# Welfare Review Submission

## Welfare Review C/- Welfare System Taskforce Department of Social Services PO Box 7576 Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

## Ticket to Work response to the interim report of the reference group on welfare reform – *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes.*

## Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the interim report of the reference group on welfare reform – *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes.*

## Introduction to Ticket to Work

Ticket to Workis an initiative that was borne out of an awareness that Australian young people with disability (with focus on Intellectual disability) are not successfully transition to employment from school and the need to provide targeted support to avoid long term disadvantage. Ticket to Work is underpinned by a philosophy that ‘every young person with disability is entitled to participate in the community, source appropriate employment and be socially included’ and that to achieve this, a localised partnership network-driven approach increases the likelihood of achieving the philosophical goal. Ticket to Work aims to improve post-school transitions of young people with disability, not only for the benefit of the individual but also for the benefit of our wider society and economy.

Before establishing the pilot of Ticket to Work in 2011 scoping research was undertaken, evaluating national and international models and approaches that would improve outcomes for young people with disability particularly those with intellectual disability. Four key features and issues emerged:

1. There is a pervasive culture of low expectation and lack of opportunities for Australian young people with disability, particularly in relation to genuine sustainable employment; a view sometimes held by the young people themselves, parents, employers, educators and government.
2. That participation in career development planning and activities, work experience (particularly paid) and accredited training during school and completion of secondary schooling are among the most significant indicators of post-school success for young people with disability. These activities are available as a matter of course for young people without disability yet not to young people with disability
3. That young people with disability who exit school with a job are more likely to maintain a positive career trajectory than those who do not.
4. Finally, that locally-based cross sectoral partnership networks which bring together expertise from an array of sectors (education, industry, disability, employment, training, youth) who share a common interest in improving the post-school outcomes of young people with disability are able to create opportunities for these young people and their local community.

These four key elements influenced Ticket to Work’s development, structure and overall model. (Wakeford and Waugh, 2010).

# Australian Young People with Disability and their Transitions

Australian young people with disability:

* are a substantial, and seemingly increasing, cohort. In 2012, 7.8 % of young people had a disability; increasing from 6.6 % in 2009. (ABS, 2012).
* 62 % were not fully engaged in work or study. (ABS, 2012).
* only 38 % had completed Year 12 or its equivalent. (ABS, 2012).
* Only half of all students with severe disability progress past Year 10 at school. (ABS, 2012).
* Young people are particularly at risk of being caught in welfare dependency trap. Over 10 % of Disability Support Pension (DSP) recipients were under the age of 30” (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011).
* Many young people with disability, particularly intellectual disability, have non-vocational transitions from school that generally include ‘alternatives to employment (ATE)’ or ‘adult day service’ programs’” (Cocks and Harvey, 2008).

As indicated in the Ticket to Work evaluationthere is very little consolidated data or research studies regarding youth disability transition outcomes (past, present and projected) in Australia. In Australia ‘general youth’ data has been collected via research projects such as ‘Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY)’ which currently does not survey students with disability. This lack of data means it is hard to know what people with disability experience of transition from school involves and what interventions have worked. We believed that lack of data has stalled the development of good government policy and at the very least it can send a message to policy makers that the educational achievement of young people with disability and their pathways are not important.

# Ticket to Work Structure

Ticket to Work’s structure is a simple one; a national overarching body (National Ticket to Work Network or the ‘National Network’) that oversees and supports many local partnership networks (‘Local Ticket to Work Networks’ or ‘Local Networks’) operating across Australia.

The National Network works with local communities wanting to establish their own Local Ticket to Work Network; it provides support, accreditation, resources, strategies and practices that produce optimal employment and career achievement for young people with disability.

The Local Networks bring together a range of partners in local regions who work together to provide young people with access to career development, workplace preparation, work experience, vocational skills and Australian School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (ASbATs). Essentially each Local Network supports young people with disability to participate in the same ‘typical’ transition to employment activities that their non-disabled peers generally partake in as a matter of course. The Local Networks use their combined skills to ensure these activities are provided in a supportive manner, in a way that reflects the individual needs of students.

In 2013 Ticket to Work received modest funding for seven months (November 2013 –May 2014) to take Ticket to Work national. The funding was through National Disability Employment initiative (NDEI) from the Department of Social Services (DSS). The funding allowed for the employment of a National Manager.

# Ticket to Work Outcomes

An evaluation was completed July 2014 and can be found on the Ticket to Work website see [www.Tickettowork.org.au](http://www.Tickettowork.org.au) with a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. For such a short period of time and such minimal finance investment of the NDEI funding, Ticket to Work has achieve some great results, the outcomes are impressive for such a short period of time and in light of the data which shows that the vast majority of Australian young people with disability (particularly intellectual disability) do not transition into ongoing open employment post-school. Of the young people in the pilot program who had completed their ASbAT through Ticket to Work and were surveyed, 86 % have continued in ongoing open employment with the remaining 14 % currently in vocational education.

The outcomes achieved in a mere seven months of NDEI funding are substantial yet with many of the Local Ticket to Work Networks just establishing it is clear that even more opportunities could be created.

It has been shown that Ticket to Work does deliver results for young people with disability. Ticket to Work is well placed to play a significant role in turning around the intractably low-level of post-school employment rates currently experienced by Australian youth with disability.

## Pillar One: Simpler and sustainable income support system

Changes to Australia’s income support system over time have resulted in unintended complexities, inconsistencies and disincentives for some people to work. Achieving a simpler and sustainable income support system should involve a simpler architecture, a fair rate structure, a common approach to adjusting payments, a new approach to support for families with children and young people, effective rent assistance, and rewards for work and targeting assistance to need.

### Simpler architecture

The fundamental philosophical structure of Disability Support Pension (DSP) is flawed, in that it presumes that at one end of the spectrum people can work and at the other end of the spectrum that people do not have the capacity to work. All people have a capacity to work (no matter the nature of their disability) provided that the individual is given the ‘right’ support with the right employer and that the role is customised to suit the needs of both the individual and the employer. Significant research and our experience via Ticket to Work demonstrates this.

**Assessment Mechanism:**

International evidence shows that standardised assessment does not necessarily take account of the individual and their capacity for work in the right employment setting. Reports have shown that even those individuals with quite severe disability can participate in employment, provided the role is customised with the right employer. This approach far outweighs a capacity assessment of an individual outside of a work context (Lueking, R (2010), & Newman, L., Wagner, eta (2011).

Indeed, research would suggest that employment success are more greatly affected by other individual characteristics than by the disability itself. These characteristics include personal ones such as persistence, resilience, self-determination, self-discipline, external/internal expectations and that the incentive to meet their vocational goals and a passion for the job were motivating factors that overcome barriers to completion. It was evident in that, with support and environment of high expectations, each of these quality traits can be taught and developed (Wakeford and Waugh 2010).

Indeed the cohort of young people with intellectual disability that we have been able to support into open employment through Ticket to Work have routinely been assessed as incapable of work through the current system. Luckily, the young people we work with are able to access DES support without a job capacity assessment as they are still in school when they engage with Ticket to Work.

We are concerned that capacity assessment is stopping people from self-determining and may encourage or stream young people with disability into a particular pathway (eg ADE, day service, open employment). Anecdotally we have heard that many regard the assessment as being a “quick fix” or “substitution” to avoid the provision of career development, self-determination opportunities, work experience and vocational education opportunities. All the elements that we know make a difference in post school employment success.

It is worrying that the Assessment, rather than experience, will determine pathways for young people. We have found that, compared to their non-disability peers, many students with disability are not receiving adequate levels of career development, work experience, vocational education and counselling prior to leaving school.

**‘Employment First’ Approaches:**

In Australia many of our policies and practices encourage young people with significant disability to transition to non-vocational pathways (such as day services) or into sub-minimal wages in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE). This pathway leads to a reliance on the DSP and significantly limits opportunities to move into open employment. Once in these settings individuals rarely move on to open employment.

Many other regions around the world have taken the opposite approach and take an ‘Employment First’ approach; that being the idea that employment in integrated or open settings within the community should be the priority service option, *no matter* the severity of the disability.

In the United States, Disability Employment Services (DES) equivalent organisations work with schools to provide ‘pre-employment transition services’ to all students with disabilities, no matter what their disability may be (except individuals in an institution such as hospital). In taking this approach, all students must experience and participate in open employment thus providing them with career development opportunities, employability skill development and technical skill development. It is also mandated that these DES equivalent providers must dedicate at least 15% of their government funding to help those with disabilities to transition from school to work. Individuals with disabilities that do attend a day service or ADE equivalent setting usually cannot do so until age 24 and even then they must periodically receive career counseling and be informed and supported to take open employment opportunities. Assessment is use to determine what support is required to ensure employment is possible rather than excluding open employment as an option. Quite the opposite to what occurs in Australia. In Australia there are many contractual restrictions place on DES which limits (and in many cases prevents) these providers from supporting young people with disability to successfully transition from school to work.

**Increasing Employment Expectations:**

“An individual’s beliefs and expectations for the future are heavily influenced by the attitudes of their immediate support network” (Miles Morgan, 2012). An effective personal support network can play a significant part in supporting and encouraging young people’s hopes and dreams, while avoiding becoming overly protective and stifling their potential (Benz 2001; Kendall & Murphy 2003). On the other hand, prolonged exposure to “horizon-limiting views and experiences” may see these beliefs become internalised and the person’s capacity to recognise their potential diminished (PwC 2011, p.33). The earlier young people gain access to experiences and support networks that positively influence their views of themselves as workers and active citizens, the better the long term outcomes will be. Ticket to Work, above all, is about changing the culture of low expectations and increasing aspirations.

We believe that some aspects of the proposed system (as well as the current system) outlined in the Welfare Review will provide a ‘horizon limited view’ which will diminish potential rather than build it up. We feel that more investment is required to ensure that all young people with disability gain support at the critical ‘school transition point’ enabling them to experience genuine employment prior to leaving school and making post-school pathways decisions. The more that young people with disability engage in authentic work experiences whilst still in school the greater the likelihood they will opt into a supported open employment pathway. This in turn has positive social and economic benefits for the individual but also for employers and our wider society. Having more young people with disability entering into open employment will become even more important as our population ages.

**Disability Support Pension (DSP):**

Currently young people with disability often begin receiving the DSP at 16 years of age. These young people are exempted from the current ‘Learn and Earn’ policies that their non-disability peers are obliged to follow, which implies that there is no expectation of employment, training or secondary school completion. A dependant welfare benefit pathways is already put in place before any participation in vocational education, work experience or career development. For many parents, young people and even schools the focus is then on the provision of safety and security for this vulnerable group, which often put focus on the retention of the DSP and ‘alternative to employment’ type programs such as Day services. Presenting the DSP benefit at such a young age, and before the young person has been provided with a chance to engage in work experience, can have lifelong consequences. The OECD (2009) found that once a welfare benefit is awarded the probability of return to work is almost zero. The OECD (2009) stated the low outflow is partly linked to the often limited access to vocational rehabilitation and employment integration measures.

The DSP is an important safety net that all persons with disability are entitled to. We do not suggest that young people with disability not receive the DSP, rather we believe that government investment in employment and workplace preparation activities for young people should be increased. On average, spending on active labour market programs for people with disability is meagre compared to what is spent on compensation measures. We believe that young people should be better supported by our system to ensure that DSP safety-net entitlements are preserved but with complementary access to employment transition pathways and interventions, such as other countries have taken with an ‘Employment First’ focus.

**DSP restrictions will reduce open employment engagement:**

The proposed changes of restricting access to DSP will have negative effects on the cohort that Ticket to Work supports. If the DSP is restricted families will likely discourage their children from pursuing open employment pathways for fear that if the employment fails or is not sustained they will not be able to easily access the DSP again. This is a comment we are hearing regularly.

The impact of this is that families are focusing on the child’s lack of capacity to work to ensure that the DSP is retained. Thus, young people, particularly those with intellectual disability, who may be able to work in the open market are not considering this pathway. Instead, they are more likely to choose non-vocational pathways that will not affect access to the DSP into the future.

Many young people with disability, particularly intellectual disability, have non-vocational transitions from school that generally include ‘alternatives to employment (ATE)’ or ‘adult day service’ programs’” (Cocks and Harvey, 2008). Simply put, day service programs are ones that are alternatives to paid employment and involve participants taking part in activities related to social, independence and skills development. Such programs can also provide the individual and their care givers with a sense of security and respite; something often seen as particularly appealing to families with a child that is preparing to transition from the security and safety of school.

As Cocks and Harvey (2008) point out day programs “generally do not have clear destinations for service users and effectively are providing lifelong support. Access to employment services or employment skills development is often very limited for those who enter into these programs, thus greatly minimising their ability to consider and/or move into open employment in the future. Indeed, clients in these programs can not simultaneously participate in the day program and in open employment support; thus gaining the benefits of being involved in two supportive environments”.

As there is limited funding for day services, many Australian jurisdictions have prioritised the placement of school leavers with a disability into their adult day services. This presents a quandary for parents, schools and young people in the critical transition from school period. Should the young person move straight into a supportive and guaranteed day program placement or should they pursue employment which doesn’t come with immediate guarantee of success?

In addition to these concerns, Cocks and Harvey (2008) also identified “other barriers and disincentives to participation in open employment including families steering away from open employment because of lack of safety nets, the lack of an interface between business and open disability employment services, and the silo nature of the disability support system”.

In Australia, federally-funded Disability Employment Services (DES) provide specialist assistance to people with disability, illness or injury to source and sustain open employment. In contrast to day programs, DES provides no safety net or guarantee of employment in an industry or role of particular appeal to the client. Of course, many DES providers work hard to source appropriate employment for their client but are limited in always achieving this by contractual parameters placed on them by their government funding contracts. So, for some young people who do choose to take the open employment pathway post-school they move from being in the very secure and safe environment of school to non-structured activities with their DES, which in many cases means attending the DES office each fortnight to participate in job-preparation and job-searching activities. This can often mean a very worrisome transition for the young person and also result in parents/carers having to spend more hours in the home caring for their son or daughter now that he/she is no longer attending school daily or participating in other structured activities in the community. To achieve this, some parents/carers have to resign from their own employment or reduce workplace hours to care for their child. As it can be seen, taking the employment pathway through DES is often seen as a risk with too few guarantees or safety nets to make it attractive.

Presently, an individual participating in a day program or in supported employment through an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) cannot engage with a DES provider. Therefore, if a person leaves their ADE or day program to source open employment they must then find ways to fill their week while waiting to find employment. If they do find employment but are not successful in sustaining it, there is no guarantee their placement at the ADE or day program will still be available to them. If the person does find and sustain employment, but it is not for full-time working hours, they are not permitted to fill the remaining hours of their week through continued attendance at their ADE or day program. It is clear that there is thus a disincentive to move out of confirmed placements in programs and attempt to source open employment. It is evident that opportunities for blending and braiding program participation is not facilitated and/or allowed in most cases.

The disincentive is even greater for young people coming to the end of their schooling and making decisions about their post-school pathways. For those young people who have had limited or no exposure to authentic work (work experience, work placements, ASbATs) whilst in school the decision will be made all the harder. There is also a disincentive for DES providers to work with some young people who do not have demonstrated workplace experience, for it may be assumed that the young person will be difficult to place in employment (and within the timeframe dictated by the DES funding contracts with the federal government).

For many parents, there is no road map or clear pathway; and there are little examples or role models showing what is possible.

A study by Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell (1996) compared two parental cohorts and their experiences during the period their children were preparing to leave high school. One cohort was parents of children without disability and the other included parents of those with disability. The study examined factors of parents’ comfort with the transition to post-school, their vision for their child’s future and their response to the schooling process. The results indicate that parents of young people with disability experience greater levels of discomfort and pessimism than parents of young people without disability.

This discomfort, few guarantees or safety nets, no role model or experiences of employment and the lack of clear pathways to a job; it is no wonder that families and young people with disability take the pathways to ADE, day services and DSP. The current and proposed system encourages this, there is an urgent need to invest in improving school transition for young people with a disability particularly those with significant disability. Ticket to Work has been successful for this cohort as it provides an employment pathways and support will still in the safety and security of school.

It is our opinion that the DSP should be preserved as a secure safety-net for persons with disability, however government investment should be increased to support individuals and employers so that greater numbers engage in open-employment. By taking an ‘Employment First’ approach, allowing DES providers to work with young people in the critical school-to-work transition period, and allowing individuals with disability to fluidly mix day-service and open employment engagement would greatly improve outcomes for our civil society.

### Fair rate structure

45% of Australians with a disability live in/near poverty, more than double the OECD average (PwC, 2011). It has been identified that the DSP is inadequate particularly as people with disability often have additional costs related to their disability. The costs associated with disability needs and care means that individuals with disability and/or the families of children with disability are at a much greater risk of poverty. Some families experiencing poverty also have fewer resources to transition out of the poverty trap.

People with disability and their families are economically disadvantaged (OECD 2003, 2007, 2010) which becomes a ***social determinant*** of related outcomes such as poor health (WHO, 2011).

Australia is ranked 21/29 amongst OECD countries for labour force participation of people with disability. Only 50% of Australians with a disability are likely to be employed, compared to 60% for the OECD, and 70% for the top eight OECD countries.

It has been estimated that increasing disability employment in Australia by a third could lead to a $43 billion increase in GDP over a decade (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011). This increase would see Australia advancing in the international disability employment league tables but would just to bring us to the average level currently experienced by ‘like’ organisations.

It was also estimated that disability participation in vocational education in training (which in turn increases employability) would also have significant economic benefits in Australia. Estimates of economic benefits of increased disability participation in, and completion of, vocational training range from $12 billion (NVEAC, 2011) to $18.8 billion (ANTA, 2000).

Increasing the levels of disability employment could also have other impacts, such as reducing accommodation support needs and expenditure of day service provision. $6.9 billion was expended in 2011-12 on disability support services for 317,616 people with disability with accommodation support accounting for almost half (AIHW, 2013). In this same period $727 million was spent on ‘community access’ (equivalent to ‘day services’) provision across 3,071 Australian outlets for over 63,000 people (AIHW, 2013). Greater participation in employment could reduce government costs in these areas.

We need investment in evidence based practice to improve outcomes, early intervention, better school to work frameworks, we need collaboration and the blending and braiding of resources to ensure the right supports can be put in place. We need to take employment of people with disability out of the disability sector and ensure that it is everyone’s responsibility.

### Support for families with children and young people

Families are a huge part of successful transition for students with disabilities. They are often going to be there for ‘the long haul’. Their support, engagement and belief that their child should and can be in employment is evidenced in the large number of students permitted to take part in Ticket to Work related activities across Australia.

Because post-school pathways for this student population are typically complex and constrained, family involvement continues to be considered an essential component of the transition process (Kohler & Field, 2003; Ludlow, Turnbull, & Luckasson, 1988).

For many parents, there is no road map or clear pathway; and there are few parental examples or role models showing what is possible. Through the course of Ticket to Work expansion we have heard, all too frequently, that many parents are often told not to have to high workplace expectations when it comes to their child.

As one parent stated after learning about Ticket to Work, *“this is the first time someone has talked about employment in the context of my child”.*

One of the few Australian longitudinal studies, conducted by Griffith University (Meadows et al 2006), surveyed parents on their experience of transition. Parental feelings about these issues, drawn as part of this study, are illustrated in the following selection of direct quotes:

One parent expressed concerns and about the lack of employment opportunities for young people with disability. *“He is stagnating and I can see him spending his life as a blimp in front of the computer or TV, from this point on there are very, very few employment opportunities these days for our special young adults. Very, very distressing!!”*

Another parent similarly outlined her child’s day in saying that *“everyday our son gets up and says ‘what video today?’”*

As part of the SELLEN report ‘South East Region Students with a Disability 2014’ focus groups were conducted with parents of young people that had left school the previous year. In these focus groups it was found that “parents whose young people are now in supported employment or a day service feel that their young person’s skills are not being utilised and they could be doing more, the parents expressed that once in the service it is difficult to transition them out into mainstream employment”.

Parents often have to pick up the pieces after an unsuccessful transition from school, pieces that can often last a lifetime not only for the person with disability but also for the family. Primary carers of disabled adults or young children often have lower rates of employment and labour force participation than those without caring responsibilities of this nature (AIFS, 2005). As discussed earlier, an unsuccessful post-school transition can result in considerable family adjustments when expected post-school outcomes related to employment, community participation, and social networks are not realised.

We need to provide support to families to raise expectations and opportunities so that their child can have a successful transition from school to work, we need to provide clear pathways with appropriate safety nets so that they or their child are not disadvantaged because they pursued an open employment pathway. We need young people with disability to engage in employment experiences while they are at school so they know what is possible. We need to change the culture of low expectation that leads to denied opportunities that those without disability take as a matter of course.

The evaluation of Ticket to Work included interviews with the parents / carers of young people that have taken part in Ticket to Work related work experience and/or an Australian School-based Apprenticeship and Traineeship (ASbAT). Their feedback and experiences clearly highlighted the transition and employment benefits that their child (and their family) are deriving through participation in the Ticket to Work initiative.

### Rewards for work and targeting assistance to need

People with significant disability require supports and safety nets. They need to be able to explore and be supported to undertake vocational education and training and employment opportunities, without fear of losing DSP or other supports. People with significant disability who obtain open employment are at greater risk of that employment being precarious making it therefore important that they are able remain or regain benefits without disadvantage. People should be able to blend and braid services so they can explore employment while in ADE or day service.

The division between state and federal government with regards the transition and support for young people with disability is problematic. Individual states are responsible for disability supports and the provision of education whereas the federal government is responsible for disability employment and income support.

Dr Meadows has outlined in his 2009 paper ‘Where Have All Our Students Gone?’ that “people with a disability are under-represented in employment, but they are under-represented in vocational educational and training systems and that this situation is exacerbated by poor links between state-administered disability school and post-school programs, and Commonwealth-funded disability employment options. The identification of this problem associated with ‘flow through’ models of post-school options is not of recent origin’’ yet we have not address this adequately.

Program concurrency in Australia is limited or not allowed in many cases, resulting in young people having to stop or exit one program before commencing in another; despite the fact that they are complementary ones all focused on the provision of transition and/or overall personal development. Indeed, the issue of program concurrency prevention is a key factor preventing mainstream transition services from working with disability-specific transition services. Similarly, this issue has also made the streamlining of multiple programs or activities to meet the transition needs of an individual very difficult. As noted earlier, a person already undertaking a day program or involved in an ADE must give up their place in these if they want to engage with a DES provider and pursue open employment. They cannot engage in all of these elements concurrently. Some DES providers have noted that it is a disincentive to work with young people wanting to transition to open employment for fear that the young person will be directed into day programs or ADEs and thus unable to continue working with the DES provider.

Ticket to Work acknowledges and recognises the importance of using disability employment and transition support funding wisely. However, Ticket to Work also recognises that the complexity of transition and open employment preparation for young people is such that it requires cross-jurisdiction and collaborative service provision that at times must be facilitated through flexible and responsive funding approaches.

To overcome this issue, some countries have initiated ‘blending and braiding strategies’. These strategies allow for funds to be used in more flexible, coordinated and sustainable ways as the funds are seen as critical to the success of efforts to improve the coordination and impact of services to young people with disability.

‘Blended funding' is used to describe mechanisms that pool dollars from multiple sources and make them in some ways indistinguishable. ‘Braiding funding’ is a funding and resource allocation strategy that taps into existing categorical funding streams and uses those to support unified initiatives in flexible and integrated manners (NCWD, 2006).

In the United States it was noted that “Neither schools, nor workforce investment programs, human service agencies, or any other single system alone can pay for and provide the array of services needed to effectively meet the often complex needs of youth with disabilities. When collectively pooled, however, these resources can produce positive outcomes for youth, well beyond the scope of what any single system can hope to mobilise on its own” (National Governors’ Association Center for Best Practice, 2004).

It has been demonstrated that blending and braiding strategies offer local flexibility and allow providers to focus on outcomes for young people and provide support to employers without the frequent restrictions that categorical funding streams impose. Both strategies allow funds to be used more easily and creatively at the point of service delivery. These strategies encourage partnerships, demand-led approaches with employers and deliver effective school-to-work transitions.

It could be said that Ticket to Work mirrors a ‘braided funding’ approach. Local Ticket to Work Networks, comprised of various partners whose organisations are themselves funded via multiple sources and across jurisdictions, utilise funds from these varying funding sources to deliver components of Ticket to Work transition activities customised to suit the needs of individual young people. Yet this has been difficult in the current climate of governments that fear concurrency and emphasize the divide between state and federal resources. Ticket to Work uses resources to ensure young people with disabilities have school transition experience that are typical of other teenagers and young adults.

## Pillar Two: Strengthening individual and family capability

Reforms are needed to improve lifetime wellbeing by equipping people with skills for employment and increasing their self-reliance. To strengthen individual and family capability changes are proposed in the areas of mutual obligation, early intervention, education and training, improving individual and family functioning and evaluating outcomes.

### Early intervention

‘School to work’ transition refers to the critical socio-economic life changing period between approximately 15 to 24 years of age – a period when young individuals develop and build skills, based on their initial education and training that helps them become productive members of the society (World Bank 2009). We believe that significant investment in early intervention and school to work transition will ensure that young people are supported into open integrated employment and diverted from welfare and societal dependence. This will ensure that young people with significant disability have a chance to self-determine their futures.

‘School to work’ transition is challenging for almost every young person. It is in this critical education transition period that a young person’s future can be determined, and the success (or otherwise) of the transition can have implications that last a lifetime. This is particularly true for young people with disability.

The impact of young people with disability making a successful transition from school to work and/or further study is critical as a positive one can greatly improve their long-term economic future, wellbeing and inclusion in society. Those who do not make a successful transition are at greater risk of labour-force and social exclusion, as well physical and mental health risks. Hence targeted and strategic policy and program intervention during transition provides benefit to the individual as well as our wider society and economy. Indeed, research has shown that transition points in life, or the **‘**fork in the road’ periods, are important times in an individual’s life when timely resources and support investment in can assist in avoiding or minimising long-term disadvantage (Ziguras 2005).

During our formal evaluation of Ticket to Work we surveyed young people with disability involved in this initiative and asked them *“In 10 years time what would you like to have achieved in your life?”.* Almost 100% advised that ‘get a good job’ was their 10 year goal. We need to provide the supports and climate of opportunity so that young people with disability can achieve this positive goal.

### Education and Training

Ticket to Work aims to replicate the ‘typical’ transition and careers pathways that young people without disability take during their final years of schooling and offer it to young people with disability. This is achieved through the provision of career planning and workplace preparation, work experience, access to accredited training (also known as VET training), access to school based apprenticeships and traineeships; but, with the support of a Local Network that can ensure these offerings are accompanied by targeted and strategic interventions to suit the individual needs and goals of each young person. Ticket to Work is centered on building the employment aspirations of young people with disability and preparing them for employment.

Previous research has shown that quickly moving youth into real jobs that are well-matched to their interests and have growth potential positively impacts job retention (Cook et al. 2005; Luecking and Fabian 2000). Put simply, the best way to get someone ‘job ready’ is to get them into a job.

As noted earlier, many young people with disability enter into day programs or ADEs upon leaving school in the hope they will be ‘trained up’ to move on to employment related activities. In a speech by Dr Meadows from Griffith University (2012), he noted that this flow-through model is not a reality as individuals who follow this course rarely move on. Instead he suggests that a placement accompanied with supported training in a real world context is preferable; that ‘place and train’ is much more successful than a ‘train and place’ model.

This approach is particularly useful for those with autism and intellectual disability where generic skills development is not easily transferred from the classroom and into the workplace. Many young people with intellectual disability can struggle with classroom-based vocational training and learn better through practical, hands-on experience. With this in mind, resources can be better utilised by training the person in the specific role, for a specific employer and on-the-job; rather than spending years ‘waiting’ for someone to becoming ‘work ready’. This also works to support the needs of employers when implementing a ‘demand-led’ approach to employment; an approach which begins with the need of the employer and works backwards to involve that employer in the design and delivery of the training (on-the-job accredited training, mentoring, DES support).

For many young people with disability, particularly those with more moderate or severe disability, often their pathway involves only disability-specific programs and organisations rather than participation in ‘typical’ or ‘good transition’ activities. This can create difficulties in any future transition to open employment, because if young people spend considerable time in programs to become ’job ready’ and do not gain access to authentic on-the-job experience they can become unappealing to employers.

For decades, research has shown the strong relationship between the experience of work during secondary school and higher post-school employment for youth with disabilities (Benz, Yovanoff & Doren, 1997; Colley & Jamison, 1998). However, as the continuing disappointing post-school employment rates for young people with disabilities suggest, there remains a critical need to expand quality work-based learning opportunities for these young people and to integrate these experiences into secondary education. Indeed, Luecking (2010) states that “while work experiences are beneficial to all youth, it has been found they are particularly valuable for young people with disabilities”.

It has also been found that young people with disability who exit school with a job are more likely to maintain a positive career trajectory than those who do not.

Ticket to Work challenges the notion of the current situation because it doesn’t place the young people in disability-specific programs but introduces them to individualised ‘typical’ transition activities prior to leaving secondary school. Local Ticket to Work Networks bring an array of sectors together, and encourages collaboration between mainstream services and disability-specific ones. The mainstream Ticket to Work services are centred on those with expertise in vocational training, apprenticeships, career development and work experience. The disability-specific ones are those centred on disability education, disability employment and general disability services that have the expertise to support with customisation, adaptation, task breakdown, and the provision of ongoing disability support. Ticket to Work brings these differing competencies and expertise together through localised partnership networks who work collaboratively (rather than in silos) to meet the needs of the individual students and employers they are supporting.

The value of the provision of mainstream employment opportunities to all young people with disability regardless of the disability severity is noted in the below quote from the Principal of a Special School involved in Ticket to Work.

*“Employment used to be aimed at those ‘top edge’ students particularly for those that can read and write. What we are now doing is moving that down the IQ scale, these kids do have employability skills. So, in our school we are raising the employment aspirations of all students in our school. ……. It means that those students that used to do training and recreation programs at day services once leaving school can consider paid and volunteer employment also. It’s a real recognition of what they can do and that they are all employable.”* (Principal, special school, Ticket to Work partner)

By introducing and offering a range of authentic workplace experiences and ‘good transition’ activities during the final years of schooling, Ticket to Work assists young people to develop skills, confidence, training and exposure to potential career pathways before they leave school. In addition to providing students with experiences, it also empowers the young person and their family with knowledge to make sound decisions regarding post-school pathways. Furthermore, because each Ticket to Work is supported by a Local Network the young person and their family build connections with mainstream and disability-specific organisations that can assist them into the future; organisations that, absent of Ticket to Work, may not have been introduced to these individuals.

Ticket to Work is reducing the time that students are spending between completing school and moving into post-school employment; often because that employment pathway has already been created whilst the young person is still in school. This is particularly true for those students who undertake an ASbAT and, through Ticket to Work, we have many examples of young people remaining with their ASbAT employer post-school. Ticket to Work also has many examples of young people moving quickly into alternative open employment, in new roles or industries, because the young person has developed transferable employability skills and an established relationship with a local organisation (typically a DES provider) to assist them to source new employment.

A 2005 report ‘Improved VET Outcomes for People with a Disability’ found that the wait time between leaving school and finding employment led to a subsequent erosion of the students VET skills gained at school (DETNAC, 2005). In other words, the longer one is out of school and not in employment, education or vocational training, the skills gained in school deplete and make the transition to employment even more difficult.

Ticket to Work takes a student and employer-centred approach to successfully transitioning young people with disability into employment, with all members of Local Networks playing a part in this. For young people this support is afforded through the provision of workplace preparation, work experience, employment and vocational training. Individualised support for employers is offered through the provision of disability awareness training, guidance and the appropriate matching of students to work experience or employment positions in their business. Ticket to Work connects young people with disability to training and employment opportunities in their community whilst they are still in school; making the likelihood of a seamless transition from school and into employment more attainable for these young people.

As stated previously young people with disability (on DSP) are exempted from the current ‘Learn and Earn’ policies that their non-disability peers are obliged to follow. This implies that there is no expectation of employment, training or secondary school completion. It could be drawn that the implications of this is there is no expectation or imperative that the community or government provide supports for this group of young people of young people to complete their education or participate in vocation and labour market activities.

A student with disability is less likely than their non-disabled peers to complete their secondary education. As noted earlier, 2012 ABS data revealed that only 36 per cent of all Australians with disability aged 15 to 64 years had completed secondary school (Year 12 or equivalent) which was nearly half that of their non-disabled peers. That same data showed that the figure is not much greater (38 per cent) for those in the 18 – 25 years of age category, despite that fact that this cohort are part of the generation of youth who have experienced increased rates of school completion and post-school education overall.

The 2014 Brotherhood of St Laurence ‘Investing in our Future’ report, which provided recommendations for boosting youth employment in Australia, singled out school completion as the critical factor associated with improving life chances. This report also noted that early school leavers are two and a half times more likely to experience deep social exclusion than those who complete Year 12. Couple early school leaving with disability and the social exclusion is likely to be much, much greater.

This same report stated that “While schooling is often understood as an area of responsibility for state and territory governments, the consequences of limited school attainment are felt nationally through lower productivity, lower tax revenues, higher unemployment and higher demand for social services”.

The specific effects of early school leaving on young Australians with disability is unavailable due to lack of data however we can surmise these young people would experience the same, or likely worse, levels of disadvantage as their non-disabled peers that leave school early.

Whilst we do not have this data in Australia, the link between level of education and paid employment for those with disability has been measured elsewhere. In the ‘National Longitudinal Transition Study’ conducted in the United States it was clearly noted that increasing levels of education directly correlate with increasing levels of paid employment for young people with disability. Seventy-eight per cent of ‘high school non-completers’ were engaged in paid employment; this increased to 88.7 per cent amongst ‘high school completers’; this increased even further to 92.4 per cent from those with ‘some post-secondary schooling’; and, saw 98.7 per cent of young people with disabilities that had attained ‘post-secondary school completion’ in paid employment. (Newman, L et. al, 2011).

Students with disability cannot get support for participating in part-time work while at school. As it is well acknowledged that students who participate in part-time work have higher percentages of post-school employment throughout their lives one would suspect this would be the same for students with disability.

Increasing numbers of young people are engaged in paid employment on a casual or part-time basis while still attending secondary school. Indeed, the Australian Bureau of Statistics data in 2006 found that around 52 per cent of young people between the ages of 15 to 19 years are employed (ABS, 2006).

Existing research suggests that part-time work can help facilitate the transition from school to work. Studies from within Australia and internationally have found a clear relationship between part-time employment while at school and a lower incidence of unemployment following completion of school. In Australia, the Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER) 2001 has found that students who work part-time during Years 11 and 12 are less likely to be unemployed at the age of 19 than those who did not work during secondary school (NCVER, 2001).

Currently DES providers are not able to support students into an after school job. A part-time job is a rite of passage that is often not available for young people with significant disability and can deliver vital employability skills and lead to employment post-school. Young people with disability should be able to access support to participate in casual or part-time work whilst at school.

The earlier young people get access to experiences and to support networks that positively influence their views of themselves as workers and active citizens, the better the long term outcomes will be. Ticket to Work, above all, is about changing the culture of low expectations and increasing aspirations and opportunities.

In summary, young people should be able access supports and opportunities that their non-disability peers do as a matter of course, such as work experience, after school jobs, career development and ASbATs.

### Improving individual and family functioning

As indicated above (see ‘Support for Families with Children and Young People’) and demonstrated in the evaluation of Ticket to Work, much can be done to support families; mainly in the areas of role modelling, support, safety nets and information. Families need support to participate in planning meetings around their child, and developing skills and confidence so that they (as care givers) can support their child’s transition to employment. Ticket to Work has been working to develop workshops for parents that will increase their knowledge, skills and confidence.

## Pillar Three: Engaging with employers

Employers play a key role in improving outcomes for people on income support by providing jobs. Reforms are needed to ensure that the social support system effectively engages with employers and has an employment focus. These reforms include making jobs available, improving pathways to employment and supporting employers.

### Employment focus – making jobs available

Disability is still off the radar for the majority of employers, particularly when compared to their knowledge and employment of persons in other equity groups.

Australia has had two decades of economic growth yet open employment of people with disability particularly Intellectual disability has been declining, there is a need to intervene, economic growth alone has not and will not improve employment opportunities, we need real leadership in this area.

As indicated earlier work experience (particularly paid ones such as ASbATs) for young people with disability whilst still in school is one of the most critical factors that sets the stage for these young people’s post-school employment success. The frequent and continuous exposure to real work environments, throughout the secondary school years, shapes a young person’s image of themselves as ‘worker’ and provides the skills, experience and confidence to successfully take an employment pathway. These experiences, however, occur only when employers are available, willing and prepared.

Unfortunately, in Australia there is a widespread reluctance of employers to employ a person with a disability, particularly one with intellectual disability and even more so a young person with an intellectual disability as they often lack the vital work experience to ‘get a foot in the door’. In 2013, the Australian Human Resources Institute surveyed 20,000 human resources practitioner members asking a question regarding where their organisation would prefer to source labour if they were limited to choosing from one of five target groups. Only seven per cent advised that they would choose an Australian with a disability (Serge Sardo, 2013).

Though we believe that a business-led covenants could be developed to generate employment for people with disability and mental health conditions, to change a culture of either unconscious to conscious bias by employers requires a much more strategic and multi-faceted approach. One that is not necessarily driven by wage subsidies but by other government-led investments and mechanisms (social procurement, marketing, training, awareness of support such as DES, cultural shift that creating opportunities is our moral obligation) that would place disability employment on the radar of significantly more employers.

We believe there needs to be significant leadership taken by government to get employment of people with disability on the radar of business and corporations. As the old saying goes, ‘You can't manage what you can't measure’**. *Currently there are no statistics on disability employment in corporate Australia.***

We feel there needs to be much more reporting on disability employment to introduce it into the consciousness of Australian businesses (whether they are multi-national, SMEs or sole operators). This should include

* More evidence-based research on what works with regards disability employment. This should include longitudinal research into what happens to young people with disability after they transition from school, as such data and information would assist government and others to determine what works, what doesn’t, how young people fare and where investments should be made.
* Monthly disability employment statistics reported and publicised though press releases.
* A requirement that publicly listed companies report on disability employment levels and any strategies that they have to used to increase disability diversity in their businesses. As stated by the AHRI “If no one within a company has a KPI on the matter, in the great majority of companies nothing will happen”. Large businesses are well resourced and positioned to lead the way and influence other smaller organisations to adopt, change and introduce new practices so that they too can increase diversity in their own enterprises.

In the United States there is a culture within businesses that having a person with disability on staff is seen as very positive and employers have gone out of their way to create pathways into their companies for people with disability. This is particularly for people with disability that have an education (University and vocational qualification). To change the US landscape so dramatically over the last few years, the government administration has shown great leadership and used their buying power to improve employment outcomes for people with disability.

In the USA most federal contractors must ensure that people with disabilities account for at least 7 per cent of workers within each job group in their workforce. While officials at the U.S. Department of Labor say they are not establishing a firm hiring quota for contractors, they do expect that businesses servicing the government will work toward achieving the target. Contractors that fail to meet the goal and do not show sufficient effort toward reaching the 7 per cent threshold could lose their contracts under the new rule. Under the rule, businesses with at least 50 employees and $50,000 in federal contracts must take specific steps surrounding recruitment, training, record keeping and policy dissemination, all designed to increase the provision of employment to persons with disability.

We need this type of leadership to turn around the woeful rate of employment of Australian people with disability. We need clear guideline on what works for employers, training for those on the front line, evidence-based interventions scaled up and support by government.

Leadership is also required within the Australian public service in order to increase the proportion of persons with disability employed in government departments and agencies. ‘’The public service is losing three times as many people with disabilities as it is hiring, with numbers hitting a 20-year low”’( State of the Service, SMH 2013).

As indicated in the Ticket to Work evaluation, employers have operational and economic stakes in the success of programs that connect them with people with disabilities. Employers must consider both the costs and the benefits associated with having young people with disabilities in their workplaces. Thus, it is essential for educators, transition specialists, workforce development professionals, family members and young people to understand employers’ needs, circumstances, and perspectives as they establish work experiences (Luecking 2004, p.1).

Ticket to Work has demonstrated a strong capacity to engage with employers in various locales across Australia, largely due to the excellent employment engagement activity that Local Networks have undertaken. 180 employers have engaged in Ticket to Work (in a mere months between October 2013 and May 2014) and have provided workplace preparation, work experience and School-based Traineeships to students with disability. However, for the Ticket to Work model to expand even further more must be done on the ‘employer demand side’ to both ensure greater employment opportunities and best meet the needs of the employers.

Ticket to Work’s model is a ‘demand-led approach’ which starts with the identification of a specific workforce need in a specific business, this need is then matched against students that have expressed or demonstrated interest in this role and the Ticket to Work partners then work with the young people to meet the identified employer need. Many DES providers involved in Ticket to Work operate this way; in that they ensure good matching between the career aspirations of the young person and the business needs of the employer, and then spend significant time and resources to ensure the placement is successful and meets the needs of all parties. Yet in our journey we have found that many DES providers have little or no knowledge of customised employment and demand-led approaches. Many still use the ‘beg, place and pray’ approach; that is beg the employer to take on a person with disability (usually pitched at the employers charitable side), place a person (even if it not role that the individual is interested in or have an aptitude for) and then pray it lasts long enough to receive the government outcome fee. The government has a role to play in supporting DES providers to gain knowledge and expertise in the demand-led approaches to employment.

The 2012 Australian ‘Demand-Led Employment Services Roundtable Report’ advised that demand-led approaches work best when employers and employment service providers are able to work in partnership, often over long periods of time and when vocational training is seamlessly integrated with the employment and training provided by employment service providers and the participating employers (ACOSS, BCA and ACTU, 2012).

For people with disability, particularly intellectual disability, often the best way to improve ‘job readiness’ is to place people into a paid job as soon as possible, taking care to ensure that the ‘match’ is the right one. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the job is customised to the needs of both the employee and employer, as this approach can assist in negating the effects of the individual's disability on the success of the employment. Toni Wren, a leading expert in demand-led employment approaches, indicates that a customised approach is one which is both demand and supply sensitive. Demand-led sensitive in that it starts with the needs of employers and works backwards and involves them in the design and delivery of the training (more work experience, on the job training, offers of jobs at the end). Supply-sensitive in that it offers smarter ways to engage, educate and employ people who have not succeeded in traditional school or training environments (Wren, 2011).

The formal evaluation of Ticket to Work with employers that have taken part in Ticket to Work related work experience and/or an Australian School-based Apprenticeship and Traineeship (ASbAT) has been very positive. Interviews with Ticket to Work employers attests to the value of workplace learning for students with disability in open employment settings and also highlighted the utility of demand-led approaches when placing students with disability in their workplace. Interviews with employers also helped to identify some common issues and challenges and provide recommendations for continuation and expansion of the Ticket to Work model.

### Improving pathways to employment

It has been found that five key elements comprise a ‘good transition’; these being ‘career development and workplace preparation’, ‘work experience’, vocational training’ ‘Australian School-based Apprenticeship and Traineeship’ (ASbAT) and ‘part-time work’. These are the options generally made routinely available to all other mainstream students / young people in Australia. Considerable research attests to the value and importance of all of these contributing to a successful post-school transition, particularly for young people with disability.

These ‘Good Transition’ activities include:

1. **Career development and workplace preparation:** Young people with disability require opportunities for self-determination, effective decision making processes, and ‘experience must precede choice’. What is clear is that career development should not and cannot just be the domain of schools.
2. **Work experience:** Ticket to Workresearch, evaluation and stakeholder discussions attest to important and positive role that work experience can play in improving the transition outcomes of student with disability. Consistently research has found that the most prominent factors to be associated with successful post-school employment outcomes are paid and unpaid work experiences during the last years of secondary school as well the completion of a high school (Luecking 2009).
3. **Vocational education:**  Completing a Vocational Education and Training qualification not only helps people with a disability to find work, it increases their chances of sustaining employment into the future.
4. **Australian School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (ASbATs):** ASbATs, combine the mix of employment, vocational education whilst still in school and often students leave secondary education with a job that they are interested in. Economic outcomes from participation in Traineeships and Apprenticeships has found to included high workforce participation, employment and income rates, comparable to similarly aged Australians without disability. (Cocks and Thoresen 2013)
5. **After school jobs:** Research has shown that participation in part-time work whilst still at school greatly increases levels of full-time employment and substantially lower unemployment post-school. Ticket to Work does not support placement in after school job as DES guidelines do not currently permit this activity.

Certainly, some young people with disability have attained successful transition and subsequent careers. Some of these young people have benefited from well delivered transition services, which included these five components, while others have received timely and appropriately delivered youth employment services including excellent DES support; many of these successes reflect both circumstances. Unfortunately, however, these successes are not the norm.

## Pillar Four: Building community capacity

Vibrant communities create employment and social participation for individuals, families and groups. Investments by government, business and civil society play an important role in strengthening communities. Also, access to technology and community resilience helps communities build capacity. Building community capacity is an effective force for positive change, especially for disadvantaged communities.

### Access to technology

Though not the focus of the interim report, we felt important to raise the issue of assistive and adaptive technology for people with disability.

For many people with disability technology is not a source of information or job seeking device, for many people with disability it is the mechanism in which they communicate in the world; the difference between them being able to work and participate in their communities.

Often the technologies are not expensive but it is more around how technology can be used or adapted to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. In many other countries there is Assistive Technology Specialists on staff in Universities, in Education Departments and in disability employment services (DES equivalent). These work in improving outcomes for people with disability by using technology to create and sustain opportunities that have not been available in the past.

Assistive Technology Specialists have, in many cases, been integrated into these education and employment services in other countries over the last 20 years. However, this has not been the case in Australia and in fact we are falling well behind ‘like’ countries in this regard. We need to look at how Australian job seekers with disability could use technology to break down barriers to employment and be used as tools that will increase their capacity to undertake a particular role or task in the workplace. We think assistive technology can be a game changer in employment participation, particularly for people with more significant disability, and we need to invest in developing greater assistive technology expertise and access in Australia.

### Community Resilience

Ticket to Work has built community resilience through the development of partnerships between organisations to ensure that resources are used in coordinated ways. It is a model that brings together a community of expertise to identify gaps and blend and braid resources to address disability employment issues and increase successful school-to-work transitions of young people.

The grass-roots nature of Local Ticket to Work Networks means that each differ from one another; whether that is the composition or the place-based strategies and activities they are rolling out for students and employers in their region. As place-based and grassroots partnerships, each Local Network is supported by the National Ticket to Work Network to build their own approaches to achieving the overall goal, recognising that the cross-sector partners in the room are well placed to determine the most feasible mechanisms for their community and student cohort. What is consistent, however, is that they all have the support of a National Network, have opportunities to formally connect with one another through national meetings and can gain the assistance and guidance of National Ticket to Work staff. In addition, all have access to a vast library of materials, tools and resources (housed in the ‘members area’ of the Ticket to Work website) to assist them in coordinating and offering Ticket to Work in their region.

We require a multi-sectoral flexible approach that wrap around the young person and address their employment needs. It is this collaboration and sharing of resources, expertise, and knowledge that create more pathways opportunities for young people collectively than they do if working individually or discretely.

The poor post-school labour force outcomes experienced by the vast majority of Australian young people with disability suggests that the interface between the school system and employment system needs investigation. It is apparent, and evident, that there is a need for more interagency collaboration at both government and non-government levels to better prepare these young people for a positive post-school employment transition.

Dr Meadows, (2012) stated that ”The setting and achievement of goals for post-school life pre-supposes a collaborative relationship between the school and post-school service providers, educational institutions, training agencies, workplaces, and businesses with which students will eventually engage. Unfortunately, there is poor links between schools and post-school systems. Interagency collaboration is viewed as a key component in any transition process for without it the preparation of students for the post-school world becomes problematic”.

With this in mind, ideally the curriculum for all young people during the last three to four years of school (middle to final years of schooling) should incorporate elements that resemble the post-school worlds in which the students will eventually reside. It is well established, and noted throughout this report, that level of frequency within which a student with disability engages in work and other out-of-school experiences whilst still at school, the greater the likelihood they will source and sustain employment upon school departure. The number of work experiences participated in whilst still attending school is highly predictive of employment post-school. Student engagement in School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships and the undertaking of accredited vocational training (such as those offered by TAFEs and other Registered Training Organisations) are also factors that contribute to a greater likelihood of post-school success. As these experiences rely on use of services and supporters located outside of the school, the opportunity for students to participate in these thus rely heavily on the establishment and maintenance of good collaborative relationships between schools, businesses and external employment and training sectors.

When reflecting on the needs of students with disability and integral role that collaborative partnerships can play in addressing their transition and workplace preparation needs Dr Meadows (2012) said that “Interagency collaboration can also be addressed on a wider basis than an individual school collaborating with individual businesses, post-school service and educational providers. Community transition teams consisting of secondary school transition personnel, post-school providers, employer groups, parents, chambers of commerce can identify common goals, address local transition issues and work together to solve the transition problems that exist in local communities. As the wider community becomes more aware of the skills these students can bring to the workforce and the supports schools can provide in learning and teaching in the workplace, the more they will be willing to provide opportunity”.

Ticket to Work is indeed predicated on this notion of collaborative and community wide partnerships and planning and led to the development of the Local Ticket to Work Network partnership model. Ticket to Work recognises that to improve outcomes for young people with disability a partnership-driven, multi-sectoral approach is required. Ticket to Work believes, and has evidence that partnerships comprised of schools, employers, employment services, disability agencies and youth services do create more pathways opportunities for young people collectively than they do if working individually or discretely.

“In many school-to-work transition programs, partners operate as disparate service sys­tems, and coordinating services into a more holistic approach is often difficult” (Luecking et al. 2004).

Local Ticket to Work Networks are built around a holistic partnership approach, which draws together key agencies via a coordinating Lead Agent body. It is also built around drawing together key local agencies that share a common desire to improve the post-school outcomes of young people with disability and have a likely stake in that goal being achieved. Collaboration between *all* partners is necessary to make Local Ticket to Work Networks successful and each partner plays a critical role in this.

The complexity of school-to-work transition requires collaboration between all sectors that can collectively identify and address gaps in provision for the students and employers that Ticket to Work is oriented towards. Local Ticket to Work Networks encourage partners to work beyond ‘just’ what they are funded for and step outside of the sector that they represent to look at the issue of youth transition needs in a cross-sectoral manner. In doing so, these partnership networks can innovatively explore what is needed in their local community and how they can combine their skills, knowledge and resources to develop a strategies, structures and approaches aimed at providing a seamless transition to employment for their local students with disability. The grass-roots nature of Local Ticket to Work Networks means that each differ from one another; whether that is the composition or the strategies and activities they are rolling out for students and employers in their region. Provided that each Local Ticket to Work Network meets the three criteria that allow them to be accredited as one, they have considerable space within which to develop as a local partnership. Regular liaison with the National Manager, with one another via National Ticket to Work Meetings and other communiqués Local Networks are able to share difficulties, highlights and innovations at a national level.

The Ticket to Work model presents a refreshing alternative to the usual lack of service coordination for transition-age young people with disability for two key reasons. First, because at a local level it draws together a diverse range of partners that, absent of Ticket to Work, would often operate in isolation from one another. Second, because the Local Networks can connect with and learn from one another via formalised meetings and other informal mechanisms facilitated by the National Ticket to Work body.

What is clear from the evaluation of Ticket to Work is that it ‘works’ and that can be scaled up, in seven short months Ticket to Work expanded across Australia and presently has Local Ticket to Work Networks operating in almost all states and territories (the Australian Capital Territory being the only jurisdiction without Ticket to Work presence).

Majority of the references in this submission came from the evaluation of Ticket to Work called ‘Transitions to Employment of Australian Young People with Disability and the Ticket to Work Initiative’ published July 2014

The full bibliography can be found in this report on the Ticket to Work webpage in research. www.tickettowork.org.au/

To contact Ticket to Work further, please do so to the National Manager, Michelle Wakeford on 03 9584 8845 or 0413 750 745 or email [michelle@tickettowork.org.au](mailto:michelle@tickettowork.org.au)