

# Community Career Counselling

Enabling career guidance and learner choice for people with disability in adult education

## Guidelines for Adult Educators

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*Supporting strong and vibrant communities that value diversity*



Adult Community and Further Education Board



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# 1. Introduction

This is an abstracted version of the document, Community Career Counselling: enabling career guidance and learner choice for people with disability in adult education (2015) which was the report following a research project conducted by Neighbourhood Houses Victoria and the ACE DisAbility Network into career guidance for people with disability.

It contains the Executive Summary of the full report plus some suggested guidelines for those neighbourhood houses and community centres that are interested in developing career guidance for disadvantaged students.

## Case Study 1

“There was one woman whose anxiety was so great that she could not bring herself to enter the building even though she had been referred from a local aboriginal centre. She now has a job in a hospital, but it took four years. At first she just came in for coffee with no expectations that she would do anything she wasn’t comfortable with. Her first visit barely lasted 20 minutes. I found someone I thought would be a good volunteer mentor for her. Thus through informal conversations which built up trust we found out that she loved to draw. It was suggested she might draw some murals for the new building. This was something she felt confident to do without having to rely on other people and with no expectation that she had to perform. She started to develop relationships and later was able to join a work for the dole class.”

(Manager, KP3 Rural)

## Case Study 2

“One guy had done half a drug and alcohol counselling course, but had dropped it and wasn’t sure if he wanted to do it. He is currently working (with a community group working with people using alcohol and other substances) as a volunteer to help with the meals to see if this is the sort of work he wanted to do at the same time as use his existing skills as well as providing service to the community.”

(Manager KP8, Urban)

## 2. Executive Summary

### 2.1 Introduction to Executive Summary

Whether directed through a rights based or an economic agenda, there is currently a strong policy commitment at all levels of Australian government to having people with disability in the workplace.

In the current context of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) due to be implemented in 2016, it was timely for the Adult Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB) to propose research into “What are the enablers of effective career guidance and learning choice for people with a disability? Which enablers are the most effective for educators?”

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This summary covers some brief information around key concepts to the research and an outline of the key findings.

### 2.2 Key concepts

#### 2.2.1 Disability

This research covers all disability types. However, some learners have a level of impairment that does not interfere with their capacity to learn or work (Waterhouse et al, 2010), thus this research focuses on career development for those whose impairments restrict their ability to access those facilities normally available to others.

There is a tendency within government and other reports to speak of “people with disability” as a single cohort. This fails to recognise a) the differences between one form of impairment and another and b) the differences between people living with the same impairment type. Even so, there are still some impairments, such as cognitive and psychiatric disability, which may impact on learning choices, career choices and employment

more severely than others (Waterhouse et al,2010, McClure, 2015).

#### 2.2.2 Learner Choice

One of the key principles of the NDIS is to “enable people with disability to exercise choice and control in the pursuit of their goals and the planning and delivery of their supports” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013). “Choice,” including learning choice, is central to the lives of all of us, including those with a disability. However, for some people with cognitive disability, choice may present problems associated with their impairment (Smyth and Bell, 2006; Ramcharen et al, 2013).

#### 2.2.3 Career development

Career in the 21st century is no longer viewed as a single job for life, but rather something that encompasses an individual’s lifelong progression in learning and work (Campbell, 2010): and work may include paid and unpaid employment.

### Case Study 3

“We had a woman who had been with us for several years; she came to us to do a literacy course. She volunteered in our café and found she loved to make cakes. She is now involved in catering and created a small income for herself and loves it.”

(Manager KP7, Outer Urban)

## 2. Executive Summary

### 2.3 Key findings

#### 2.3.1 Challenges

Challenges for students: The two most frequently cited challenges relating to gaining employment or effective career guidance were:

- The disability, which in itself provided a challenge for student in obtaining employment where employers were reluctant to engage with disability
- Lack of self-confidence especially for those without any experience of work; those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and those lacking in a sense of self worth.

Challenges for career developers: The major challenge most career development practitioners cited was that of unrealistic expectations on the part of students and in some cases their parents.

The two most frequently cited challenges relating to gaining employment or effective career guidance were:

- The disability, which in itself provided a challenge for student in obtaining employment where employers were reluctant to engage with disability
- Lack of self-confidence.

#### 2.3.2 Enablers

##### A. Learner choice

- The “Conversation”

The process of discovering a learner’s choice and developing career plans requires an investment in time. In practice the conversation could last for anything up to four years, be a single event or intrinsic to a longer term and on-going relationship. This conversation can be individual or part of a group process; it may be formal or informal depending on the program and the individual student. What became clear over the course of the research was that time and effort expended in this engagement

#### Case Study 4

“We had a man with schizophrenia, which developed while he was studying engineering at RMIT. He had no family support, became homeless and had several suicide attempts. He came into our men’s program doing cookery and gardening. He is now in a Community Care Residence and also doing a computer class and has re enrolled in engineering at RMIT. His computer teacher worked one on one with him. The factors that worked for him was the partnership system in that all services: police, homeless agencies, mental health agencies and the neighbourhood house all worked together.”

(Manager, KP4 Urban)

was an undeniable enabler.

- Confidence building  
Confidence building was key to research participants who did well in enabling career development. There were a myriad of strategies to achieve this including: personal development courses, mentoring programs, introductory courses with an absence of “assessment requirements,” group activities, offering a practical experience of work through volunteering or social enterprises, assistance and support with personal appearance and hygiene issues, anger management programs, various social opportunities and the valuable strategy of ensuring the person with the disability understood that there were people who were interested in them as an individual and who cared about their personal outcomes.

##### B. Learner choice and employment

- Experience of work  
Experience of work was identified more broadly than “paid work.” It included volunteer placements as well as social enterprises. Experience of work was an enabler in so far as it was identified as providing:
  - Potential employees with a practical “taste” of what the chosen work might involve
  - Confidence in being able to perform the work

## 2. Executive Summary

required

- An opportunity to establish the expected standards in a particular workplace including “soft skills”
- An entry point for possible longer term paid employment.
- “Wrap around”

This term encapsulates the practice of engaging and enfolded a student into his or her community. This concept became increasingly evident as the research developed. “Wrap around” describes the principle of providing a sense of belonging, building confidence, building social connections, enhancing a sense of worth within in each individual. Inherent in the concept of “wrap around” is an understanding of community development and the creation of community connections and social capital.

This contribution and investment in social capital and the “wrap around” was demonstrated in lasting commitments such as social clubs to which people continued to belong even after a paid position had been found. It underscored the clear and definable value of community based informal space that is apparent in the existing social architecture of Victoria such as neighbourhood houses. It involves career guidance tailored to the individual with a commitment to and understanding of the importance of listening as much as “teaching.” It is clear that the building of relationships of respect and trust are central “enablers.”

- Time

An investment in “time” as a perceived enabler and an understanding of the nature of this investment became apparent through responses related to:

- Provision of an adequate amount of time for the student to establish what they want to do and build sufficient confidence to pursue an identified area of work and ensure enough time to allow for false starts.
- The necessity to create networks amongst potential employers, agencies and leverage their spheres of influence.
- Relationship building which requires respect and trust in the first place with the student and then with a potential employer. Trust is a product of time (Buckingham, 2004).
- Staff and volunteers being most productive when there was time to build a multi-disciplinary team approach.

- People

A significant number of strategies articulated throughout the research and forming part of the participant’s career guidance are dependent upon a professional approach by someone skilled in effectively exploring career options side by side with personal issues.

All managers of key participants without exception made reference to the calibre of staff and volunteers they engaged. The prime importance of recruiting staff and volunteers for their ability to empathise and listen to students without judgment was a common theme. There was also acknowledgement that with appropriately recruited staff and volunteers training in this area could also be effective. A key and enabling aspect of organisational management included an understanding of the nature and development of a team work approach.

### C. Enablers for finding employment

- Networking

The ability to network with employers was considered an essential skill by participants. The advantages that were identified by participants included:

- Broadening the field of potential employers for people with disability
- Building a relationship of trust with the employers that enables clear communication and joint strategy development around the challenge of any disabilities
- Developing pathways for students including from school to an adult learning context
- Enabling organisations to come together with a shared focus on the development of strategies that respond to the complexity of issues that some people present with.

- Employer attitudes

A number of participants noted negative experiences in interactions with certain employers. These included:

- Resistance to employing people with a disability based on perceived fears around the impact of disability on ability to do the job required
- A perception of a large investment of time required in the supervision and support that employing someone with a disability entails
- The market being flooded with various organisations such as schools, training

## 2. Executive Summary

institutes and tertiary education sector seeking “placements” that effectively create competition that disadvantages people with disabilities who are frequently perceived as the more challenging option

- Occupational health and safety concerns
- Employer’s productivity imperative.

Participants also identified positive experiences with employers. The differentiation was often related to an organisation’s capacity to create a bank of prospective employers, where there was good networking and characterised by trust among employer groups, where there had been a real investment in community links that had been built up over time, or where the organisation had been entrepreneurial and established various social enterprises.

### Enablers needed for learner choice and employment

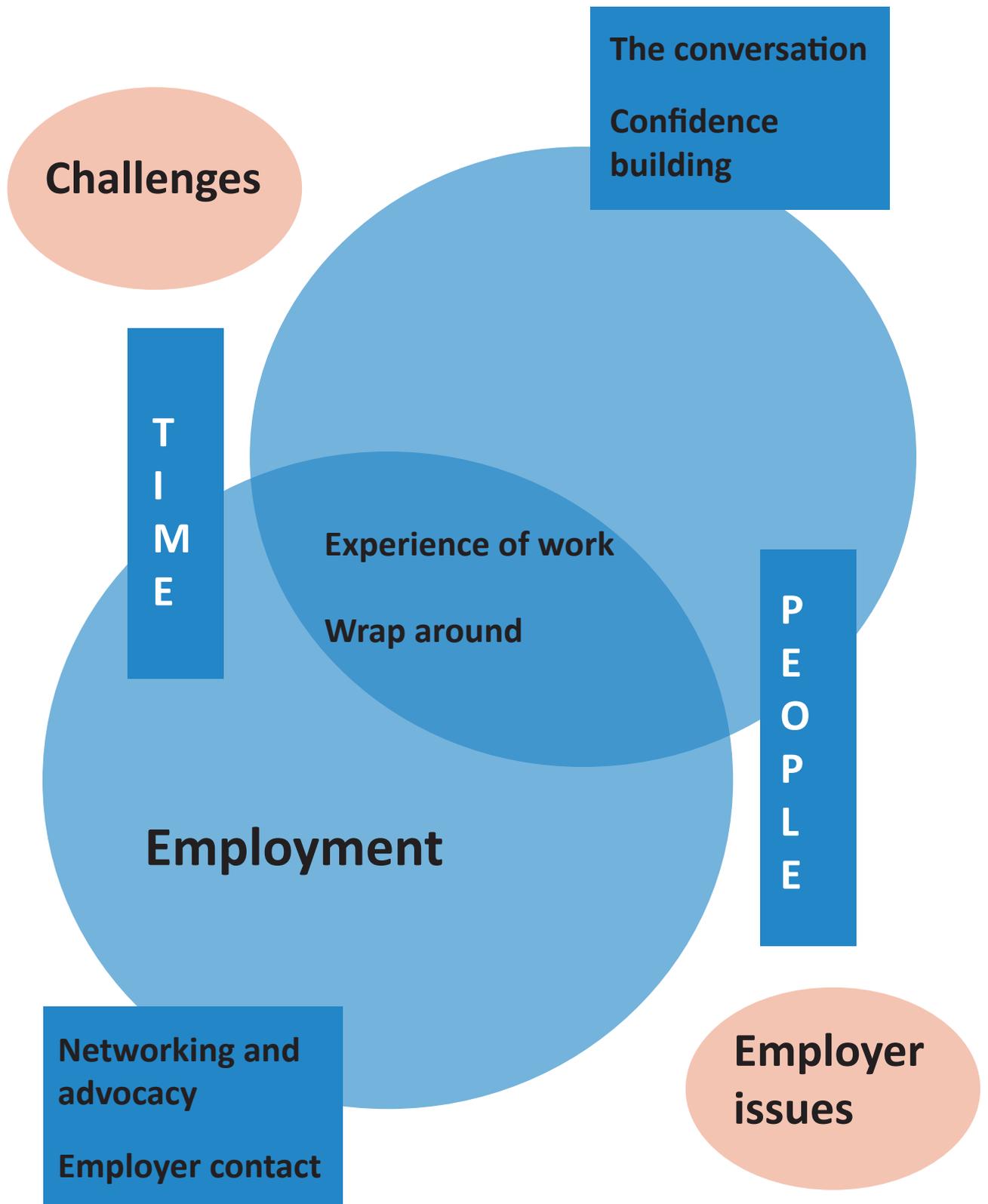
- Experience of work
- “Wrap around” i.e. the practice of enfolding a student into the community
- Time: to find out what they want to do; to mature; to build networks; to build trust; for staff and volunteers to build relationships and work as a team
- People: Trained professionals exploring career and personal issues.

### Case Study 5

“There was a young man with a lot of issues including mental health. He didn’t want to be at our centre. He was only just this side of jail and was quite violent. He had a bad name in the town. Now he is one year older and has a job and his employer is delighted with him. This was because his tutor involved him in the community and by the whole of the staff working with him, finding his interests and treating him as an adult.”

(Manager, KP6, Rural)

### 3. Career guidance diagram



## 4. Guidelines for adult education providers

Not every ACE provider is able or wishes to be involved in career guidance. For those that do this research suggests the following strategies:

1. Know and be involved with the local community in depth and breadth in order to know and be known by employers and others who can provide students with experience of work. That is: networking with employer groups/employers/ JSAs/volunteer groups and community groups. This may involve attending regular forums, being on management committees, boards, CALD community groups, disability/mental health organisations etc. Have on-going connections with JSA/DESS – they often have the resources other organisations don't such as incentives for employers.
2. Have an organisation wide commitment and team approach to career guidance. In this way people are less likely to fall through the cracks. All staff and volunteers should have some training in listening skills/counselling and in how to achieve in depth knowledge of client. It is also worth investing in training in techniques such as McCormick et al's Guiding Circles(2002), Poehnell and Amundson's Hope Filled Engagement (2011) or Amundson's Pattern Identification Exercise (1995) or some of the resources from peak bodies such as the Career Education Association of Victoria.
3. Have access to at least one person in (or accessible to) the organisation with leadership, passion and training in career guidance.
4. Recognise that anyone (with appropriate training) can be a career counsellor – it is a matter of getting the right people connected to each other.
5. Develop a sense of belonging and trust in order to repair the damage caused by low self-esteem and lack of identity in some students, recognising that trust is a product of time.
6. Find out what a person needs to build their confidence and sense of hope and purpose – anger management, grooming. Informal spaces are preferable and well developed listening skills essential.
7. Recognise that a) an inability to progress in a course or work experience is not "failure" but may be the next step along the pathway; b)

pathways may not be linear.

8. Provide informal spaces such as coffee rooms where people who are experiencing low confidence and anxiety can make initial contact with the organisation and/or people without having expectations placed upon them.

### Case Study 6

"One girl was so shy she couldn't look anyone in the eye and has been unemployed for 18 years, but has just enrolled in a Cert III in Aged Care. Part of the program, especially for women (and most are women) deals with health, beauty and grooming. This particular woman previously had poor grooming. Now she has dyed her hair, dresses well and wears make up. As a consequence she is now chatty and had made friends, where she was previously reluctant"

(Manager KP8, Urban)

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate those factors that might enable educators to assist people with disability in career guidance and learner choice. The emphasis here (because of the funding source and choice of researchers) has been on educators within the adult community education sector, although reference has been made to other organisations, including those providing employment for youth, in the course of the research process. One of the more surprising results of this study was to find the extent of the work being done in career development by community based organisations, some quite small (annual budget less than \$500,000). Their emphasis was primarily on community development processes, often supported by professional knowledge of recognised and up to date career development techniques.

**One of the more surprising results of this study was to find the extent of the work being done in career development by community based organisations.**

Adult community education organisations, while they may enable learner choice and career guidance, are not resourced to as employment agencies to people with or without disability. Nevertheless experience of work was seen as an important part of career development and most participants included this as part of their program. Some of these experiences led to jobs. The research process was greatly enhanced by the willingness of participants to share their experiences, often beyond the initial questions. The researchers were also grateful for the support and guidance of the Adult Community and Further Education Board.

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