



# CONNECTING PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT WITH THE WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (WISE) MODEL

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**CENTRE  
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IMPACT**



## ACRONYMS

ADE – Australian Disability Enterprise

BE – Business Enterprises

CSI – Centre for Social Impact

DES – Disability Employment Services

IEP – Individual Employment Plan

ILC – Information Linkages and Capacity

LAC – Local Area Coordinator

NDIS – National Disability Insurance Scheme

PPE – Personal Protective Equipment

SLES – School Leaver Employment Supports

WISE – Work Integration Social Enterprise

WHS – Workplace Health and Safety

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report has been prepared by CSI Swinburne for the Department of Social Services Information Linkages and Capacity Building Program (2021). This research project was conducted by CSI Swinburne and *genU* Business Enterprises and Employment Pathways.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*In 2021, CSI and genU disability services were funded by the Department of Social Services to adapt and implement elements of the Work Integration Social Enterprise model into a genU Supported Work environment. The characteristics of a Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE) are represented in the model (Figure 1) containing 7 design elements that can be used to support employment outcomes. WISE have a social purpose to provide transitional pathways to meaningful work for people with experiences of marginalisation, including people with a disability.*

The CSI team worked collaboratively with genU and a variety of stakeholders in the Barwon region to use and implement the WISE model to improve Supported Employees' work readiness and their transitions to Hybrid (working in both a supported setting and in Open Employment) or Open Employment. The project focused on the model elements: *Structure, Space, Relationships, Culture, Finance and Funding, Policy and Process* and *Industry*.

The project was located at genU Business Enterprises (Geelong) with the support of genU Employment Pathways. **Business Enterprises** employ and support over 200 people with a disability at 4 central locations in Geelong. Supported Employees receive training, life skills coaching, welfare and behaviour support, mental health and emotional support, as well guidance for NDIS funding, service access and referrals. **Employment Pathways** are an outward facing division of genU matching Supported Employees with employment opportunities in the open labour market. Pathways Coordinators work with individuals to develop their employment plans based on personal interests, skills and goals.

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*The new WISE-Ability model describes how to create a supportive work environment and how to develop pathways out of this supportive environment into appropriate and safe forms of employment for people with a disability.*

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Figure 1

WISE model (for full model visit <https://socialenterprisewellbeing.com.au/index.php/dedesign-for-wellbeing/>)

A WISE-Ability model was developed by adapting the WISE model to the disability sector through analysis of each model element. The model combines data from both Business Enterprise and Employment Pathways. The relevance and purpose of each WISE element in supporting the needs of people with a disability was examined via interviews, a series of Action Learning workshops and Steering Committee meetings. All participants were asked to consider how model elements, like having different physical spaces to work in, would assist people with a disability to learn hard and soft skills and maintain a job in Open Employment. Participants were able to identify a range of employment barriers, supports and tools.

Data collection was conducted via interviews (27), Action Learning workshops (4) and Steering Committee meetings (5) with different groups of stakeholders between November 2021 and March 2022.

## BARRIERS TO OPEN EMPLOYMENT



The barriers to Open Employment include:

1. **Lack of 'Flexibility' in the NDIS Individual funding model** inhibiting the movement of Supported Employees between Supported Work environments (i.e. genU Business Enterprises) and Hybrid or Open Employment.
2. **A lack of employer knowledge** of Supported Employee experiences and an associated lack of confidence in recruiting, managing and supporting workers with a disability. Knowledge and confidence can be enhanced with resources like the Employer Toolkit (Appendix 4. See also Appendix 1).
3. **Reduced support** provided to people with a disability when they enter Open Employment.
4. Subtle **social stigma** experienced by Supported Employees in Open Employment (assumptions about reduced ability or capacity).
5. **Work environments that require specialised skills** in the use of equipment or the need to work in unusual circumstances (such as working with animals), particularly where these environments are not tailored to the individual.
6. Lack of preparation and **support for school-leavers** to develop an understanding of career pathways and how to pursue these.

## FACILITATING OPEN EMPLOYMENT



Facilitating Open Employment involves:

1. Investment of **time and Staffing resources** in understanding Supported Employees goals and equipping them with the skills and confidence required for different types of work.
2. Maintaining strong **support networks** for Supported Employees, and establishing and maintaining open communication with caregivers and family members.
3. **Preparing employers by communicating** to them the individual needs and support requirements of individual Supported Employees.
4. Supporting employers in building the right kind of **inclusive culture** for Supported Employees. Their willingness to embrace inclusivity is a powerful indication of their strength as an organisation.
5. Embracing purposeful **work customisation** including job carving, repeated tasks, and specific tasks for Supported Employees.
6. Maintaining **on-the-job supports** with Support Workers, teamwork, and the ability to approach a 'go-to' person. These supports need to be developed in reference to workplaces and NDIS funding approaches.



## PROJECT RESOURCES AND EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT


The project team engaged with employers to understand their needs and build useable **project resources** and **sustainable employment pathways**.

- Employers were included in the design of the **WISE-Ability model**. The full WISE-Ability model can be found at Appendix 1. The model captures social enterprise organisational design which supports the wellbeing and employment pathways of people with a disability. The model combines elements that support individuals with a disability (for example, wraparound support, learning opportunities, safe spaces, and elements that support WISE organisations), with elements that WISE require (for example, strong structure, good partnerships, stable funding).

**Figure 2 (right)** shows the WISE-Ability model:



**Figure 2**  
WISE-Ability model

- 
- The **WISE-Ability Training Guide** (Appendix 2) provides practical advice for organisations seeking to implement the WISE approach to help create a supportive work environment and employment pathways for people with a disability.
  - The **Employer Toolkit** (Appendix 4) offers accessible and practical guidance to employers, networks and individuals, via Factsheets and training resources.
    - The **Factsheets** provide information about how employers can address concerns about risk, accessibility and modifications of the workplace, funding support, wages and on the job support for employees.
    - **Employer training** aims to build employer confidence and raise awareness about how disability support can be embedded in organisational culture.
    - A **Case Study** (Appendix 5) was also created to help individuals/Supported Employees think about the support they might need to work in a Supportive or Open Employment environment, and the questions that they may ask about support. The Kassy Case Study captures commonly identified Supported Employee concerns/requirements for work and how these can be met.
    - After close collaborations with employers, **job shadowing** and **work experience places** have been established and these pathways will continue to be developed by *genU*.

The challenge in creating sustainable employment pathways is shaped by **employer confidence**, **employee confidence** and having the right **funding structure** to support pathways. Funding for Support, particularly in Open Employment, is a key barrier. Moving from intensive-support employment to Open Employment often results in funding changes, creating difficulties for employees who want to return to more supported forms of work after attempting Open Employment. In this way, 'flexible' funding can become a disincentive for those wishing to attempt Open Employment.

The transition into Open Employment is not usually a one-way path. The journey of many Supported Employees involves attempting Open Employment before returning to Supported Employment (i.e. Business Enterprises or other Social Enterprise settings), with the goal of attempting Open Employment again as their confidence grows and skills improve. For this reason, Hybrid Employment – some worktime spent in Open Employment while continuing with reduced work time in Business Enterprises – plays a vital role in carving out this pathway and developing Supported Employee skills and confidence. Trying and trying again should be embraced as a vital step towards Open Employment. This complex pathway, and the supports involved along the way, are managed by disability service providers as a routine element of supported employment, but this support often goes above-and-beyond staff roles and funding allowances. Further research is required to understand how funding policy and parameters can be better structured to meet the real-life needs of people with a disability carving out pathways to employment.





# >>> 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Employment rates for people with disability have remained stagnant in Australia despite the increased funding available. This is due, in part, to potential employers being ill-prepared to offer work environments that best support the assets and wellbeing of people with disability (Bigby & Fyffe, 2010; Gooding et al., 2017). Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) provide supports to many people with disability, providing settings for foundational skills development. However, there is a significant opportunity for ADEs to strengthen their organisational models to enhance the employment skills and Open Employment outcomes for this cohort (Clifford et al., 2014).

Many people with a disability in Australia transition from school to a Supported Work environment or ADE, where they remain for a long period of time (Davies & Beamish, 2009). ADEs are in a unique position to provide high quality training and supports to people with a disability as a transition step to employment in the mainstream labour market (Cocks & Harvey, 2008).

Researchers in Swinburne's Centre for Social Impact (CSI) have demonstrated that young people's health and wellbeing, education, employment and social participation is supported by Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE) (Barraket et al, 2020; Campbell et al., 2021). Many WISE have a social purpose to provide transitional pathways to meaningful work for at risk young people including people with disabilities. The characteristics of a Work Integration Social Enterprise are represented on a 'Wheel', containing 7 design elements that can be adapted to support employment outcomes in ADE settings.



Figure 1  
WISE model

In 2021, CSI and *genU* National Disability Services were funded by the Department of Social Services to adapt and implement the Work Integration Social Enterprise model<sup>1</sup> (**Figure 1**) in a *genU* Supported Work environment (an ADE setting). CSI have identified that the employment outcomes of ADEs could be improved by adapting the WISE model for the disability sector, and for implementation in ADEs.

*genU* operates across the Geelong region and works with local businesses to develop training opportunities, work experience and ongoing employment opportunities for people with a disability. *genU* has 30 years' experience assisting people with a disability nationally to find Open Employment through the delivery of Disability Employment Services (DES), Supported Employment (since 2000) and NDIS funded Employment Supports (since 2014).

The project included two branches of *genU*: Business Enterprises (ADE) and Employment Pathways (Capacity building supports to assist with employment). The research for this project took place at *genU Business Enterprises* (Head Office,

Geelong). *genU* Business Enterprises employ and support over 200 Supported Employees. The Business Enterprises team includes the General Manager, Managers for the 5 Business Enterprises, 4 Support Services Coordinators who travel between locations in Geelong and Colac, and additional staff members including supervisors and front desk receptionists. All staff members are pivotal to the successful functioning of Business Enterprises and for the Supported Employees who receive training, life skills coaching, welfare and behaviour support, mental health and emotional support, as well guidance for NDIS funding, service access and referrals.

**Employment Pathways** are an outward looking division of *genU* that assists NDIS participants to build their capacity for work across a range of activities and supports. This includes, matching Supported Employees with employment opportunities in the open labour market. Employment Pathways Coordinators work with individuals to develop an employment plan based on personal interests, skills and goals. They customise jobs, job carve and job match individuals to roles and employers.

<sup>1</sup>For the full WISE model visit <https://socialenterprisewellbeing.com.au/index.php/design-for-wellbeing/>



## 1.2 ADAPTING THE WISE MODEL

The project adapted the WISE model with *genU* Business Enterprises for use in the disability sector. Business Enterprises (Head Office and Eastern Hub) provided the context for developing and adapting the WISE model to meet the needs of people with a disability. While Business Enterprises is the focal point of the model, *genU* Employment Pathways played a vital role in the development of the outward facing WISE element **Pathways to Employment**. The model describes how to create a supportive WISE environment and develop pathways to external employment. Conceptually, the WISE model holds together two divisions of *genU*. It captures a forward-looking supportive environment where individuals are offered: (a) safe working conditions for substantial blocks of time; and (b) coaching towards external work environments, including Hybrid and Open Employment.

The model reflects the *genU* organisational structure at a moment in time when Business Enterprises and Employment Pathways are working more closely together to generate formal pathways to Hybrid and Open Employment for Business Enterprises clients. This involves supporting pathways into and out of Business Enterprises. The aim is for formal pathways

to begin in Business Enterprises guided by a structure, policy and process around the individual Supported Employee. This requires a formalised relationship and processes linking Business Enterprises and Employment Pathways to document the interests and skills of the Supported Employee, their professional development, their potential for matched or carved employment outside of *genU*, all via a pathway that is aligned to their NDIS supports.

### > APPROACH

The WISE model (**Figure 1**) was adapted to the disability sector through analysis of each model element. The relevance and purpose of each element in supporting the needs of people with a disability was examined via interview data, a series of Action Learning workshops, and Steering Committee meetings. Participants were asked to consider how elements, like having different physical **spaces** to work in, would assist people with a disability to learn hard and soft skills and maintain a job in Open Employment.

Participants were able to identify a range of supports and tools that would need to be in place to support Open Employment. Many of these elements are in place at *genU* Business Enterprises.

Action Learning workshops with *genU* Staff were used to verify information, identify how elements of the model work in detail, and which elements the organisation wished to develop further in practice. For instance, the Action Learning meeting about the element **Space** led to a discussion of how existing rooms and lunch areas could be renovated or maximised to create additional safe and quiet areas for Supported Employees. These ideas were then implemented at Business Enterprises.

The model was also adapted with the views of employers in mind. Steering Group members discussed the WISE model elements and identified key areas where more information was required for employers. This process led to the development of resources for employers, family members and potential employees (see Appendices 4 and 5).



# >>> 2. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

## 2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1 What are the barriers to Open Employment?
- 2 What Facilitates Open Employment?
- 3 How can the WISE model be adapted to support Open Employment pathways in a WISE/ADE contexts?

## 2.2 ACTION LEARNING APPROACH

Action Learning involves learning from experience through a process of observation, reflection, planning and acting. This research method allows knowledge and information to be shared between different individuals

and groups as part of the 'process of change' without things having to be 'fully worked out in advance' (Fricke, 2011: 256; see also Dick, 1997). As such, it is a suitable method for capturing and utilising dynamic organisational change and developments as vehicles for learning through reflection.

Action Learning issues were identified for key elements of the WISE model: *Structure, Space, Relationships, Culture, Finance and Funding and Industry*. Action Learning workshops were used to verify and reflect on interview data through planned meeting activities. Participants were able to identify and reflect on organisational challenges and how these could be addressed.





## 2.3 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was conducted via interviews, Action Learning and Steering Committee meetings. In total, 27 interviews, 4 Action Learning workshops, and 5 Steering Committee meetings were held with different groups of stakeholders over the period November 2021 – March 2022. This information is detailed below.



### 2.3.1 INTERVIEWS

Interview participants:

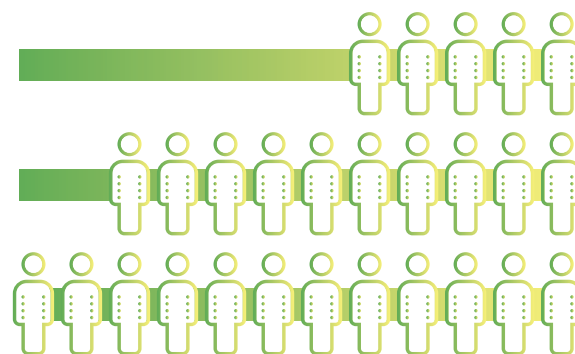
genU Staff	genU Supported Employees	Stakeholders
12	10	5
8 Business Enterprise Staff and 4 Employment Pathways and Training Staff;	age range 21 – 53	including: Current Employers; Potential Employers; Education/ Network Stakeholders
<b>Total</b>		<b>27</b>

The intent of the interviews was to understand the perspectives of staff and Supported Employees who were not part of the Steering Committee or Action Learning Group (ALG). We established the following inclusion criteria for interviews:

- Individuals who live in the Geelong region (aiming for a balance of men and women across organisations);
- Individuals who employ or have employed people with a disability via *genU*; and
- Individuals with whom *genU* have an emerging relationship and where employment pathways may develop.


Interviews were used to inform the development of the model, or 'what works', by identifying stories of success, challenges and barriers to employment and support services.

All interview participants were provided with a Plain Language Information and Consent form. All staff and Stakeholder interviews were conducted online via videoconference, and all but one Supported Employee interview were conducted in person at *genU* premises (for interview scripts please see Appendix 3).



### 2.3.2 ACTION LEARNING GROUP

The Action Learning Group engaged staff members who were closely involved in *genU* management and operations. Four Action Learning workshops were held, each addressing 2 elements of the WISE model. As part of the Action Learning methodology the aim of the workshops was to feed back on interview data to capture organisational challenges and best practice responses. Action Learning members were asked to reflect on the elements of the WISE model by considering scenarios in their own organisation. Prior



*On average 8 staff members participated in each workshop. The gender breakdown of workshop participants reveals a stronger participation by women; 5 were women and 3 were men.*



to each of the workshops, staff were provided with a 1 page document outlining 2 scenarios relating to WISE model elements (drawn from interview data themes). The purpose of the 1 page document was to encourage participants to think about their own practices, such as how they engage Supported Employees in hands-on learning or training, and how this fits into a work day. This Activity structure provided the basis for analysis of the WISE model elements and their suitability for the organisation.

On average 8 staff members participated in each workshop. The gender breakdown of workshop participants reveals a stronger participation by women; 5 were women and 3 were men.

The process followed for each workshop: staff were divided into 3 groups (2 groups attended in person, and one group via zoom). One participant read the scenario and questions out loud for the group and then groups broke off to write down their responses on marked-up butchers paper. Staff came together as one large group to discuss and compare responses. This process was repeated for the second scenario. Each group's responses to questions contained shared themes.

## 2.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

A thematic analysis of the Action Learning Group data and interviews was conducted. This involved identifying patterns and shared themes across data sets. Analysis was informed by the WISE model elements.

A selective and iterative coding approach was undertaken to identify key themes from interviews regarding employment barriers, facilitators, and how *genU* provide employment and support to people with a disability. An initial coding framework was developed using the original elements of the WISE model. An iterative approach was undertaken during the coding process identifying new insights and themes emerging from the interview data.

The WISE model was adapted by first identifying data matching with the organisational elements in the coding process. New WISE model categories and sub-categories were identified from coding interview data and then cross-checked with the Action Learning Group data and through discussions in Steering Committee meetings.

# >> 3. FINDINGS



## 3.1 WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO OPEN EMPLOYMENT?

### NDIS FUNDING AND THE DISABILITY SUPPORT PENSION

➤ ***Movement back and forth between Supported and Open Employment can be inhibited by NDIS funding.*** While recent NDIS policy changes have made Individual NDIS funding more flexible this can still be a significant barrier for those wanting to move between supported and Open Employment. Flexible funding can encourage Supported Employees to trial and test work in Open Employment. However, those who decide to use their NDIS funding for Open Employment are at risk of having their funding packages adjusted or reduced upon assessment. Many people with a disability oscillate between higher and lower levels of functionality and support needs, sometimes on a day-to-day basis. After attempting Open Employment some Supported Employees wish to return to environments with more support. As such, Supported Employees often need varying levels of support and NDIS funding at different times.

➤ ***NDIS plans*** require considerable amounts of detail. Often there is a significant reliance on supported employees, their nominees, and their supports to provide detail regarding their support needs for their NDIS plans. Without this detail individual supports may not be seen as reasonable and necessary, and funding may not be granted. This process can create stress for participants, workers, support staff and carers.

➤ ***Variation in Planner interpretations*** of individual needs creates ambiguities in the funding people with a disability receive. It was reported that some participants plans will provide individuals funding to access an ADE and an Employment Service (i.e. both Business Enterprises and Employment Pathways), but other participants have not been able to access both despite similar needs and goals.

“ One 19-year-old participant with School Leaver Employment Supports had his funding ceased after a plan review because he had a supported employment position one day a week. This was very stressful for him and his family because he still needed a lot of support to build capacity to be independent in a workplace, and he still had a goal to move to open employment. Eventually he received funding for a further 6 months after some lobbying, but this still is not enough time for him to build enough independence to find an open employment role. (genU Staff 11)

➤ ***Changes to NDIS plans:*** Reviewing or changing NDIS plans is **laborious** and **time-consuming**. Any delays can inhibit training and employment prospects:

“ We’ve had people on the waiting list that have been appropriate. They’ve got employment supports in their plan. They’ve got employment goals in their plan, they’ve got everything. Everything ticks the box. But they haven’t got the allocated funding in their plan as a line item.

They go back to the planner or to the LAC, and it can sit there for six months until they get a plan review. And so that’s a real barrier to people being able to start and get some real meaningful employment outcomes. (genU Staff 10)

The impact of planning delays is explained by a Supported Employee:

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“I got a job trial out at Douro Street and was offered a place in that, but I had to sort out my NDIS funding for it, and then that was start of November last year. Of course, I would have had to have a plan review and being so close to Christmas they sort of went, “We won’t do it until next year.” (Supported Employee 3)

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- **Reduced payments:** Disability Support Pension (DSP) recipients reported concerns about losing their allowance and entitlements if they increased their employment hours too much. Participants were worried that they might struggle to sustain the longer work hours and eventually be left in a precarious financial position without adequate support.

## EMPLOYER KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE

- When hiring people with a disability, employers face a number of challenges. Some employers believe they lack the required **knowledge** to adequately support people with a disability and, as a result, feel *uncertain* when recruiting workers who require support. **Knowledge and confidence barriers** faced by employers vary depending on the pre-existing experience and awareness the employer has of the disability sector.

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“I think ... for us as a business ... we have to acknowledge that our Warehouse workers ... are basic trained warehouse staff. They are not trained in dealing with any challenges [outside of the Warehouse]. (Stakeholder 5)

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“Easily, the biggest challenge is the employer understanding the disability or mental illness, and how it affects them in different situations within the community and the workplace. (genU Staff 3)

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- Employers and staff report a **lack of resources to guide employers**. For instance, employers are unsure of what steps should be taken if a Supported Employee faces mental health challenges at work:

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“The biggest downfall is employers not having a toolkit ready, and that toolkit can simply mean “people to call out to”. It’s not just “a book”. It can be a phone number, it can be anything ... It can be a website. It can be just information tools. A personalised toolkit. You can have parts of it generic, but a personalised toolkit to help the employer support the person in their workplace. (genU Staff 3)

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- All employers thought **advice and pointers for all staff** in the external organisation would help improve know-how and confidence. Employers can be supported via in-house workshops or through an Employer Toolkit. (Based on this feedback an Employer Toolkit was developed by the project team, see Appendix 4).
- Employers were unsure of their **exposure to risk and liability** in employing a Supported Employee. This was a particular concern for employers who had limited experience and knowledge of the support and intensive partnership that genU offers. For instance, genU work provide information about each individual’s needs, how they can be addressed and financially supported in the workplace (i.e. by drawing on Individual NDIS support). If a Supported Employee requires additional break time during the day this level of planning and paperwork will be developed by the employer and genU Employment Pathways together. By planning and developing employment pathways in conjunction with the employer, genU can help develop approaches for offering Supported Employees additional breaks, emotional support, and physical assistance, and link this support to funding if appropriate.



## SUPPORT ON THE JOB

- Many genU Staff were **concerned about the support** that would be offered to Supported Employees when they entered Open Employment, particularly when they experienced 'bad days' (i.e. experiences of depression and anxiety). In Open Employment there is far less on-the-job support, creating uncertainty for workers. *Do Supported Employees know when to take breaks? Do they have access to food and water? Will their needs be met and their rights upheld? Who can they speak to if they are not well or comfortable?* (genU Staff 2). *How do employers balance the requirements of the role whilst not placing unreasonable expectations on Supported Employees?* (genU Staff 3).
- **Negative employment experiences** can significantly impact the wellbeing of Supported Employees who strive for success in Open Employment. Transitions into Open Employment must account for the time needed to adjust, and not require a sudden leap into challenging work. Areas of Open Employment that require additional support include:

“Time management. Dealing with difficult other employees or customers. Being punctual. Being consistent in the work they do. Good hygiene. Having a work/life balance and not relying on others to assist. Expectations. Obligations. Working to a deadline, or working to a budget.” (genU Staff 4)

- **Ongoing support in the workplace is required.** Supports need to be embedded in the external employment organisation because when the funding for a Supported Employee runs out there is a risk that employment opportunities and support will end.  
  
Individuals moving into Open Employment can receive support from a DES, however this support is often not intensive enough for moderate to high need individuals.

“... there is a lot of conversation about holistic supports and all of the extra things that they [DES] could be doing ... but the way that DES are often modelled limits the amount of support they can provide each jobseeker. Our supported employees moving into Open Employment and their new employer often require intensive supports, and within the workplace, particularly at the start. This is often outside of the scope of what a DES provider can assist with.” (genU Staff 12)

## SOCIAL STIGMA

- There is a widely held **perception** that people with a disability have **limited capacity** and will not be able to perform work tasks. Social stigma impacts the types of employment opportunities offered to people with a disability:

“If I went into Open Employment, I might say the wrong thing to someone not meaning to say that ... or I take offence when they get angry at me and it'd make it impossible for me to work, like if they bully me or whatever. Make it hard for me to do, get my job done, like harassment and stuff like that. I worry about Open Employment because you can't always get along with everybody.  
... [if] I was in Open Employment I feel like I'd be on my own a little bit with a situation like that. Like, I could talk to my boss, but most bosses would say, "Don't worry, mate, get on with your job," or something like that.” (Supported Employee 10)

## WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT AND LOCATION

- It is important to create a **culture of support** and understanding in workplaces. Managers that invest in training programs, promote inclusive practices, and seek to offer meaningful support will see the most benefits from hiring Supported Employees. This will help create a culture where a worker's strengths are valued.
- **Transport and travel:** Public transport options may not be available for particular locations and this should be factored into employment plans.
- **Some industries are more suitable than others:** Support and training is important in industries that involve specialist equipment, chemicals or objects that pose a safety risk. Tasks may be modified to suit the needs of Supported Employees, for example, complex tasks may be broken into smaller tasks or instructions provided via pictures rather than text alone.

## PREPARATION FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYEES

- **Preparing school-leavers with a disability for meaningful employment:** Some Supported Employees believed that more information should be made available about pathways to work, especially for school-leavers. Most Supported Employees found out about *genU* through their family and social networks. Some had family members who strongly encouraged them to contact *genU* or apply for a *genU* job. It is beneficial for schools to be informed/connected to services that support students in employment after leaving school.
- There is not enough **on the job training** for a long enough period of time (i.e. 2 weeks learning the cash register is needed). Two Supported Employees recalled negative experiences being on the job without adequate training using a cash register:

“I thought I was selling the products but I was on cashier, which is not my strength, with money. And I was only working there for two weeks. They'd showed me one time how to use the till, but because I have memory loss I work by being shown things a couple of times. They walked in front of me and did it themselves, didn't explain what they were doing or anything ... they didn't give me a chance, so I was only working there for two weeks ...

I wasn't really comfortable with that and I was always calling and asking, “How do I do this, how do I do that?” (Supported Employee 1)



Preparation  
for Employees

Informed,  
involved  
networks

Preparation  
for Employers

Inclusive  
work culture

Customised  
& tailored work

Support on  
the job

## 3.2 WHAT FACILITATES OPEN EMPLOYMENT?

### PREPARATION FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYEES

- Preparation involves **time spent developing skills** for a job, especially for entering Open Employment. Preparation may include targeted training, an appropriate support plan, development of hard and soft skills over time (i.e. social confidence), personal wellbeing support, and preparation efforts seeking to match the right people to the right role:

As one *genU* support staff member explains:

“For a lot of the guys that do go into Open Employment, they are between Open Employment and us ... And so was the girl I was talking about with the anxiety. She was at that level where she's probably at the top of our guys, but not quite at the level to go into Open Employment. Which must be super frustrating for them, because they're probably at a level where the job's now easy for them and they don't have much challenge with us, but it's such a big step between us and Open Employment that it is super overwhelming and scary for them. (*genU Staff 4*)

“It's more just ensuring they've got the right skill set to the place they're going to or want to work at. It's making sure they've got all the skills needed, that if someone wants to work in a warehouse ... do they have the safety awareness of working in a warehouse. There's pallet jacks, there's heavy items, there are forklifts, there are trucks being loaded and unloaded. You know, being able to read and write. Because being in a warehouse, you've got to do pick and pack, and it's making sure they're skillset ready. (*genU Staff 9*)

## INFORMED, INVOLVED NETWORKS

- It is important to keep support networks (i.e. family, carers, and services) and Supported Employees informed with information sessions (i.e. 'Family Forums'), sending letters with pay slips to advise of any changes to pay rates and if they will impact upon individual plans. This allows individuals to discuss and understand changes.

## PREPARATION FOR EMPLOYERS

- **Employers need to be supported** in order to provide for Supported Employees. This means communicating to the employer individual needs, and explaining the support resources available. The referring agency (i.e. genU) needs to help employers understand the impact of disabilities on individuals in an employment setting so that they can build awareness and recommend the right resources.
- Employers should be supported in creating **productive and inclusive workplaces** that allow Supported Employees to experience a safe and friendly environment for learning new skills. Individual NDIS packages can include funding for a Support Worker to assist in this process, and service providers like genU can also provide this support. One employer told us:

“That would make a world of difference. I think that would be a real game changer to the point we'd go, “Yeah we would definitely employ someone if they had someone that could help out, could supervise, could make sure that they were safe. (Stakeholder 4)

## INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

- **An inclusive workplace culture is essential.** This inclusivity must filter from the top to every facet of the organisation:

“For any employer that wants to employ a person with a disability, they've got to be on board in regards to a cultural perspective. Absolutely has to be critical that they want to make a difference and be a positive influence on this person's life and have empathy. (genU Staff 4)

“

Success really does rely on the other staff and the culture of the organisation or company and that's why sometimes those smaller companies are really good, because it might be like an owner operator, which is less likely to sort of turn over. Or we need – if it's a bigger company – it really needs to be embedded into the culture that they're supporting people with a disability in their workplace. It can't just be the philosophy of that one manager. (genU Staff 12)

- **Strong policy and procedure for communication (embedded communication strategies):** Regular scheduled breaks can allow micro-meetings to occur (i.e. at morning tea or lunch). These allow people to discuss their work or progress and any challenges they are facing, or assistance they may require. These conversations may involve multiple people in an organisation as work roles might impact multiple work areas.



## CUSTOMISED AND TAILORED WORK

- **Customising** involves understanding and identifying how individuals work best. This involves, first, identifying the job, or parts of a job, that the individual is interested in doing and, second, putting in place strategies for mastering and using the equipment, tools, or work setting that the job requires:

“ I think it's a step-by-step process of having someone understand where they want to go, how they might do it, and the confidence to be able to take those steps without being burnt along the way, I think is important. (Stakeholder 1)

“

I think finding what they like to do and what interests them is a key because if they're interested in something, they will know it very well and they understand it and they can deal with it. (Stakeholder 4)

- Many Supported Employees enjoy variety but require **support to adapt** to new tasks or jobs. One Stakeholder describes a work around to avoid last minute changes in tasks:

“ ... in terms of when she got moved around, it really unsettled her. So, I think just to have that knowledge, if we tell our Warehouse lead, “Don't move this person around,” she won't get moved around. (Stakeholder 5)

- Customising work with individual interests and strengths boosts **confidence, wellbeing** and **skills**. Customised employment might also be understood in a variety of industry contexts as *job carving, repeated tasks, and standardised sectioned-off tasks*. Customising has the potential to improve productivity and output. Customising must also be accompanied by meaningful and purposeful engagement with organisational goals. Understanding, for instance,

how the smaller task contributes to the whole or other goals of the organisation/business can improve confidence, motivation and wellbeing:

“ If you've got an employer that's taking on one person and giving them a role within their organisation, they can actually be specific and very tailored around what that person needs. And so then, they just need to have the tools and the toolbox ... and they've got to be willing to invest in that to set up the environment. (genU Staff 1)

- Employers need to show **empathy**, attempt to **understand the individual** that they are supporting, and commit the time required to support workers with a disability. When they do, employers will discover the incredible contribution Supported Employees make to an organisation's performance and culture, ‘and the insight to life that they can bring to your organisation’. (genU Staff 1)

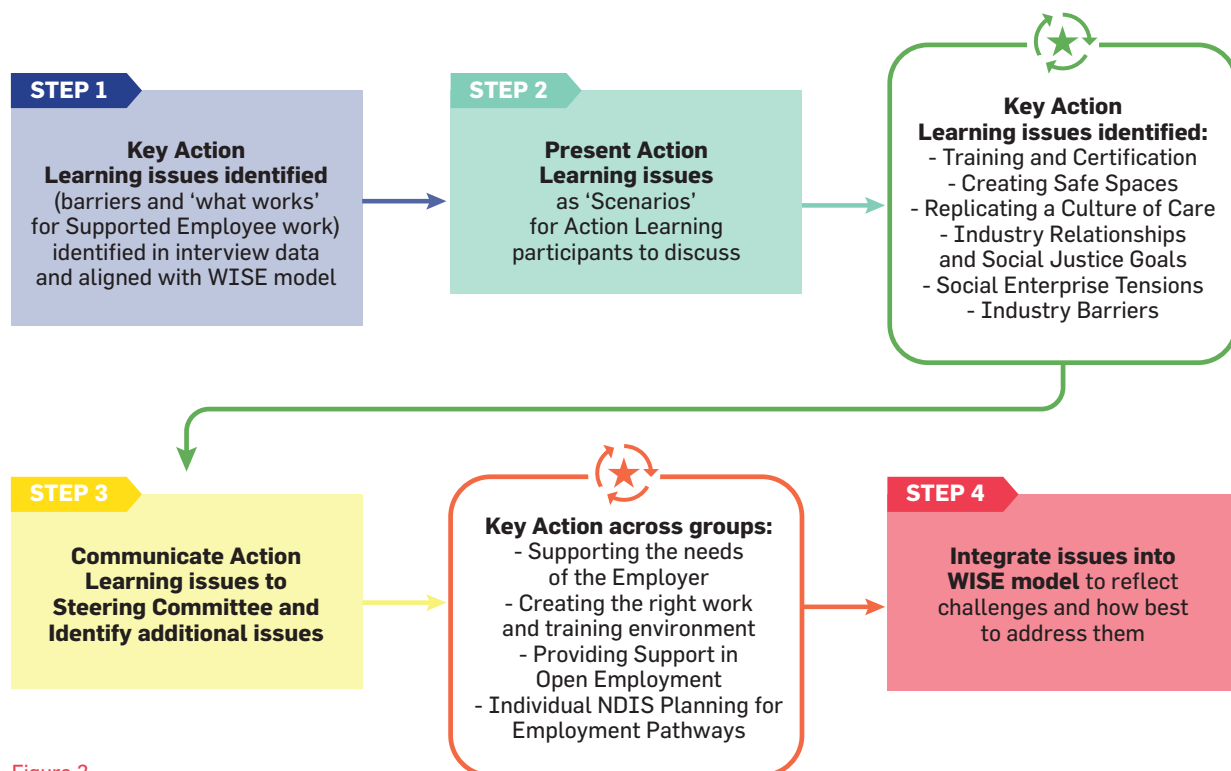
## SUPPORT ON-THE-JOB

- On-the-job support is vital for success. Supported Employees have the best chance to thrive when they work with friendly and helpful staff, engage in teamwork, are assisted on-the-job by Support Workers, are provided resources and tools that help with understanding and remembering their role, have flexibility (time allowances), have a “go-to” person to ask questions, and access to easy-English versions of written communication. Working with team players is particularly important, as one Supported Employee says:

“ When you got people that are not team players, mistakes happen, and it's just not a good environment at all. So you know, being a team player it actually helps it be comfortable as a person, but it also makes it more efficient. You get the job done better, and you also get the job done safer. (Supported Employee 2)

### 3.3 ACTION LEARNING EVALUATION OF THE WISE MODEL

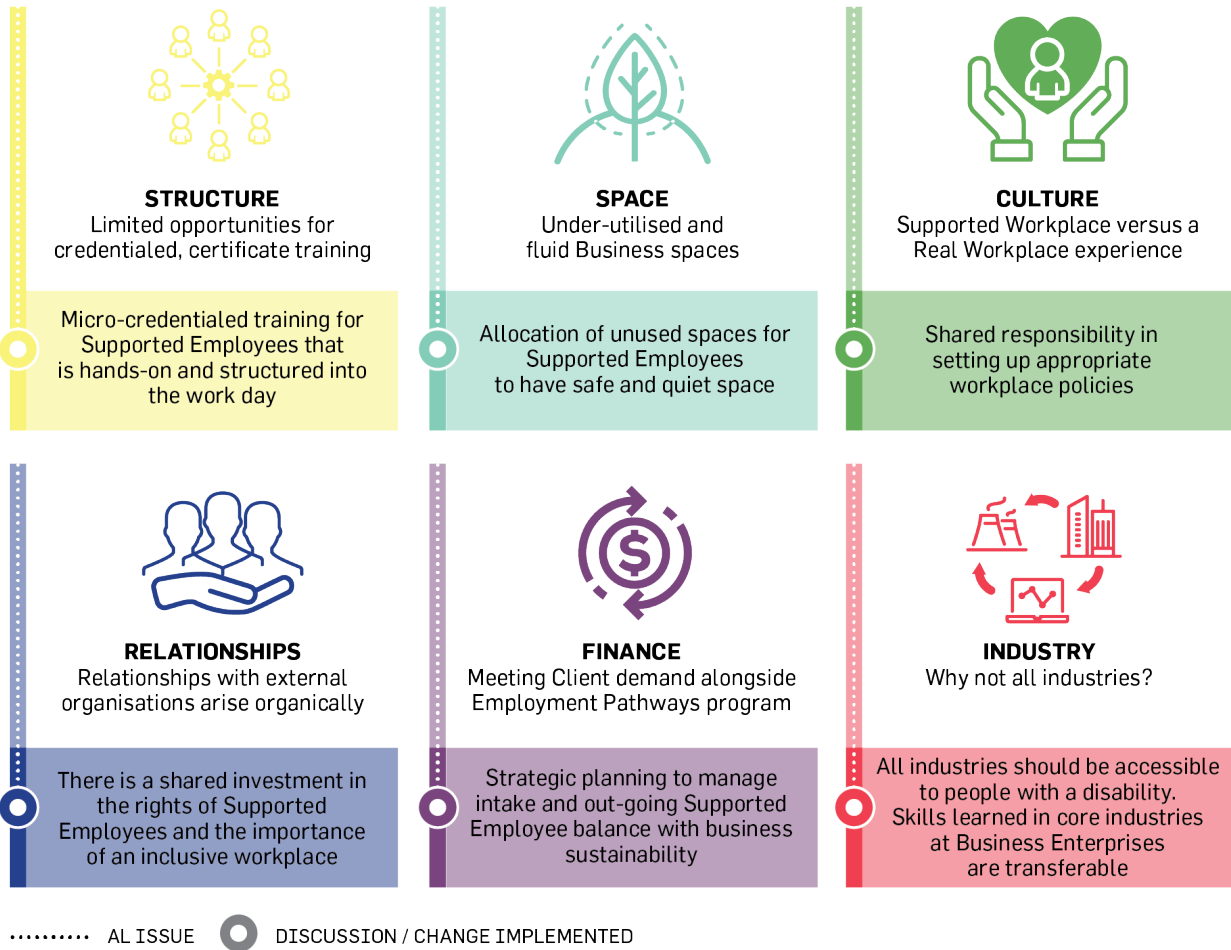
Action Learning (AL) evaluation of the WISE model was carried out by communicating interview and meeting data with the Action Learning and Steering Committee group. The Action Learning Evaluation (*Figure 3*) shows the flow of information, key areas of concerns for project participants, and the link to model development.



**Figure 3**  
Action Learning Evaluation Overview

### 3.3.1 KEY CHALLENGES

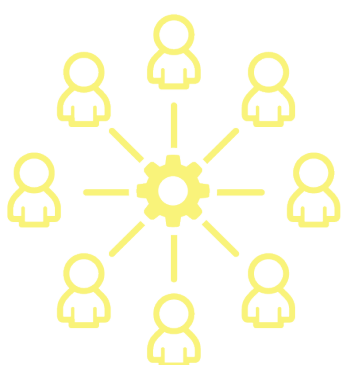
Action Learning workshops were the central mode for in-depth sharing of information and discussing challenges related to adapting the model to disability social enterprises and supporting pathways to employment. Key challenges in adapting the model and the how these can be addressed in the disability sector are captured in the Action Learning Group Key Challenges **Figure 4**, below.



**Figure 4**  
Action Learning Group Key Challenges



Each challenge is presented below, including the AL group discussion and 'solution'.



## STRUCTURE (TRAINING)

**AL Issues:** Certified training opportunities within a WISE are impacted by staff resources, time and accessible training and learning options for people with diverse disabilities.

“... we talked about giving the Supported Employees specific barista training, and that person from [Support] team is there to work and do that. Right now, it's a real challenge for them to get time to do that, because the caseload is just so huge in regards to the model that we've got at the moment. (genU Staff 1)

**ALG discussion:** Hands-on learning/training is effective, it requires modifications and a Job Instruction sheet. If certified training were to be offered it would need to be accessible and modified. Both staff and Supported Employees are often busy with assigned work tasks which makes scheduling training difficult.

**Change implemented:** Supported Employee work activities and learning needs to be resourced with staff, linked to micro-credentials and facilitated by structured group training times during the work day. Business Enterprises are pursuing staff resources and micro-credential/micro-badge options with genU Training. However, there may be NDIS funding limitations for individual certified training in an ADE setting (see Section 4.1.3). genU Training courses could be modified for accessibility. These courses are important for employment pathways because the course directly connects the individual to the employer. The employer is invited to the training to provide guidance and pinpoint the skills that are necessary. In this sense individuals are training not only for specific jobs, but for specific workplaces.

“We're agile in that respect, too, that if we're doing a WHS unit, we can use the policies and procedures of the recruiting company as the way of delivering the training and then the assessment. So they've got that knowledge before they walk in on day one, of the manual handling policy for [business]. And also reduce training costs for the employer, because they don't have to necessarily go on to then do the same training the week of their first day. (genU Staff 2)





## SPACE

**AL Issues:** Some areas have multiple uses and are high traffic, while other areas are under utilised.

**ALG discussion:** Business Enterprises spaces must be kept fluid so they can be adapted to suit different jobs (however, constant adaption/modification takes time/resources).

**Change implemented:** Allocation of unused spaces for Supported Employees to have private space/conversations with Support Workers, and quiet safe space.



## CULTURE

**AL Issues:** Achieving the right balance of a supportive workplace versus a 'real workplace' experience for Supported Employees.

**ALG discussion:** Staff carefully prepare Supported Employees for the world of work by sharing in responsibility and setting up appropriate workplace policies. Staff ensure that there is awareness of expectations and workplace norms.



*If you've been told you can't do this and you can't do that... Well ... you can! We just have to find a different way ... Our team goes above and beyond.*  
(ALG member)



## RELATIONSHIPS

**AL Issue:** Relationships with external organisations arise organically, the criteria that makes these relationships work differs depending on the client/stakeholder.

**ALG discussion:** There is a shared investment in the rights of Supported Employees and the importance of an inclusive workplace. *genU* Staff build strong, mutually beneficial relationships with clients and employers over time to provide them with a range of business solutions. Employers who have Supported Employees onsite must have inclusive policies, make reasonable adjustments, and be aware of the support networks available to them and to their employees.



## FINANCE

**AL Issue:** Social Enterprise tension between finance and social mission: balancing client demand, growing/scaling, and, at the same time transitioning skilled Supported Employees into Hybrid/Open Employment. Supported Employees receive over 2 years of training each in hard and soft skills.

“It’s more the staffing side so we can staff up to make sure we can still get the job done on time, but still giving the opportunities for Supported Employees to do it. So for instance, for the cafes, we might run with three front of house staff and a crew<sup>2</sup> member, whereas if we weren’t in a supported environment we’ll probably just run with two front of house staff. (genU Staff 5)

“If we’re going to have a successful business like that, as that bridge, then we need a constant flow of people coming in so we can get them into Open Employment as well. (genU Staff 6)

**ALG discussion:** Changes to intake and out-going Supported Employee balance requires strategic planning for business sustainability and appropriate job matches for Supported Employees. Business Enterprises is working towards being self-sustainable, relying on revenue from businesses rather than funding.

**Change implemented:** Business Enterprises and Employment Pathways are working together<sup>3</sup> on a pathways plan for Supported Employees and integration of a non-supported model (i.e. employing people who do not have a disability) for parallel growth. This means that people without a disability will also be able to work at Business Enterprises:

“... we’re going to have Supported Employees disappearing in one end, but we haven’t got the intake at the other end. So I’m working on parallel growth. I mean, non-supported model. That way, we can still support the business through a non-supported model whilst we’ve got our growth. (genU Staff 9)

This will enable Business Enterprises to continue growing and building revenue, and at the same time accommodate a larger number of Supported Employees with the aim of increasing numbers from 200 to 250.



## INDUSTRY

**AL Issues:** The more choice for Supported Employees the better, but not all industries in Open Employment provide inclusive work environments.

**ALG discussion:** All industries should be accessible to people with a disability. Skills learned in core industries at Business Enterprises are transferable (i.e. reception, customer service and soft skills, transport logistics), however other hands-on learning options could include IT and coding, tourism, and animal welfare.

<sup>2</sup>Supported Employees are often referred to as ‘Crew’ or ‘Crew members’ at genU Business Enterprises.

### 3.4 EVALUATION: WISE SURVEY RESULTS

*Alongside the Action Learning approach, an Inclusive Workplace Survey was also used to assess what design elements of the WISE model are in place at Business Enterprises. Staff at Business Enterprises were asked to complete the survey. Results from the Survey indicate the presence of WISE model elements in place in the organisation.*

- ✓ All of the staff surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that Business Enterprises had ***tailored, customized*** activities that supported each participant.
- ✓ All staff agreed or strongly agreed that Business Enterprises provided a range of ***spaces*** to people with diverse access requirements.
- ✓ 71% of staff agreed that Business Enterprises connects people to ***formal and informal training*** and employment networks that support ***employment pathways*** and develop social capital. 29% either disagreed or were neutral in their response.
- ✓ 86% of staff agreed that Business Enterprises provides access to workplaces that ***enhance wellbeing*** whilst meeting ***industry standards***.
- ✓ 86% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that Business Enterprises managed ***funding requirements*** to cater for individual needs.
- ✓ All staff agreed or strongly agreed that Business Enterprises had a ***culture*** of challenging social stigma, and all staff agreed or strongly agreed that Business Enterprises supported the mental health and wellbeing of participants through inclusive practices.
- ✓ 71% agreed that Business Enterprises was ***universally accessible***.
- ✓ 86% agreed or strongly agreed that Business Enterprises fostered ***positive and supportive*** workplace attitudes.

<sup>3</sup> This work includes charting and mapping relationships, processes and workflow between genU Pathways and Training to streamline transitions to Open Employment. As part of the pathways plan for Supported Employees a job shadowing experience was developed for Supported Employees in May 2022 to create opportunities for work in different environments. The process involved top level steps: Identifying and matching participants, introducing them to identified employers, running disability awareness sessions with employers, identifying individual needs (support staff to attend, clothing or equipment required), evaluating the placement experience from the perspectives of Supported Employees, support workers and employers.

# >> 4. WISE-ABILITY: THE ADAPTED WISE MODEL

The WISE-Ability model captures social enterprise organisational design which supports the wellbeing and employment pathways of people with a disability. The model combines elements that support individuals with a disability (for example, wraparound support, learning opportunities, safe spaces, and elements that support WISE organisations), with elements that WISE require (for example, strong structure, good partnerships, stable funding). **Figure 2** (right) shows the WISE-Ability model:

All categories of the original WISE model are relevant to the disability sector. The adapted model identifies one new category 'Pathways to Hybrid and Open Employment'. There is an additional level of information that was not included in the original WISE model under all sub-categories.

This section provides information about how the WISE model operates in a disability employment context.

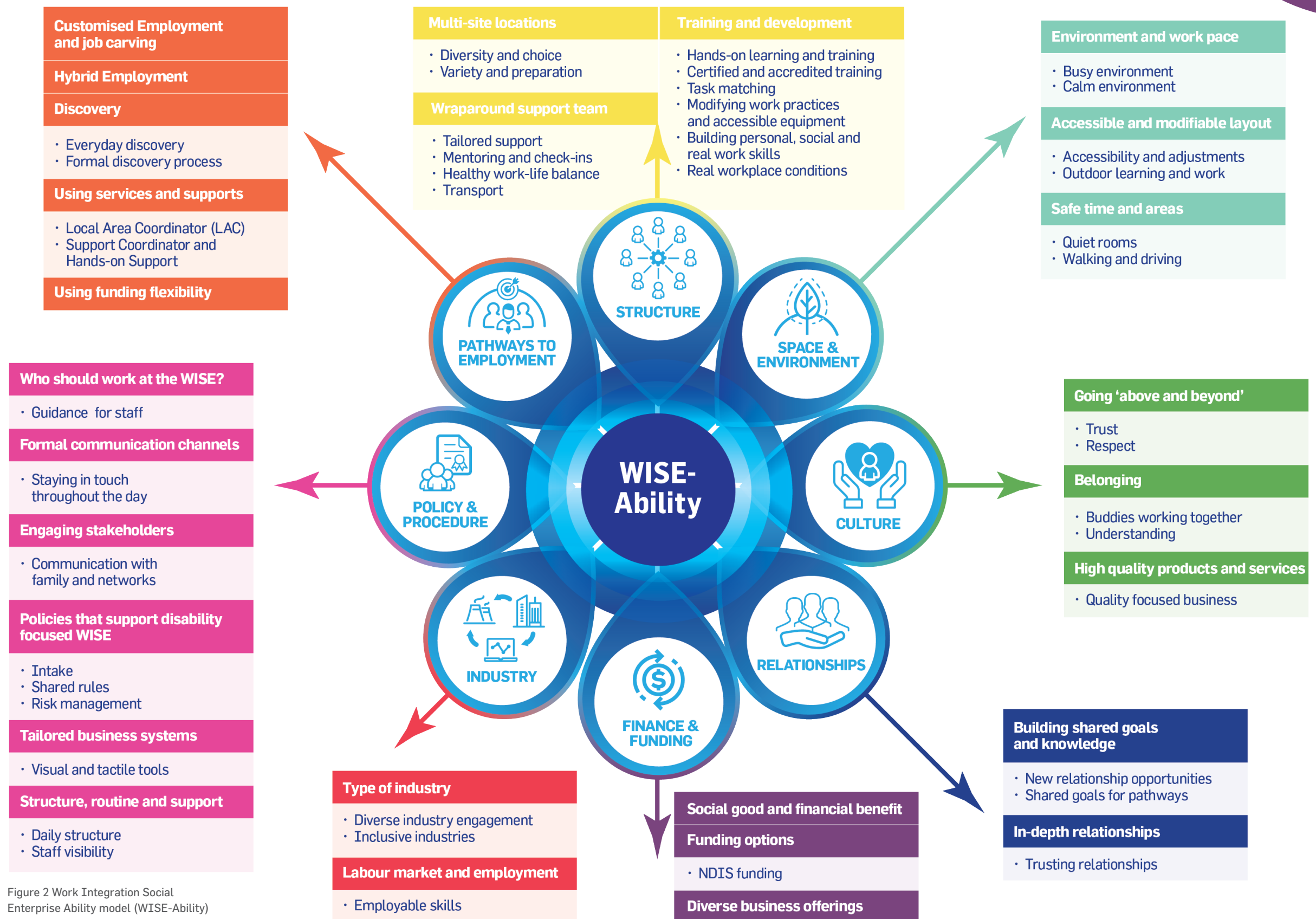
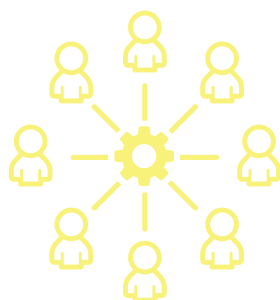


Figure 2 Work Integration Social Enterprise Ability model (WISE-Ability)





#### Multi-site locations

- Diversity and choice
- Variety and preparation

#### Wraparound support team

- Tailored support
- Mentoring and check-ins
- Healthy work-life balance
- Transport

#### Training and development

- Hands-on learning and training
- Certified and accredited training
- Task matching
- Modifying work practices and accessible equipment
- Building personal, social and real work skills
- Real workplace conditions

## 4.1 STRUCTURE

### 4.1.1 MULTI-SITE LOCATIONS

#### DIVERSITY AND CHOICE

“genU has a lot of different areas and you can jump across to different areas, which is really good. (Supported Employee 1)

genU offer different ‘sites’ or spaces for Supported Employees to work in and learn a range of skills. Supported Employees can find out what they are interested in by trialing different jobs in different industries. Business Enterprises Head Office is located at the Douro St site, as are four (of the five) **Business Enterprises**. Hospitality, Business Solutions, Warehousing, and Landcare. The Nursery is located at genU’s South Geelong location, and a second Hospitality business enterprise is located at the Eastern Hub.

Each of the Business Enterprises have diversified their operations. For instance, the Hospitality Business Enterprise in Geelong oversees a number of operations<sup>4</sup>. The Landscaping WISE offers on-site and off-site work enabling Supported Employees to work as groups with the support of genU Staff members and Support Workers. Supported Employees also work off site (often in groups) at genU partner organisations, including Viva and Alcoa.

Having different work choices enables Supported Employees to explore their interests and develop new skills. Staff report that offering different choices for work supports engagement and productivity:

“We take people for tours and we don’t say, “This is the only place.” We always say, “What’s your choice? Where would you like to work?” Because there’s no point putting someone somewhere where they don’t want to work. I mean that’s a huge barrier. (genU Staff 3)

<sup>4</sup> Café (at Eastern Hub), Viva canteen (located at Shell Refinery), Café (at Douro Street), Café (at Support Hub head office), Catering department (at Douro Street), Food processing area (at Douro Street) which does slice, dice, peel, and prepares vegetables for restaurants, cafes, hospitals.



Offering off-site work for groups of Supported Employees (accompanied by support staff) provides even greater choice and variety by expanding location and work environment. Supported Employees enjoy this diversity, and recognise versatility as a skill. Supported Employees also like to specialise in particular areas. One participant explains:

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“The variety is probably right up there. But also being front of house, that’s my main role. And the reason why I like front of house is because you’re dealing with the customers, and you feel like you’re actually helping customers, like you’re doing a service. And the customers are great. They’re polite, they’ll have a joke with you – yeah, they’re just really good, and very respectful. (Supported Employee 2)

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The meaning and purpose of carrying out varied work tasks should be explained to individuals to help them understand the employment pathway and trajectory towards their goals.

### VARIETY AND PREPARATION

Variety of work, balanced with appropriate lead-in time, allows individuals to prepare for change. Change may include different types of work, working with new people and working with new equipment in different environments. Constant changes between jobs can increase anxiety levels as one staff member explains:

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“Our Supported Employees would look at the board and see where they’re at the next day, where they’re working. I would have people not turn up to work. I would have people not sleep during the night because they were going to be on a job they didn’t like ... So, we tried not to do that in front of them until we’re certain. (genU Staff 6)

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To address this issue, staff meet with Supported Employees to understand their work preferences, requirements and discuss any potential changes. For example:

“So, we have to explain to [Name] that, “We know you like sealing, you’re good at it. We love you doing it. But we want someone else to have a go because one day you’re going to be on annual leave and you’re going to be sick and someone else needs to know how to do it. (genU Staff 6)

Supported Employees appreciate having time to get comfortable doing new tasks and working in new environments and are rotated through different types of work to enhance their skill development and to support Business Enterprise workflow and productivity.

## 4.1.2 WRAPAROUND SUPPORT TEAM

### TAILORED SUPPORT

“Tailoring employment to the individuals is the gold standard. (genU Staff 11)

Tailored support means matching supports, environment and equipment to individual requirements. A deep understanding of individual Supported Employees means that Staff are able to meet the needs and challenges that may arise during training and the workday<sup>5</sup>. The Support Team help with specific needs such as bespoke communication tools at work for people with Autism:

“We’re going to assist you to develop the tool [i.e. pictures, photos, objects, videos], so you can implement it, whatever it might be. (genU Staff 1)

Many WISEs run programs for 10 to 20 people with training staff, support workers, and management (approximately 6 staff in total). The Business Enterprise team provides assistance to over 200 Supported Employees. Staff also find themselves providing help and advice on issues outside the workplace, but are not strictly funded to provide this ‘above and beyond’ level of support.

Tailored support can range from help with understanding new NDIS guidelines<sup>6</sup>, aligning work settings with work preferences (location and work mate/team), to providing specific forms of support if an employee becomes upset.

The Support Team have parameters and strategies for creating the right environment within Business Enterprises, these include:

<sup>5</sup> Business Enterprise Staff are respectful of individual privacy and do not encourage individuals to disclose personal information unless they feel comfortable doing so.

**Behavioural Support Plans** are submitted for each new Supported Employee commencing at Business Enterprises to ensure supports provided are tailored to the individual's needs. Special care is taken by the team who meet to review Behavioural Plans and update them as Supported Employees progress.

**Equipping Supported Employees** with the tools to monitor their own wellbeing and participation in the workplace, including strategies for self de-escalation.

**Reporting incidents** and setting parameters for appropriate workplace behaviours:

“ If anyone has done the wrong thing, we'll go over the disciplinary actions with them and go through some tasks and guide them through and sit in meetings with them. (genu Staff 3).

**Dispute resolution procedure:** this includes removing the person from the situation, making sure they are safe, talking to them about the issue/experience, and perhaps changing the situation by walking outdoors/outside. Techniques:

“ walk with someone, just make sure you're both not looking at each other and you just walk along. (genu Staff 3)

“ You get to know their personalities, their traits and when they come into work you can tell okay, you're not quite right today. You'll say, "Oh, giddy [Supported Employee], how are you going? What's happening?" You can tell from their demeanour that something has happened. So, you start doing a little bit of digging. You can find out a piece of the puzzle and Support Services might have another piece of the puzzle and we can put something together where we go, "Okay, we can give them the support they need while at work." (genu Staff 6)

Business Enterprises and Employment Pathways both take an 'open wheel' approach to supporting complex needs and concerns within and outside work that require continuous checking-in with the individual and their support network.

“ It's about problem shooting and seeing what's involved in their life, not just their workspace. (genU Staff 11)

<sup>6</sup>For instance, as one genU Staff member describes this process: 'First of all, with the new disability standards – we talk about the standard, what that means and what it impacts on you and what it is. We might have something about accessing your supports outside of community. If someone's struggling or they're renting and having trouble with certain things, we can help them and guide them into what they can do outside work and if they've got outside supports, we can then ask them to talk to those people.' (genU Staff 7)



## MENTORING AND CHECKING-IN

Often Supported Employees will need extra assistance with supporting their feelings and emotions at work. All staff, including Managers and Trainers, provide some form of support to participants. Mentoring and support techniques can be learnt on the job by staff and via in-house training. Staff roles involve:

- answering questions/ providing information about professional and personal matters
- ensuring workers take breaks and have access to food and water
- guidance for use of phones in workplace and appropriate behaviour
- support in the use of new equipment
- support for work in different environments: on-site at Business Enterprises or when groups work off-site for catering or landscaping jobs
- providing tailored training: communication should be taken into consideration for people who are non-verbal.

Staff emphasise the importance of talking with Supported Employees, 'checking-in', and, if in doubt, asking if everything is okay. It is important to acknowledge the experiences of Supported Employees and validate their experiences. Being able to discuss the challenges of the job as they arise is pivotal, as one Supported Employee explains:

“... I talk to the supervisor. I've had incidents and I just tell [Name] and she just said, “Don't worry about him.” And she worked it out and I was working with someone else, because I said that I'm not very happy. And she said, “No, you don't have to. Put you somewhere else ... You need to work as a team and people have got to feel safe.” (Supported Employee 7)

Staff strongly endorsed the 'talking it out' method (in a private room, on a walk etc) to provide individuals with a chance to voice issues they are concerned about and process how they are feeling. This is part of creating an understanding and safe work environment which might otherwise feel overwhelming:

“... if something is going on, and they're a little bit reluctant to want to talk about it, but you've just got that feeling that somethings wrong, I think it's better to try to at least give them the opportunity in a different setting to express that. Even if they've got things going on, which is absolutely fine if this person did need to go home, but I think that it's just if you do have the time to be able to do that for them, it's a better outcome for them. Because they might not really want to go home, they just felt overwhelmed and needed somebody there for them. Things like that make a huge difference.” (genU Staff 8)

## HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Supported Employees participate in a range of activities outside of work, for instance, social and group-based activities which help individuals gain confidence. The Support Team match workload commitments with external programs, duties and leisure networks. Staff seek to maintain a healthy balance and Supported Employees are not encouraged to overload their schedules:

“So I don't know how they do it sometimes, really. They'll do a day's work here, then they'll go out ... They'll go bowling with a group of a night time and they'll do leisure networks. They're just so busy, they have majorly better social lives than any of us! (genU Staff 3)



In this context it is important to be aware that Supported Employees need time to review their work schedule with their support network before they commit to additional workdays or hours. Work hours should reflect the preferences of the Supported Employee, particularly if there is a health consideration:

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“ I chose how many days I would like to do... if you've got back problems or something that you're finding it hard to do a full day, some people can do a half day.  
(Supported Employee 9)

---

Staff are aware of external factors that influence work attendance, including, but not limited to:

- **Lack of outside support:** coming to work alone can be difficult, absenteeism or being late can be an indication of more complex issues and it's important to tease this information out in order to provide support.

- **Living conditions:** poor living conditions affect sleep, wellbeing, experiences of safety and security, and mental health. Having a strong support structure at genU helps, and staff can recommend additional external support services, and mindfulness tools for mental health support:

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“ ... if someone comes in late every day, there could be other issues. We try and look at everything. It could be an issue where they've run out of NDIS funding, and they're walking to work ... Everything can lead into something else, and that's what I tell my team. We always try and think, especially changing behaviours, what's going on? (genU Staff 3)

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## TRANSPORT

Support staff provide assistance for individuals to travel to work safely whether by public transport, car or taxi. This may involve funding for travel (i.e. taxis) or *marking out a safe, direct route* to work. The ability to get to work and home is also important and may involve funding for a taxi or *marking out a safe route*. Staff ensure that Supported Employees are adequately funded for travel in their individual NDIS plans.

## 4.1.3 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

### HANDS-ON LEARNING AND TRAINING

“My skills have improved since I first started to now and with remembering a bit more ... To this day, I'm still learning. (Supported Employee 6)”

Hands-on learning involves learning how to do a job or task through practice and with support of a co-worker or staff member. Management and Supervision Staff work ‘on the floor’ with Supported Employees and go through the jobs/tasks teaching hands-on skills and professional development skills. Assistance from the Support Team is requested as needed<sup>7</sup>.

One Supported Employee working in the kitchen describes learning about fresh produce by collecting fruit and herbs from the on-site garden:

“I've learnt about different herbs in the garden, and there's a parsley that looks like a parsley but you need to taste it and you need to smell it before you pick it, because it does look like parsley but it's not ... I love the garden. (Supported Employee 1)”

**Warehouse and Landcare skills** are learnt during work hours, such as learning to use machinery. As one Supported Employee explained:

“I've definitely learned all the machinery. Learned how to drive a little – we call it a buggy but it's an old ride-on lawnmower ... we use for just pulling the trailer around ... I get on the big ride-on as well ... I'm always keen on learning more tools and machinery. (Supported Employee 8)”

Staff explained that this was a way of providing a ‘skill set’ that would be transferable

“to an external warehouse, they knew for instance what the word “pick and pack” meant. (genU Staff 9)”

Hands on-learning and training requires Staff and Supervisors to plan in advance and structure a Supported Employees' workday. Business Enterprise staff use a ‘skills matrix’ which shows the skills of Supported Employees and match these up with work tasks or opportunities for skills development:

“So we had the crew, they're on one side and then all the skills that we wanted along the top for people to be able to do, and then work out how many people we needed trained in each one of those skills to be able to cover the day. So if we had potatoes being peeled, we knew we would have to have six people trained in that, do we have six people on the roster? And then from that came actually training crew and up-skilling crew in different tasks, and my favourite part about the entire process was afterwards, we employed a new staff member and they came in to help one day, to help prepare more potatoes and it needed setting up, and the crew member put his hand up and said, “Well, I can show them how to do that, I've been trained in that and I can train someone else to do that.”

And just that whole process of, “All right, you've now taken ownership and you understand it, and you can train a staff member to that.” (genU Staff 5)

It is important to have Supervision Staff in place to tailor training and hands-on learning to individual needs:

“It might be a recipe, or it could be – anything. It could be learning how to mow the lawn. I don't know if everyone knows how to do that job with a ride on mower. Things like that. So just making sure that for every group of however many people are allocated to the area, that there is actually a supervisor there to run through any issues that they come across within their day. (genU Staff 4)”

<sup>7</sup> A Staff member explains that attempts are made to continually provide one-to-one training: ‘And do that one-on-one, even just teaching them their job. If it were hospitality, it would be if someone is struggling to cut something the right way but it's a bit busy and there's no time to sit down with that person and say, “Okay, let's go through it. Let's go through it repeatedly,” until they pick up on that.’ (genU Staff 8).





“

*... He's a great supervisor; he's basically taught me everything about the job, what areas are what and how to do it properly, which I guess would vary from supervisor to supervisor probably. He's taught me in a way that I understand, and I appreciate, and I agree with as well. (Supported Employee 8)*

Gaining skills over time in a supportive environment enables a gradual progression towards more independent work. As one Supported Employee explained, this also builds confidence:

“

*... one of the chefs went away for a few weeks, and it was like, well, here's a laminated printout of all the foods you need to make in a week, and you've just got to tick all of them off at some point during the week. Now it's like me just going to the café and the storeroom and going, all right, we're low on this slice, we're out of this slice, this cake needs to be done, and writing that list myself and getting through it. (Supported Employee 3)*



## CERTIFIED AND ACCREDITED TRAINING

Supported Employees are offered formal targeted training matched to the area they are working in. A small number of Supported Employees interviewed had completed a Certificate II in Hospitality and Certificate I in Work Education with the support of *genU* Training. Offering accessible certified training more broadly across Business Enterprises has been impacted by accessible certified courses and time/scheduling, individual funding barriers, and staff resources (Section 3.3)<sup>8</sup>. Business enterprises are working towards micro-credentialing to provide Supported Employees with formal credentials for hands-on learning and training.

Short courses are offered to groups of Supported Employees by training staff and include:

- **Hospitality Enterprise:** Supported Employees are provided with essential Occupational Health and Safety and food safety training, including knife handling:

“ I’d say, probably 95% of hospitality [Supported Employees] have done that. Also, made a resource to do safe knife handling, which I’d say probably about 65% of the guys have done that. (*genU Staff 4*) ”



- **Landcare Enterprise** provide first aid training for encountering wildlife, especially snakes (including what to do if you get bitten). They also provide training in packaging and forklift operation.
- **Warehouse Enterprise** train people in document destruction and confidentiality. In the Warehouse not everyone requires training, whereas in hospitality everyone requires occupational health and safety training.

Training and assessment at Business Enterprises often can include a range of approaches: watching a video, demonstrating a task, and being deemed competent or incompetent. Pre-planning before training sessions is particularly important to ensure adequate time and funding is available. The Support Team and Staff members take into consideration the abilities and learning needs of each individual:

“Does the person understand? Do I need to offer a different examples and ways of explaining/ delivering? Should I include images and printed tools? I did some printed things and laminated them and used them as kind of props in some of the hospitality training so that they would understand what I was trying to get across. We also use YouTube videos and apps. Everybody's different and it just depends on the situation.”  
(genU Staff 4)

## TASK MATCHING

When matching Supported Employees with work, staff consider individual interests, strengths, and challenges and how these can be aligned with work tasks and industry. Support needs (for instance, physical and mental health needs) are taken into consideration alongside employee interests. Challenges may work to the individual's advantage in the right setting. For instance, some tasks require a focus on details which suits particular Supported Employees. For individuals who find social environments challenging, work in less interactive settings is a better match (i.e. Business

Solutions, Laundry, or Nursery). Individuals with back injuries are matched with jobs that do not involve lifting heavy objects (i.e. Food preparation or Warehouse).

This type of matching enables individuals to participate in a work environment on their own terms and can be a stepping stone to other kinds of work. This sets Supported Employees up for success:

“She could do the hairdressing and makeup, but she had a lot of barriers around her interactions, communication skills and managing that side of things due to her autism. So she practised in some of our groups to begin with and learn some skills.”  
(genU Staff 10)

Recognising Supported Employees' skills and providing opportunities for them to utilise these skills can lead to independent work. One staff member recalls:

“I said to her one day, I said, “Do you know how to use the computer that good?” She said, “Oh, I like to think so.” I said to her, “I want you to jump on this computer. Can you to type this up exactly how you see it, as best you can.” ... She did it in 10 minutes, exactly the same. So, then I knew she could use Word [Microsoft program], she could format

... we got her then through a computer course with about three or four others who showed the same capability. We got them trained up on reception, so now I've got five Supported Employees who can jump on reception. Now those same employees will now jump on a computer each morning ... and organise the couriers and I really have nothing to do with that job apart from making sure I've got enough stock.” (genU Staff 6)

<sup>8</sup> Training barriers: 'It's the supports that guy's need ... He did the course for two days, and he quit. When I spoke to him I said, “Why did you quit?” He goes, “It was just too much.” He goes, “My anxiety levels went through the roof because there was all this theory stuff.” He's a practical person, he needs to visually see it and actually do it. Sitting there reading all this stuff and charts and all that, the Cert IV in Disability is tailored for people like you and me to do it. If we're going down the path of people doing certificates here for warehousing, there needs to be a department or somebody to give the guys the supports while they're here. Now that might be genU Training, or it might be someone that's based here.' (genU Staff 6)

## MODIFYING WORK PRACTICES AND ACCESSIBLE EQUIPMENT

Many areas of Business Enterprises have been modified for accessible training and work. Work tasks are modified by the on-site support team on a daily basis. Accessible equipment is purchased and provided for Supported Employees. For example:

- **Hospitality Business Enterprise:** a chopping board with spikes on top and suction cups on the bottom can assist someone to prepare food without having to hold the board or food in place; for individuals with vision impairment, talking scales that identify a shortfall or excess in the weighed amount; colour coding is also used to modify measuring tasks:

“ So just understanding them to say, “All right, with a recipe, it might say one cup,” but then you do a picture of the red cup that is a cup, so they know – so that again it’s visual, so they know the red one is one cup, the green one is half a cup, so when we do measurements we buy those measuring tools and have it next to the weights. (genU Staff 5)

- **Café:** One Supported Employee describes how his manager has modified the workplace with simple cost-effective additions of coloured stickers on the cash register:

“ She’s put sheets out for me to know the basic stuff to read which is a café sandwich, or a basic sandwich or a wrap that comes to the till. With the coffees, there’s buttons to press, she’s put a sticker on the buttons for small and large ... And it does make it more enjoyable, and more of a happier workplace. But it also makes it an efficient workplace as well. (Supported Employee 2)

- **Reception Desk:** when training individuals in the use of front desk work such as answering phones, training staff will identify the tools people are familiar with already. Training staff are able to identify and adapt tools to the work environment (i.e. an iPad equipped with a Voice



Over Aid Application). Rather than memorise or use phone numbers, vision impaired individuals are able to work with the tools and technology they are familiar with to support their productivity. This example reinforces how knowledge about individuals facilitates tailored supports, and also how training meets hands on learning and work.

- **Warehouse:** Coding is used for individuals with literacy challenges. Warehousing equipment includes a forklift, but training can be modified and tailored for Supported Employees to use a walking forklift or ‘Walkie’. This requires Warehouse spatial adjustments and planning to link the Walkie training to an accreditation:

“ With a walking forklift you don’t have to have a licence, so that means Supported Employees who don’t even drive or can’t get a licence at all, can use the walkie if they’re trained up. So, it’s engaging with genU Training to, I guess, liaise with our Supported Employees as to who would like to do a Cert III or Cert IV in warehousing. Then they can do that while at work ... So, they’re getting the job done, but they’re getting some accreditation for what they’re learning.

... if they want to go into Open Employment, they’ve got something that will help them one, get the job, but also give them the skills to be successful in Open Employment. (genU Staff 6)





## BUILDING PERSONAL SKILLS, SOCIAL SKILLS AND REAL-WORLD SKILLS

genU Staff assist Supported Employees to learn soft and hard skills valued in work environments. A staff member describes the journey of one Supported Employee from being 'shy and timid' to working in Open Employment. This journey involved training in different areas of Business Enterprises over a number of years to develop social skills, work skills, self-confidence and, finally, working with reduced supports.

“She would work two days a week and her job was just to put paper onto the conveyor belt. That was it. I would go over there to say, “Hi,” and she wouldn't make eye contact at all. Very shy and very timid. I could tell that she was more capable than what the job they had her doing. So, I started rotating.

She started doing some jobs there, got to know people more. Because in [Business Enterprise area] the machine's going all day, so they don't get to, I guess, engage with their other employees. So, she had no friends really. But being down in [Warehouse] where she's in a team environment she got to make friends. She got confident ... She'll come in here and tell me what to do

... She's gone to Open Employment ... for three months and she came back and she's got some other skills now. Now she's gone into Open Employment again for another few months.  
(genU Staff 6)

Supported Employee skill sets are strengthened via Open Employment experience opportunities, mentoring, hands on learning, and a module called 'I have confidence in me'. This module assists Supported Employees who are preparing for Open Employment if they are feeling hesitant or anxious. One staff member describes how this preparation can help:

“... She really wants to go to Open Employment, but she has really bad anxiety, so that can come on super quickly. She can't prepare for that because something can just set her off instantly. So, for her, it's really hard. We've advised her to go and do some courses. She's just done a course called I have confidence in me with genU. So it gives her a bit more confidence within herself, and maybe how to deal with some of her anxiety, and some of her triggers. (genU Staff 4)



## REAL WORKPLACE CONDITIONS AND WORK PREPARATION

Supported Employees are empowered and prepared for Open Employment via real workplace conditions at Business Enterprises. For instance, having autonomy at work coupled with support, job sharing with teammates, and being encouraged to apply for leave when they need it. This combination of employment, training and support is especially helpful for individuals leaving school:

“ I did a few courses instead and as much as I enjoyed them, it wasn't getting me the experience that I wanted to actually get a job. That's when I started looking for a course to do with gardening or land care that would lead me into that industry that I'd be interested in doing. *(Supported Employee 8)* ”

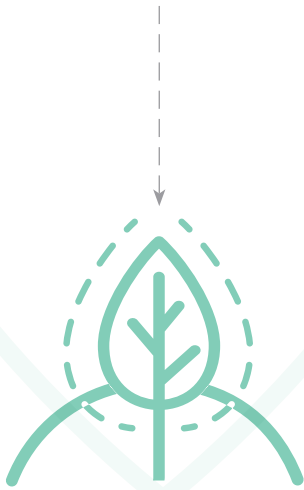
Supported Employees are offered work in divisions of Business Enterprises that simulate a real work environment, including activities around work schedules, opportunities for promotion, and staff meetings (**Figure 5**):

 <p>ROSTERS</p>	<p>Supported Employees consult a roster to confirm which area they will be working in. This is available upon entering Business Enterprises. Some sections use a large digital screen which they can update as needed.</p>
 <p>PROMOTION</p>	<p>Individuals may progress from food preparation, which is a highly structured, task oriented environment, to training/coaching other Supported Employees in tasks in food preparation, then finally to the on-site cafe which is less structure due to the interaction with customers and addressing each customer's order. This progression gradually increases skills and responsibilities while at the same time offering support that can be less hands-on depending on individual preferences.</p>
 <p>STAFF MEETINGS</p>	<p>Supported Employees are included in decision making processes and management meetings, participate in Work, Health and Safety training, and everyday work participation is aligned with organisational policy practices.</p>
 <p>TOOLBOX MEETINGS</p>	<p>Toolbox meetings are a way of including Supported Employees in decision making, encouraging individuals to prepare for their workday or work off-site, assist in understanding any changes that might happen at work, or changes to NDIS funding and other supports.</p> <p>“ ... we have a meeting once a month, all the Supported Employees are there, we rotate it around. So, for example, October we had our crew meeting on Wednesday, November's will be on Thursday, December's will be on a Friday, that way every Supported Employee gets an opportunity to go to a crew meeting and voice things. So, we have an agenda. We speak about safety. We talk about maintenance. We talk about upcoming jobs. We talk about where we sit financially. But I do tailor to the audience. (genU Staff 6)</p> <p>“ I always talk about the toolbox. I say to the guys, "Have we got our toolbox?" And they go, "What do you mean your toolbox?" Well, we're going to do a job. It's not about your hammers and spanners. It's about knowing everything we need to do that job, and it should be sitting right in our toolbox beside us. (genU Staff 9)</p>

**Figure 5**  
Real workplace conditions and work preparation



## 4.2 SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT



### Environment and work pace

- Busy environment
- Calm environment

### Accessible and modifiable layout

- Accessibility and adjustments
- Outdoor learning and work

### Safe time and areas

- Quiet rooms
- Walking and driving



### 4.2.1 WORK PACE: BUSY VERSUS CALM ENVIRONMENTS

Supported Employees identified that working in busy environments can be a challenge, particularly if there is limited support. The fast-paced Open Employment café and food service environment can be overwhelming, however with the right support in place Supported Employees are able to work as part of a team:

“I’ve been offered a day in the café and I’ve gone, “no ...”, I guess because people come in and they’re like, “I need this, this and this,” it can be quite full on [busy], I find.

Even when I’m in the café, I’ll let the other ladies do the till and the orders, and I’ll go, “right, they’ve ordered a croissant, they’ve ordered a toastie, I’ll put those on”. (Supported Employee 3)





Business Enterprises offer a variety of work environments ranging from busy to calm. While the cafés are busier, the laundry is a quieter. Calmer environments allow for a controlled pace and social interactions. Supported Employees are able to request quiet workspaces:

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“And you just go to the supervisor, “Can I just have some time out?” And they understand, “Okay, all right”. Then they’ll put you somewhere, just quietly on your own and you’ll just need some chill out time. Because sometimes you just want to work on your own.” (Supported Employee 4)

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The Warehouse also offers controlled social interaction and is relatively slow paced, as one staff member reports: ‘even when we shrink-wrap pallets, we do it by hand.’ (genU Staff 9). Supported Employees also work off-site (in supported groups) in a warehouse with fast paced, fully automated equipment and reported having a positive and often exciting experience.

## 4.2.2 ACCESSIBLE AND MODIFIABLE LAYOUT

### ACCESSIBILITY AND ADJUSTMENTS

Spatial design can also affect how WISEs meet social goals. A flexible layout means that work areas can be changed to meet individual needs. For instance, utilising an air-conditioned office on a hot day instead of working in an unconditioned environment is essential for some Supported Employees. As one Stakeholder describes, production can sometimes be mobile:

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“Just move production into the office, so she’s comfortable ... So, let’s move her into the office, and let’s move the production area, basically, temporarily there so that she feels comfortable.” (Stakeholder 5)

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Multiple use areas or a layout that can be modified (i.e. moveable tables, chairs, machinery) also means that WISEs are agile and can meet the needs of new/ different contracted jobs.

These spaces can be made more accessible by, for instance, clearly labelling rooms, keeping walkways clear of objects, providing directions to nearby/ in-house food and coffee spots, and monitoring the number of people using spaces at one time. If there are large groups working, for example, then breaks and lunches can be structured, catered, and staggered for access to break rooms and food.

WISEs can test the layout of workplace and other spaces by seeking feedback from Supported Employees. Supported Employees may require ‘Reasonable Adjustments’ to be made to their work environment, which are often cost effective and simple like the availability of laminated instruction cards attached to machinery and equipment.

“just making sure that they’re comfortable with where the lockers are, and where the lunchroom is, where you can sit, so they can have that relaxed downtime and not have, “Oh, I really want a coffee, I don’t know where the coffee shop is” ... a lot of that will weigh on their minds if they’ve not walked around or no one’s pointing it out to them. (genU Staff 5)

## OUTDOOR LEARNING AND WORK

The nursery with vegetable gardens is stimulating and enables hands-on learning and work in open air environments:

“I like working here because we’ve got the option of working inside or working outside ... it’s good working here on hot and cold days, because we’ve got the air con and then, if it’s a hot or cold day, we can turn it to either ... it’s hard to work in a hot day outside. (Supported Employee 6)

## 4.2.4 SAFE SPACES

### QUIET ROOMS

Having available/free rooms as designated areas that facilitate rest, quiet time and privacy for Support Worker meetings and personal conversations. A designated room for Supported Employees also creates a sense of ownership, belonging and empowerment. Supported Employees discuss the importance of having quiet spaces:

“When I’m on lunch break, I just put my headphones on, watch my laptop and just veg out. You probably need to just have that time where you’re just doing that. (Supported Employee 5)

“It’s also a nice place to go and relax. Whoever wants coffee and milo can make themselves that. (Supported Employee 6)

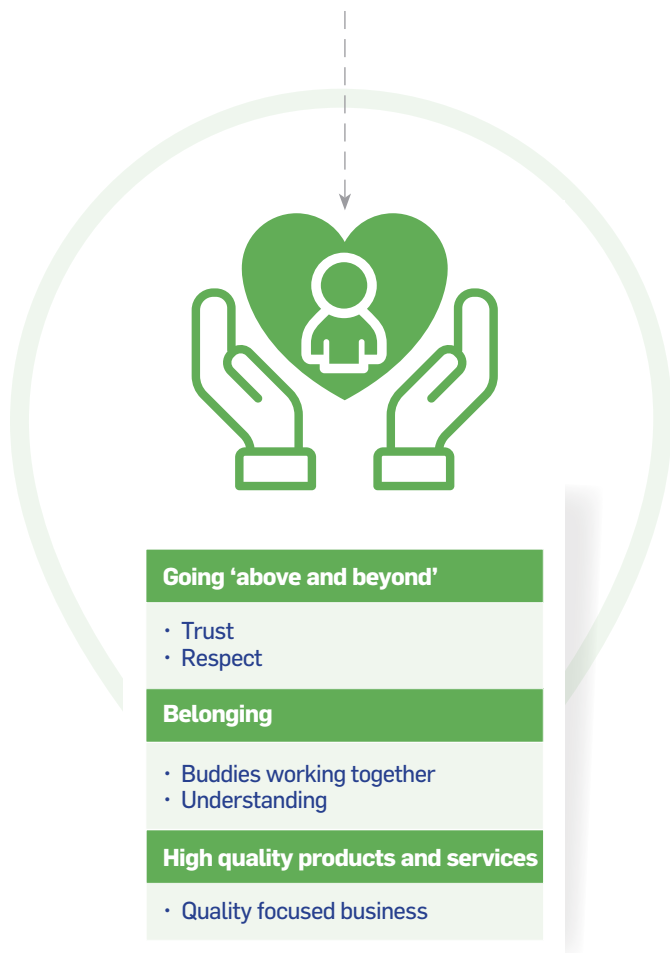
### WALKING AND DRIVING

A sense of safety and relaxation may also be generated by physical movement. Walking and/or talking with someone may help to lower stress. Alternatively, being in the car can be a space of safety for some.





## 4.3 CULTURE



### 4.3.1 'ABOVE AND BEYOND'

“They may not have support coordination. They may not have some core supports in their plan ... There's a gap. And our team do fill that. They assist with doctors' appointments. They've been assisting people with vaccination appointments and getting prepared for that ... So, there's things that we do over and above ... Our core purpose about having a positive impact on people's lives is very much ingrained. (genU Staff 1)

### TRUST

Creating trusting relationships breaks down barriers to participation and ensures Supported Employees feel comfortable and safe when taking on new tasks. Staff create a culture of care and trust by being understanding in everyday work situations. For example, small forms of care make a big difference, as one Supported Employee explains:

“When I have a migraine, they just put me in the office and give me a banana if I have a low [blood sugar] – because I have diabetes ... and just say, “Get up when you feel like getting up. Just take your time.” And they're really good. Because I get lows. (Supported Employee 7)

This level of support raises Supported Employee expectations for Open Employment working conditions:

“Well, they've [Business Enterprises] got that good culture where they understand that everyone has different needs and other workplaces, they need to learn that. They've got to get on board with that I reckon. (Supported Employee 9)

### RESPECT

Supported Employees report feeling respected in their roles: *'they're excellent here ... You're not looked at or judged like you have a disability here'* (Supported Employee 2). Staff ensure that Supported Employees are valued, their accomplishments acknowledged, and their voices heard in the workplace. This generates a sense of empowerment and mutual respect.

Staff and stakeholders believe that Supported Employees play a vital role in creating a happy and productive workplace culture:

“people come in here as a chef, and then they work around people with a disability. And they just fall in love with it. (genU Staff 2)





#### 4.3.2 BELONGING

##### BUDDIES AND WORKING TOGETHER SIDE BY SIDE

On their first day at Business Enterprises, Supported Employees are matched with a Buddy from the Support Team. The Buddy helps with orientation and settling in, for example, protocols for arriving at work and leaving work (genU Staff 8)

As Supported Employees settle into Business Enterprises, staff describe working 'side by side' and consider Supported Employees part of the staff team:

“Staff and crew are working side by side ... yes, we support them and everything, but we're becoming more like an Open Employment style business because we're getting more staff and they're working side by side, rather than, “Let me train you and here's a job and I'll just supervise and watch.” (genU Staff 5)

The 'Buddy system' was discussed by Stakeholders and Employers who believed it would be useful in

“

*Every disability is different and some people handle their disability differently ... and you've got that help there. (Supported Employee 9).*

Open Employment contexts. Buddy training would be required to upskill staff in other organisations to be buddies, and funding would also be required for Buddies in Open Employment.

##### UNDERSTANDING

A range of understandings are core to the culture essential in a WISE-Ability model:

- **Difference:** Understanding that everyone is different and that difference and acceptance go hand-in-hand is an important part of Business Enterprise Culture.
- **Calm culture:** Support Team note that an understanding attitude is important to mediate and control potentially reactive environments.

- **Everybody makes mistakes:** learning from mistakes on an everyday basis generates new skills.
- **Positivity:** Staff report that providing encouragement helps support a positive workplace culture.

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*I think that if crew feel safe and they've got that positivity around them, positive staff to encourage them where they need to be. I think*

**“***just having those kinds of things in place, it is better for their mental health. And obviously, if their mental health is on track, then they're going to be better at what they're doing... “Okay, I feel emotionally good at work, I feel mentally good at work, I feel supported at work. I feel safe at work,” all those kinds of things reflect in the work that they do physically. (genU Staff 8)*

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### 4.3.3 HIGH QUALITY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

#### QUALITY FOCUSED BUSINESSES

Business Enterprise Staff and Supported Employees are invested in producing high quality products and services as a business. Business Enterprises do not consider themselves as offering a program for employment. They are an inclusive business striving for both quality of product and workplace conditions. One staff member discusses meeting client needs:

**“***“So can you do hampers? Can you bring us a small, medium, and large?” And we actually went one further. We took about eight different-sized boxes, and then we took four big boxes of just all different products. And we said, “How about we build a hamper that suits you with all our products?” (genU Staff 9)*

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#### Building shared goals and knowledge

- New relationship opportunities
- Shared goals for pathways

#### In-depth relationships

- Trusting relationships

## 4.4 RELATIONSHIPS

### 4.4.1 BUILDING SHARED GOALS AND KNOWLEDGE

#### NEW RELATIONSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

genU Staff report that relationship development with clients, partners and employers is crucial to build shared goals and knowledge, break down barriers around social stigma, and facilitate the transition of Supported Employees to Open Employment. Relationships are developed over time and require sensitivity to both employer needs and the Supported Employee's needs for an inclusive work environment.

Business and employment pathway opportunities may arise from contacting other businesses to discuss how a WISE can fulfil their unique needs as well as its own.

“I reached out to them, and before you know it, we've got a job painting ... it's just getting the conversation started, but where does it end? There is really no endpoint. (genU Staff 9)”

A WISE that offers trials (i.e. in Landscaping) also enables all partners to work on the right match/fit between work tasks, individuals and organisations:

“We'll do a little trial day, whether it's two hours, three hours, four hours, we'll bring our Supported Employees to you. We'll trial the work, which means our guys can feel it, touch it, see if it meets our scope of work, and then from there we can present quotes. We're actually giving you a better price because we actually know what we're quoting for. (genU Staff 9)”

Alternatively, staff can approach clients and employers with strategies for engaging Supported Employees for particular tasks off-site. This is the next step (towards Open Employment) in an employment pathway for Supported Employees:

“... if we're going into an employer, we don't want to be ambiguous ... So, if I was going to go into a factory, I would've already thought about what tasks would happen in this factory ... you just be very specific about some ideas of things that our participants could do to generate those conversations in the beginning. (genU Staff 10)”





The process of building new relationships can also raise awareness about Supported Employees' skill sets and breakdown preconceived ideas about disability and capability. One staff member describes opening up business possibilities by describing the skill set of Supported Employees:

“

*They [client] said "So what? Someone with disability can jump on a ride-on mower?"... I said, "Well, they can actually - they can chop trees, they can use brush cutters, they can use petrol hedgers," and they're going, "Well, can they just start coming to mow our lawn at the front of one of our prisons?" Absolutely. (genU Staff 9)*

## SHARED GOALS FOR PATHWAYS

To build strong relationships for employment pathways it is important to share goals with partners regarding social mission, employment parameters and career pathways. Once the employment goals and interests of the Supported Employee and Employer are established there are key areas that the Employer and WISE should discuss to ensure a smooth transition to Open Employment. These include:

- agreed upon start and finish times, and break times
- agreed upon accessibility and support requirements
- the role of Support Services (i.e. genU) in assisting
- an induction process for Supported Employees
- a briefing for all staff to ensure an inclusive work environment and clear expectations about the role of Supported Employees (their capability, skill set, employment or career goals).



Business partners may also have requirements for work times and the nature of seasonal work (i.e. for an Open Employment position, consider if there are quiet times of the year where coaching can be provided to Supported Employees), and these should be discussed with all stakeholders to ensure best fit.

## 4.4.2 IN-DEPTH RELATIONSHIPS

### TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS

genU seeks to establish trust with new clients and business partners by demonstrating their capability to deliver products and meet deadlines. An additional level of trust is required to ensure the needs and rights of Supported Employees are attended to in off-site and Open Employment contexts. Supported Employees often have a staff member or Support Worker visit them at work, however, in Open Employment contexts support is eventually reduced.

Business Enterprise Staff look for a 'connection' with Employers to build a trusting relationship:

“

*I find if there's a connection, we're going to do better in someone else's business ... I was able to make a better connection because one of the director's brother is disabled, and he's based in Melbourne ... So when he came for the tour and realised how much work we do, whether it's onsite or offsite, he welcomed us to work within his site.*  
(genU Staff 9)

For genU Employment Pathways, building trusting relationships is also about setting expectations about what Supported Employees are capable of and identifying employer needs. Employers are offered advice and coaching along the way to maintain open communication and transparency:

“

*... it's about genU building those relationships with the employers that when there's a hiccup, that we don't want to disempower people, like we want people to be able to deal with their hiccups, of course. ... we need to have that relationship where they know if there's a hiccup, they can come to us ... there's lots of employers that will call and say, "Look, things are not going well. We really need you guys to step in and help us out here."* (genU Staff 11)

Lasting relationships help to develop the identity of both organisations and enhance the social impact of support programs. For example, existing relationships may be developed to offer new forms of employment and associated training.

## 4.5 FINANCE AND FUNDING

Financial sustainability, or having consistent funding, is often a challenge for WISEs. Understanding WISE cost structure and having a commercially competitive (high quality, fair price) offering is vital to sustainability. Long-term grant funding, multi-year contracts and/or repeat customers can support success. Choosing the right industry, and balancing social and business goals, is vital for financial sustainability. The challenge is balancing client demand, growing/scaling, and, at the same time, transitioning skilled Supported Employees into Hybrid/Open Employment. It takes time to train the skilled Supported Employees who are vital to the WISE workforce (see also Section 3.3). In the WISE-Ability context additional funding needs are related to the funding available to individuals with a disability (via NDIS) and to employers (via wage subsidies employment assistance funding).

### 4.5.1 SOCIAL GOOD AND FINANCIAL BENEFIT

Business Enterprises are contracted by other organisations and local businesses to assist with their needs. This demand for Social Enterprise goods and services may be supported by the Victorian Government Social Procurement (spending for 'social good') Framework<sup>9</sup>. WISE can leverage this policy initiative to gain business and work for Supported Employees, on- and off-site, as it incentivizes businesses to contract Social Enterprises. As one staff member describes:

<sup>9</sup> The Victorian Social Enterprise Strategy aims to create a more inclusive economy by increasing social enterprise impacts and innovation; building business capacity and skills; and improving market access. The Victorian Social Procurement Framework, which commits government agencies to creating social value through procurement activities, including purchasing from social enterprises (Barraket et al. 2020).



“... they [an industry partner] went and put it on their socials and promoted us as part of their social procurement. That’s one good conversation I can have about [how] we can meet people’s social procurement needs. Especially when they’re tendering the large jobs, whether it’s big developers or others. (genU Staff 9)

### 4.5.2 FUNDING OPTIONS

#### INDIVIDUAL NDIS FUNDING

NDIS funding makes it possible for Supported Employees to enter a WISE (and Open Employment) and develop hard and soft skills at their own pace. NDIS funding can be used to support individuals via the provision of Support Workers and accessible equipment:

“I don’t know when NDIS got involved in my life, I’m not too sure, but I’m glad they did because without them I couldn’t work here. I enjoy working here. (Supported Employee 10)



NDIS funding line items are identified alongside the goals of Supported Employees when they complete an NDIS plan. The line items are subject to variation. Individual plans (at the time of writing) may include particular items to provide resources to Supported Employees in a work environment through, for instance: 'Core funding: Supports in Employment' (at ADEs), and 'Capacity Building' funding for transition to Open employment.

### 4.5.3 DIVERSE BUSINESS OFFERINGS

Running multiple businesses or enterprises in key industries can help to secure relationships, jobs and contacts with a range of partners. This diversification can support overall financial sustainability, particularly if one business is operating in a financially precarious industry. Some industries are better suited to diversification, such as Hospitality, Warehousing and Business Solutions. Warehousing can offer a range of services including: pick-and-pack, labelling, component work, storage, and unpacking containers. This diversification can support overall financial sustainability:

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“I’m not just stuck selling one product. So I can go to a customer and say, “What are your needs?” because I’m sure there is something that we can support your businesses with. So, then they say, “Well, what can you do?” and I say, “How about we start with a tour of our place and a tour of our facilities?” That gets the conversations going. And if it’s not something we do onsite here, we’ll always give something a go (genU Staff 9)”

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Having diverse business offerings also creates variety of work for Supported Employees:

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“having new clients coming in means different jobs. So you’d need that essentially to keep the hands-on learning aspect flowing along as well and the up-skilling aspect. They go together. (genU Staff 9)”

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## 4.6 INDUSTRY

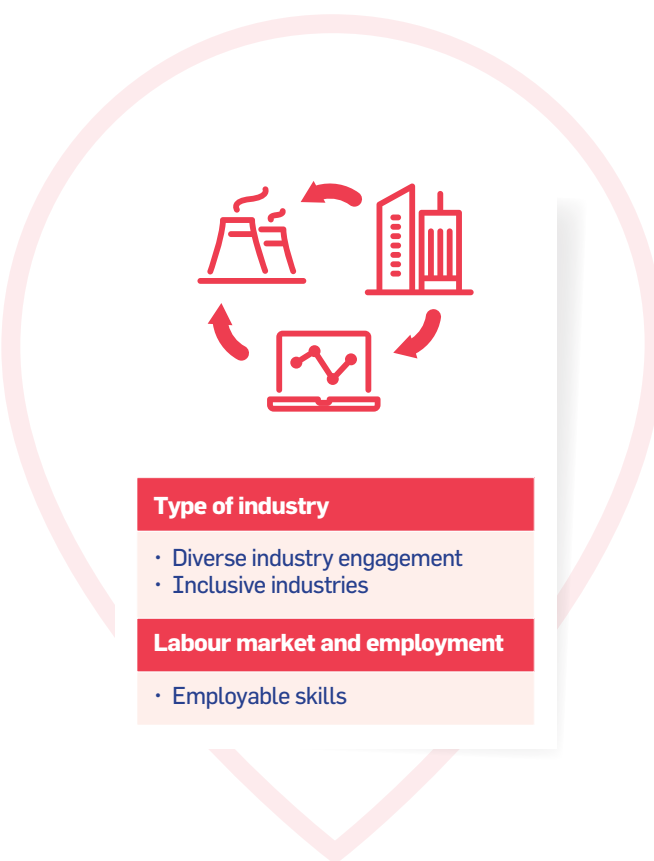
### 4.6.1 TYPE OF INDUSTRY

#### DIVERSE INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

There is a dual social and financial benefit of diverse industry engagement: WISEs are able to service different industries and offer different goods and services to clients, and Supported Employees are exposed to different work environments. For example, *genU* Landscaping involves off-site contractual work which means that Supported Employees experience a range of working environments and skills outside the WISE premises. Business Enterprise Hospitality reports that no two jobs are the same and this requires Supported Employees to learn about various ingredients and use different equipment. The financial benefit is that Business Enterprises are able to engage a diverse pool of clients to build revenue.

#### INCLUSIVE INDUSTRIES

Connecting with industries that have a culture of care, understanding, and are responsive to individual needs and interests is important for Supported Employee wellbeing. Staff arrive at *genU* with a particular skill set but soon want to know more about disability and the 'contagious' culture of learning and inclusivity (*genU*, Staff 3). Staff report that Business Enterprises offer work environments that align with the interests and skills of Supported Employees. External/Open Employment Hospitality settings are identified as more 'high pressure' and may pose challenges to Supported Employees. As one staff member identifies, not all industries allow for regular break times and support:



“They get their lunch on time, they get things that they understand. And they might not feel like that sometimes outside – not saying every place is like that – but there’d be a few places that are a bit of a harsh environment. (*genU* Staff 7)

### 4.6.1 LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

#### EMPLOYABLE SKILLS

WISEs offer training and hands on learning in employable skills such as food preparation, reception, pick-and-pack, stock maintenance, cleaning, and laundry work (see also Section 4.8.3 Training and Development). Business Enterprise and Employment Pathways are working together to link these skills to Open Employment opportunities for Supported Employees in the local area. Staff members report that entry level work is a good starting point for Supported Employees looking to transition into Open Employment, for example, in large retail organisations (see also Section 4.8.3 Customised Employment).





## 4.7 POLICY AND PROCEDURE

### Who should work at the WISE?

- Guidance for staff

### Formal communication channels

- Staying in touch throughout the day

### Engaging stakeholders

- Communication with family and networks

### Policies that support disability focused WISE

- Intake
- Shared rules
- Risk management

### Tailored business systems

- Visual and tactile tools

### Structure, routine and support

- Daily structure
- Staff visibility

### 4.7.1 WHO SHOULD WORK AT A WISE?

#### GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

“You could be a chef anywhere but genU chefs are also supporters (genU Staff 4)”

Business Enterprise Staff members are qualified in their profession (i.e. Chef, Landscaper), but are also required to provide support or mentoring while training Supported Employees. This combined skill set can be hard to find and such staff have been referred to as ‘Unicorns’ in the Social Enterprise sector. One staff member comments:

“

... we've worked out that there's probably six main things that we all need, not just employees: you need to work effectively with the industry; you need to just have your heart in it a little bit; you need to get on with others, have a bit of patience; you need to follow work and health procedures and directions; you need to communicate in the workplace if you need something or want something or want to know something. (genU Staff 7)





Having processes and policies in place supports business operations, staff and Supported Employee wellbeing. Policies that provide guidance, and accessible, modifiable and flexible ways of working for staff and Supported Employees helps to create an inclusive organisational culture. Clear processes provide guidance for troubleshooting and can save valuable time.

It is important to provide strong guidance for new staff members (both within the WISE and in Open Employment), especially if they do not have previous experience working with people with a disability. To support this learning process, genU staff are provided with an 'Understanding our Mental Health and Disabilities' Handbook:

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“... it's got one page on every disability ... a description, some common behaviours and conditions and symptoms and the support you would provide to that person.

*So, the first thing is an ABI, acquired brain injury. And then you've got stuff like addiction, ADHD, and it just goes through every disability. And then at the back, we've got support links for every disability as well ... Panic attacks, actively listen to a person. (genU Staff 3)*

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Above all, it is important for staff to be patient and understanding, such as being willing to repeat instructions to Supported Employees with limited memory. As one Supported Employee explains, patience and adequate work time matters:

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“ I think the only stress would probably come from the supervisor ... [saying] “Okay, we need to get this done right now”, and not as relaxed. I think then – it's definitely shown in the past when we've had replacements, then it gets stressful, because of the supervisor, not because of the work. (Supported Employee 7)

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Supported Employees benefit from happy and enthusiastic staff who are positive (i.e. take a strengths-based approach).

## 4.7.2 FORMAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

### STAYING IN TOUCH THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Staff from different teams stay in contact via face-to-face discussions on-site, and via email and phone, to make sure Supported Employees are comfortable throughout the day and that their concerns are addressed in a timely manner. Staff members report that this is about ensuring all necessary staff members across teams are kept up to date. Formal processes support good communication:

“Between 4:00 and 4:30pm I have a meeting to debrief the day with my supervisors, so we go through how the jobs are going, any issues with the job itself. We'll talk about the Supported Employees, were there any issues regarding them, do they seem okay? So, we get some feedback from their supervisors as to how actually Supported Employees are going. After 4:30 we work out labour for the next day. (genU Staff 6)

## 4.7.3 ENGAGING

### COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILY AND NETWORKS

Staff put in place processes for communicating with Supported Employee networks and family members to provide clear information about the work Supported Employees are doing. Supported Employees are then able to work through information they receive with networks/family. Information includes: the structure of the workday, instructions that reinforce this structure, pay slips with letters of explanation if there are any changes, achievements and challenges in the workplace, upcoming events and meetings, milestones such as NDIS reporting, changes to NDIS policy and if these affect Supported Employees, options for employment off-site or variation to employment.

## 4.7.4 POLICIES THAT SUPPORT DISABILITY FOCUSED WISE

### INTAKE

An intake policy of diversity and group coherence supports productivity. This means including people who will likely get along and learn new skills together. Intake is crucial for generating pathways into and out of Business Enterprises. Staff call for an intake policy that acknowledges different levels of skill and skill requirements for Supported Employees:

“For our dedicated team help people move into Open Employment through a framework or a smooth transition ... I would like that same team to recruit Supported Employees [for Business Enterprises] as well. So, they understand the type of employee we've lost to Open Employment and they know then the type of employee they need to get in. (genU Staff 6)

New Supported Employees commencing at Business Enterprises are inducted via an orientation process that involves: meeting with the Support Team and other staff members, being assigned a Work Buddy who is the go-to staff member during the first few weeks of work, being provided with information in the form of a manual (i.e. which staff member to talk to for particular issues), and attending Toolbox meetings which promote team building and feedback.

## SHARED RULES

Supported Employees at *genU* developed their own guidelines for effective workplace behaviours. Setting boundaries creates clarity for new Supported Employees. These shared rules focus on teamwork and understanding, supporting each other and communicating issues and challenges with staff:

“We have 10 commandments as well that the Supported Employees decided on – like no use of bad language ... turning up on time, being respectful to your peers ... just simple, clear instructions that are really good. (*genU Staff 3*)

Common behaviours and supports that can be put in place are clearly identified. *genU* have developed a handbook for this, discussed above, the A-Z of disabilities with supports containing detailed information.

## RISK MANAGEMENT

“I would just say providing a safe workplace where they feel seen [is] ... probably the biggest thing for productivity. (*genU Staff 3*)

Workplace health and safety is a top priority at Business Enterprises. Staff ensure that Supported Employees:

- are equipped with appropriate WHS training, clothing, communication skills, physical aids, access to PPE
- watch safety videos to help visually communicate relevant information
- have knowledge of and access to a hygiene station and emergency kits (with household supplies and facilities)

It is also important to ensure Supported Employees stay hydrated during summer and are rotated through different jobs to avoid any repetitive stress injuries.

Some roles at Business Enterprises require manual labour and lifting which is monitored on a daily basis via an ‘individual employment plan’ (IEP) (*genU Staff 7*). Once heavy lifting is flagged in an IEP, training is offered to the Supported Employee which includes protocols for assistance with lifting.



When new equipment is introduced into the WISE, the Support Team, compliance and quality staff will conduct risk assessment testing and trialing machinery use with Supported Employees to develop a Safety Card. The Safety Card describes machine settings to be used, warnings that are needed for safe operation, and cleaning instructions. The Card (or 'Tag') is kept in a satchel next to the machine and has step-by-step instructions for people using machinery. Supported Employees receive training to ensure they understand the Card. Staff report that if equipment is deemed hazardous or dangerous, an authorised user list is attached to the Card:

“... over time, obviously, they get used to doing it and it becomes second nature. So, training support and I think for all the staff, even a chef or anything like that, to make sure that the staff that are using, say a griller or a deep fryer, they should have training signed off, even though they said they can use it, but it's good to make sure everyone's on the same page.

*For this reason, trials are good – people can come in and get paperwork done, and you need information from medical doctors to ensure that medical needs are disclosed, behaviours are disclosed, there is a police check process, individual employment plan is created with work goals for each new Supported Employee (genU Staff 7)*

Working off-site or at a different location requires staff to do a safety check of the premises to ensure the work site has accessible breakrooms and access to water. Off-site checks follow a detailed procedure:

“My first bit was site inspection of the Warehouse, then the next step was to our WHS representative. He then came and did a safety walk. So we tick all the safety boxes before we actually engage any Supported Employees to do a trial day. So there's a lot of conversations had before we even start doing the actual work. (genU Staff 9)

## 4.7.5 TAILORED BUSINESS

### VISUAL AND TACTILE TOOLS

genU have bespoke business systems tailored to Supported Employee skill sets and disabilities. These systems are particularly important in Business Enterprise where work practices have been modified to incorporate tactile forms of communication and task tracking. For instance, in the commercial kitchen, a whiteboard system is used to manage tasks and allocate staff resources. The whiteboard has different magnets and tags used to indicate tasks and task status. It is tactile and visual. When a new person starts work they can be shown the whiteboard and refer to it as needed. As one staff member explains:

“... on our whiteboard, we'd have – they call them 'Kanbans', so if we need four tubs of carrots, there'll be four can bands on the whiteboard, so when you've done a tub, you get to take the tag off, put it on the tub and it goes into the cool room, then you know you've got three left. So it's a very tactile, touchy process rather than going up to a touch screen and pressing a button. (genU Staff 5)

The use of these tactile objects, like laminated cards (called 'Kanbans') that have an image on them (i.e. carrots), are an alternative way of counting tubs of carrots and communicating how much work is required and completed. Cards are matched to tubs to determine if the task is complete or not. This system is accompanied by a job instruction sheet, which, includes more detailed information on each task, for example, how to peel, top and tail a carrot.



#### 4.7.6 STRUCTURE, ROUTINE AND SUPPORT

##### DAILY STRUCTURE, WORK PLANNING AND SCHEDULES

A reliable work structure and routine, which includes consistent use of equipment, contributes to Supported Employee wellbeing. Change of tasks or work type is discussed with Supported Employees ahead of time to enable appropriate time for adjustments and to minimise any change-related stress. Staff plan the work schedule of Supported Employees in advance and reassess work plans each day to ensure appropriate staffing for jobs. Supported Employees discuss work tasks in planning meetings and are able to access a digital whiteboard to confirm their work schedule.

##### STAFF VISIBILITY: KNOWING WHO TO GO TO

It is important that Supported Employees know who they can approach for support, mentoring and checking-ins (i.e. the Support Team), or to report incidents (Supervisors and Managers). While the roles of these team members overlap at times, it is important that Supported Employees are clear that they have a designated staff member they can approach if needed. Staff report that this is a fine balance and that Training Staff and Supervisors should involve the Support Team, especially if personal or outside work issues arise (see also Section 4.7.4).

## 4.8 PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT

There are different ways to find the best fit between an individual and a job. As such, the pathway to Open Employment can be supported by informal or formal processes. The informal pathway involves learning on the job with employers like Business Enterprises. The formal process begins with an NDIS Plan and Discovery Process. This formal pathway is supported by a service provider like *genU* Employment Pathways. Individuals must be registered with NDIS to work with Business Enterprises and use *genU* services.

Many people with a disability are registered with the NDIS and have an NDIS plan. The NDIS Individual Plan includes different types of funding to support different activities. There are two main categories of NDIS funding for employment purposes: *Capacity Building* and *Core Support* for everyday living. NDIS funding amounts and names of funding line items are frequently adjusted by the NDIS, and service providers like *genU* keep up to date with these changes.

The other form of payment that individuals may receive is the Disability Support Pension (DSP) from Centrelink.

Depending on capability, individuals can work with a Disability Employment Service (DES) like *Matchworks* (a *genU* service) to look for Open Employment opportunities. In this section we summarise the key elements of planning an employment pathway while taking NDIS funding into consideration.



**Customised Employment and job carving**

**Hybrid Employment**

**Discovery**

- Everyday discovery
- Formal discovery process

**Using services and supports**

- Local Area Coordinator (LAC)
- Support Coordinator and Hands-on Support

**Using funding flexibility**

### 4.8.1 HYBRID EMPLOYMENT

A small number of Supported Employees were interested in trying work in Open Employment, but were not yet ready to leave Business Enterprises ('BE').

“... people don't want to leave BE because it's a safe, supported environment and I get that, like we don't want to leave something that we love and that our friends are there and we've built relationships. So it's about having those conversations but it doesn't necessarily mean you have to leave BE, maybe you could be doing something at BE and in Open Employment. (*genU* Staff 12)





A Hybrid Employment pathway means sharing time between a WISE supportive environment and in Open Employment. This allows individuals to develop work skills, confidence, networks, relationships and transition into Open Employment at their own pace, or build a working life that involves both engagement types.

## 4.8.2 DISCOVERY

### ‘EVERYDAY DISCOVERY’

As staff work with Supported Employees on an everyday basis, they identify individual's interests, work style, training and employment goals. This information helps when matching a person with a job and can be captured in an Employment Plan<sup>10</sup>. This ‘Everyday Discovery’ process takes place during the workday and is informed by hands-on work and relationship building.

<sup>10</sup> In addition, Supported Employees each have Individual NDIS plan with information re accessing supported employment. They are not obliged to share these plans with Business Enterprises as part of their employment conditions.

Not everyone wants or is ready to work in Hybrid or Open Employment. genU Staff understand Supported Employees’ preferences, interests and goals in developing employment pathways.

### FORMAL DISCOVERY PROCESS

A formal NDIS funded ‘Discovery’ process is completed with a Coordinator (i.e. genU Employment Pathways Coordinator) who meets with an individual to determine individual interests, goals, strengths and potential matches to industries and jobs in Hybrid or Open Employment. A staff member explains:

“... what we do with the participants really does depend on their goals and their progress towards achieving them. It's not a set program ... It is an individualised employment support and we work with each person according to their goals and their progress towards achieving them. So it could be anything from career guidance and planning [to] getting to know them. (genU Staff 10)

The discovery process is integral to a deep understanding of the individual, their skills and goals in order to match people with the right jobs. Discovery documents are constantly updated:

“They're living documents, they need to be updated, they need to reflect current information, not just what's happened in the past, it needs to reflect strategies to support that person in a workplace or support that person to successfully obtain employment. (genU Staff 11)

Part of Discovery includes identifying existing networks. ‘It's all about who you know who can get you a job’ (Supported Employee 8). Family and friends play an important role in connecting individuals with work opportunities. Networks can help people to understand their own strengths and interests and identify ways of using these in a job. For example, some people are detail oriented which is a skill that can be used in Warehouse and Nursery work.

## 4.8.3 CUSTOMISED EMPLOYMENT AND JOB CARVING

Support Team and Coordinators can team up with an Employer to tailor or 'customise' an Open Employment position that utilises individual strengths. Alternatively, there may be particular areas of a job an individual has experience in and these can be 'carved off' as a micro-job for this person. Business Enterprises do this by creating new paid positions that match up with a Supported Employees' interests and skills. One Supported Employee explains doing a 'carved' job:

“What I like to do is get the pumpkins, wipe them, put them in their guillotine, chop them into four bits, and then unseed them all and then get it ready for everybody else to do. That's what I did this – probably in the morning I did that, after I did the spuds. I like doing that. And I like doing the rumbler as well. Putting the potatoes in, and then getting them ready for everybody to peel them.

And I make sure he's always got his lunch and always got his knives ready, because what I do, I chop the pumpkins and then I wait for him, and then I just move aside, get him ready, and then he just chops the pumpkins and I peel them. So it's really good. It's good teamwork.

*(Supported Employee 7)*

Employers and staff report that job carving is ideal for Supported Employees and is achievable across different industries. For instance, Landcare jobs can be carved into watering, or pruning trees or mowing, and these jobs do not vary or change too often which means that people can be trained over time and progress to other carved jobs at their own pace.

Customised and carved employment pathways may include the following steps:

**A** Individuals complete **Supported Employment (at Business Enterprises)** before going into Open Employment. This allows Employment Pathways to better understand how individuals work in Open Environments.

“... we complete a lot of evaluations in that work experience phase, so we have a really clear understanding of what may happen, we don't have a lot of surprises. *(genU Staff 10)*

**B** Employment pathways work on a **Discovery** (i.e. with Employment Pathways see above) and **Individual Support plan** with people going into Open Employment. Staff note that this is a way of personalising the steps of the journey:

“... we have an individual support plan, it's generally set out as an agreement between both parties, what are your goals within the next six weeks, six months, 12 months, how can we achieve that? *(genU Staff 11)*

**C** Customised Employment and job carving requires **strong relationships with employers** to match participant strengths to employer need. This is where the Discovery process can help:

“That's why I feel as though our [Discovery] documentation we've got in place identifies everything a person needs to know before they go and contact an employer or have those friendly conversations. *(genU Staff 11)*



**D** Before an individual takes up a placement or a paid position it is necessary to understand both **participant** and **employer expectations** for the role. This means there are no surprises and the individual is set up for success.

“That’s where that brokering comes in to understand whereby the young person has an understanding of what their skill level is, and the employer has an understanding of what that skill level [is] – And then it’s saying, “Well, here’s a role that would suit you.” (genU Staff 10)

**E** Individuals **map the workspace** or complete introductions/tours<sup>11</sup> before they officially start work:

“... when we’re exploring a workable space with a new employer, we visualise that space first, just a conversation so the person actually just doesn’t attend an interview and start work, they may do a tour, there may be a risk assessment completed at the workspace so they feel as though they’re involved before their first day and we’re alongside them throughout that process, and then on their first day of starting, we would be there.

So we’re actually trying to identify those external factors, it might be another staff member, that person you can see can identify there’s a personality clash there, or there’s something. So I believe the really important strategy here is the support that it needs to be ongoing until it’s not needed. (genU Staff 11)

“... We work with a lot of people with autism spectrum disorder and they like to plan ahead. They want to know what’s going to happen. They have a very routinised behaviour where they like routines and structure and things like that, so going out and just seeing workplaces is a good way for them to start because then they can start to decide on what they might want to try for work experience. (genU Staff 10)

**F** Individuals complete a **Supported Job Placement/Trial** in groups or individually (up to a 12 week trial period) with an employer.

“At Rebel Sport, we tidy up and pump up balls ... Security tagging’s another big one, so putting security tags on clothes ... So that’s fine motor skills, it’s attention to detail ... that’s just an option and a way to get the participants started ... We are looking for separate placements as well for them. So they might start off with the groups and then end up doing an individual placement after six months. They might love the groups and do that for a year and try different ones. It just depends on each person. Some never do the groups. They don’t want to do groups at all and they want to do anything. That’s just an option that we have. (genU Staff 10)

<sup>11</sup>Introducing employees and employer prior to work or training is an approach endorsed by the Passport to Employment program (<https://www.swllen.org.au/passport-2-employment>). This helps to establish relationships, understanding and break down social stigma.



## 4.8.4 USING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Work Experience in Open Employment is a vital step to determining the preferences of individuals and to develop work skills:

“Our staff members are there. We’re running the session. We’re there with them the whole time. We couldn’t claim any funding if we’re not with them because in a sense we’re not really providing support to them. So we are going into Target with three or four participants and we’re running that session. We’re observing. We’re assessing them. We’re checking all those things. We’re doing workplace assessments. We’re providing the training. (genU Staff 10)

Employers note that trailing work with Supported Employees takes time but allows for best fit:

“... you need the time and the resource to be able to go – ‘that didn’t work there’ or ... ‘Ah, you’ve got this – you can spot these defects.’ One good example is just, one [Supported Employee] was poor-sighted, so it was hard to get him into manufacturing, but the feel when he touched a finished part, he could feel any defect straight away because it just spoke to him ... and it just showed, there’s the job for him. (Stakeholder 3)

**G** Following this learning and assessment process individuals are placed in a paid **Open Employment** position. Employment Pathways continue to provide support, for instance, via weekly site visits. The level of support provided is determined by the NDIS plan.

### LOCAL AREA COORDINATOR

The pathway to employment involves planning to work out how individuals want to use their NDIS funding package to support their goals. This planning process is often with the Individual, their nominee (i.e. family member or guardian), a Local Area Coordinator (LAC), and/or the NDIA. An LAC helps individuals access the NDIS, specifically to create an NDIS plan. LACs who have a strong understanding of the individual and their employment goals, and who work closely with employment services like genU, are able to provide strong support to individuals.

### SUPPORT COORDINATOR AND HANDS-ON SUPPORT

A Support Coordinator or LAC may advise individuals looking for employment to talk to genU Employment Pathways for help deciding how to best use NDIS funding to reach employment goals. As a first step, the Employment Pathways Coordinator uses the Discovery process (described above) to help individuals work out what they would like to do, and how they can use their funding to achieve their goals. For instance, they help with:

- Work preparation (i.e. trial jobs, complete experience, placements and travel training).
- Job Matching by observing the work style of individuals to help match them with the right work conditions and staff.
- On the job support (i.e. working with groups and individuals on the job)
- Driver's License
- Certificates (i.e. hospitality or White Cards)
- Open Employment
- Assessments for NDIS plans
- Wages for Employment (i.e. Productivity Based Wage and Supported Wage<sup>12</sup>)

## 4.8.5 USING FUNDING FLEXIBLY

Funding for Hybrid and Open Employment is challenging and requires careful planning to ensure individuals transition in a sustainable way (see Section 3.1). Support Coordinators provide recommendations for future NDIS funding and this potentially impacts on whether or not individuals will receive an appropriate rate of funding to maintain employment in a WISE setting (i.e. Business Enterprises intense support setting).

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***The ebb and flow of mental and physical health challenges and disabilities means that individuals may need to move back and forward between WISE and Open Employment settings continuously throughout their lifetime.***

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Funding needs to be flexible enough to accommodate these transitions.

The individual NDIS funding plan is reviewed annually. During this review the LAC or Planner can determine if an individual requires continued support on the job and will need funding for this in their plan:

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“If someone has a 12-month plan, at the nine-month mark, we forward completed documentation illustrating that person's journey, what they've achieved within this time, and what our recommendation would be based on. So there is a clear pathway so the person can actually attend their plan review having a clear understanding of what's ahead because we are dealing with an insurance company and they need to understand what the payment is used for and how that's assisting that person.

We walk beside the individual until we're actually not required. And the funding does govern that. (genU Staff II)

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While funding for employment may be flexible, the assessment of individual capacity does not always take into consideration the need for more intense supports in Open Employment and varying pathways to employment that oscillate between WISE and the mainstream labour market.

Financial and support challenges arise for individuals who increase work hours and pay rendering them ineligible NDIS support and also for DSP. Often, the increase in pay is not adequate to offset the loss of DSP income and NDIS support and the security that goes along with this. If not managed carefully, individuals are at-risk of financial distress and marginalization from the workforce.

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<sup>12</sup>To be eligible for a supported wage or productivity-based wage individuals need to be eligible to receive a Disability Support Pension (DSP).



## >> 5. PROJECT RESOURCES

*The WISE-Ability model captures the right working conditions for Supported Employees. However, these can be difficult to implement in non-WISE/Open Employment settings for organisations that do not have the capacity or resources to implement elements like wraparound support. The Steering Committee and interview participants identified the need to make the model accessible for employers by identifying, specifically, how, where and when employers and genU offer support. Support is offered to employers via the Employment Pathways team who liaise with the employers throughout the process of on-boarding and supporting the new employee.*

In order to make the information in the WISE model more accessible and practical for providing guidance to employers, networks and individuals, the project team developed an **Employer Toolkit** (Appendix 4) with Factsheets and training resources for employers, as detailed in Table 1 (right). The Factsheets provide information about how employers can address concerns

about risk, accessibility and modifications of the workplace, funding support, wages and on-the-job support for employees. A **Case Study** (Appendix 5) was also created to help individuals/Supported Employees think about the support they might need to work in a Supported or Open Employment environment, and the questions that they may want to ask about support.



EMPLOYER TOOLKIT	
EMPLOYER FACTSHEETS	
Job Carving	Explains job carving and benefits for business and people with a disability. Job carving is the creation of a new position within an organisation.
Funding for Employers – we can help	Explains different types of funding: funding for workplace changes, wage subsidies, productivity based wages. <i>genU</i> will work closely with businesses to identify the support available to employ a person with disability.
Inclusive Communication	Communication tips for employers.
Reasonable Adjustments	How to seek support and funding for Reasonable Adjustments. The <i>genU</i> Employment Pathways team can work closely with businesses to identify if any reasonable adjustments are required. <i>genU</i> can do a risk assessment of workplaces.
TRAINING RESOURCES	
Awareness Raising Training	This training aims to build employer confidence and raise awareness about how disability support can be embedded in organisational culture. For more information about Employer Awareness Training please email <i>genU</i> Employment Pathways ( <a href="mailto:contact@genu.org.au">contact@genu.org.au</a> )
CASE STUDY	
Case Study for Individuals, Family and Employers	The Kassy Case Study captures commonly identified Supported Employee concerns/requirements for work and how these can be supported.

Table 1 Employer Toolkit

## >> 6. CONCLUSION

*This project adapted the WISE model for the disability sector, implemented elements of the model within genU Business Enterprises, and identified factors that facilitate and inhibit pathways to employment.*

The WISE-Ability model captures techniques for supporting employable skills and pathways, and displays these in eight organisational design elements. As summarised in the Action Learning evaluation (Section 3.3) all elements of the WISE model were present within genU Business Enterprises, with plans to strengthen areas such as Certified Training offerings and pathways in Open Employment. These two areas are particularly challenging as they intersect with accessibility, policy and funding barriers (identified in Section 3.1).

Drawing on WISE-Ability learnings, the project developed resources for employers, family and individuals considering Open Employment, and has supported sustainable pathways to employment for people with a disability. The Employer Toolkit recognises the need for accessible information to boost employer knowledge and confidence. Employer engagement combines customised styles of employment with a Job Shadow and Work Experience approach, recognising the need for a gradual transition informed by strong organisational relationships.

The concerns of all interviewees were integrated into the WISE-Ability model, along with the organisational practices and design features that support the participation of people with a disability in training and employment.

The voices of Supported Employees are particularly helpful for understanding the key barriers to Hybrid and Open Employment. While some Supported Employees felt that they might like to try Open Employment, they were also wary of the **limited support** and **social stigma** they believed they would encounter. These disincentives, coupled with the risk of jeopardising **Individual Funding Plans and DSP support**, meant the pathway to employment was uncertain at best, and at worst, emotionally or physically harmful. Many reported previous experiences in Open Employment where they had been 'thrown in at the deep end', or experienced bullying and marginalisation.

Many Supported Employees were hesitant to transition into Open Employment and leave behind a Supported Work culture that had enabled them to build skills, confidence, independence, friendships and a sense of stability and security. Participants felt that their mental and physical health needs were strongly supported by genU Staff. In their own words, Supported Employees explained:



## **JAMES**

*'I'm in a much better spot than I used to be. I've got a lot more confidence, but I've still got a lot to learn, and that's a journey. But that was one on one last year and then this year I started more group-based activities with a larger group of people, similar levels – we've all got disabilities – it's a disability support group.'*  
(Supported Employee 7)



## **ALICE**

*'Everything good about the job. Just getting out of bed and going to work, really. It gets you motivated. Staying at home, you're just going home and watching telly all the time. It just makes you bored, just watching telly.'*  
(Supported Employee)



## **JEFF**

*'It's just good that I can actually see a potential future, that I might be able to do that. Versus last year, I was thinking, "No, there's no way" ... I think I just changed for the better ... I feel like I've just become a better person. Maybe that's because of the job: I think it's confidence mostly for me. Confidence, and I'm not nearly as anxious as I used to be. Still get it occasionally, but it's something that I'm working on and I feel like I'm on the better side, rather than stuck in the middle.'*  
(Supported Employee 8)



Supported Employees, including James, Alice and Jeff, reported significant benefits from their training in Business Enterprises, however these benefits – unless certified – are often undervalued alongside ‘soft skills’ (such as inter-personal and communication skills). Staff were committed to the wellbeing of Supported Employees but were under-resourced. In order to maintain the wellbeing of Supported Employees and staff, resourcing must become a priority.

The challenge in creating sustainable employment pathways is shaped by **employer confidence**, **employee confidence** and having the right **funding structure** to support pathways. Employers and Disability Sector staff worry that employers require more support to provide the right working conditions, and that this support is not funded:

“It’s like a piece is missing for that side of things, I think personally. And I think it could be – there would be so many more people who feel comfortable going to Open Employment if there was something in place for that, because it is a secure – it’s a competence thing, it’s a security thing. Some people are frightened. Personally, if people do, like people go – I’m just thinking of the staff we have here and I can think of a few people that if they wanted to go into Open Employment, I’d be so happy for them. But I’d be so worried. (genU Staff 6)

Funding for Support, particularly in Open Employment, is a key barrier. This barrier is linked to the way in which employment pathways are understood as a linear progression from intense support (Business Enterprises) to reduced/minimal supports (Hybrid/Open Employment).

***The transition into Open Employment should not necessarily be viewed as a one-way path. A Supported Employee’s journey will often involve attempting Open Employment before returning to Supported Employment (i.e. Business Enterprises) with the goal of attempting Open Employment again as their confidence grows and skills improve.*** Trying and trying again should be embraced as a vital step towards Open Employment. This complex pathway is managed by disability service providers as a routine element of supported employment. The WISE-Ability model provides a framework for movement back and forward, and Hybrid experiences of work. Further research is required to understand how funding policy and parameters can be better structured to meet the real-life needs of people with a disability carving out pathways to employment.

# >> 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

## BUSINESS ENTERPRISES AND EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

1. **Increase Staff Resources** at Business Enterprises and Employment Pathways to meet current and growing numbers of Supported Employees working and transitioning into Hybrid/Open Employment.
  - a. **Increase Support Staff Resources** to assist with hands-on learning and work at Business Enterprises' and during Job Placements.
2. Employment Pathways and Business Enterprises to develop a **shared and documented planning process** to identify Supported Employee goals and employment pathways for Supported Employees who wish to pursue Hybrid or Open Employment.
  - a. Process for Intake and Outgoing Supported Employees should be linked to Business Enterprises financial sustainability plan to ensure Business Enterprises remain financially viable.
3. **Assist with NDIS planning** to ensure that individuals are able to receive adequate support in Open Employment, and that future funding/plans are not adversely affected.
4. **Provide Employers with advice and training** (delivered via a Toolkit or workshop).
5. Provide options for **Certified training and/or Micro-credentials for Supported Employees**.
6. **Work with employers** to address barriers to employment pathways and co-design supports for pathways.

## EMPLOYERS

1. **Engage Service Providers** (i.e. genU) to establish relationships, supports and goals for employment pathways for people with a disability.
2. **Plan for employing people with a disability** that draws on Business Enterprises' and Employment Pathways' knowledge regarding support, job carving, and job matching.
3. Grow awareness and confidence to employ by **accessing the WISE-Ability training guide** or online model, Employer Toolkit and Awareness Training.

## NDIS

1. **Clarify funding rules** for the use of Flexible Funding in WISE and Open Employment to ensure that individuals who require continued, long-term support are not affected.
2. **Clarify funding rules** so that individuals can receive intense support in Open Employment to sustain employment status and career pathways.
3. **Clarify guidelines for assessment of NDIS plans** that can be used by LACs.
4. **Provide NDIS funding** line items for development of 'soft skills' in the workplace.
5. **Provide funding for Buddies (Section 4.3.2)** in Open Employment.

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# >> APPENDIX 1

## WISE-ABILITY MODEL



## 1. STRUCTURE

*Aligning your business goals with your training and transitions program creates a strong WISE structure. For instance, how could you line up a Nursery with a learning or work program for people with a disability?*

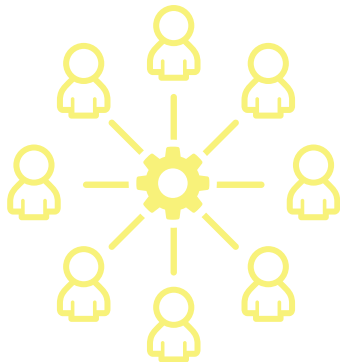
### MULTI-SITE

Having different sites or spaces offering different types of work means that there is variety and choice for individuals.

This also provides varied social interactions. Work sites and spaces may all be under one roof or may be located at different premises.

- **Diversity and choice:** For many people with a disability there are limited choices of where you can work. Having different work choices enables people to explore their interests and develop new skills. Having options for work enables people to match up their strengths and preferences with work spaces and environments, which supports engagement. For instance, a calm outdoor work environment might be preferred over a busy or social work environment.
- **Variety and preparation:** Variety of work, which is balanced with lead-in time, allows individuals to prepare for change. Change may include different types of work, working with new people, and working with new equipment in different environments.





## WRAPAROUND SUPPORT TEAM

Understanding each person and providing in-depth, tailored support is important. Support teams are private and respectful. They provide day-to-day guidance, mentoring, ensure work-life balance, and connect individuals and services outside of work to ensure wellbeing.

- **Tailored support:** Tailored support means matching supports, environment and equipment to individual requirements. A deep understanding of individual Supported Employees means that Staff are able to pre-empt needs and challenges that may arise during training and the workday.
- **Mentoring and check-ins:** Support Staff and Managers in contact roles can also act as unofficial mentors. These Staff roles involve answering questions, providing advice, ensuring Supported Employees take breaks and have access to food and water.
- **Healthy work-life balance:** Supported Employees participate in a range of activities outside of work. A Support team can match workload commitments with external programs, duties and leisure networks. The right balance of working hours is required for personal health and professional productivity. Some Supported Employees receive a support payment which enables them to balance personal and work commitments and

maintain high levels of productivity at work. The Support team help to manage this balance.

- **Transport:** Support Staff provide assistance for individuals to travel to work safely whether by public transport, car or taxi. This may involve funding for travel (i.e. taxis) or marking out a safe, direct route to work.

## TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT (WORK MATCHING AND HANDS ON LEARNING)

Knowing that there are opportunities to learn on the job and that these opportunities will keep arising is a motivating factor. Certificates may be completed by some, however this type of learning does not suit everyone.

Having Supervisors and Mentors on-site supports learning and skills development. Learning experiences are supported by hands-on, structured, accessible, and tailored training and learning activities. Progressing to different activities supports engagement and skill development.

- **Hands-on learning and training:** Hands-on learning involves learning how to do a job or task through practice and with support of a co-worker or Staff member.
- **Certified and accredited training:** Recognised forms of training (i.e. Certified) can be tailored to each person. The trainer can take into consideration questions

such as: 'Does the person understand? Do I need to offer a different examples and ways of explaining this content?' Use of verbal, printed words and images, prompts, and digital tools including video can assist.

- **Task matching:** Consider personal challenges and strengths when matching Supported Employees to work. For instance, a social/team environment in a café can be a challenge for people who experience anxiety. Less socially interactive work can be an alternative.
- **Modified work practices and accessible equipment:** Work tasks can be modified by the on-site support team on a daily basis to ensure good work experiences.
- **Building personal skills, social skills and real world skills:** Skills sets are strengthened via short courses, work and meetings (i.e. Supported Employee Toolkit meeting), which also assist in preparing Supported Employees for Open Employment.
- **Real workplace conditions:** Supported Employees are empowered and prepared for Open Employment via real workplace conditions. Supported Employees are included in decision making processes and management meetings, participate in Work Health and Safety training, and everyday work participation is aligned with organisational policy and practices.





## 2. SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT

*The use of physical space can improve or undermine participation. Consider for example: do busy work environments suit individuals? And where are the safe areas, nooks and crannies?*

*Spatial design can also affect how you meet your WISE social goals. Consider, for example, who and how many people the work and training settings can support.*

### \*ENVIRONMENT AND WORK PACE

Not everyone likes working in a busy environment. Having a mix of busy/active and calm work spaces available to participants supports different workspace preferences and mitigates workplace stress.

- **Busy:** An active environment involves working at fast pace often with high levels of social interaction.
- **Calm:** A calm environment includes controlled social interaction, controlled noise levels and pace. A calm environment may still be noisy but protective equipment (i.e. sound cancelling headphones) can help.

### \*ACCESSIBLE AND MODIFIABLE LAYOUT

Having enough space to move safely and freely around the workplace is vital. Having clear pathways for Supported Employees to access different rooms/spaces enables participation and productivity.

WISEs that have business sites that are connected to the outdoors or to open-plan areas are better for personal health. Open, spacious environments can also be simulated by warehouse settings or indoor-outdoor cafes.

- **Accessibility and adjustments:** Making spaces easy to access includes monitoring the number of people using spaces, (i.e. a lunch area). Supported Employees may require 'Reasonable Adjustments' to be made to the environment, which are often cost effective and simple like the availability of laminated instruction cards attached to machinery and equipment. A warehouse layout that can be modified (i.e. moving tables, chairs, machinery), means that individuals can work in large or small teams and equipment can be moved to suit these different configurations. Being agile in this way can also help WISEs meet the needs of new/different contracted jobs. WISEs can test the layout of workplace and other spaces by seeking feedback from Supported Employees.
- **Outdoor learning and work:** Nurseries with vegetable gardens are stimulating and enable hands-on learning and work in open air environments.

### SAFE TIME AND AREAS

Feeling safe and secure in the workplace reduces stress levels and increases belonging and productivity. Consider what kinds of safe areas you will offer. Different kinds of safe areas can be generated through informal use by Staff and participants. While quiet rooms suit some people for breaks, relaxation and meetings/conversations, others enjoy physical movement or driving to support well-being.

- **Quiet rooms:** Having designated rooms for Supported Employee/Support Worker/Coordinator meetings creates a safe space for personal conversations. Having a designated room for Supported Employees creates a sense of ownership, belonging and empowerment. Undesignated or hidden areas and unused rooms can help to lower stress levels by providing a place for rest, quiet and solitude when needed.
- **Walking and driving:** A sense of safety and relaxation may be generated by physical movement. Walking and/or talking with someone may help to lower stress. Alternatively, being in the car can be a space of safety for some.

## 3. CULTURE

*An organisational culture of care, inclusivity and genuine collaboration empowers Staff and Supported Employees. Culture is crafted by people – from your leadership and stakeholders to your participants, your unique combination of business and social goals, the WISE space and environment, and the industry you connect to. A culture of recognition, working together and valuing each other supports well-being.*

### GOING 'ABOVE AND BEYOND'

A non-institutional, 'above and beyond' approach to support means offering specialised/tailored forms of support to Supported Employees. This creates an understanding and comforting environment in which barriers to participation, like social stigma around disability or mental health differences, are overcome.

- **Trust:** WISEs are committed to the health and well-being of Supported Employees. Supported Employees know that they can turn to Staff when they need to address issues both within and external to the workplace.
- **Respect:** Valuing Supported Employees abilities creates a culture of respect. Staff and Supported Employees share in a culture of mutual respect and appreciation by, for instance, listening to one another. Supported Employees not only contribute to the culture of WISE, but also the culture of partnering organisations who host work groups, and employers connected to Employment Pathways.

### \*BELONGING

An organisational culture that is accepting, inclusive and disability-aware, creates spaces of belonging for and with Supported Employees.

- **Buddies working together:** A culture of support is established in the first week of employment. Supported Employees are matched with a Staff member 'Buddy' on their first day of employment. The Buddy will induct the Supported Employee, have lunch with them, answer any questions they might have, and introduce them to other team members.
- **Understanding:** Everyone has good and bad days. It is important to acknowledge when someone is struggling in the workplace so that they are not faced with unrealistic work expectations. Putting pressure on someone on a bad day can exacerbate stress levels, or worse, impact upon their health and well-being. A range of understandings are core to the culture essential in a WISE-Ability model: Difference, Calm, Accepting, and Positivity.



### HIGH QUALITY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

WISE compete with commercial organisations in the marketplace. A culture of high quality products/services is essential for building meaningful relationships, reputation and social purpose.

- **Quality-focused businesses:** WISE Staff and Supported Employees are invested in producing high quality products and services as a business. WISE are inclusive businesses striving for both quality of products and workplace conditions.



## 4. RELATIONSHIPS

*People external to the organisation (for example, employers, education providers, stakeholders) play an important role in providing different forms of support. They can reinforce and broaden social and financial goals and help build organisational culture. Creating relationships with commercial partners opens up funding opportunities. Strong relationships can intersect with WISE programs leading to further training and employment opportunities.*

### BUILDING SHARED GOALS AND KNOWLEDGE

involves going on a journey with your business partners and stakeholders to break down barriers. This helps to facilitate transitions and build appropriate supports for Open Employment environments. This bridging work can also be used to define a pathway, for instance, for Supported Employees from WISE like *genU* to Open Employment.

- **New relationship opportunities** may arise from contacting potential partners and identifying how your social enterprise can fulfil their needs as well as your own. WISEs that offer trials (i.e. in Landscaping) allow all partners to work on the right match/fit to create good work experiences.
- **Shared goals for pathways:** Work with partners to set up an induction process for Supported Employees, including: briefings for all Staff to build teamwork and a strengths-based culture, expectations about when the Supported Employee will be on site (i.e. what times of the year provide the right environment to host a Supported Employee? When are the low-stress, quiet times of the year where you can provide more coaching than usual?).

### IN-DEPTH RELATIONSHIPS

Lasting relationships help to develop the identity of both organisations and enhance the social impact of programs. For example, existing relationships may be developed to offer new forms of employment and associated training. Partners who have an in-depth understanding of each other are better able to leverage new work and training projects that benefit all parties involved.

- **Trusting relationships:** Establishing a relationship of trust with your partners ensures that Supported Employees have their rights and requirements met, and provides for a trusted Staff member to be on site who serves as a 'go-to' person for Supported Employees.



## 5. FINANCE AND FUNDING

*Financial sustainability, or having consistent funding, is often a challenge for WISEs. Understanding WISE cost structure and having a commercially competitive (high quality, fair price) offering is vital to sustainability. Long-term grant funding, multi-year contracts and/or repeat customers can support success. Choosing the right industry, and balancing social and business goals, is vital for financial sustainability. A key WISE financial challenge is balancing client demand, growing/scaling, and, at the same time, transitioning skilled Supported Employees into Hybrid/Open Employment.*

### \*SOCIAL GOOD AND FINANCIAL BENEFIT

*The Victorian Social Enterprise Strategy* aims to create a more inclusive economy by increasing social enterprise impacts and innovation; building business capacity and skills; and improving market access. The **Victorian Social Procurement Framework** commits government agencies to creating social value through procurement activities, including purchasing from social enterprises (Barraket et al, 2020).

Demand for Social Enterprises' goods and services is supported by this Framework. WISEs can leverage this policy initiative to maintain demand for business, contracts and work for Supported Employees on- and off-site.

### \*DIVERSE BUSINESS OFFERINGS

WISE compete with commercial organisations in the marketplace. A culture of high quality products/services is essential for building meaningful relationships, reputation and social purpose.

### FUNDING OPTIONS

What would you need to make the program engaging, accessible and meaningful for Supported Employees?  
What sort of funding can support these costs?

- (a) There are different types of funding opportunities available for WISEs at different stages of development. Funding opportunities for new organisations are provided by early-stage investors and can include start-up funding. WISEs that are more developed can access Accelerator programs/funds and Philanthropic and Government funding. It is important to get the right type of funding for your WISE;
- (b) The funding options available depend on the structure of the WISE – it is important to find the right funding, but it is also important to understand that your legal structure will determine the type of funding available to you.

➤ **NDIS funding:** NDIS funding makes it possible for Supported Employees to enter a WISE (and Open Employment) and develop hard and soft skills at their own pace. NDIS funding can be used to support individuals via the provision of Support Workers and accessible equipment.





## 6. INDUSTRY

*The type of industry you choose to operate in not only gives your WISE a particular direction and culture, but can impact finance, funding and program outcomes. Aligning your social goals and strategy with the right industry or vehicle for change can help.*

*Consider if the costs of operating in the industry are high or low; if they are high, how will you offset your expenses? You will need to be able to sell your product/services at a margin. It's important to find out if there is a market for the goods/services you are thinking of producing.*

### TYPE OF INDUSTRY

What industry will you be connected to? For example, Warehousing, Farming, Horticulture, Building, Landscaping or Hospitality. Consider how the industry will affect your training program. For example, do the industry regulations and conditions support on-the-job training or on-site training? What certification will you need to build a WISE in this industry? Will the industry area support other activities that benefit Supported Employees?

- **Diverse industry engagement:** *genU* Business Enterprises operate across several key industries. There are both social and financial benefits in diverse industry engagement: Business Enterprises are able to service different industries and offer different goods/services to clients, and Supported Employees are exposed to different work environments and skill sets in different industry areas. For example, the Landscaping WISE involves on- and off-site contractual work which means that Supported Employees experience a range of working environments outside the WISE premises.
- **Inclusive industries:** Connecting with industries that have a culture of care, understanding, and are responsive to individual needs and passions supports well-being.

### LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

Consider if there are employment opportunities or other significant benefits for Supported Employees in your chosen industry area/s. For example, will employment opportunities be accessible and local or will people be expected to travel and commute?

- **Employable skills:** Consider the skills that your participants will develop and how these match with Open Employment opportunities. For instance, if you are a Nursery that teaches horticulture skills consider if there are other opportunities in Open Employment in horticulture for Supported Employees in the local area.

## 7. POLICY, PROCEDURE AND PROCESS



*Having processes and policies in place at your WISE supports business operations, as well as Staff and participant wellbeing. Policies that provide guidance, and accessible, modifiable and flexible ways of working help to create an inclusive organisational culture. Clear processes provide guidance for troubleshooting and can save valuable time.*

### WHO SHOULD WORK AT A WISE?

Employing individuals with skills in social and business operations, who communicate effectively and can empathise with others (i.e. have 'emotional intelligence') can help to support the goals and mission of your organisation. The hybrid (social + business) nature of the WISE means that Staff often bring industry skills, for example in hospitality, to the WISE and develop other skills on the job.

- **Guidance for Staff:** Just as Supported Employees require guidance in their roles, so too do Staff members. Existing Staff members can encourage new Staff members to be supportive, patient, understanding, responsive and aware. Background reading can help inform your workplace culture (for example, *genU* have a booklet called 'Understanding our Mental Health and Disabilities').

### FORMAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Having a time and space for regular Staff meetings is vital for information sharing. Informal Staff chats are just as important and allow Staff to share knowledge, strategise, develop new ideas and build relationships.

- **Staying in touch throughout the day:** Staff from different teams stay in contact via face-to-face discussions on-site, email, and phone to make sure Supported Employees feel safe and that their concerns are addressed in a timely manner.

### ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

A 'with not for' approach to working with people with a disability helps to build an inclusive organisational culture.

- **Communication with family and networks:** There needs to be effective communication structures that provide clear information about the work Supported Employees are doing. This information should be communicated to family and other networks to allow challenges to be addressed in supportive ways.





## \*POLICIES THAT SUPPORT DISABILITY FOCUSED WISE

- **Intake:** An intake policy of diversity and group coherence supports productivity. This means including people who will be able to get along and learn new skills together.
- **Shared rules:** Setting boundaries creates clarity for new participants. For instance, Supported Employees developed their own handbook – 10 policies and procedures around effective workplace behaviours to support teamwork.
- **Risk management:** Risk management strategies create a safe learning environment and workspace. A safe and healthy work environment means Supported Employees have access to: essential WHS training via different forms of communication (visual, audio); food and water facilities especially in warm environments; protective clothing where appropriate; Covid-safe equipment such as PPE; and a hygiene station. Different work environments will have different levels of risk that need to be managed and communicated to Supported Employees.

## \*TAILORED BUSINESS SYSTEMS

*genU* have bespoke business systems tailored to Supported Employee skill sets and disabilities. These systems are particularly important in Business Enterprise where work practices have been modified to incorporate tactile forms of communication and task tracking. Having a defined set of principles, practices and procedures that are applied to specific activities (i.e. food preparation) can help to achieve businesses goals. Tailored business systems suit the diverse skills of Supported Employees and enable Staff and Supported Employees to maintain a relaxed and productive atmosphere.

- **Visual and tactile tools:** For instance, in the commercial kitchen, a whiteboard system is used to manage tasks and allocate Staff resources. The whiteboard has different magnets and tags used to indicate tasks and task status. It is tactile and visual. When a new person starts work they can be shown the whiteboard and refer to it as needed. This system is accompanied by a job instruction sheet which includes more detailed information on each task (e.g. specific instructions for how to peel, top, and tail a carrot).

## \*STRUCTURE, ROUTINE AND SUPPORT

It is important to have a reliable structure and routine for Supported Employees. This may include the same arrival time, work team, equipment and location to ensure consistency and productivity (see also: Structure – Variety and Preparation).

- **Daily structure:** Staff plan the work schedule of Supported Employees in advance and then reassess work plans each day to ensure appropriate resourcing of jobs. Change in tasks or work type is discussed with Supported Employees ahead of time to enable appropriate time for adjustments and to minimise any change related stress.
- **Staff visibility:** It is important that Supported Employees know who they can approach for support, mentoring and checking-in (i.e. a go-to person or the Support Team), or to report incidents (Supervisors and Managers). While the roles of these team members overlap at times, Supported Employees are clear that they have a designated number of Staff they can approach if needed.



## 8. PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT

*The transition into Open Employment is not usually linear. A Supported Employee's journey will often involve movement back and forward between Open and Supported employment contexts as confidence and skills develop.*

### \*HYBRID EMPLOYMENT

There are different ways to find the best fit between an individual and a job. Hybrid employment – working in both a supported setting (ADE) and in Open Employment – may be suitable for some, whilst pure Open Employment is more suitable for others. A Hybrid Employment Pathway allows individuals to develop work skills, confidence, networks, and relationships and transition into more Open Employment at their own pace.

### \*DISCOVERY

Employment pathways can be supported by informal or formal processes. The informal pathway involves learning on-the-job with employers like Business Enterprises and this can take place in short term work experience/work placements.

- **'Everyday Discovery':** Through this day-to-day process, Staff and Supported Employees work out what Supported Employees are interested in doing for training and work. Learning about someone's interests, goals, passion, individual work style and how they work best can help when matching a person with a task, job, business and industry. This process can unfold on the job over time with a Supported Employee, Staff and/or the Wraparound Support Team.

- **Formal Discovery process:** A formal Discovery process is completed with a Support Coordinator (i.e. **genU** Employment Pathways Coordinator) who can meet with an individual to determine and document individual interests, goals, strengths and potential matches to industries and jobs in Hybrid or Open Employment. This process is NDIS funded. Family and friends play an important role in Discovery and can help individuals to understand their own strengths and interests and identify ways of using these in a job.

### \*CUSTOMISED EMPLOYMENT AND JOB CARVING

Supported Employees can team up with an Employer to customise a job to capitalise on an individual's strengths. Alternatively, there may be particular areas of a job an individual has experience in and these can be 'carved off' as a micro-job for this person.

### \*USING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

The pathway to employment involves planning to work out how individuals want to use their NDIS funding package to support their goals. This planning process is often with the individual, their nominee (i.e. family member or guardian), a Local Area Coordinator (LAC), and the NDIA.

- **Local Area Coordinator (LAC):** An LAC helps individuals access the NDIS, specifically to create an NDIS Plan.
- **Support Coordinator and hands-on support:** A Support Coordinator or LAC may advise individuals looking for employment to talk to **genU** Employment Pathways for help deciding how to best use NDIS funding to reach employment goals. As a first step, the Employment Pathways Coordinator uses the Discovery process to help individuals work out what they would like to do, and how they can use their funding to achieve their goals.

### \*USING FUNDING FLEXIBLY

Individuals can use their NDIS funding in Open and Hybrid Employment arrangements. Often, part of the funding is used for a Support Worker to visit the workplace. Funding for Hybrid and Open Employment is challenging and requires careful planning to ensure individuals transition in a sustainable way (see Section 4.8). If an individual works in Hybrid or Open Employment their work capacity will be assessed by their LAC. Support Coordinators provide recommendations for future NDIS funding and this potentially impacts on whether or not individuals will receive an appropriate rate of funding to maintain employment in a WISE setting (i.e. Business Enterprises intense support setting).

# >> APPENDIX 2

## WISE-ABILITY TRAINING GUIDE FOR STAFF

*The WISE-Ability model captures best practice organisational design for social enterprises and other organisations seeking to support the wellbeing and employment of people with a disability. The model combines elements that support individuals with a disability (for example, wraparound support, learning opportunities, safe spaces, and elements that support WISE organisations), alongside elements that WISEs require (for example, strong structure, good partnerships, stable funding). This guide provides practical advice on how you might implement the WISE-Ability approach in your organisation to design a supportive work environment and employment pathways for people with a disability.*



Figure 2 WISE-Ability model

WISE-ABILITY ELEMENT	How to create inclusive workplace conditions
<p><b>STRUCTURE</b></p> <p>Setting up the right organisational structure is the first step to ensuring you have the capacity to meet the needs of clients and Supported Employees.</p> <p>Aligning your business goals with your training and transitions opportunities creates a strong WISE structure. For instance, how could you line up a Nursery with a learning or work program for people with a disability?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Offer different <b>work types/tasks and work environments</b> or settings. For instance, in-door and out-door work options, different locations or rooms for work.</li> <li>➤ <b>Allow ample time</b> for individuals to prepare themselves to change environments.</li> <li>➤ Identify staff to be a <b>buddy or mentor</b> to frequently check-in and offer support in a range of areas in and outside work. For instance, learning on the job and the development of soft skills in the workplace.</li> <li>➤ Connect individuals with a <b>Support Worker</b>. Understanding each person and providing in-depth, tailored support is important.</li> <li>➤ Identify <b>accessible equipment</b> requirements (funding may be available via Job Access).</li> <li>➤ Identify and document individual interests and skills and create opportunities for <b>hands-on learning and training</b> in these areas. Through this process <b>identify goals</b> and work aspirations.</li> <li>➤ Support a healthy <b>work life balance</b>.</li> </ul>

## PATHWAYS AND CUSTOMISED EMPLOYMENT

There are ways to ensure the best fit between an individual and a job. The pathway to Open Employment is supported by informal and formal processes. The informal pathway involves learning on the job with employers who can support professional development. The formal process starts by making sure individuals have access to all the resources they need, for example via their NDIS Plan.

The pathway to employment involves financial planning to work out how individuals want to use their NDIS funding package to support their goals. This process is governed by the Individual, a Support Coordinator, a Local Area Coordinator (LAC), and/or the NDIA. As a first step individuals should talk to their Support Worker/Coordinator.

- **Create pathways** to outside work experiences and opportunities that match up with individual interests, strengths and needs.
- Draw on an **individual's networks** (support network, family, friends) to link up with potential employers who can offer appropriate work conditions.
- Draw on **established relationships** with your stakeholders, partners and clients to create a consistent experience and work environment for Supported Employees.
- Support the individual to **plan carefully** for the pathway with an LAC or Support Coordinator (i.e. the individual **NDIS funding plan**).

### 'Customise and Carve' Employment Opportunities

Talk with the employer to tailor or **customise** a job for the individual (i.e. modified hours, tasks). You can also **carve** off specific work tasks to create a new job. What does this involve?

- Identifying tasks a person is interested in doing
- Identifying an employer and understanding the kind of roles and jobs they require
- Identifying which roles and jobs can be tailored to individuals (customised, i.e. with accessible equipment), or sectioned off into a number of smaller/focused jobs (carved).

## SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT

The use of physical space can improve or undermine participation. Consider for example: do busy work environments suit individuals? And, where are the safe areas, nooks and crannies?

Spatial design can also affect how you meet your WISE social goals. Consider, for example, who and how many people the work and training settings can support?

A warehouse layout that can be modified (i.e. moving tables, chairs, machinery), means that individuals can work in large or small teams and equipment can be moved to suit these different configurations. Being agile in this way can also help WISEs meet the needs of new/different contracted jobs. WISEs can test the layout of workplace and other spaces by seeking feedback from Supported Employees.

- Provide **calm spaces** and busy/**active spaces** for work by sectioning off tasks and work areas.
- In addition to lunch breaks provide **quiet, safe times** of the day for Supported Employees to relax/talk freely with peers and trusted staff.
- Create access to an **outdoor environment** for work or lunch breaks
- Create an **accessible environment** by clearing walkways and modifying/providing accessible equipment (i.e. instruction cards attached to machinery and equipment).
- Provide options for **time-out** when individuals are not feeling physically or mentally well, like going for a walk, drive, sitting in a quiet/hidden area.



MODEL WISE-ABILITY ELEMENT	How to create inclusive workplace conditions
<p><b>CULTURE</b></p> <p>An organisational culture of care, inclusivity and genuine collaboration empowers staff and Supported Employees. Culture is crafted by people – from your leadership and funders to your participants, your unique combination of business and social goals, the WISE space and environment, and the industry you connect to.</p> <p>A culture of recognition, working together and valuing each other supports wellbeing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Establish a culture of understanding and support on day one by <b>identifying a buddy or go-to person</b> that individual Supported Employees can contact for support/ issues within and external to the workplace.</li> <li>➤ Create opportunities for <b>Supported Employee voices</b> to be heard; i.e. feedback on daily routine at work via staff meetings.</li> <li>➤ In addition to your social goals, establish a common goal of <b>high quality</b> services and products to build pride and purpose at work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>RELATIONSHIPS</b></p> <p>People external to the organisation (for example, employers, education providers, stakeholders and intermediaries) play an important role in providing different forms of support. They can reinforce and broaden social and financial goals and help build organisational culture.</p> <p>Creating relationships with commercial partners opens up funding opportunities.</p> <p>Strong relationships intersect with WISE programs and can lead to further training and employment opportunities.</p> <p>New relationship opportunities may arise from contacting potential partners and identifying how your social enterprise can fulfil their needs as well as your own. WISEs that offer trials (i.e. in Landscaping) allow all partners to work on the right match/fit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Identify</b> other organisations linked to your industry or business goals and discuss how you can work together to meet common goals.</li> <li>➤ <b>Ask:</b> How you can leverage current services to meet partner/client their needs? Consider how this will meet your WISE needs as well.</li> <li>➤ <b>Develop shared goals for pathways:</b> set up an induction process for Supported Employees and a briefing for all staff to build teamwork and strengths-based culture. Set up expectations about when the Supported Employee will be on site (i.e. arrival time, departure time). Consider when you will have time to induct a Supported Employee – are there quiet times of the year when you can provide coaching and support/make necessary adjustments?</li> </ul>
<p><b>FINANCE</b></p> <p>Financial sustainability or having consistent funding is often a challenge for WISEs.</p> <p>Understanding your cost structure and having a commercially competitive (high quality, fair price) offering is vital to the sustainability of your WISE. Choosing the right industry is also vital for success and financial sustainability.</p> <p>Long-term grant funding, multi-year contracts and/or repeat customers can support the success of your WISE.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Victorian Government <b>Social Procurement Framework</b> and Policy encourages commercial businesses to work with organisations that have social goals. If you operate in Victoria, consider how you can leverage this policy to support demand for business, contracts and work for Supported Employees on- and off-site.</li> <li>➤ Draw on <b>NDIS funding</b> to support your Employees. For example, this funding can be used to provide equipment that enhances accessibility.</li> <li>➤ Consider <b>diverse business offerings:</b> Running multiple businesses or enterprises in key industries can help to secure relationships, jobs and contacts with a range of partners. This diversification can support overall financial sustainability, particularly if one business is operating in a financially precarious industry.</li> </ul>

## MODEL WISE-ABILITY ELEMENT

## How to create inclusive workplace conditions

### INDUSTRY

The type of industry you choose to operate in not only gives your WISE a particular direction and culture, but can impact finance, funding and program outcomes. Aligning your social goals and strategy with the right industry or vehicle for change can help.

What industry will you be connected to? For example, Warehousing, Farming, Horticulture, Building, Landscaping or Hospitality? Consider how the industry will affect your training program.

- Consider operating **across industries** which can be achieved by running multiple micro-businesses from the one location.
- Understand **labour market demand** and what skills will increase the employability of your Supported Employees.
- Prioritise **inclusive industries** that offer a supportive workplace culture and environment.
- Consider technology-based industries and utilising equipment that Supported Employees can be upskilled in. Environments that mimic external businesses prepare Supported Employees to move in to Open Employment in the future.

### POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Having processes and policies in place at your WISE supports business operations, staff and participant wellbeing. Policies that provide guidance, accessible, modifiable and flexible ways of working for staff and Supported Employees helps to create an inclusive organisational culture, while clear processes provide guidance for troubleshooting and can save valuable time.

- **Provide guidance for staff** about how best to provide support. Awareness Raising training and background reading can help inform your workplace culture (i.e. **genU** have a booklet called 'Understanding our Mental Health and Disabilities').
- Work to understand individual needs which vary throughout the day. **Staff should stay in contact** with Supported Employees to meet changing needs.
- **Keep family/networks informed** about any changes at work or challenges that the individual may need assistance with.
- Have a **policy for intake and outgoing** Supported Employees to keep your work force strong.
- **Safety first!** Making sure Supported Employees have access to: essential WHS training via different forms of communication (visual, audio); food and water facilities, especially in warm environments; protective clothing where appropriate; and Covid-safe equipment such as PPE. Different work environments will have different levels of risk that need to be managed. This may require particular communication skills or physical aids.
- Use **visual and tactile tools**. For instance, a whiteboard system can be used to manage tasks and allocate staff resources. In addition to words, you can use tactile magnets and tags to indicate tasks and task status.
- Plan ahead and **inform Supported Employees** of any changes to their work schedule ahead of time. Doing this will minimise work stress.
- Ensure staff members are **visible and accessible** to Supported Employees.

# >> APPENDIX 3

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### SUPPORTED EMPLOYEE

#### Recruitment and consent meeting prior to the interview

The recruitment and consent meeting will allow the researcher and participant to meet at *genU* Business Enterprises. The researcher will explain the project and ensure the participant (and if present, support person or family member) understand the project and what participation involves.

The researcher will explain that the participant has the option of taking photographs to aid the interview discussion. This will specifically aid questions about

what the participant likes/does not like about working at *genU*, and where they would like to work. A hard copy of the interview questions will also be shared with potential participants and support person/family.

The researcher will confirm consent, the presence of support person/family and set a date/time for the Interview. As per the participants preference stated on the consent form, the participant will be provided with a transcription of their interview to review.

Introductions and background	Introduce Researcher and Participant
Let's talk about your work at <i>genU</i> . Please use pictures if you would like. What work or activities do you do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Do you enjoy the work?</li><li>➤ What are the things you like/ what are the things you do not like?</li><li>➤ What is your favourite and least favourite part of the work?</li><li>➤ What would you change/do differently at <i>genU</i>?</li></ul>
What do you learn at <i>genU</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ What/other skills would you like to learn?</li><li>➤ Who helps you to learn and work?</li><li>➤ What support would you like to do this?</li></ul>
Where would you like to work other than <i>genU</i> ? (think about the things you want to do)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Why would you like to do this? (think about the places and things that are important to you)</li><li>➤ Would you like any support to do this? (think about the people who are important to you)</li></ul>
Thank you for participating in an interview with me.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Is there anything else you would like to add?</li><li>➤ Do you have any questions for me?</li></ul>

## EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER

- 1 Introductions: where do you work; can you tell me what your organisation does; can you tell me about your role?
- 2 How is your organisation linked to *genU*, or how have you worked with *genU*?
- 3 Does your organisation employ or support people with Intellectual Disability?
- 4 In your view what are the key challenges preventing more Open Employment opportunities for people with Intellectual Disability?
- 5 *Prompts: Are there any challenges related to support in the workplace, the industry specifically (i.e. fast paced environments), productivity?*
- 6 Who/what do you think could play a role in addressing these Open Employment challenges and how, what would they do?

*Prompts, discuss:*

- a. What/ who would make it work? (what works?)
- b. What sort of Settings, places, objects would help?
- c. What sort of Culture would help?
- d. Are there particular Policies and practices that would help?
- e. What are the most suitable Industries
- f. What Funding is required?
- g. What are the obstacles to these sorts of changes?
- 7 Is there anything that you think employers could do differently/ better? If you could change one thing, what would it be?

## *GENU* STAFF

- 1 What is your role at *genU*? Does your work focus on one Business Enterprise in particular?
- 2 What is essential to have in place for CREW so that they are able to work and complete activities in the Business Enterprises?
- 3 What helps/assists CREW to be productive?
- 4 What are the barriers that the CREW experience in their everyday work and training? How are these overcome or addressed?
- 5 Do you think they could be addressed differently in the Business Enterprise? What do you think could have been done differently/better?
- 6 Are these modes of support transferable to Open Employment?
- 7 What are the challenges of Open Employment?
- 8 What do you wish you could do at the Business Enterprises? What would you change?



# >> APPENDIX 4

## EMPLOYER TOOLKIT



# EMPLOYER FACT SHEET



## About Job Carving

### WHAT IS JOB CARVING?

Job carving is the creation of a new position within an organisation. It works by analysing the tasks that are assigned to an existing role, and 'carving' off some of those tasks to develop another position.

Job carving can provide an opportunity for a person with disability to work within your organisation.

### HOW TO CHOOSE WHICH TASKS TO JOB CARVE?

Tasks that would be right for job-carving can be identified in your business by considering the below questions.

- Are there tasks that do not fit into a specific role?
- Can you reallocate tasks to reduce overtime costs?
- Do you have tasks that are rarely performed due to time constraints and business priorities?



### BENEFITS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

- More effective allocation of tasks improves productivity and service delivery to customers.
- More efficient utilisation of your workforce and increased diversity also improves employee engagement and workplace culture.
- A more inclusive and diverse workforce better reflects your customers and community.

### BUSINESS FOR A PERSON WITH DISABILITY

- Opportunity to work in a meaningful job as a valued employee.
- Builds confidence and employability skills.
- Job Carving may be a transitional step with the opportunity for further skills development and additional tasks.

### FURTHER READING

<https://includeability.gov.au/resources-employers/customising-job-person-disability>

<https://includeability.gov.au/resources-employers/economic-and-business-benefits-employing-people-disability>

JobAccess video –  
Diversity makes good business sense.

<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/node/77726>

For further information call the genU Employment Pathways Team:

Phone: 1300 558 368 or  
Email: [contact@genu.org.au](mailto:contact@genu.org.au)

# EMPLOYER FACT SHEET



## Reasonable Adjustments

### WHAT ARE REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS?

Reasonable adjustments are a change to the workplace to enable a person with disability to do their job.

Often employees with disability do not require any adjustments to do their job, but sometimes they do.

Reasonable adjustments may include changes to premises (e.g. making sure a walkway is clear and accessible), facilities, work practices or training.

**The genU Employment Pathways team can work closely with your business to identify if any reasonable adjustments are required.**

### COMMON EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

- Flexible working arrangements – flexible hours, remote working, time off for medical appointments.
- Mobility – moving furniture, widening doorways, ramps.
- Additional training, mentoring, support.
- Vehicle modifications.
- Assistive technology – screen reading software, hearing loops.

If you are aware of an employee's disability, legally you must provide an adjustment to accommodate the needs of your employee.

A reasonable adjustment is one that does not impose an unjustifiable hardship on the employer.

While adjustments are designed to support employees with disability, often they also benefit a larger range of employees.

### FUNDING FOR EMPLOYERS

Often reasonable adjustments cost very little or nothing at all.

However, there is funding available through the Australian Government's Employment Assistance Fund (Job Access) to cover the costs of making workplace changes. Some funding caps apply, for example – physical changes are capped at \$30,000.

**If funding is required, genU Employment Pathways can help you prepare and submit your application.**

<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employment-assistance-fund-eaf>



**Call genU Employment Pathways Team**

Phone: 1300 558 368 or  
Email: [contact@genu.org.au](mailto:contact@genu.org.au)



# EMPLOYER FACT SHEET



## Inclusive Communication

### INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Inclusive language is about using words and phrases that are inclusive of social, cultural, linguistic and lifestyle diversity.

Best practice is to take a person-centred approach. We are all first and foremost people – disability, culture, gender, sexual orientation, or age is relevant only in particular contexts.

### COMMUNICATION TIPS

- Position the person before the disability. Use the term 'person with disability' rather than 'disabled person'.
- Speak to a person with disability as you would speak to anyone else.
- If a person with disability is accompanied by another person, speak directly to the person with disability.
- Avoid phrases such as 'suffers from', 'handicapped' and 'physically challenged'.
- Use the phrase 'person who uses a wheelchair' rather than 'wheelchair bound'.
- Use the words 'accessible toilet', 'accessible parking' rather than 'disabled toilet or parking'.
- If you think someone needs assistance, ask the person if you can assist them. If they say no, accept this and move on. If they say yes, allow the person to tell you what they need.
- People with disability are often asked intrusive and probing questions which can cause discomfort. Ask questions about a person's disability only if you are invited to do so.

- If necessary, move to a safe, calm, or quiet space to communicate.
- When talking to a person in a wheelchair, try to find something to sit on to be at eye-level.



### FURTHER RESOURCES

Video – Inclusive Language, Job Access  
<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/node/77781>

Further Reading  
<https://includeability.gov.au/resources-employers/creating-accessible-and-inclusive-communications>

**For more information contact the genU  
Employment Pathways team:**

Phone: 1300 558 368 or  
Email: [contact@genu.org.au](mailto:contact@genu.org.au)



# EMPLOYER FACT SHEET



## Funding for Employers – We can Help

genU will work closely with your business to identify the support available to employ a person with disability.

### FUNDING FOR WORKPLACE CHANGE

When you employ someone with disability, sometimes changes need to be made in the workplace to assist them.

In this case, the Australian Government provides funding through the JobAccess Employment Assistance Fund (EAF). We will help you complete the paperwork and assist your business to seek reimbursement for aids, software, equipment, and training that benefits new and existing staff with disability.

**For more information contact genU Employment Pathways:**

Phone: 1300 558 368

Email: [contact@genu.org.au](mailto:contact@genu.org.au)

<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employment-assistance-fund-eaf>

### WAGE SUBSIDIES

Subsidies are available for employers who employ a Disability Employment Services (DES) jobseeker and are arranged directly with a DES provider before commencement.

Read more about wage subsidies:

<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/wage-subsidy>

Contact MatchWorks

Phone: 1300 13 23 63

Email: [info@matchworks.com.au](mailto:info@matchworks.com.au)

### WAGES BASED ON PRODUCTIVITY

A person with disability who is able to perform jobs at full capacity would obviously receive a full rate of pay.

However, some people have disabilities that significantly affect how much they are able to achieve at work each day

In these cases, as an employer you may need an alternative option to pay a fair wage for the work being done.

In this case you would use the **Supported Wage System**. This allows you to match an appropriate wage with the productivity of a person with disability.

The supported wage system makes it more sustainable for organisations to employ people with disability and keep them in work.

Read more on the application process:

<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/wages-based-productivity>

**For more information about the Supported Wage system contact genU Employment Pathways:**

Phone: 1300 558 368

Email: [contact@genu.org.au](mailto:contact@genu.org.au)

### FURTHER SUPPORT

<https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/other-australian-government-support>

*Note: All funding subject to eligibility criteria.*

# >> APPENDIX 5

## KASSY CASE STUDY



The Kassy Case Study captures commonly identified Supported Employee concerns/requirements for work and how these can be supported.

Kassy has been working at Business Enterprises for 2 years. She is a friendly and socially confident individual. She has difficulty remembering tasks and tells us that she uses:

“...a laminated printout of all the foods you need to make in a week, and you've just got to tick all of them off at some point during the week. Now it's like me just going to the café and the storeroom and going, all right, we're low on this slice ... and writing that list myself and getting through it.  
(Supported Employee 3)

She enjoys work in the kitchen but likes variety in her work tasks – she doesn't want to be stuck in one area for too long. She is NDIS funded and is keen to work for 4 hours per week in an employment setting outside Business Enterprises. Kassy comes from a workplace based on the WISE model.

Things you should know about Kassy's past/ongoing workplace experience is that she has:

- ✓ enjoyed working across a range of **different work environments**, and has experienced rotation around different work tasks and spaces
- ✓ has **hands-on experience/strengths** in **hospitality** and **warehouse** work, particularly food preparation: chopping/peeling
- ✓ been trained in **workplace health and safety**
- ✓ had supportive **supervision** and on the **job mentoring** to complete tasks
- ✓ found benefit from having a **calm/quiet space** to take time out
- ✓ enjoyed **social connection** in the workplace with co-workers
- ✓ has NDIS funding for a **Support Worker** to visit her on-site
- ✓ has NDIS funding for **travel** to and from work
- ✓ is looking for an entry level position **tailored** to her strengths, with preparation via job shadowing/trialling
- ✓ enjoys **gardening** when not at work
- ✓ utilises **assistive technology** for a hearing impairment

**These factors contribute to wellbeing for Supported Employees like Kassy.**

**Kassy's pathway to work is supported by NDIS funding line items: Capacity Building and Core Support. Keep in mind that the names of line items and funding amounts are subject to change. It is important for people to know that their funding could be affected and that they need to think ahead and ask themselves questions about what they want to do exactly and what they will need (i.e. support worker, travel) to do it. Work with LAC/family/network and genU planner to ensure best outcome.**



**Contact**

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