleb would be willing to reconsider. “By disclosing your disability,” he tells Caleb, “you will have support behind you, a team on your side.”

Initially Caleb and his parents are distressed, but once they realise it is only a means to an end, and that it will make it more manageable for Caleb and his RTO, for example allowing the RTO to access equipment and resources to create a disability-friendly workspace that Caleb and his parents feel comfortable and willing to formally disclose his disability.
SECTION 3

TRAINING
AND ASSESSMENT
FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY
Banking high-flyer, Bill Moss, says supporting people with a disability is just good business…

If you can’t deal with it in the workforce, then you won’t be able to deal with it in your client base.

RTOs that can deal with the diversity of their students will be able to maximise their client base.

Contemporary VET pedagogy recognises the need for different teaching and learning approaches, for different contexts and different learners. But this is no easy task in spite of the heightened awareness about it. One of the most hazardous traps is when people assume that ‘groupings’, such as ‘people with a disability have uniform characteristics’. Successful teaching and training approaches begin with the assumption that each student is unique and teaching strategies should be modified to match their individual needs.

Like teaching, assessments can also be modified to suit the particular requirements of students. Alternative assessment strategies are not designed to give a student with a disability a greater advantage or affect the integrity of the course, but rather to minimise the impact of the disability on the student’s assessment performance.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act, education and training providers are required to take reasonable steps to ensure that students with a disability can participate in learning experiences, including assessment and certification, on the same basis as a student without a disability.

Education and training providers are required to:

- Consult with a student to determine if any reasonable adjustments are required;
- Determine whether any changes are needed during a course;
- Assess whether a particular adjustment is reasonable;
- Make adjustments in a timely manner; and
- Implement strategies and programs to prevent harassment or victimisation.

Successful teaching and training approaches begin with the assumption that each student is unique.
USE THE SUPPORT AVAILABLE

You do not need to find your way alone. There is a range of help available for RTOs to make training and assessment practices inclusive of all students.

NATIONAL DISABILITY COORDINATION OFFICERS (NDCOs)

There are 31 NDCOs across Australia. NDCOs assist education providers within their region to provide better services for people with a disability. They also provide information to individuals with a disability, link individuals and organisations to local support services and raise awareness amongst education providers and the general public of the issues facing people with a disability.

See www.deewr.gov.au/ndco to find out more

EQUIPMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Many State and Territory education and training departments have particular programs RTOs can access to provide equipment or support services for people with a disability. In Queensland, there is the Vocational Education and Training Disability Support Service (VDSS).

This service provides funding for:

- assessment of the student’s learning support requirements;
- adaptive equipment, and training (eg software, ergonomic furniture etc);
- personal support services (eg sign language interpreters, specialist support workers, notetakers etc).

The amount of support provided is based on individual requirements. There is no cost to the student or the training provider. Information about the VDSS and the relevant forms are available at:


DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

Some students will be registered with a service provider that specialises in providing support and assistance for their particular disability. Service providers offer a range of services for their members including career counselling, advice, the provision of adaptive and other technologies, advocacy and industrial services. Ask your students if they are registered with such a provider, and if not explore with them the option of joining up.

GOOD PRACTICE BENEFITS EVERYONE

Teachers and trainers often find that when they use teaching and assessment methods to benefit a student with a disability, all students benefit. Facing the class when speaking, presenting information in a variety of ways, making course material available ahead of class and asking students if assistance is required are all examples of good practice that benefit students with and without disabilities.

Read the case study on the following pages and think about what improvements you can make to your teaching and assessment practices to make them more inclusive.

Training and assessing a student with a disability can require an RTO to think creatively and while many are keen to give it a go, some may also feel unsure of how to get it right. Yet as we see in the case of Kianna Rodriguez – a young 18-year-old woman who has an acquired brain injury – the search for solutions can lead to new and innovative ways of delivering all training packages.

Kianna fell ill with meningitis in her last year of school. As a consequence of the severity of the infection she has memory problems and finds it difficult to enunciate words clearly. She also tires easily and struggles with problem solving. Her condition may improve, but as yet no one can predict by how much.

When she met her trainer John, Kianna had what many called unrealistic career expectations. She still wanted to go to university. After all she reasoned, “she’d always been at the top of her class.” Her parents wanted her to consider an alternative career path, but Kianna was adamant – she wanted a high-flying career – and any discussion would end in tears, leaving her parents at a loss as to what do. How could they help their daughter when her injury meant she wasn’t fully aware of the changes to her abilities? How would her employer manage? How would her co-workers react?

To her parents’ surprise John supported Kianna’s ambition – “Yes, she could go to university,” he said, “he was willing to help her.” It was then Kianna who surprised everyone by suggesting she start small and perhaps undertake a course in basic office skills. John agreed. He also voiced the advice of disability advocate Bill Moss, “If you can’t deal with it in the workforce, then you won’t be able to deal with it in your client base. Kianna’s employer will have customers like Kianna,” he reassured her parents, “It’s in their best interests to manage.”

John made sure the course was paced for Kianna – using visual cues and modified course materials (compiled with the support of the local brain injury support organization). He also created a series of podcasts that Kianna could refer to anytime to refresh her memory.

Thanks to John’s lead, Kianna’s parents realised that if they agreed with Kianna, if they said “Yes, she could do whatever she wanted,” she was more likely to feel a sense of control and make suitable decisions. As it turned out Kianna recovered better than anyone had expected and over time no longer needed any extra assistance. So much so she is now considering training as a para-legal.

For the RTO involved the journey with Kianna not only boosted their confidence when it came to enrolling students with learning difficulties, but also enabled them to realise the value of incorporating visual cues and podcasts into many of their training packages.
IT’S WHAT WE’RE ALL HERE FOR

Why do people with a disability enrol in vocational education and training? To get a job. People with a disability want to get a job from their training – just as we all do.

No-one wants to be moved through a succession of training courses with no paid work in sight.

While some RTOs may not see the transition to work as part of their core business, high performing providers know that sincere and strenuous efforts to achieving employment for their students gives them a key competitive edge. It is the prize every student expects.

Government sees RTOs as crucial partners in the goal of increasing the employment prospects of people with a disability. The National Disability and Mental Health Employment Strategy highlights the key role of VET in getting people jobs; and thousands of fully funded training places have been allocated for jobseekers, including people with a disability, under the new Productivity Places Program.

HOW CAN RTOS HELP PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY GET JOBS?

CAREER PLANNING

Students have to make the right choices about their education and training so that they can get the job they want. The way they make their decisions is influenced by many people, including parents, friends and teachers. The RTO is also important in guiding students’ career choices.

When interviewing potential students or providing career planning advice, it is important to let go of any preconceived ideas about the choices available for people with a disability. At the same time, RTOs must provide clear information about the career pathways and workplace requirements that allow people with a disability to match their training program to suitable job opportunities.

APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS

People with a disability are more likely to get a job when their training involves practical experience in the workplace. As such, students enrolled in apprenticeships or traineeships get better employment outcomes. Unfortunately, people with a disability still have much lower participation in apprenticeship and traineeship programs than other students.

To improve employment results, RTOs could think about how they can help students participate in apprenticeships and traineeships. This might be through career guidance, providing relevant bridging courses, as well as creating strong partnerships with group training organisations (GTOs). GTOs are a good choice for many people with a disability because of the extra support they provide throughout the training contract and, as employers, they are eligible for wage support when they employ an apprentice or trainee with a disability.
RTOs can also access funding of up to $5,500 a year for tutorial, interpreter and mentor services for apprentices or trainees who require additional assistance with their off-the-job training because of their disability. For more information see:

PARTNERING WITH EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Partnerships between RTOs and employment agencies can help develop career pathways for people with a disability which are targeted to employment opportunities. The employment agencies which provide specialist assistance to jobseekers with a disability are called Disability Employment Network providers (DENs).

Each year, DENs help more than 50,000 people with moderate to severe disabilities find and keep work. DENs are being encouraged to increase their focus on skills development, training and education. As a result, RTOs may well benefit from a burgeoning client base being referred through DENs in coming months. DENs are also an important contact for RTOs in helping navigate the array of services provided by the disability sector. To find the DENs in your local area see:
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/Programs/DES

Not all students with a disability will want to use a DEN. Some people may not want to disclose their disability to an employer and may prefer to use a Job Network Provider for employment support. Job Network Providers are working with people with a disability more and more, and will also be looking for RTO partners to train their clients with a disability.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Think about how RTOs and employers can work together to help people with a disability achieve employment outcomes.

- What are the perceptions of your staff, including career advisors, about what people with various disabilities are capable of?
- What more can RTOs do to support people with a disability to undertake apprenticeships and traineeships?
- What organisations could your RTO foster partnerships with to improve employment outcomes for people with a disability?


ii ibid.

IT IS IMPORTANT to let go of any preconceived ideas about the choices available for people with a disability
The core business of an RTO is training people. Looked at from this perspective it is not surprising then that some RTOs view the transition to open employment as outside of their area of expertise and not part of their business. However, given that securing a job is what most students want, including those students who have a disability, it makes good business sense for RTOs to strengthen their capacity in this sphere. In the case of Michael Velosky we see how one RTO went about this – encouraging Michael to plan ahead so it would be more likely he would find sustainable long-term employment.

Michael is a 23-year-old man who works in the aviation industry as an aircraft maintenance engineer. He uses a wheelchair – the result of a serious car accident he had when in Year 12 at school.

Michael’s journey began five years ago when he first approached his RTO. At the time the staff were very impressed by his determination, but did not feel comfortable about taking him on. Would he, they wondered, be able to perform critical components of his job such as checking aircraft wheels for cracks? Michael, they reasoned, would need a significant amount of practical assistance in order to do his job. And while they did not see the problems as insurmountable, they wanted him to have support in these areas before he began training.

“We are willing to accept you as a student,” Michael remembers the RTO saying, “but we strongly encourage you to approach our Group Training Organisation (GTO).”

Initially Michael was reluctant, he had not enjoyed his time in rehab and was wary of seeking any further assistance. “Are you saying I can’t do the job?” he asked. “No,” they reassured him, “Not at all, what we want is for you to have job when you finish training. Having a disability is hard enough, what we want to do is make sure your training doesn’t go to waste, that we iron out any problems as we go.”

With some persuading Michael finally agreed to make an appointment and the rest is history. The staff at the GTO not only found him an apprenticeship, but also supported him every step of the way. For example, they organised a stand up wheelchair so he could access workbenches and made sure any other necessary adjustments were made so that he could do all aspects of the job.

Now working full-time, Michael contributes much of his success to the wise advice given to him by his RTO. “I could’ve just done the training,” he says…

But without the staff at the GTO assisting both my employer and my RTO I doubt I would’ve been work ready, let alone working at the job of my dreams.
SECTION 5

WORKING TOGETHER TO FIND SOLUTIONS
WORKING TOGETHER TO FIND SOLUTIONS

Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

WENGER, MCDERMOTT & SNYDER 2002

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

As educators, you are no doubt familiar with the concept of a community of practice – the process of learning that occurs and shared practices that emerge when people who have common goals interact as they strive towards those goals.

This is a useful way to approach improving services for people with a disability. There is no generic solution for people with a disability – everyone’s situation is different. And sometimes the best solution isn’t immediately obvious. It might take a bit of lateral thinking, some brainstorming or just a better understanding of where the various resources are located and how to get hold of them.

Communities of practice, or localised informal information networks, provide the means to work through these issues. They also provide a way of forming new and enduring relationships with stakeholders within and outside the VET sector.

THERE IS NO GENERIC SOLUTION FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY…

Everyone’s situation is different. And sometimes the best solution isn’t immediately obvious.
NETWORKING IN THE NORTH

National Disability Coordination Officers (NDCOs) help coordinate services for people with a disability that attend or plan to attend university or vocational education and training. Until recently, the NDCO in Townsville had been receiving a lot of calls from schools, parents and RTOs about tricky individual cases – students with a disability whose situation could not be handled through usual processes. The fact was people didn’t know where to go or who to contact.

The NDCO called the main stakeholders together and rang a few of his contacts from the disability sector in the local area and asked them to work as a group to solve these cases. By sharing ideas and resources, with each individual stepping up to play their part, the group was able find ways to help the students participate in the courses of their choice.

This group of stakeholders have now formed a loose community. Others have joined as they have faced similar challenges. Now whenever there is an issue that requires a coordinated solution they work it through together.

They’re all busy people so they tend to use phone or email rather meeting face-to-face; in fact they might only get together about once a year, but they all know they can call on each other when they need to thrash out a problem related to a student with a disability.

WHY THIS MODEL WORKS

THE TOWNSVILLE MODEL WORKS BECAUSE:

- it is voluntary and informal – no one feels obliged to turn up to yet another meeting;
- it deals with real cases, so the discussions are focussed and work towards an outcome;
- it is localised and cross-sectoral – open to all people with an interest or contribution to make.

This approach reduces time-wasting and angst for busy providers and is a practical way of getting results for your students.

You can find out more about NDCOs and how to get in touch with the person working in your area by visiting:


THINK ABOUT

How you could set up such a network in your local area?
Who could you involve?
What issues could you address?
RTOs are constantly looking into the future to best position themselves to meet the demands of an ever-changing workplace. What with the rapid changes in technology and the expectation a wider range of students with differing capabilities will be enrolled; there is a constant stream of information requiring digestion. And while many RTOs would agree it’d be useful if they could network and share information with one another, there are only so many hours in a day and more often that not pressing daily concerns. So let’s look at Remo Training, an RTO that offers training courses for business, manufacturing and transport and is using a community of practice model to further enhance its capacity to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Established in 1995 Remo manager Jim Sparkes realised early on that on-going staff professional development would need to be a high priority if it were to thrive and grow. But rather than opt for the traditional half or full-day workshop which takes people way from their workplaces, he chose to hold in-house ‘muffin mornings’ for both course advisors and trainers.

The first ‘guests’ to attend these informal gatherings were job placement providers who welcomed the chance to talk about current and future employment trends. Over time however, the ‘muffin mornings’ expanded to include guests with other areas of expertise. For example, one guest from a local association assisting the blind was able to bring trainers and course advisors up to speed on the latest in voice-activated technology as well as demonstrate how it could be incorporated into training. This information excited trainers because immediately they could see its potential and how it might benefit a larger pool of students, especially those with cerebral palsy and other movement disorders. They were also interested to hear about employers who were already using the technology – call centre operators, accounting firms and legal practices. And inspired to learn that even without the technology there were people with significant vision impairment who were pursuing careers as diverse as remedial massage therapist, television engineer and chiropractor.

The ‘muffin meetings’ are now at times bigger than Ben Hur. “Not quite what we had in mind when we started them,” says Jim…

"But as a RTO we have not only increased our capacity to service a wider range students, but the knowledge we have gained has enhanced our ability to solve numerous workplace issues – for both abled and disabled students."
INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

ADCET
The Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET) provides information and resources to support the work of disability practitioners in the postsecondary education and training sector.
http://www.adcet.edu.au/

CREATING ACCESSIBLE TEACHING AND SUPPORT
Guidelines on inclusive teaching practice for specific disabilities including hearing impairment, vision impairment, mental illness, learning disabilities and health conditions.
http://www.adcet.edu.au/Cats/Specific_Impairments.chpx

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT 1992 AND DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR EDUCATION 2005
Legislation providing protection against discrimination based on disability. Includes Disability Standards that set out rights and responsibilities of staff and students at education institutions. Action plans lodged by RTOs to comply with the Standards are available to download.

DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR EDUCATION
http://www.ddaeductards.info/
With downloadable booklet:

MATURE STUDY INITIATIVE
Website for mature age people with disabilities considering education at university or RTOs. Includes examples of information students will need when enrolling with a training provider.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN
Information about designing learning materials so that more people can use them.

WEB ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE
Strategies, guidelines, and resources to help make information on the web accessible to people with disabilities.
http://www.w3.org/WAI/
STUDY SUPPORT

NATIONAL DISABILITY COORDINATION OFFICERS
NDCOs bring together stakeholders and coordinate support, for people with a disability who are at, or who will soon be attending, university or vocational education and training.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICE
Provides support for eligible students with a disability who are undertaking off-the-job training in Queensland. Includes funding for assessment of learning support needs, adaptive equipment, and training in its use and personal support services (interpreters, specialist support workers, notetakers etc) at no cost to the student or the training provider.

DISABLED AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICE ASSISTANCE FOR TUTORIAL, INTERPRETER OR MENTOR SERVICES
Australian government funding payable directly to the RTO for Australian Apprentices with disability who require additional assistance with off-the-job training.

WILLING AND ABLE MENTORING PROGRAM
WAM matches tertiary students with disability with a mentor in the profession or industry the student is interested in. It aims to enable job readiness and support the career development of students and graduates with disability.
INFORMATION AND SUPPORT IN RELATION TO SPECIFIC IMPAIRMENTS

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING
Provides expertise and advice to key stakeholders in the VET sector on the teaching, learning and accessibility needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

VISION AUSTRALIA
Provides knowledge, skills and expertise to enrich the participation in life of people who are blind or have low vision and their families. Website includes RTO student handbook and assistive technology guide.

SANE AUSTRALIA
Website includes fact sheets on all the major mental illnesses.
www.sane.org

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH A PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITY
Resource book to help RTOs appropriately support people with mental illness.

OPEN ALL OPTIONS
Website provides information and resources about learning disabilities (LD) including information on teaching strategies, assistive technology and support strategies.
http://www.adcet.edu.au/Oao/

SPINAL CORD INJURY AUSTRALIA
Provides free practical, relevant information on all aspects of life for people with mobility impairments including employment and training, equipment, transport and support.
http://www.scia.org.au/services/scinfo_-_information_services

CHRONIC ILLNESS ALLIANCE
Online resource to inform teachers and communities of the impacts of the illnesses on students’ lives and educational performance and to offer strategies to assist them.
http://www.chronicillness.org.au/invisible/
WORKPLACE SUPPORT

AUSTRALIAN EMPLOYERS NETWORK ON DISABILITY
Group of employers that work to improve opportunities for people with a disability in all aspects of business. They help business people welcome people with disability as employees, customers and suppliers. They provide training and information on disability awareness, communication and etiquette.

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT NETWORK
DENs provide specialist assistance to job seekers with disabilities who require on-going support to find and maintain employment. They provide job placement and on-the-job support for apprentices and trainees.
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/Programs/DES

GROUP TRAINING AUSTRALIA
Group Training Organisations employ over 40,000 apprentices and trainees throughout Australia. They provide pastoral care to all apprentices and trainees and many have particular expertise in employing and placing people with a disability.

DISABLED AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICESHIP WAGE SUBSIDY
Wage support is available from the Australian Government to an employer who employs an Australian Apprentice with disability that needs assistance.

JOB ACCESS
An Australian Government initiative to help find workplace solutions for the employment of people with a disability. Phone 1800 464 800 for expert advice or go to the website for practical tips and ideas, or to make an on-line application for a workplace assessment.
NETWORKING AND TROUBLESHOOTING

NATIONAL DISABILITY COORDINATION OFFICERS
NDCOs bring together stakeholders and coordinate support for people with a disability or are attending or will soon be attending university or VET.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE
A guide to developing shared learning and practices with people who have common goals.

PATHWAYS CONFERENCE
Conference on Post Secondary Education for People with Disabilities held every two years and convened by the Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability.
www.pathways9.org

POLICY

NATIONAL DISABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY
Australian Government Strategy which aims to address the barriers faced by people with disability and/or mental illness that make it harder for them to gain and keep work, including access to training.

BRIDGING PATHWAYS
The national blueprint for improving outcomes for people with a disability in vocational education and training.
ACPET is committed to addressing the issue of disability in vocational education and training and the workplace. We’ve had a great response and we want the dialogue to continue.

If you have any comments or questions about training and employment for people with a disability, or if you just want to share some experiences or knowledge with other ACPET members, please log on to the disability discussion board on the ACPET website at...

WWW.ACPET.EDU.AU

 WE’D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU
ACPET

WHAT IS ACPET?

ACPET is the Australian Council for Private Education and Training – the national industry association for independent providers of post compulsory education and training for Australian and International students.

WHAT IS ACPET’S DISABILITY PROJECT IN QUEENSLAND?

ACPET’s Disability Project promotes the vocational training needs and employment skills of people who have a disability – sensory, physical, intellectual, or mental wellbeing – by applying the following principles:

- **INNOVATION** in professional development, to expand the disability knowledge base of RTOs;

- **COLLABORATION**, to support the responsibility and initiative of students with a disability;

- **LEADERSHIP** and advocacy through improved information, support and brokerage.

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MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FROM:

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