



Customised Employment presentation by Peter Symonds

Family Advocacy Annual General Meeting, 4 December 2020

Introduction – Cecile Sullivan Elder:

I'd like to formally welcome our special guest presenter today, Peter Symonds who will be sharing today's experience in supporting people with disability into paid employment. It's important to note that one of Family Advocacy's strategic focuses is on increasing paid employment of people with disabilities across New South Wales. And when we talk about paid employment our focus is on real employment opportunities for people whilst working towards the abolishment of disability specific employment such as Australian Disability Enterprises and other disability specific employment options. Work is already underway with this in our capacity-building initiative Resource Inclusive Communities with a recently funded "School to work" project that I think Annette talked about earlier. So, without further ado Peter has worked in the disability employment sector since 1992. Peter is a General Manager for Operations at Possability in Tasmania, a not for profit organisation. Peter's currently leading up his project of transitioning participants who work in two Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) to community-based work as well as setting up school transition programs for people excluded from the formal employment systems. Peter is a firm supporter of the principles of social role valorisation with a passionate belief that all people regardless of their level or type of disability have the right to work within their community. Peter continues to seek examples of best practice both in Australia and overseas. Over to you Peter.

Peter Symonds:

Thank you all, and thank you for inviting me. To begin with, I'd like to acknowledge collectively we meet on Aboriginal land, and I would like to recognise their elder's past, present, and emerging.

I would also like to acknowledge unrecognised leaders of getting more people with significant and ongoing support needs into community-based employment.

I want to recognise those whose aspirations are more than what the system and community say they should settle for, for themselves or their loved ones.

History has shown our community doesn't easily recognise the validity of those expectations, and society is often comfortable to maintain the damaging historical roles.

I want to begin by acknowledging the struggles many have faced who aren't seen as sector leaders or who don't have the backing of powerful allies.

Who am I?

Let me just really, really quickly talk about who I am. As Cecile talked to, I'm in the industry and I'm an NDIS participant. I started in what was called a sheltered workshop in 1992. So, I've done my time in purgatory. And now my mission is to transition my current employers last two remaining

ADEs, assisting the individuals that currently work in those operations to something that is more aligned with their skills and interests. It's a passion I've had since I've began in '92 and recognised that the people that I first met in those places of employment were often there not because they wanted to be, but because they were told to be by the communities in which they lived.

What does this presentation bring? This is a very quick history of over 50 years of research and practice that highlight what has been proven and what is possible. This is not based on wishful thinking about what could be. It's based on evidence. In the time I've got I can't give much detail but I'm more than happy to respond to comments or questions.

This presentation may be familiar to people. The issues remain the same as when I first began talking about the issue of community-based employment. The challenges remain but for the first time I get a sense the world is becoming more supportive of people's aspirations of community-based work.

I also want to tell this story through people. All have given their approval for their son's stories to be told to this audience. They have also asked their sons if it was OK. All said yes.

1. Clinton's story



And so, I want to start with a story that's got 17 years of history. I'd like to introduce you to Clinton Hall and his dad Gerald Hall and mum Judy. They come from Burnie on the NW coast of Tasmania. When I told Gerald and Judy, they were leaders in social change they scoffed. But they are.

Clinton went to special school in Burnie, then to a Day Support service. He hated it. He ran away, he hit people, people hit him, he refused to join in programs, he hated it.

He had two support workers with him much of the time because he was considered to be a risk.

His mum and dad (Gerald and Judy) wanted some help and sought us out around 2002 because I'd put the shingle out as an organisation that we might be able to support people like Clinton into

community-based employment. Thinking back on that I realised I was a bit cocky - I was a lot younger than.

What was Clinton's reaction to our endeavours?

He ran away, hit people, turned hoses on people who were supporting him to wash cars. He hid in an industrial drier to get out of the job we had found him in a hospital laundry

We tried many things, and none worked.

We made the decision we couldn't support Clinton. I travelled to Gerald and Judy's home to give them the news, but by going to Clinton's home I discovered a different Clinton.

Gerald and Judy ran a home that was and still is immaculate. They have a prize-winning garden. I saw Clinton in that garden, staying on task, listening to instructions, carrying them out as required, politely interacting with Gerald.

Clinton served me tea inside and was the perfect, attentive host, washed up and sat in on the now, very awkward conversation I was having with Gerald and Judy!

Those awkward conversations turned to what was possible. There was several them as we began to respond to the newly discovered skills and attributes Clinton always had. Through conversations Mum and Dad identified someone they knew at the local Target warehouse and thought the tasks there would suit. Through conversations with the warehouse, linked to us by Gerald and Judy's connection, we unknowingly customised a series of tasks for Clinton and provided a support worker that suited Clinton. In this case it was a male, firm but gently spoken and who offered clear sequenced instructions. That worked for Clinton.

Clinton has outlasted restructures, new managers and supervisors, changes in location, COVID and all his life's lumps and bumps to where he is today, celebrating 17 years as a Target Employee. The picture of he and his dad is from the local paper, celebrating that milestone.

He has ongoing support that fades in and out. He uses public transport himself to get to and go home from work.

So, what do I know based on Clinton's success?

Although Judy and Gerald don't see themselves as social change agents – Gerald worked in the local paper mill and Judy maintains a splendid house and is a dotting grandparent – the important thing is that they had a belief in Clinton.

What were the benefits to Target?

This makes commercial sense to Target. That's why Clinton has remained employed. There is no Position Description for Clinton. His job is defined by tasks. Target needed someone to straighten up clothes on the coat hangers and put them back in size range and the right way around. Clinton does that, using the colours on the coat hanger labels to get the sizes right. He also unpacks clothes and his speed is an asset. Goods get out on the floor quicker than when others do it.

What I've also learnt:

That you must be there for the long haul. In Clinton's case 17 years, support has fading in and out as needed. Natural supports are powerful, and his support worker supplements this. It's not a case of one or the other. It's both and they fluctuate.

You need skills and passion. Just wanting to do it isn't enough as we found out with Clinton and any number of times since.

You need to draw back on the over 50 years of history and seek out those with skills. You need to understand how to discover the individual's attributes and skills, identify through a gentle and conscious manner what the potential employer needs and then craft jobs that are mutually beneficial. This might be the development of micro enterprises, all the way up to 38 hour a week jobs with a large employer. All this can be found via any Google search for Customised Employment.

2. Guiding principles.



Foundational Assumptions

Everyone, regardless of their disability or the severity of that disability can work, whatever the economic conditions in their community with the right type and level of support

What I know – you must state your vision, goals and principles.

Otherwise your actions are without foundation and your work vulnerable to the vagaries of untested trends and the influence of those that have an unanchored view of social and physical integration. Remember a theme of Social Role Valorisation. Be conscious of what you are doing.

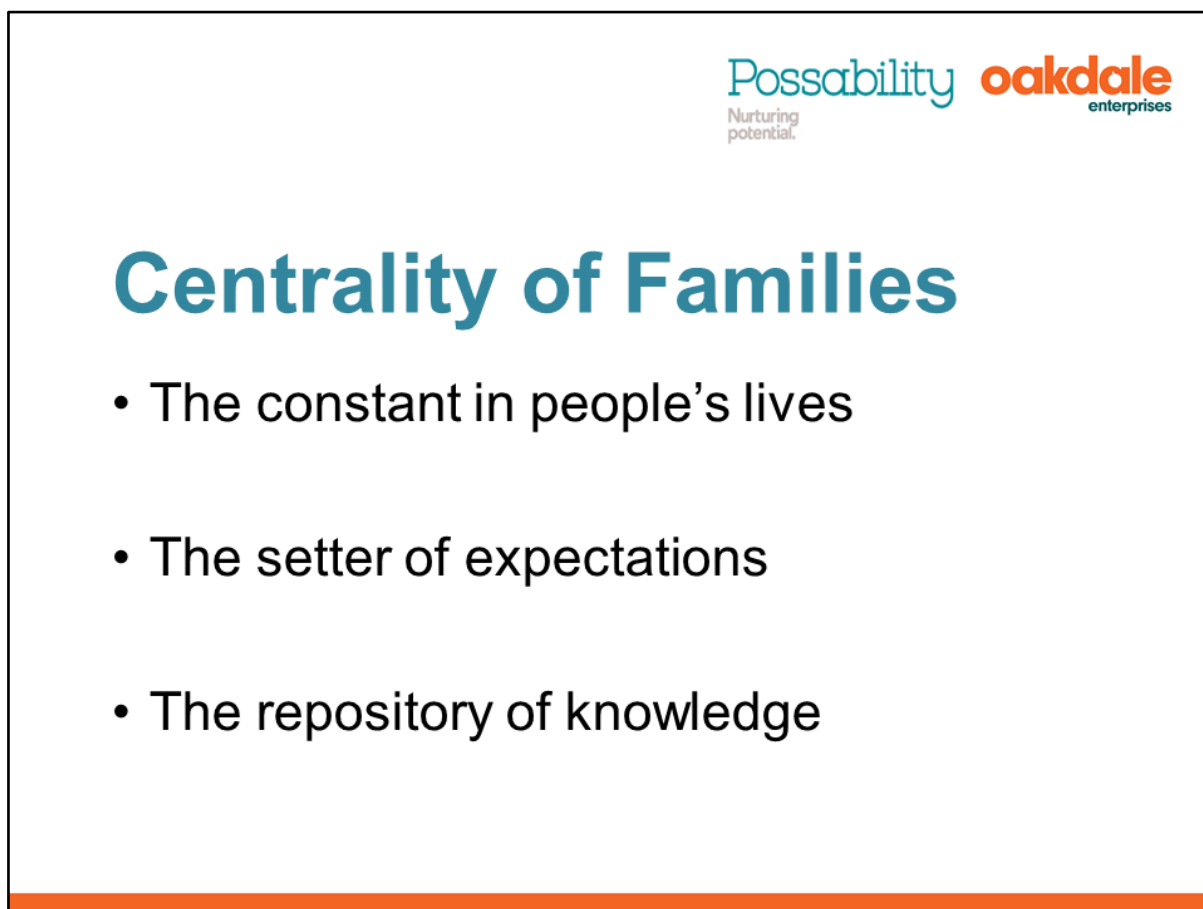
To make some points: Everyone means everyone. Not just those with lots of support or skills or who are nice to work with. Everyone has the right to the economic inclusion that comes from work. Everyone has the right to give to their community rather than just being someone who receives service.

Everyone has the right to the good things in life that come from having a job.

But what about COVID? Yes, that has challenged our country in a manner never seen. It would be foolish to state it hasn't impacted the employment of people. However, what I want to highlight later is a story that shows with the right type and degree of support, people with significant and complex needs can find and maintain employment even in the toughest times

Because of the time I have I can't break down the elements of how you identify the right of level of supports, how you might do Discovery, how you carve tasks to create jobs and so on. I can provide some directions if you want to delve into that space.

3. What have I learnt



Possability Nurturing potential. oakdale enterprises

Centrality of Families

- The constant in people's lives
- The setter of expectations
- The repository of knowledge

While each family is different, I know families are central to getting ready for, gaining and maintaining work. Their knowledge of the person is richer than almost all other sources of information. They know an individual's heart qualities; they know what makes a person's eyes sparkle. They know what works and what to be aware of.

An Inclusion Australia report articulated this far better than I can.

What I am also seeing is the innovative work being allowed to flourish through the NDIS by families that are crafting their own pathway, creating their micro services, tailored around individuals. Think of Imagine More in Canberra and the innovative practices it's spawned.

Always feel comfortable in injecting yourself in the centre of the activity. If you are pushed out, question if this is the right service for you.

4. What else do I know

A history going back over 50 years



This work goes back over 50 years. If you search for “Marc Gold” and “Try Another Way” you can find him, at the start of the 1970’s showing the world people with the most severe challenges, learning how to carry out quite complex tasks. His work called “Try another Way” put the onus for the first time on the success of an intervention on the provider, not the person.

It’s a fundamental plank that Marc saw as critical. No one needs to get job ready. The only criteria to being job ready is that you want to work.

His work is carried on through organisations and centres of employment excellence. There are few in Australia but those that exist offer the resources needed to equip practitioners to get people ready for find and keep community-based work. Search for The Centre of Disability Employment Research and Practice, Paul Wehman, Rich Luecking, Sara Murphy, Cary Griffin, Marc Gold and Associates, Easter Seals and you will find much to guide you.

Remember this is not an uninformed fad. This has a rich set of data going back to the late 1960’s behind it.

5. What I have learnt



The Bigger Picture

External Employment Environment

The NDIS is currently a small participant in the Australian employment environment

- JobActive-1,434,399 participants
- Disability Employment Service (DES) -291,119 participants (*Department of Employment. September 2020*)
- NDIS- 22,000- in ADE's (*NDIA/ NDS various discussion papers*) *Active post-employment support not identified*

Labour Market Information Portal September 20 <https://lmip.gov.au/>

The area of disability employment is not a friendly place if you have complex and ongoing support needs. In my view, it has been openly hostile to the inclusion of individuals with those needs since the mid-2000s.

The government data shows just how excluded people with an Intellectual Disability or who are on the Autism Spectrum are from mainstream disability employment services are.

The system, known as the 'DES' (Disability Employment Service) system is funded by the federal government and has been in operation under various guises since 1986.

If we look at the data now, we see the DES system almost exclusively supports people with mental health and physical disabilities. This is not to deny their needs, but that means people with an Intellectual Disability (ID) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) don't get services.

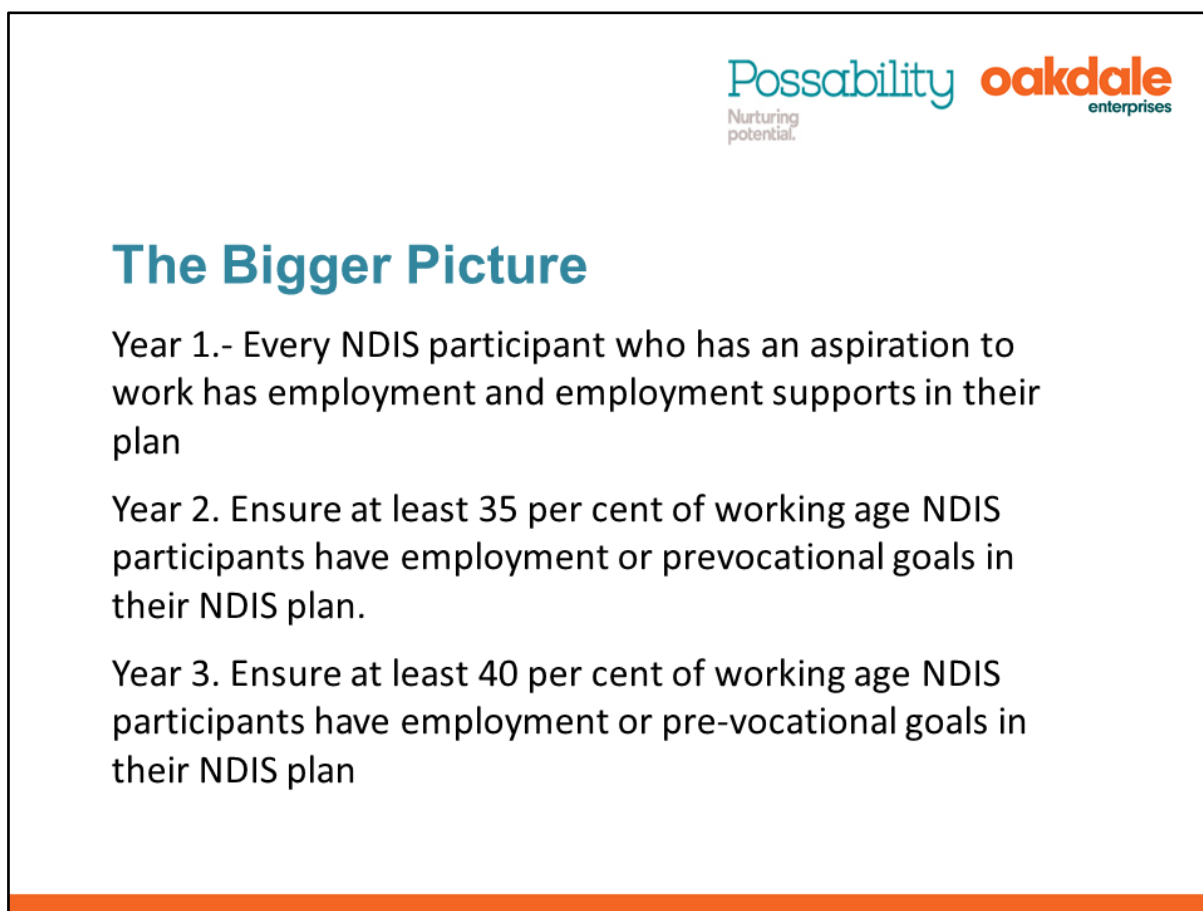
As at October 2020, government data shows

- 83% of DES participants had a mental health issue or physical disability.
- 91% were on Jobseeker, their levels of impairment too low for them to gain the Disability Support Pension.
- Only 6% of the DES participants had an Intellectual Disability or ASD
- Yet 60-70% of NDIS participants had an ID or ASD

It is my view the DES system, the services that operate in this space and the government department that fund the DES system don't see value in supporting the people we seek to find work for.

I want to recognise the champions within the system that have stood up for the people we support, often over years. People like Jeannie Hodges and others who have fought to get the NDIA to engage with the concept of employment through formal structures and supports

6. A 3-year plan



The slide features the logos for 'Possability' (with the tagline 'Nurturing potential.') and 'oakdale enterprises' in the top right corner. The main title is 'The Bigger Picture' in a large blue font. Below the title, three bullet points outline a 3-year plan for NDIS participants.

Possability Nurturing potential.

oakdale enterprises

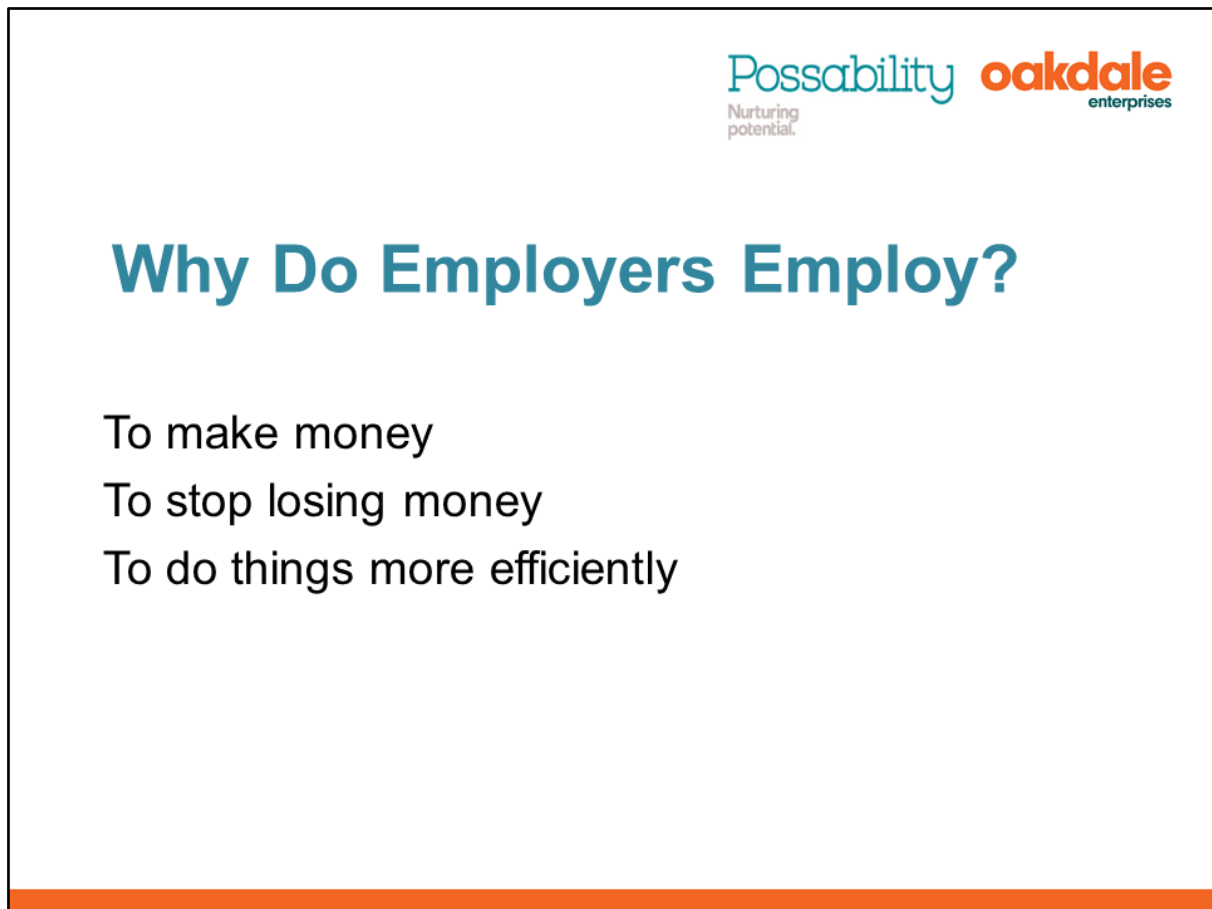
The Bigger Picture

- Year 1.- Every NDIS participant who has an aspiration to work has employment and employment supports in their plan
- Year 2. Ensure at least 35 per cent of working age NDIS participants have employment or prevocational goals in their NDIS plan.
- Year 3. Ensure at least 40 per cent of working age NDIS participants have employment or pre-vocational goals in their NDIS plan

The agency recognised the scheme's sustainability and the foundational underpinnings were at risk unless it was more proactive in driving employment in people's plans. In December 2019 it announced a 3-year plan to lift the number of people with employment related supports in their plans

The tide is moving in our direction and you as the funder now decide what you want, who supports you or your loved ones and where that's done. You can blend or braid supports as it's not separate systems dealing with work and non-work activities.

7. What I know is that there is another partner here



The slide features the logos for 'Possability' (with the tagline 'Nurturing potential.') and 'oakdale enterprises' in the top right corner. The main title is 'Why Do Employers Employ?' in a large, bold, blue font. Below the title, three reasons are listed in a simple black font: 'To make money', 'To stop losing money', and 'To do things more efficiently'. The slide has a white background with a thin black border and a solid orange horizontal bar at the bottom.

The other partner is the employer. These are the other vital part of the arrangements. Without their active engagement, nothing will happen.

What I know is there are 3 core reasons employer employ.

Without doubt employers also consider giving something back through the employment of people, creating a social license that supports their work.

But at the end of the day, the fundamental reasons why organisations employ are:

- to make more money
- to stop losing money or
- to do things more efficiently

We need to recognise this if we are going to create long term employment.

8. What I know

Resume – Tim Jones

Work History

Work experience - XYZ Australian Disability Enterprise

Education

123 Special School

Getting Ready for Work - Cert 1 - Happy Valley TAFE

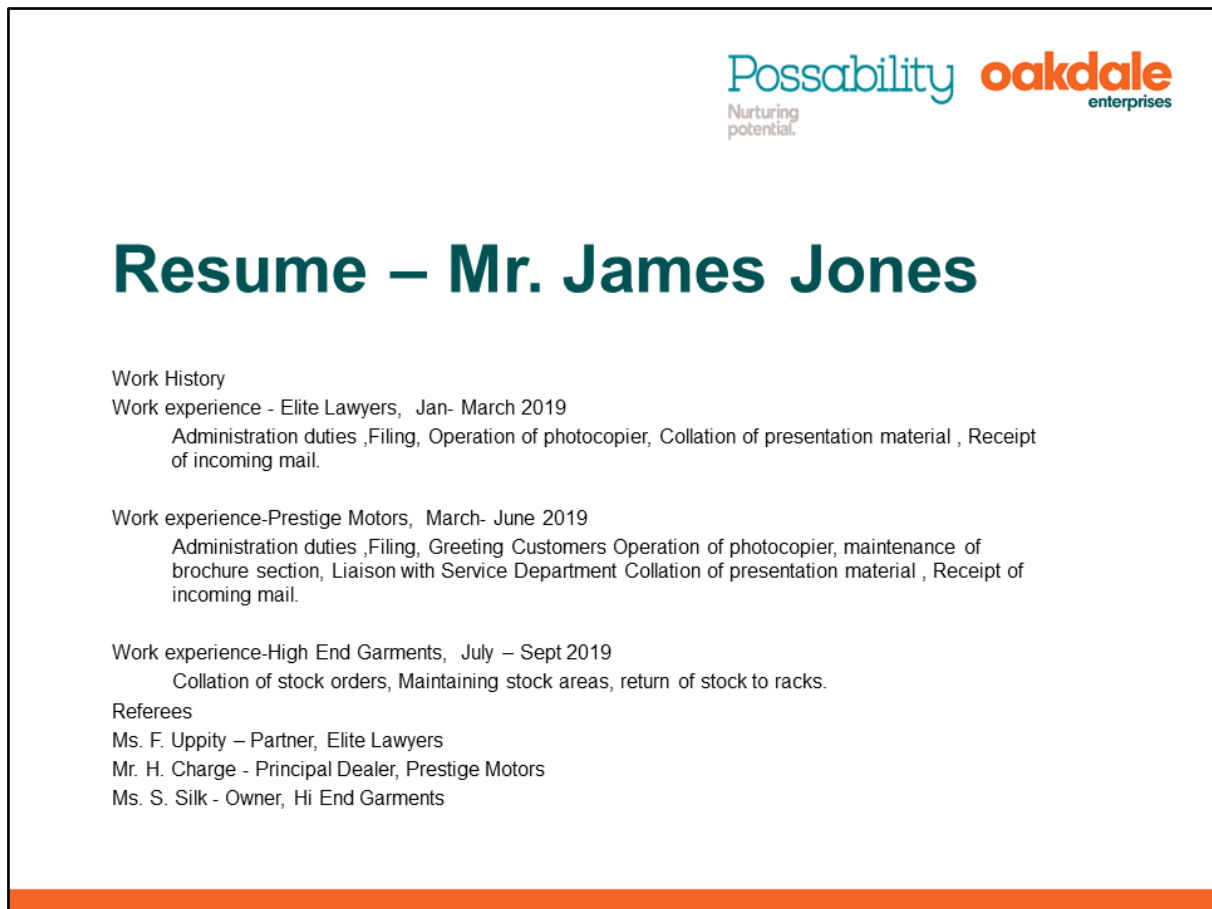
Referees

Ms. Highly Stressed – Principal 123 Super School

Mr. Earnest Worker - Disability Employment Consultant

What I know is that too often we present Employers with resumes or records of activity that make no sense to them and most often reinforce the belief that individuals with a disability, especially a significant one, need a parallel but different system, unconnected to the business world. And we wonder why people don't get jobs when we prepare job seekers with something that looks like this

9. We want a Resume that looks like this:



What if we constructed our support and service to allow a record of activity that looked like this to the employer?

Real workplaces, real peers, real connections

Often the outcome is the potential employer understands what that means, and their peers are vouching for this person.

10. Simply put, our role is to facilitate mutually beneficial connections.



We are creating positions that suit the individual and the employer

Customizing the tasks to create positions that meet the needs of the employer and the participant

There is a large body of work behind this but essentially, it's

1. Discovery. Who is this person and what are the circumstances that need to be in place to allow them to 'be their best'? This isn't an assessment done at a desk, it's done in the participant's home, in their community.

It's not a test of someone's work readiness. If you want to work, you are ready to work. Remember the 'Try another Way' methodology? It's up to us to find out what works for the people seeking to gain employment

This is where your connections as a member of the community come into play. Customised employment has the family at the centre of the activity. You know your community!!!!

2. Informational Interview with the employer. What do they want what do they need? Where are the places in the business where the skills of the individual meet those needs?

a. Remember Clinton's skill at staying on task to straighten things. Target had a need for that to be done= Connection

3. Crafting the job. You aren't looking for existing roles. There will be no job description. You are going to bundle up tasks that need to be done or done more effectively and which suit the person you are supporting

You will need to understand the job so the service delivering the training needs to do the job before the person starts. They need to know what's expected and what they are training to.

11. Leif's story



Remember the principles stated, 'No matter what the economic circumstances of the community are'? Here is a young man who gained employment in Devonport just after the region was opened after a full lockdown due to COVID.

We knew what Leif wanted and needed to be successful. He likes clean places, he enjoys company, he liked tasks that can vary but he works better if they are also structured. Mum and Dad have several connections and pointed us in the direction of a farm machinery dealer.

What did they need? They needed their tractors and machinery in the showroom cleaned. They had apprentices and tradesman doing it, which meant fewer billable hours out of the workshop.

What was the benefit for them? By employing Leif, they got key staff back in the workshop, billing out work. They had their showroom looking great.

Leif started on 4 hours a week but will go to 8 hours next week. His goal is to work around half the week so he can do other things.

12. The Principles

Guiding Principles

- You are ready to work
- We start early
- Zero Instructional inference (Place and Train)
- Service not programs
- We aim for flexible long term support

You want to work – you are ready to work. There are no employability test job seekers need to pass. Back to Marc Gold's ethos of 'Try Another Way'.

School to work should be seamless. The last day of work should look like the first day of work. Material from Richard Luecking is a great read in this area.

In many ways, Grade 12 looks like work. As much time as possible should be spent in workplaces rather than the classroom.

We need to ensure our training and support happens as much as it can in the places the skills will be used. If an individual has trouble transferring skills or making concrete abstract concepts, we need to make sure our activity is done in a manner that makes sense to the person and suits their learning style.

Flexible long-term support is critical. Workplaces aren't static, people change, jobs change, issues emerge. We need to be able to ebb and flow as support and training needs fluctuate. We need to recognise the intertwining of natural and specialist supports.

13. This is our model:

Customised Employment?

Instead of competing for advertised jobs in the open labour market, customised employment strategies are used to support people to create opportunities in businesses and organisations that suit their unique skill set and support needs

14. Talk to outcomes

What are the outcomes?

Our Tasmanian CE experience Jan 2014 to Dec 2015

72% of people with work prep in their NDIS plans got work and 91% of these people remained in work past 26 weeks

Disability Employment Service (DES) comparison

Nationally- Got Work- 24.6% and of this group 29% remained in work after 26 weeks

Measuring how successful an employment program is relatively easy. It's based on how many people got jobs, how long did they keep them, what are they paid and do the hours of work match what the person is seeking.


The formal DES system gets around a third of its participants work for more than 8 hours a week. Of that third, a third get to keep work for 26 weeks.

We had a program in the North West of Tasmania when the NDIS was in a trial stage. 32 people started with work in their brand new NDIS plans, and over two years 72% found work and of that group, over 90% kept their job past 26 weeks.

This wasn't magic, falsely created or due to service worker excellence (although they were great!). It was because we followed a proven model.


When choosing a Transition to Work provider, ask how many people find work. That's where the rubber hits the road.

15. A 17-year relationship may be an outcome!

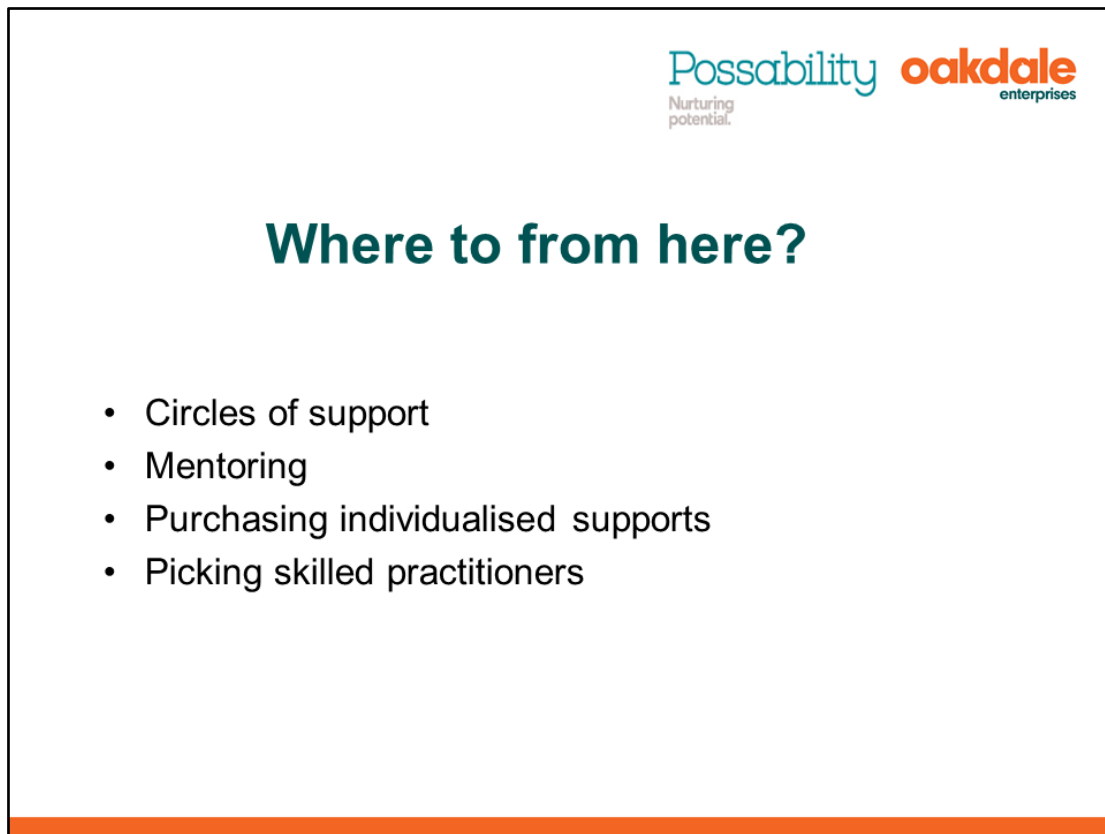


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We are there for the long haul



16. Where to from here?



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Where to from here?

- Circles of support
- Mentoring
- Purchasing individualised supports
- Picking skilled practitioners

This work isn't well known or even supported. Over my time I see strategies like these as being critical.

Circles of support. You know your community; your friends know the community as do your family. Use them, create circles of support. I witnessed the power of this in Canberra through work Jan Kruger did and still does. No matter how big or small the community, relationships will be the basis of your work.

Mentoring. Give each other support, find experts and draw from them. This work may be hard to do on your own and so get 'resourced up!'

Purchasing Individual Supports. The NDIS is now primed for supporting you. You may need to explain much to a LAC or a Coordinator of Supports but be creative with your funding. Again, to go back to the first two points, talk to people who have done that

Picking skilled practitioners. This may be difficult as employment through the NDIS gains momentum and providers chase the \$. Be prepared to ask the hard questions and again seek out allies that can guide and support you. Also, be prepared to walk if you aren't getting what you want.

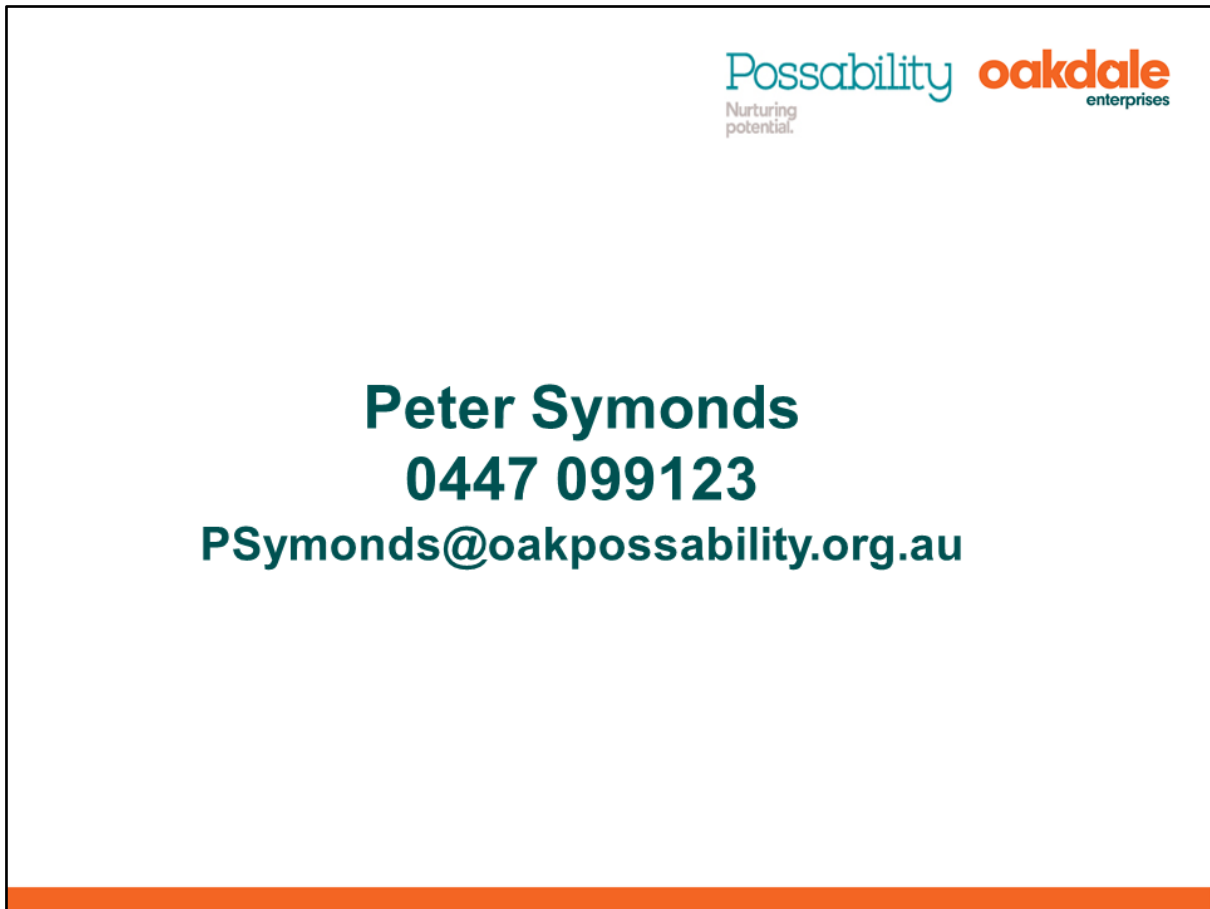
17. Liam- just starting to think about work



Selina and Adam, Liam's mum and dad want to think about work for Liam. He lives in a shared home where he gets around the clock support.

What work will look like for him will be very different from Clinton and Leif. It will be customised around his aspirations, skills and interests. Like all job seekers, Liam has several factors that will need to be responded to. This is what we should expect of all the people we aim to assist as each person brings different things to the employment table. Again, Liam has shown he's work ready. He can't tell us directly but the people who know him well can, he's shown several attributes that show he could be a successful worker, whatever that looks like. Liam is job ready.

18. Thank you



I'm absolutely open to anyone contacting me and having a discussion. I don't have the answers, but you have insights. Maybe I can offer some thoughts and suggestions. But please don't hesitate to contact me at any stage around how we may get the Liam's, Clintons and Leif's of the world into paid community-based employment.

Thank you for your time. I'm honoured to be able to spend this time with such a vital organisation.

I wish you well in your work in the community-based employment space.