

WHY EMPLOYMENT MATTERS

A handbook for Job Seekers



Expanding Ideas; Creating Change

Anne Cross Leadership Initiative



CRU

Expanding Ideas; Creating Change

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The purpose of life is
a life with purpose:
creating meaningful futures
through valued roles

”

Meg Sweeney and Jane Sherwin

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS

Employment plays a vital role in improving economic, social, and personal wellbeing for all Australians. We hope that this booklet will introduce readers to common employment processes as well as new ideas that can assist them to pursue their employment goals more successfully.

This is a resource intended to benefit people with a disability in preparing for, seeking out and improving their employment opportunities and goals throughout their working life.

At Community Resource Unit (CRU) we aim to create and promote positive change so that people living with disability can belong to and actively contribute to social and economic life. Together with people living with disability, their families, allies in the human services sector and the community we build a movement for change.

Acknowledgements

CRU respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet, work and live and recognise this land always was and always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land. We pay our respect to Elders, past and present.

We would also like to offer a special thanks to Marlana, Will, Mike, Georgia, Freya, Millie, Sarah, Bobby, Jack and Tammy for sharing their employment stories with us. These stories and photos offer guidance, encouragement and a powerful dose of inspiration. Our sincerest thanks to you and your families for this valuable contribution.

These booklets have been developed as part of the Anne Cross Leadership Initiative, a partnership between Uniting Care Queensland (UCQ) and CRU, created to honour the contribution of Anne to UCQ during her years as the Chief Executive Officer.

The initiative aims to contribute to strong, principled leadership amongst people with disability and families across Queensland to work towards better lives for people with disability.

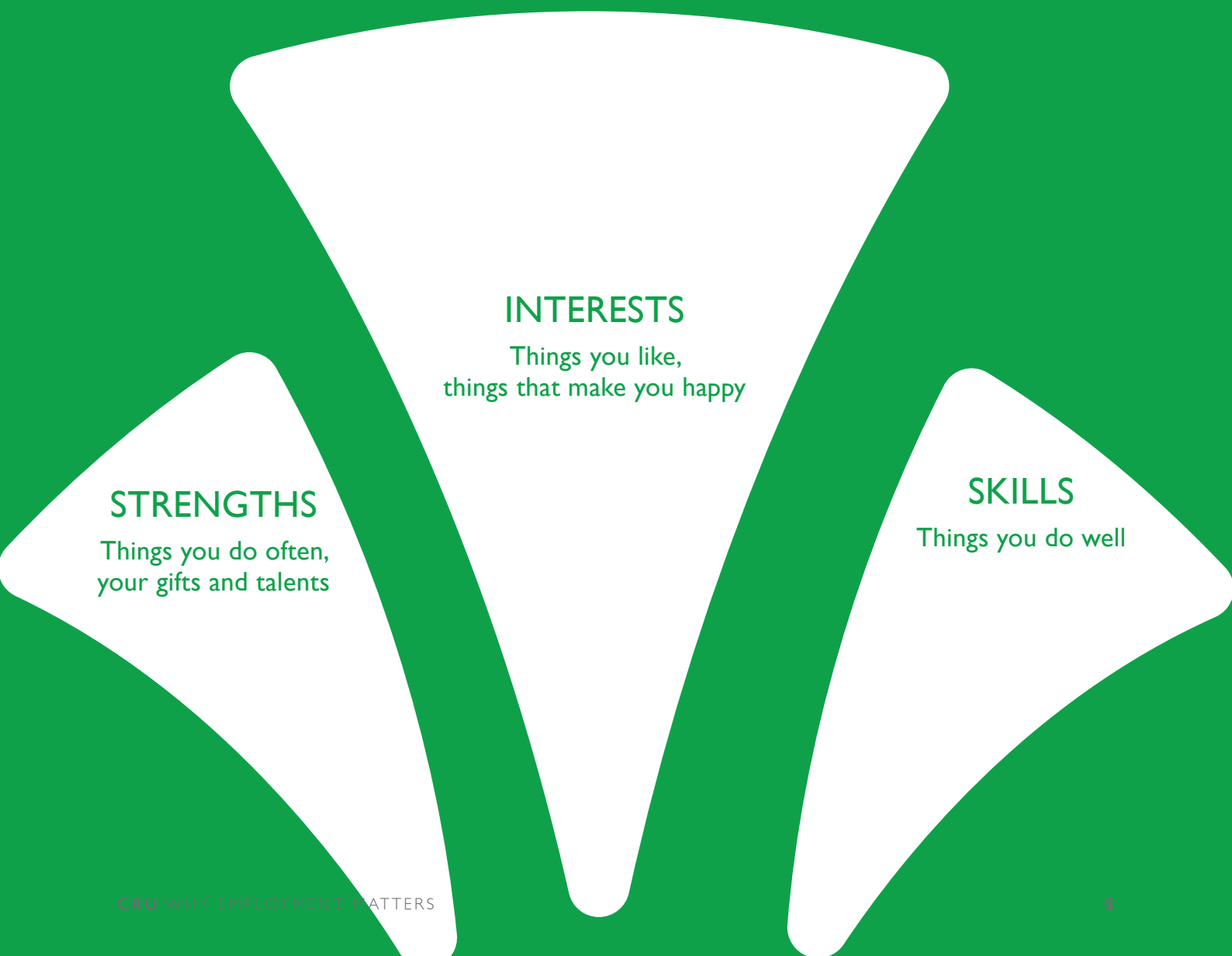
To access further resources visit www.cru.org.au/whyitmatters

GETTING STARTED

Why employment matters: Through employment you get to make money, challenge yourself, learn new things, connect with others, and find purpose by making a positive contribution to society.


When to get started: You can start looking for a job anytime, whether you're just beginning to think about it or you're already working and want to explore other options. The truth is your first job won't be your last! Throughout your employment journey your skills, interests and confidence will grow and change.

How to get started: Starting to look for a job can be hard, but everyone starts somewhere. It's helpful to think about what's important to you before you begin. Good questions to ask yourself: What tasks do you like, where might you enjoy working and how do you prefer to work with people.



Asking Key Questions

Create a list of your **strengths, interests, and skills**. This will help direct your job search to areas that you find the most interesting.

STRENGTHS Things you do often, your gifts and talents	INTERESTS Things you like, things that make you happy	SKILLS Things you do well
e.g. planning, sharing	e.g. books, animals, , exploring	e.g. cooking, singing
		

Think About What You Like Doing

What familiar activities do you find yourself naturally drawn to? These could be activities you do on your own without being asked or prompted by others or simply things that you find calming, enjoyable or interesting.

1. Practical and hands on activities.

Example: Gardening, woodwork, animal care, fixing things, physical exercise etc.

☐

I like this a lot

☐

I don't mind these

☐

I don't like these

2. Searching for facts and figuring out problems.

Example: Working with numbers or on computers, analysing information and data etc.

☐

I like this a lot

☐

I don't mind these

☐

I don't like these

3. Being creative and exploring new ideas.

Example: Artist, performer, working with people, designing, public speaking etc.

☐

I like this a lot

☐

I don't mind these

☐

I don't like these

Involve Others:

It can be helpful talking about these ideas with trusted contacts like family and friends. People who know you well will often recognise gifts and talents that you hadn't personally thought of.

If you think about the types of activities you enjoy and link it with your list of strengths, interests and skills this might give you some good ideas about jobs that would suit you. Brainstorming ideas with others can help you pick out well-suited job options.

Tip: Write things down as you go – It will be helpful being able to revisit ideas and notes later.

Surround yourself with positive people.

Your loved ones can be a great support. They care about you and want you to do well in life.

DREAMING BIG

What are your goals for the future and what type of job do you really want? Dream big and plan to make it happen.



“

The sky is not the limit,
there are footprints on
the moon aren't there?

”

More to Me Than What You See

Marlena's Story

I am a simple person and yet complex at the same time. I have dreams, fears and I sometimes wonder where I will be in say ten years' time. Currently I am trying to develop a number of businesses that will secure my future and provide an income to support these dreams and goals of mine.

I bought my first business when I was 15. A simple business that wasn't that expensive but was purchased due to the fact I was in Year 9 and basically wanted a part time job, as most of my peers were starting to get jobs. Never did I think at that stage this small business would be the start of what it has become today.

I studied Journalism and have had the pleasure of interviewing a number of well-known sports stars and business people. While these interviews have been interesting, my goal with this is to become the next Molly Meldrum and do music journalism. I have already started my plan to see this goal be achieved and have had a number of musicians and promoters show an interest.

It is hard to hide the fact I get around in a wheelchair; however I don't get up every morning and look in the mirror and think, does my backside look big in this or I wonder if people will notice me? I can't hide the fact that I use a talking device and facilitated communication to communicate. My obvious abilities are often overshadowed by my obvious disability, but only to those who do not know me.

While I am still young, I would prefer to be known as a journalist, a friend, a writer, an entrepreneur or many other titles rather than being disabled. We all have a story and mine is interesting to some people, especially the fact I want to make a living doing public speaking despite the fact I can't verbally talk.

I believe we can all look at our lives in a positive or negative way regardless of whether we have a disability or not. Those who are successful set goals and plan where they want to go, get rid of the doubters, surround themselves with positive people and work hard at achieving whatever it is their heart's desire.



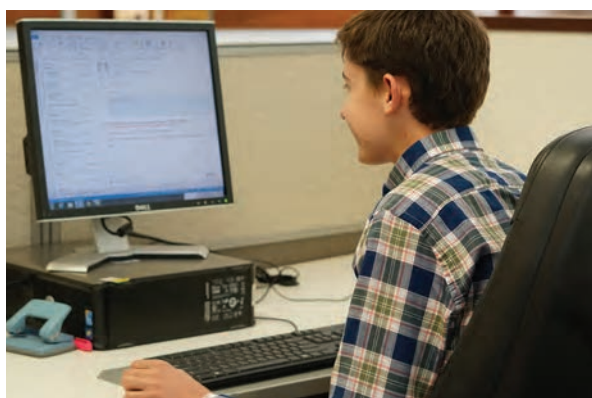
Finding the Right People

Will's Story

Our vision for Will has always been that he lives a typical life, just like his older brother Henry. One part of this means having a job and the opportunity to contribute to his world.

When Will was in year ten we decided to bring in a few key family and friends to help Will prepare for life after school with particular focus on finding work experience during his final school years. We found these opportunities by going out and talking to people, sharing a bit about Will and asking if they had any jobs that might be a good match for him. This eventually led to him working three part-time jobs in a junior admin role for an accounting firm, a law firm, and a communications PR firm. His favourite part of work is the social aspect, and he has made a lot of friends through his work.

We are not quite sure where Will's work will take him next, but wherever it takes him we are conscious of continuing to make sure it is exciting and challenging in the years to come.



Let's Do It

Mike's Story

Mike listened to his school mates talking. They had many plans for the future—leaving home, travelling, going to university, and having a girlfriend. Mike's dream was to be a rock and roll superstar. When his Mum asked him about what he wanted to do when he left school, he thought she would simply laugh at him.

Instead, she said: ***“Well, that’s a challenge. We will need to think about how this can happen.”***

With the help of his family, Mike found his first job at the local music store where all the local musicians hung out. They got to know him and invited him to their gigs.

Ten years on, Mike continues to work in the music store. He has set up a studio at home, recorded some songs and played in his friends' band throughout the district. He is well on his way to fulfilling his dream.

“Well, that’s a challenge. We will need to think about how this can happen”



Expect Challenges

Finding a job may take time, but it's important to stay patient and motivated by doing things you enjoy and remembering, other people have done it before, so you can too!

In the case of Mike and his mother, they understood that it wasn't going to be easy – but believed that it was possible. This positive mindset allowed them to continue working towards Mike's dreams.

So be prepared for challenges and if things don't go to plan at first, have a backup plan in place! Think along the lines of: Plan A, Plan B, Plan C!

Hopes and Dreams

Imagine what could be possible and talk to other people about how they decided what they wanted to do. Write down your hopes and dreams for your working life.



“ You are braver than
you think, more talented
than you know, and capable
of more than you imagine.

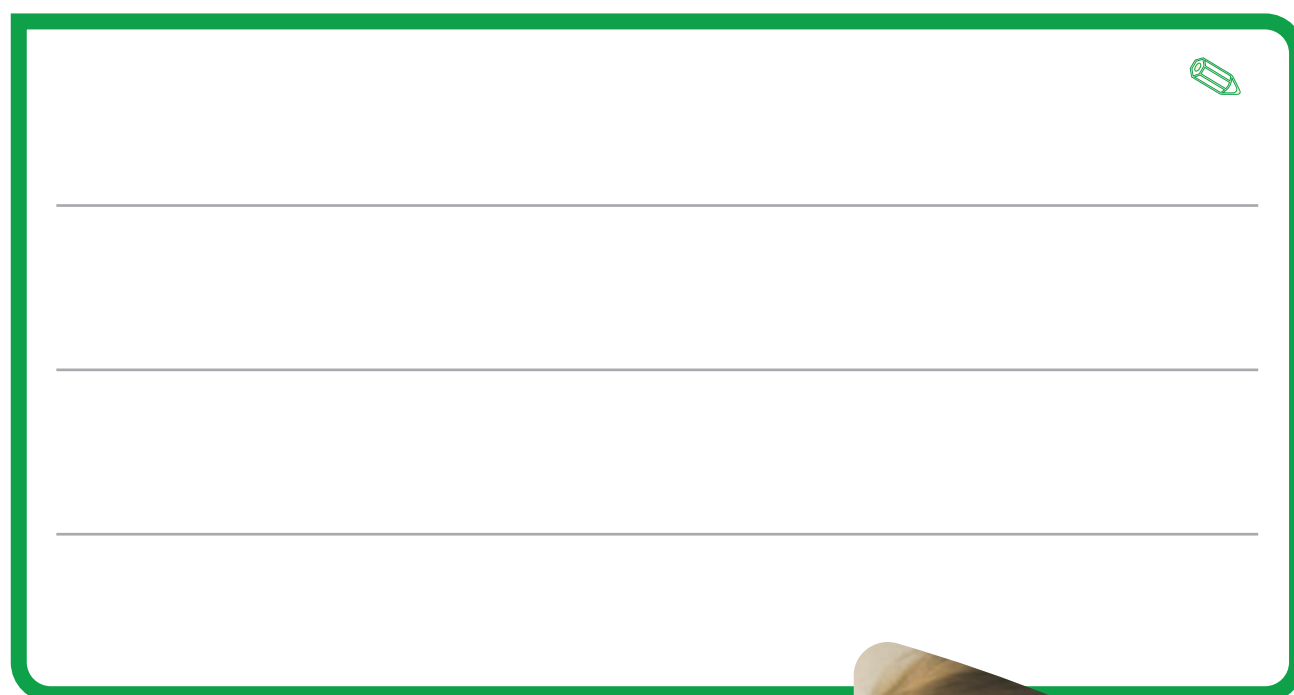
Roy T. Bennett ”

The Power of Networking

Did you know that in Australia in 2022, employment data shows that about one-third of all employers used word of mouth to advertise their job openings. This means that some employers reached out to individuals directly to offer them job opportunities, while others asked their current employees, friends, or family if they knew anyone who might be interested in the position.

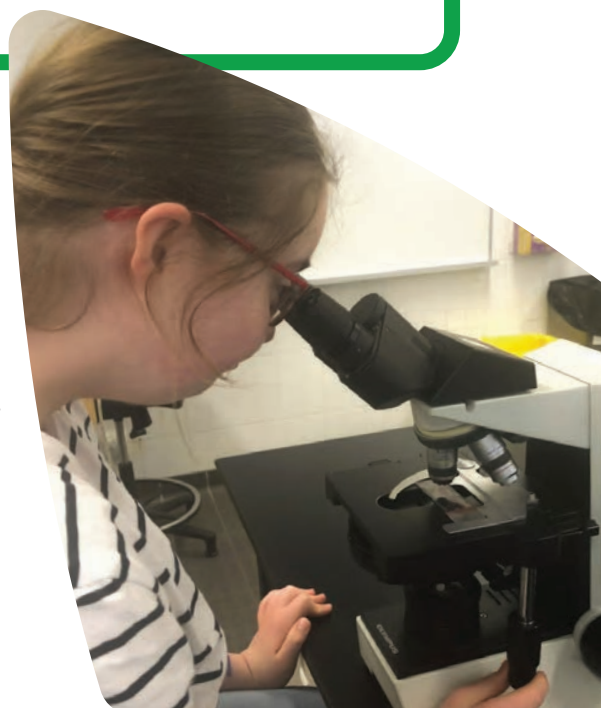
Support networks can be made up of family, friends, peers, community connections and even service workers. Involve people who are encouraging and who believe that a disability shouldn't be life defining. Your personal connections can be some of the most valuable resources for finding work. The more people you know, the more job opportunities you might find.

Write down people who may be able to help you find work!



Staying Motivated

1. Do things you enjoy to stay positive and confident.
2. Be patient and persistent in your job search.
3. Have a clear goal in mind and plan out the steps to achieve it.
4. Surround yourself with supportive family and friends.
5. Stay organised and keep track of your progress.
6. Take breaks and rest when needed.
7. Believe in yourself and your abilities.
8. Keep learning and developing new skills.
9. Hold high expectations of yourself and others.



FINDING THE RIGHT JOB

Get started where you can. Look for jobs in an area of interest but remember this is about finding your first job, not necessarily the perfect job right away. This is just the beginning. You will learn a lot, and the experience will help you decide what you want to do in the future.



“

I am pretty short, so sometimes reaching things on the top shelf is a bit tricky but other than that I love it here!

Georgia

”

Aiming High

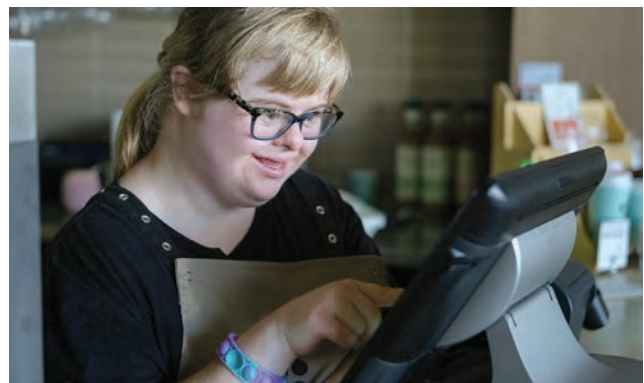
Georgia's Story

Georgia started working at one of the local coffee shops in Mackay in 2019. She was inspired to work in the hospitality industry by her sister who was a waitress at the time. Georgia is now a core part of the team and helps with anything from table service, to stocking up the fridges and welcoming guests.

When asked about workplace challenges Georgia said with a bit of a chuckle, "I am pretty short, so sometimes reaching things on the top shelf is a bit tricky but other than that I love it here!"

Georgias employment has resulted in some very exciting opportunities - like training with Jetstar as a flight attendant. She very quickly settled into this new role thanks to her already existing knowledge of the service industry. She said it was exciting trying something new and her encouragement to others is to be brave and say yes to as many opportunities as possible, because you never quite know what might just happen.

Georgia has since happily returned to her job at the café and is enjoying life back on the ground. She continues to develop her skills and looks forward to her next big adventure.



Developing Transferable Skills

Georgia's experience shows us how the skills you build in one role can pave the way to another job opportunity in the future. These skills are often referred to as transferable skills.

Revisit your list of strengths and interests and think about how these everyday activities can be translated into employability skills.

For Example:

- Hanging out with friends could show you have good interpersonal skills.
- An interest in travelling could demonstrate things like flexibility, planning and organising, time management.

And remember you can always learn and develop new skills!

Tip: Work experience and volunteering are also great ways to get ready for work and further develop your skills.






Workplace Options

Everyone has different workplace preferences. It is important to know what employment options there are and think about which environments will be best for you.

- **Large organisations:** Big companies like Coles, McDonald's and Bunnings often employ people with disabilities.
- **Local small businesses:** Maybe you or your family are regular customers at a small business, no harm in asking if they are looking for new employees!
- **Family businesses:** Or perhaps your family might have their own small business, which could be a great place for you to start working.
- **Government departments:** This could include local councils and services like the National Disability Insurance Agency. Reach out to find out what's possible?
- **Apprenticeships and traineeships:** Sometimes training and studying are great options to help develop the skills needed for other jobs and learn more about the sort of work you are interested in.

Finding The Right Workplace

It is important to work in environments where you can feel comfortable, safe and relaxed. We are all very different! Here are some simple things to consider:

 LOCATION	Outdoors	I don't mind	Indoors
 NOISE	Some noise	Mixed noise levels	Low noise
 WORK STYLE	Following a set of instructions	A mix	Figuring things out myself
 PACE	Fast pace	A mix	Steady pace
 PEOPLE	Working with people	I don't mind	Working alone

Skill Building

Sarah's Story

Sarah is currently completing her Certificate III in Childcare!

It all began when Sarah volunteered at her old primary school as part of her vacation care program. Sarah helped out in the tuckshop, office and in the classroom and even though there was a lot of learning on the way she enjoyed the challenge.

Sarah very quickly knew she wanted to continue working with young children, the question was how to make this happen. So, Sarah linked in with a disability employment service and got a job at a local childcare centre in 2016. She hasn't looked back since and is currently completing her Certificate III in Childcare.

Childcare is often described as an incredibly demanding but rewarding role. Sarah however is very comfortable at her workplace and doesn't mind the noise and busyness at the centre. In the future, Sarah wants to continue learning and supporting children's development. She looks forward to her ongoing career in childcare.



TALKING TO EMPLOYERS

There are many ways you can get ready to talk to employers. You can think about what skills you have and what you are willing to learn. Start to prepare with the help of people who know you well.



“

I like libraries. It makes me feel comfortable and secure to have walls of words, beautiful and wise, all around me.

Roger Zelazny

”

There may be a job you have seen advertised that you want to apply for

How to Prepare

1. You can practice with a friend or family member going through common interview questions.
2. Gather photos or videos showing off your skills – this is called a visual resume.
3. Create a pitch to introduce yourself and explain why you would be a good fit.

Before an Interview

Think about if you want to or need to share information about your disability. You need to explain what you can do and how you can do it. Don't be afraid to talk about the supports needed to do the job. Getting ready for your interview can make you feel more confident. Share what you feel is necessary and relevant to the role.

In the Interview

1. Be Positive and Real.
2. Dress professionally.
3. Arrive a few minutes early.
4. Minimise distractions.

Employment Rights

It's important to know your rights as an employee, even though most workplaces treat their employees well. The Disability Discrimination Act says that it's illegal to treat someone unfairly because of their disability. This law protects people with disabilities from unfair treatment when looking for a job, working conditions, training, promotions, and being fired.



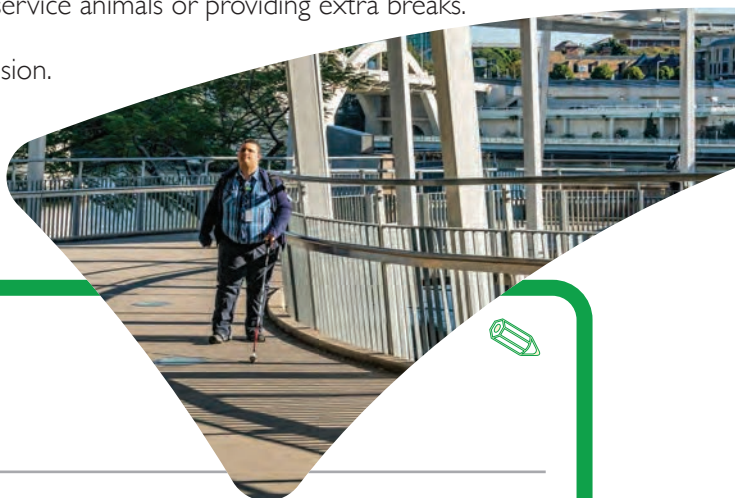
Reasonable Workplace Adjustments

Your disability may impact your work. You, and your employer may need to consider making changes to your work environment or schedule. These changes can be referred to as accommodations, and they can be any tool or process that helps you succeed in your job.

Examples of reasonable workplace adjustments:

1. Better building access like installing ramps or adjusting desk height.
2. Access to special equipment if you are visually impaired, like screen readers or braille displays.
3. Flexibility with work hours or schedules if needed.
4. Making it easier to do work, like giving extra time, training, or coaching.
5. Help with communication needs, like providing written materials in accessible formats, using sign language interpreters, or adding captions to videos.
6. Changing workplace policies or procedures, like allowing service animals or providing extra breaks.
7. Educating all employees about disability, diversity, and inclusion.

List some adjustments you might need to discuss.



Working Together

Bobby's Story

Bobby has always been very athletic, and it was through his love for swimming he was offered his job at the Centenary Pool. Bobby's boss is encouraging and makes time to talk to him about what he is enjoying about his role and what things he would like to do more of. This way, together they can continue building on Bobby's skills, allowing him to take on more and more tasks at a comfortable pace.

Bobby and his employer negotiated hours based on what other commitments he already had. At each shift Bobby will receive a written list of tasks to complete that day, this way Bobby can work independently when needed as well as manage his time more effectively.



THINKING CREATIVELY

Look at the list of your own strengths, interests, and skills. Brainstorm ideas with family and friends to think about work and business ideas that suit your needs and interests.



“

We didn't always know what we were doing, so sometimes we just went for it and attacked each hurdle as they came up

”

If you need more flexibility and an established job won't work for you, it is possible to customise employment

Customised Employment is a relationship between an employer and an employee that is negotiated to meet the needs of both parties. By focusing on your unique skills, interests and support needs you can think outside the box and create or adapt an existing job with an interested employer in a way that works for everyone.

You can approach the employer with a pitch on what you have to offer to meet a particular need in their business. By being open with your employer about what your needs are you will be more likely to have a positive employment experience.

Tip: Much more Information about this can be found by searching “Discovering Customised Employment”.

Micro-enterprises

A micro-enterprise is a small business owned and run by you. It is a form of self-employment where you get to build your own business crafted around your own interests and skills. Businesses can range from gardening and T-shirt design to selling home-grown produce. It is really up to you!

If this interests you, start by:

- Brainstorming some ideas with family and friends.
- Revisiting your lists of strengths, skills, interests and workplace preferences to help guide your thinking.
- Considering how your business ideas can last long-term.
- Looking for a genuine community need so that the product or service is in high demand!

Business Time

Jack's Story

Jack is an ambitious young man who runs a successful ice-cream business. You will find him at the Manly Markets every Sunday with a range of fresh gelato or choc tops. He is responsible for getting everything ready the night before and has his alarm set for a six o'clock start in the morning.

Jack felt that starting a small business of his own allowed him more freedom to explore things that interested him. Jack's family helped him with the research and planning to get the business off the ground. His mother explained “We didn't always know what we were doing, so sometimes we just went for it and attacked each hurdle as they came up”.

Jack works two to three days each week, sometimes adding in a private event or festival. Jack recently completed a Certificate III in Business Administration and says that maybe in the next few years he will expand. Jack's choc-top range is in high demand and he has even had a few inquiries about delivering locally!

The Benefits of a Micro Enterprise

With a micro-enterprise, you can set up your own work hours to better match your needs instead of working to a strict schedule. Other benefits could include working shorter hours or taking breaks during the day. Micro-enterprises can be run from home or in the community, making this job option more accessible and comfortable if you have higher support needs.

THRIVING IN YOUR ROLE

Thriving in a job is not just about financial success but also about finding fulfillment, passion and making a positive impact. Embrace your journey, follow your passions, and believe in your abilities to achieve greatness in your chosen path.



Small jobs that make a big difference

Tammy's Story

Tammy enjoys music, art, traveling and spending time with friends and family. One of the reasons it was important to find a job was so that Tammy could connect with her community and make some extra money at the same time. Tammy has worked in a few different roles over the years but thrives in environments that attract like-minded people who understand her fluctuating health needs, and how these needs can change week-by-week.

For the last three years she has been running her own business called NoOne's Jobs. She now travels to four different workplaces and does those little jobs that are not assigned to anyone. For example, she will wash your tea towels using environmentally friendly soaps, empty the fridge or buy milk in the mornings. A small everyday job that makes a big difference! Other employees are so grateful to see those jobs get done!

The family are always thinking about what could be next for Tammy and her business. Tammy's mother says it's important to never underestimate her daughter. She just needs a bit of support from time to time, one of the greatest challenges is getting the right kind of support.

Like Tammy we all need support from time to time so its important to know what support options are available to you. The key to success for Tammy has been linking in with people who need a job done and are flexible with the deadline.

Tammy also thrives with people who believe in her and share some of the same values and interests.



Some Job Support Options

- **Job Mentors / Coaches and Supporters:** The role of a job mentor is to be a positive and strong role model who can work flexibly alongside you. This could include on the job support from a colleague or supervisor. The benefit of this is that it helps you get the same job training as other staff. You can also hire someone to assist you. Talk through options with your employer and family to find the best option for you.
- **Role based recruitment:** Recruiting for a specific role is helpful when seeking support workers. It is important to find support workers who know when to get involved and when to step aside. If you want a person with knowledge or experience in a particular area of interest, think about where you find these people. For example, Sam is interested in poetry, so linking with someone who enjoys creative writing could be a great way for Sam to build his skills. A good place to advertise could be through universities, libraries, or poetry clubs.
- **Employment Assistance Programs:** Funded programs can be helpful in providing financial support and expertise. Disability Employment Services can offer support in the workplace to help with your job if you are eligible. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) can provide funding if you need support to work but are not eligible for Disability Employment Services. Check if you are eligible for either of these !
- **Job Access:** this a free and confidential information and advice service.

Settling In

It will take time to settle in and feel comfortable. Be patient and keep on going!

1. Others could help get things ready at the workplace before you arrive.
2. Be friendly and say hello to people.
3. Listen carefully to what others are saying or have them write your tasks down on a list.
4. Let people know you are willing to learn new things.
5. Show initiative and ask for help if you need it.
6. Be patient. Building good relationships takes time.

Job Satisfaction

Our working lives from finishing school to retirement can cover many years. We need to plan for a marathon not a sprint. You can take time to try different jobs; sample what they are like and build your career over time.

You could ask to meet regularly with your supervisor and keep friends and family members who you trust in the loop. These are the people who will be able to support you when you are having a bad day.

Good Questions to ask:

- Are there other tasks that you still want to learn to do ?
 - Do you look forward to going to work?
- Are you being paid fairly? • Are you feeling valued for the work you do?

If you answered no to any of these questions, you might need to discuss the role with your employer. And remember you are allowed to change jobs if this one isn't the right fit.

We wish you well in your job search!

Stay positive and persistent and believe in yourself. Your unique skills, experiences and talents will make you a great fit. Keep learning and growing and never underestimate the power of your determination. Your next great adventure could be just around the corner. You've got this!

To access further resources visit www.cru.org.au/whyitmatters

Your notes





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