Customised Employment in Australia: Where are we now?

Final Report

April 2024

Dr June Alexander

Tel: 08 8201 3902

Contents

1. Executive Summary

In Australia, people with disability experience an unemployment rate that is more than double that of people without disabilities, with this disparity being particularly pronounced for people with intellectual disability. The USA Customised Employment model is designed to facilitate employment acquisition and maintenance for people with disabilities and has shown promise in the Australian context in achieving award-based open employment outcomes. Despite increased attention to Customised Employment in Australia in recent years and the provision of employment services utilising this approach, Customised Employment lacks legislation and an agreed-upon process with fidelity. Consequently, this study aimed to address two primary questions: How is Customised Employment being implemented in Australia, and are there policy or practical obstacles hindering NDIS participants from utilising funds for Customised Employment? Interviews were conducted with staff utilising Customised Employment, as well as with carers and people with disabilities receiving Customised Employment support from various services across Australia. The study's findings highlighted the successful outcomes for people with disabilities, particularly people with complex support needs when the stages and procedures of Customised Employment were utilised. Although staff utilising Customised Employment reported receiving training, it was typically on an informal ad hoc basis. This study highlighted two particular areas requiring strengthening in Customised Employment delivery, that is, Job Analysis and on-the-job supports. Another issued highlighted in this study was the inconsistency of NDIS staff in facilitating the use of NDIS funds for Customised Employment implementation. While not traditionally recognised as part of the role of disability employment consultants, staff in this study were often providing non-clinical counselling supports. Accordingly, this study's recommendations include integrating an agreed Australian Customised Employment process into relevant policies, providing Customised Employment training for NDIS personnel and, developing an accredited Customised Employment training program inclusive of Employment Counsellor training.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background: State of employment for people with disabilities in Australia

Despite efforts to improve job prospects in mainstream employment for individuals with disabilities, there has not been any notable rise in Australian employment rates in recent years (ABS, 2019; Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, 2023). People with disabilities face an unemployment rate that is more than double those without disabilities. Approximately 113,000 Australian individuals with disabilities are actively searching for employment (Department of Social Services, 2021).

Open employment or jobs in the mainstream are seen as providing better financial, social, and psychosocial outcomes for people with disabilities than sheltered employment (Dean et al., 2018; Robertson et al., 2019; Taylor, 2022; Taylor et. al., 2023; Thies et al., 2021, Voermans et al., 2021; Wehman et al., 2018). Furthermore, people with disability have expressed their desire for jobs in mainstream employment (People with Disability Australia, 2022) and open employment is more cost effective than other post school pathways (The Centre for International Economics, 2023). In Australia, Disability Employment Services (DES) agencies, private companies and nonprofits, are tasked with assisting people with disability to find and maintain employment in mainstream employment. There are 108 DES providers receiving $1.4 billion annually (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022). However, it is well recognised that the current Disability Employment Services (DES) system is not providing acceptable employment outcomes for people with disability, especially for people who are most disadvantaged, people with complex support needs (ABS, 2015; Australian Government, 2021; Meltzer et al., 2019). Complex support needs encompass individuals who require assistance across a spectrum of physical, cognitive, sensory, emotional, social, and behavioural aspects.

The introduction of Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has provided NDIS participants an opportunity to utilise NDIS funds to work towards employment goals beyond what a DES provider or an employer can provide (NDIS, 2021). In addition to DES providers there are a variety of non-DES employment organisations providing mainstream disability employment supports. Some disability employment providers utilise an employment strategy known as 'Customised Employment' (CE) and the NDIS reports when CE is utilised it provides positive employment outcomes (NDIS, 2023b).

2.2 Customised Employment

Customised Employment is described as a person-centred, strengths-based approach that recognises the individual's capabilities and talents and builds community inclusion (Smith, 2018). Reported outcomes in the USA for employees with disability finding employment using the Customised Employment process include increased quality of life, wages higher than minimum wage, attainment of part-time or full-time long-term employment (Riesen et al., 2015). Hence, in USA, CE has been considered an approach that supports successful employment and included in the Federal Register since July 2001 (Callahan, 2002) and included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act 2014 to assist particularly people with severe disability to gain and maintain employment (Wausbrook, 2022). Customised Employment has been previously utilised in Australia as early as the 1990s, however, in 2012 Australian disability employment funding models changed (APO, 2024) and it was no longer considered financially viable to implement Customised Employment (O. Sorre, personal communication, April 17, 2024). Currently, in Australia there is no requirement for employment agencies to utilise CE but it has received renewed attention in Australia since the availability of employment funding via NDIS.

Staff employed in disability employment roles in the USA have access to training provided by courses approved by the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) (ACRE, n.d.). ACRE lists 23 approved training providers that teach both general employment services curricula and employment services with an emphasis on Customised Employment. This certificate is now commonly mandated by state agencies as a prerequisite for authorising a provider to deliver CE services (Marc Gold & Associates, 2023). In Australia, pre 2012 disability employment staff, also known as job consultants, were trained in Customised Employment by visiting American academics or via the ACRE online training by Virgina Commonwealth University (Virgina Commonwealth University, 2010). Today staff working in disability employment can complete a Certificate IV of Disability Employment Services (Training.gov.au, n.d.) however CE is not included in this Certificate. Currently the only Australian training organisation, offering an equivalent level of CE training to ACRE providers is Centre for Disability Employment Research & Practice (CDERP) College, Victoria (CDERP, 2024).

2.2.1 Stages of Customised Employment

To date much of the research on Customised employment has been descriptive and while research reports CE as providing quality employment outcomes for people with disability, it is yet to be established as an evidence-based practice (Risen et. al., 2023). Even still Customised Employment

and Discovery receive funding support for implementation through NDIS (Smith, 2023a). While researchers endeavour to establish Customised Employment as an evidence-based practice, there is significant published information regarding CE's stages available and a summary is provided below.

The four stages of Customised Employment described by Harvey et.al. (2013) are: -

(1) Discovering Personal Genius, or 'Discovery' for short (Griffin-Hammis, 2024)

(2) Job Search Planning

(3) Job Development and Negotiation

(4) Post-Employment Support.

Discovery

The initial stage, Discovery aims to identify 'Who is this person?' and 'What are their ideal conditions of employment?' (Griffin et al, 2007). During the Discovery phase visits to the person's home, community and interviews with significant others (i.e., family members, friends, professionals) are conducted.

Another element of Discovery is developing 'Vocational themes.' Themes encourage the job consultant and job seeker to have open discussions so that other options than just one 'dream job' is considered These combinations of interests, termed as 'themes', can pave the way for novel and varied career pathways (Griffin et al, 2007).

Further practices of Discovery include (a) thoughtfully listening to the job seeker, referred to as 'smooth listening'[TM] (Griffin et.al., 2007). and (b) observe the person in daily activities in several different community settings (Inge et.al., 2018).

While the elements of Discovery are summarised here it is worth noting researchers in the USA have highlighted agreed elements of a Discovery Fidelity Scale (Risen et. al., 2021) and researchers at CDERP and the University of Melbourne continue to develop a Discovery Fidelity Scale to be used within the Australian context (Smith, 2023a).

Job Search Planning

Information gathered during Discovery is utilised to formulate a plan to compile a list of potential employers (Harvey, 2013). Employers are contacted utilising 'Informational Interviews' which can be a casual conversation with a prospective employer and/or a discussion and site tour (Inge et.al., 2018). Here the job consultant is gathering information about the prospective employer and the company i.e., information about their products and services, varying tasks and duties, values and culture of the organisation, training requirements and work hours etc. Ensuring that any job fulfills a legitimate requirement for the employer while also aligning with the strengths and job preferences of the job seeker (Griffin et.al., 2007).

8

If the job consultant has a potential employee in mind, it is at this stage work experience can be organised (Inge et.al., 2018). Work experience should be compensated at wages that reflect the value of the tasks performed and should extend for a duration sufficient for the individual to gain a comprehensive understanding of the responsibilities and skills involved (Griffin et.al., 2007). This can vary from a few hours to multiple weeks.

As part of the Customised Employment process, a Visual Resume can be utilised in place of the usual written Curriculum Vitae (CV). Visual Resumes serve as a tool to introduce the job seeker to potential employers, and show pictorially their strengths, such as relevant interests, education, work and volunteer experience, potential contributions to the business, and a detailed list of tasks they are capable of performing. (Marc Gold & Associates, 2017).

Job Development and Negotiation

Upon identification of an employer, the third phase, involves negotiations of a customised job and facilitation of supports which meets the requirements of both the individual with disability and the employer (Harvey, 2013). This stage includes 'Job Carving' and 'Job Analysis.'

Job carving is a process within Customised Employment where job duties are tailored or customised to match the strengths, skills, and preferences of an individual with a disability. Instead of fitting individuals into existing job roles, job carving involves adapting or creating a new position. This process often involves analysing and restructuring tasks and responsibilities, to accommodate the individual's needs while still meeting the employer's requirements. During this stage it is important to not only consider workplace skills the individual with disability has, but also personality or relationships that create profit or enhance the workplace (Griffin, 2017; Inge et.al., 2018).

Job Analysis pinpoints the essential tasks that require completion, including informal rules and rituals of the workplace (Griffin, 2017). Job matching is the cornerstone of Customised Employment, and a good job match can lead to higher job satisfaction and productivity (Inge et.al., 2023). A job match needs to include crafting employment opportunities that align with the optimal working conditions for an individual. The Job Analysis process assists in highlighting the workplace natural supports, that is, co-workers that will routinely assist the employee with disability and, necessary adaptations, technology, and instructional supports. Hence the job matching process demands serious attention to detail, and a 'Job Analysis Record' (JAR) should be completed (Griffin et.al., 2007).

Post-employment Support

The fourth phase, Post-Employment Support, represents the final stage of the CE process. It encompasses the establishment of continuous support structures and the monitoring of the

employment relationship to guarantee satisfaction for both the employee with disability and the employer (Harvey, 2013).

Post employment supports includes utilising modifications and/or training that assists the employee with disability to complete necessary workplace tasks. One of the strategies that can be utilised to teach these skills is Systematic Instruction (SI). SI is a nuanced group of techniques of which two components are prompts and writing a task analysis and is an essential element of Customised Employment (Marc Gold & Associates, n.d.).

Post-employment supports extend to providing ongoing assistance once the job consultant has transitioned to natural supports (Butterworth et.al., 2023). Post-employment supports include serving as a liaison between the employer and the employee with disability to address any issues that may arise. Job consultants may also offer on-going supports to assist with build social connections, maintain well-being and, provide opportunities for ongoing skill development and career progression (Butterworth et.al., 2023).

Variations of CE

CE is an individualised model and hence there are reported variations that may occur (Harvey, 2013). For example, the four components may not always follow a strict sequence. The implementation of the stages and sub steps naturally vary to address the distinct desires and aspirations of the individual and the specific work requirements of the employer. Furthermore, one staff person may be responsible for all four components, or different team members may deliver different components. For the job seeker an outcome of the CE processes may result in the creation of a micro-enterprise rather than traditional paid employment.

2.3 Aim of this project

In Australia, anecdotal reports have raised issues about the ability to successful implement the stages of CE. This includes (a) NDIS not providing funds for CE in participant's plans and (b) disability employment staff's lack of professional knowledge and expertise to deliver CE effectively. This study aimed to examine issues hampering the implementation of CE.

The Aim of this project was to address the following questions:

1. How is Customised Employment being delivered in Australia?
2. Are there policy or practical barriers to NDIS participants utilising funds for Customised Employment?

This study examines Customised Employment in the Australian context and offers policy and practice recommendations for successful implementation of Customised Employment to ensure best possible employment outcomes for people with disability.

Qualitative data was collected from staff utilising the Customised Employment model to find and maintain employment and carers and people with disability who had received Customised Employment services.

This report presents findings and analysis of qualitative interviews of 23 participants including 16 staff, four carers and three people with disability from five Australian states.

3. Methodology

This research received ethics approval from the Flinders University Human Ethics Committee (reference number: 6294). The project team consisted of the following members:

Chief Investigator: Dr June Alexander
Co-researchers: Jala Burton, Tim Cahalan and Dr Darryl Sellwood
Videographer: Side Alley Media

Co-researchers and the videographer have lived experience of disability, and have supported this research by devising interview questions, data analysis and providing critical feedback on the final report.

2.1 Participants

Three groups of participants were interviewed. Group 1 were staff working in nine Australian disability employment agencies that proclaimed to be utilising a Customised Employment model. Group 2 were carers of people with disability who had supported a NDIS participant to access CE funding, and Group 3 were people with disability receiving funds for CE from the NDIS. Refer Table 1.

Staff participants were from organisations that utilised Customised Employment. Organisations were identified via (a) a Google search, using the term 'Customised Employment,'(b) researcher's contacts, and by (c) utilising snowballing sampling, i.e., staff participants were asked to refer other potential interviewees who met the research criteria. Carers and NDIS participants were recruited via staff contacting who they thought may be interested in being interviewed for this study. All participants were emailed and supplied with a Participant Information Sheet which detailed the study's purpose and the researcher's contact details. Interviews were conducted via

video conferencing, except for one carer in-person interview. All NDIS participants were interviewed with support from a carer or an advocate.

2.2 Procedure

All participants (or guardians) provided formal written consent to be interviewed prior to the interview commencing. Participants were asked socio-demographic information (age, sex, location, etc.) before being asking about their experience of delivering or receiving Customised Employment services. Interviews were recorded with the permission of participants and transcribed by a professional transcription company under a signed confidentiality contract with Flinders University. Each participant received a transcript of their interview, and two individuals returned theirs with minor revisions.

2.3 Analysis

The transcriptions were imported into NVivo software to aid in the analysis process. One predefined theme of 'Stages of Customised Employment' was established before data analysis began. Other codes were formulated as coding advanced to accommodate further research findings as reported by study participants.

4. Findings

In total, 23 participants were interviewed. Table 1 provides participant details.

Table 1: Participant Information

Staff Participants	Age	Sex	Location	Organisation	Length of Interview
Staff #1	52	F	QLD	#H	41mins
Staff #2	32	M	WA	#G	29mins
Staff #3	54	F	SA	#A	23mins
Staff #4	36	F	Qld	#D	35mins
Staff #5	51	F	Vic	#E	53mins
Staff #6	Not reported	F	Vic	#E	53mins
Staff #7	45	M	WA	#B	42mins
Staff #8	55	F	Qld	#F (DES)	28mins
Staff #9	56	F	Vic	#C	36mins
Staff #10	32	F	Qld	#D	26mins
Staff #11	35	Nonbinary	NSW	#F (DES)	18mins
Staff #12	34	F	Vic	#C	33mins
Staff #13	25	F	Vic	#C	30mins
Staff #14	45	F	Vic	#F (DES)	36mins
Staff #15	24	F	Vic	#A	34mins
Staff #16	55	F	WA	#I	24mins

Carer Participants	Age	Sex	Location	Supported NDIS participant	Length of Interview
Carer #1	47	F	Vic	16-year-old male	31mins
Carer #2	55	F	SA	20-year-old male	21mins
Carer #3	61	F	Vic	NDIS Participant #1	41mins
Carer #4	57	F	Vic	NDIS participant #3	34mins

NDIS Participants	Age	Sex	Location	Primary Disability	Interview supported by	Length of Interview
NDIS Participant #1	18	M	Vic	Intellectual Disability	Carer #3	41mins
NDIS Participant #2	58	F	Vic	Intellectual Disability	Advocate	16mins
NDIS Participant #3	28	M	Vic	Intellectual Disability	Carer #4	34mins

The analysis highlighted six themes, these were identified as: (1) Defining Customised Employment (2) Utilisation of the stages of Customised Employment (3) Workplace Counselling (4) Funding (5) Staff Training, and (6) Level of support.

"With customised employment it is definitely person-centred … people love their jobs …"

4.1 Defining Customised Employment

In literature, Customised Employment is characterised as a person-centred, strengths-based approach that acknowledges the capabilities and talents of individuals. Similarly, participants in this study described Customised Employment as unique, individualised and with a focus on strengths.

Staff participants accented the uniqueness of the Customised Employment approach, for example *"It's not cookie cutter…this doesn't have to be one size fits all"* [staff #1] and:

> *"It's not just ticking a box, spending minimal time, it's spending a lot of time with them one-on-one, really discovering and understanding what makes them tick, what it is that they want to do to explore employment"* [staff #3].

Other staff emphasised Customised Employment's individualisation and a focus on the job seeker's strengths, for example:

> *"With customised employment it is definitely person-centred …We're looking at their strengths, their talents, their abilities, their likes, their dislikes. When you're working with strengths with people, you're just building their resilience. So, it's compounding and it's really effective … people love their jobs, and they don't leave their jobs. Or they just progress in their jobs"* [staff #9].

> *"…it's a strengths-based process where you're finding out what a person is really good at what are their skills, what can they leverage that they've already got to add value into a workplace"* [staff #2].

Carer #3 was a proponent of CE's individualised approach; she reported her son was:

> *"…supported one-on-one …personalisation around getting to know [son's name], talking to him, getting a sense of what he likes, bring him out of his shell."*

Other staff highlighted the work put into delivering Customised Employment. *"…it's time consuming, it's labour intensive, organisations and their staff need to have been trained and skilled and mentored in the approach"* [staff #7]. Another staff member concurred stating:

> *"There's a lot that goes into it. It's not necessarily an easy approach. There isn't a step-by-step instruction. It's quite an observational practice where you have to feel the approach and know where the individual is at"* [staff #12].

Despite the additional work involved in Customised Employment staff felt the outcomes achieved were worthwhile:

> *"… they're going to get better outcomes for their clients because they're going to match them to a work environment that they're actually wanting to do and actually more aligned to them"* [staff #14].

4.2 Utilisation of the stages of Customised Employment

As outlined in the Introduction to this report, Customised Employment is separated into four main stages i.e., Discovery, Job Search Planning, Job Development & Negotiation, Post employment supports. Here, staff described their understanding of each of the stages.

4.2.1 Discovery

Throughout the Discovery phase of Customised Employment, thorough familiarisation with the job seeker occurs to ensure the identification of a suitable job opportunity. Vocational themes or a variety of job options are examined at this stage. Staff participants in this study appeared well versed with understanding the philosophy behind the Discovery process and how it differs from the usual process. For example:

> *"Discovery is about getting to know the individual. And that's getting to know them from the community that they're in, from the places that they enjoy visiting, the people that they have in their lives, the people that are supporting them"* [staff #12].

"… that whole world of job readiness seems to work in a deficit space … it may say 'You don't know how to communicate properly with an employer' …whereas Discovery says 'No, you've got these things, let's work with that and find you a role specific to those strengths.' … you're working with a person's strengths and not what they don't have, or don't know yet." [staff #2].

"Discovery is not, yeah, come into an office and we'll talk about work, and let's look for a job online. …That's where we're trying to avoid the revolving door of employment …and more than often than not it's because there wasn't Discovery undertaken" [staff #7].

Carers highlighted the importance of Discovery to provide insight about potential career paths beyond those they initially recognised for their sons:

"So, the Discovery part was a really important part of CE. …He [son] may have skills in this area that we don't know about. That's what the whole Discovery thing was, so that opened my mind to it" [carer #2].

"... she [CE job consultant] was very proactive in looking at options and not just going down the path of the music but saying 'Well look, what else can you do?' [carer #4].

"…so, I think the Customised Employment [Discovery], finding things that he really likes and motivates him [son] has been really, really important" [carer #1].

4.2.2 Job Search Planning

The Job Search Planning stage comprises three components. Firstly, the process of gathering information about employers, known as 'Information Interviews.' Additionally, involvement in work experience and possibly developing a visual resume. Although staff members acknowledged the use of Information Interviews and work experience, none of the participants mentioned utilising visual resumes.

Work experience was collectively considered a very useful process. However, how work experience was delivered and what it was called varied. Work experience was sometimes described as a *"…taste tester to check out the environment"* [staff #2]. Staff participant #15 also referred to work experience as *"taster visits"* that provided *"a chance for the to try out different industries."* Largely the goal of work experience was to provide *"hands on experience …with the intent to try and work out what participants are enjoying"* [staff #4]. Staff reported accompanying the job seeker on work experience if the job seeker was happy for this [staff #3, #6] and only one staff participant [#8] mentioned paying the employer for work experience.

Carers also valued work experience, with one carer stating their son got a 'really good sense of what work he enjoyed' [carer #3] with another carer stating work experience had *"been really critical"* [carer #1].

Staff participants mentioned completing Information Interviews, where they met with potential employers in person, prior to a job seeker applying for a job. Staff sometimes referred to Information Interviews as *"street marketing"* [staff #8] or *"cold canvassing"* [staff #10, #15]. Staff participant #3 gave a particularly insightful description of Informational Interviews:

> *"…its going out and having a meeting with them [employers], talking to them, finding out who the contacts are, having a look at the site, seeing it's suitable. Is it a safe site? Is it accessible? All those sorts of things. Looking at what roles they have. And then once you've got to meet with them and you've got a contact you can understand and they're the right fit for potentially one of your participants, then you can then introduce the participant"* [staff #3].

Some staff spoke of taking clients with them during the Information Interview. For example, *"…with the Informational Interviews, it's a lot about learning about the businesses and seeing if one, the client likes the business"* [staff #13], other staff did not take the job seeker to Informational Interviews.

An Informational Interview should result in a thorough understanding of the potential workplace to ensure the needs of both the employer and job seeker correspond. Staff involved in delivering Customised Employment placed a significant emphasis on a good connection with the employer, as exemplified by staff participant #15: *"Building a relationship with an employer is paramount."* While some CE staff provided mentoring to employers:

> *"… [name of organisation] is heavily supporting them [employers], and we can support you and help train you as a business"* [staff #4].

Carers also accented the importance of aiding employers:

> *"…there is so much more that needs to be done with employers, is that next step. …how can we support the employer? … I feel like I'm asking way too much of employers … I don't think there's enough support for employers in the current landscape either, which makes it really hard"* [carer #1].

Some staff spoke of separate staff delivering Discovery and Informational Interviews [staff #1, #5, #10].

4.2.3 Job Development & Negotiation

Job Development and Negotiation stage incorporates Job Carving and Job Analysis to ensure a good job match. Staff could provide clear explanations and examples of Job Carving:

> *"We do a lot of job carving. …we figure out what elements of that job or what other roles in that company could fit with a participant or a participant fit with that and care, change or customise it essentially to make it work so that the employer is still having someone fill this role and the participant is going to be able to do it successfully." "…other times it could be finding an employer, and they might not have a role advertised but explaining to them their options. Maybe they've never thought of just having someone in to do some data entry just to help out the reception as an example"* [staff #15].

> *"The process of job carving was really new to me before. There's clear benefits for the business. Theres' clear benefits for the worker. It's a no brainer. People need to know that it exists and that it can actually help with productivity and all those things' businesses care about."* [staff #9].

> *"Job carving its less of like, 'Can we make this role for my client' and it's more like, 'Can we adjust this role for my client's needs?"* [staff #13].

> *"They [employer] may have a role available, but it might not be suitable for that person [job seeker], the whole role. So, it's a matter of going to the employer and saying, "Well, look, they can do this portion of the role, or they could take ups some other parts of someone else's role, and maybe you can do a bit of a job share"* [staff #3].

> *"In fact, it's never a role that's already on Seek that you can just go and apply for. It's actually going well, what – you have to know a lot about the business, and you have to know a lot about the participant to have any hope of that being a genuine long-term thing [job]"* [staff #4].

> *"… job carving; it's identifying maybe gaps in the business or things that people are doing that you could lessen their workload and create a role for someone else...'* [staff #10].

Job Analysis appeared not to be utilised by the majority of staff, with only three staff mentioning utilising a Job Analysis Record [#5, #13, #14]. One staff participant explained the difficulty of this process:

> *"It's that component that I think we're only starting to get our heads around now, way after the fact, because it's a difficult component of the model, I think. So, it's that bit there that I think we missed out on sort of really sinking our teeth into"* [staff #5].

This difficulty was reported despite documentation i.e., a Job Analysis Record (JAR) is available for free download on Griffin-Hammis's USA website. However, participants emphasised the importance of receiving information about CE in the Australian context as participant #5 expresses *"…having Australian examples. We really crave that, and it wasn't available."*

Griffin et.al., (2007) advocates the use of a JAR to help assist with an effective job match. This refers to the compatibility between a job seeker and a specific job or employment opportunity. Despite not utilising a JAR, ensuring a job outcome that suited the job seekers interests and skills was demonstrated by staff. Staff reported that sometimes the outcome of CE process was not salaried employment but instead the job seeker might be more suited to starting their own microenterprise [staff #4, #7]. Furthermore, staff demonstrated how the CE process lent itself to finding creative job matches, for example, participant #9 discussed how a job seeker had *"… a sensory thing, so he absolutely loves feeling the potatoes and the onions."* Although the sensory matter could have been seen as a possible obstacle to employment, this staff member transformed the initial sensory issue into a successful job placement at a fruit and vegetable store.

4.2.4 Post-employment supports

Post employment supports are provided after the employee with disability is employed. This may be 'check ins' and/or more structured supports such as modifications or adaptations and on the job training in relevant workplace tasks. Staff delivering CE reported providing extensive post-employment supports.

Once the employee with disability has obtained a position, adaptations or training may be required to ensure the employee can complete necessary workplace tasks. Staff in this study mentioned utilising Occupational Therapists for workplace modifications [staff #6], and adaptations such as JAWS [Job Access with Speech: a computer screen reader] [staff #9]. Staff also mentioned utilising training strategies such as visual supports [staff #14], task analysis/breaking a task into steps [staff #1, #7, #10, #13], prompts [staff #2], show & tell [staff #13], YouTube clips [staff #8, #14]. However, staff did recognise their limited knowledge of training strategies and requested further education:

> *"I think probably more formal training around Systematic Instruction would be really beneficial. …and understand how to write a good Social Story would also be really beneficial rather than sort of making it up as you go along"* [staff #5].

The importance of providing strategies to ensure the employee has the best opportunity to succeed in the workplace was demonstrated by carer #3 when she revealed she had taken it upon herself to provide written information to the employer about the type of supports that assisted her son, *"for*

example, instructions are simple, give them slowly, repeat, let him [son's name] ask you lots of
questions."

The importance of staying in contact with the employee with disability and the employer was stressed by staff:

> *"So, it's important to stay in contact with that person and stay in contact with the client … I*
> *also stay in contact with the family … I stay in contact with the admin person or someone at*
> *the company, … so I can get an alert if there's anything untoward … if there's anything, it*
> *needs to be nipped in the bud immediately. So, it's just constant checking and monitoring"*
> [staff #16].

Despite organisation [#D] providing only the first two stages of CE (Discovery & Job Search) then placing job seekers with a DES provider to complete the final stages of CE, staff at organisation #D were continuing to also provide ongoing supports:

> *"But in terms of check-ins with the business and sometimes ongoing education with a*
> *business…we're often still involved for six to 12 months just doing that kind of check-in.*
> *…Often that's because they [DES] haven't shown to do that work"* [staff #4].

"There were 10 goals listed. … She's now been there a year and a bit and we're down to two, so we set some new ones."

CE staff providing post-employment supports promoted task development and career progression for employees with disability:

> *"And when I met him, he was pushing trolleys at Woolworths, Woolworths is a great place*
> *for people to get an introduction into, but to leave people there forever, you're just killing*
> *people's dreams"* [staff #16].

> *"There were 10 goals listed. … She's now been there a year and a bit and we're down to two,*
> *so we set some new ones"* [staff #16].

> *"The only thing that she's struggled with in the past was keeping the job and being able to*
> *advocate for herself towards the employer. …I'm there speaking to her every week … So, I am*
> *always updating what tasks she's doing each week"* [staff #14].

"And some of our clients are really happy within their roles, but they actually end up coming back to us and saying, 'I've been in this role for a little bit, but you know what, I realise I can do more. So maybe you can come in and you can help me to negotiate and see if they can get an extra day or I can perhaps learn some extra skills" [staff #12].

However, NDIS funding allocations did dictate whether post-employment supports could be provided:

"So, if we get them a role and they need ongoing support, generally we can provide some, I guess depending on what funding line item they're coming through and what funding they have, but if they need some support ongoing, we may then get them to bring their own individual support worker in to do it" [staff #3].

"It's about self-confidence and building self-esteem.."

4.3 Workplace Counselling

Many staff and carers mentioned counselling supports provided to people with disability throughout the CE process. Five organisations mentioned they utilised qualified workplace counsellors.

Participants highlighted the strength of utilising workplace counsellors:

"…so, if we're able to then include in our suite of services a therapeutic oversight around work-specific counselling that breaks down those barriers and causes them to become enablers then we find that we probably have better outcomes for our customers as well. …working hand in hand with an employment counsellor to give a more holistic and nuanced approach to delivering CE. We think that might be the gold nugget …" [staff #5].

"Wonderful part about what we do now is that we've gone from an approach where originally it was a separation of the person doing employment and the person doing counselling. We're actually employing counsellors to do both. In the background, the counsellors are constantly working in the space of providing that – again, that holistic approach" [staff #12].

Staff recognised the lack of confidence and anxiety job seekers with disability often exhibit and workplace counselling supports were utilised to build self-assurance:

"It's about self-confidence and building self-esteem… So, it looks like it's going to be a new strategy where we start off with employment counselling right from the beginning" [staff #9].

"…make them feel a bit more confident … confidence to start looking for jobs. …We were doing a lot of confidence building together and just having work conversations without looking for work" [staff #15].

Counselling was utilised throughout all four stages of the Customised Employment process:

"…it's a process [CE] and I think it's very important for our client to have someone who walks with them on that process. … I have some clients I'm counselling during their post placement support. Some clients I'm counselling while were looking for jobs. It really depends on the clients … manage anxiety, practicing social skills, making friends, confidence, self-advocacy, self-assurance. …dealing with rejection is a huge part of job hunting" [staff #12].

With carers also recognising the value of workplace counselling:

"… it wasn't about the job itself …but talking to other people and how appropriate [sic] things with colleagues, and what to do when you're upset, conflict resolution, that sort of stuff" [carer #4].

> ## Customised Employment: "…it is definitely a longer process, but there's better results."

4.4 Funding for Customised Employment

Funds facilitating access to Customised Employment were reportedly sourced from NDIS. Diverse responses regarding the ease or difficulty of accessing NDIS funds for employment were reported.

Several participants mentioned difficulties around accessing NDIS funds for Customised Employment:

"…the NDIS will say, Well, that participant can just go to a DES, they don't need Customised Employment" [staff #15].

"They'd [LAC] never heard of it [CE]. They felt it was something that the employment agencies did, and I went no, it was completely different …and I had to explain what it was" [carer #2].

"…some families have approached their service but have not had access to NDIS funds … but yes, we've had three families now that have paid out of their own pockets. …it can take six months to get the right funding. We've had success and sometimes we haven't. …We found him [NDIS participant name] the job and he needed post-placement support but the NDIS in all their wisdom didn't allow it. So, sometimes there are disappointments" [staff #9].

However, other participants articulated the ease of accessing NDIS funds:

> *"The NDIS has been very excellent at acknowledging the value of not only the service [CE] but also the possibility for each young person. And they have received that funding, and it has worked"* [staff #1].

> *"So easy. Yeah, the NDIS, I know a lot of people have issues here and there, but I've never had issues, I love the NDIS and the people we work with are amazing …"* [staff #16].

Recognition was given to the crucial role of LACs in aiding or prohibiting individuals to acquire funds for Customised Employment, as demonstrated by the following quotes:

> *"After being initially told NDIS doesn't fund employment supports but now, we've got LACs that now encourage families to explore Customised Employment"* [staff #7].

> *"I've been 100% supported, the LACs have referred clients to me …"* [staff #16].

> *"...we've had as many LACs as we've had plans, some of them were really on board with that [CE], others were not, including not even realising that employment was important to the NDIS … we had one LAC for two plans, and he was fantastic … he was very supportive of our focus on work and us using the plan in that way. … The last two LACs have had absolutely no idea and really questioned why we had employment, and how we were using that fund, and said that NDIS would reject that"* [carer #1].

Even when NDIS funds were accessed, there was confusion over where CE sits in relation to NDIS support categories. The following staff quotes highlight the difficulties:

> *"The hardest part is communicating it [CE] with the support coordinators and LACs about what we can and can't use"* [staff #15].

> *"…getting capacity building, finding and keeping a job funding … a lot of NDIS planners put it under Core, and it should not be put under Core. … We're doing capacity building, we're building the capacity of the person to be able to go into mainstream open employment and so we have to do that building of capacity, so it has to sit under that. And it can be very, very challenging in getting them [NDIS planners] to understand that it needs to sit under capacity building, employment, finding and keeping a job funding. We do see a lot of times that it's actually put in the wrong area, and it can be quite a battle to get it changed. I have also found, especially in Adelaide, not so much in Victoria, but in Adelaide they are very hesitant to fund students that are at school that are aged 14 years and 9 months up to while they're at school, to get supports to help them start exploring for employment while they're at school"* [staff #3].

Staff felt the money provided for CE was inadequate:

> *"Yes, one thing that is the biggest pain point really is around the funding issue. …[NDIS] hourly rates are not necessarily reflective of the specialist work that the staff do or need to have the skills to be able to do. It's a support worker rate and there's a lot more complex supports wrapped around the delivery of employment"* [staff #5].

The cost of implementing CE is impacted by the length of time the process takes. Both staff and carer participants indicated the Customised Employment stages require a significant amount of time. Some staff participants specified the CE process takes two years [staff #1, #3, #4, #12, #16]:

> "…an average time for some of our participants would be a minimum of two years … it [CE] is definitely a longer process, but there's better results" [staff #3].

However, others felt the CE process could take longer:

> "It's not a quick process to try and get them in a job, it's really about making sure that it's the right job or the right journey for them … a year or five years, we're always reupdating their goals" [staff #15].

NDIS participant #2 reported the Customised Employment process took 3 years but was happy with the outcome, pointing out her dissatisfaction with her previous employment provider "… [name of DES provider] was totally useless. They didn't really give me much help."

Both staff and carers shared examples of the frustration carers had around the length of time CE takes:

> "…you talk to it [families] and they go, 'Oh, it sounds perfect' but once you get into the thing [CE], they're 'What are you doing with my child? And why don't they have a job yet?" [staff #5].

> "One of the main difficulties I've had with Customised Employment is family's expectations of when are you going to get my son or daughter a job?" [staff #13].

Carer #2 stated "I think it [CE process] was drawn out ..." with carer #4 concurring:

> "There was a time when I was starting to feel frustrated that we were spending a lot of money and not getting anywhere. Now that he's – once he got the job and things were working, I'm like 'Yep, good, I'm happy.' But yeah, watching the money go out and not actually getting a job was hard for a while."

4.5 Staff training

4.5.1 Training received

Staff participants were asked how they learnt about Customised Employment and if they would like further training in the stages of Customised Employment.

All participants reported receiving some form of training on Customised Employment. However much of the training was unstructured knowledge sharing, for example:

- Accessing online short courses through Australian disability organisations such as, Imagine More & National Disability Services (NDS) [staff #1, #4, #10]

- Workshops conducted by staff of the organisation they were employed [staff #3, #10, #15, #16]

- Reading information from USA CE specialists, Marc Gold & Associates and Griffin-Hammis [staff #5, #6, #7].

Two structured training events were discussed by staff participants, these were (a) visiting USA CE professional Milton Tyree [staff #2] and (b) CDERP online or in person training [staff #2, #5, #12, #13, #16]. Not only was CDERP's training mentioned most frequently but staff participant #5 emphasised *"…we've used the CDERP [Discovery information] which is an abridged version of the American Discovery Staging Record. So that's become our Bible really."*

4.5.2 Future Training

Staff participants agreed they would like further training but how this would be delivered and how long the training should take was varied. Staff participants felt a *"one off or a few sessions might be most achievable"* [staff #15], while others felt a few days would be appropriate [staff #2, #3]. However, one participant felt training should be for much longer:

> *"…I think maybe a year's worth of study …where theory and of course practical would be built in. I know that might seem a long time, but Customised Employment is not your standard type of disability qualification that exists out there. I fear if it's not done [training] then it can go rogue very quickly. It's becoming a bit of a buzzword, customised employment"* [staff #7].

Staff acknowledged their preference for face-to-face training but also acknowledged the practicality of online training [staff #9, #15, #16].

Furthermore, carers were concerned about staff skills in Customised Employment,

> *"So, I think there's not that many people offering CE in Victoria …So I don't think we've got enough skilled workforces or provide them with enough resources in a sustained way. So, I think the workforce is probably the biggest issue, I think we don't have enough people that are really highly skilled in CE. We don't have system that can sustain them to continue in those roles to have that ongoing engagement with young people"* [carer #1].

4.5.3 Practical Training

Staff mentioned the importance of learning Customised Employment on the job. Staff felt training needed to include practical components:

> *"I can't express how much being out there in the workforce is important with this job …actually applying that information and actually seeing what the work is like, is where you really learn the most"* [staff #13].

With staff participant #9 in agreeance, *"doing the work experience, like shadowing people that actually do it. I think you need your practical … need your hands-on."* Further elaborating staff participant #12 stated:

> *"It would be great if it was put into the TAFE space, because it means that they could get the balance between the education as well as that hands-on. Because when you're learning about CE, the theory is really fantastic, but to understand how you're going to put that intro practice you need to go hands-on; you need to work with an individual"* [staff #12].

> ***"… if we're really going to adopt Customised Employment and the model itself, we need our own [Australian] fidelity model."***

4.5.4 Customised Employment Certification

Along with the importance of training, staff indicated the importance of Customised Employment being accredited to ensure fidelity of the model:

> *"… if we're [Australia] really going to adopt Customised Employment and the model itself, we need our own fidelity model. We need to have standards that we can all work to so that the bloody thing doesn't get bastardised by people who say they're delivering it when they're not. That piece of work I think needs to be done to legitimise it and to make sure that we've got a gold standard"* [staff #6].

Staff were concerned without regulation CE would be utilised incorrectly:

> *"…every DES provider you talk to now knows the word customised employment and discovery. They all know the lingo. …But the practicalities of them actually doing it … within their 30 minutes once a fortnight … They're not actually going into workplaces knowing that participant well enough. There's not a deeper understanding of what specific skill set somebody has"* [staff #4].

> ***"…the cohort of clients that we're delivering Customised Employment to are probably the people that fall through the cracks through DES because they're more complex."***

4.6 Level of support

Staff noted that they offered assistance to people with any disability but explicitly mentioned providing services to individuals with the following disabilities: Intellectual Disability [staff #1, #12, #13, #15]; Anxiety [staff #1, #4, #12]; Psychosocial challenges/needs/mental health disability/schizophrenia [staff #5, #12, #14, #15]; people requiring behavioural support & personal care [participant #9];Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [staff #9, #12], Autism [staff #15 #5]; Cerebral Palsy [staff #15, #5], Blind [staff #13]; and physical disability [staff #14].

Participant's comments indicated that people with complex needs were accessing and receiving Customised Employment services:

"…the cohort of clients that we're delivering Customised Employment to are probably the people that fall through the cracks through DES because they're more complex" [staff #5].

"However, the clients we work with at [organisation's name] don't even qualify to go to DES, so to speak. They might be on the DSP, Disability Support, but don't have a requirement to look for work" [staff #6].

"I went to one place; …but they sort of went, 'Oh no, he doesn't have the skills for us to be able to get him anything. He's not intelligent enough for us to work with him" [carer #4].

5. Recommendations

The use of Customised Employment in Australia to find and maintain employment for people with disability has seen a resurgence since the introduction of the NDIS. Hence this study aimed to discover how Customised Employment is currently being delivered in Australia. Recommendations for policy and practice are discussed here.

Adopting Customised Employment in Australia

In this study staff utilising CE were interviewed about their use of CE steps and, carers and people with disability who had received support for employment using CE were interviewed to discover their experience of CE. It is acknowledged the voices of individuals with disabilities themselves are not fully captured in this report, primarily due to the aptitude of interviewees with cognitive disability. Consequently, their viewpoints are predominantly conveyed through the voices of their carers. Even still, participants in this study reported CE was a worthwhile process describing it as person centred, unique, individualised with excellent employment outcomes.

It is well documented that the current DES system is not improving employment rates for people with a disability (ABS, 2019; Smith, 2023a; Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, 2023], especially people with intellectual disability and complex support needs (DRC, 2023). Despite substantial government investment to attempt to improve employment rates for individuals with disabilities, there remains a gap between legislation, policy, and practical methods supporting people's right to equitable employment opportunities (Smith 2023b). It has been suggested that in numerous instances, Customised Employment stands as the sole avenue through which some individuals with disability can attain Open employment (Marc Gold & Associates, 2023; WINTAC, 2017). In this study it was reported that people with intellectual disability and complex support needs were able to gain successful employment outcomes when CE was utilised.

The United States has placed significant trust in the effectiveness of Customised Employment, evident through its legislation dating back to 2014. The Disability Royal Commission also showed confidence in CE by recommending "The Australian Government Department of Social Services should ensure that the design of the new Disability Employment Services model adopts Customised Employment models as a core component of service provision" (Disability Royal Commission, 2023,p.27). As such, this report advocates for policy modifications aimed at integrating Customised Employment into the framework of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and other relevant policies.

> **Recommendation 1: Customised Employment be acknowledged as a valuable method for securing employment, especially for individuals with complex needs and CE be incorporated into relevant policies.**

NDIS & Customised Employment

In this study funding for CE was mainly obtained via NDIS funds and while it was not an aim of this study to determine the amount of time CE takes, the consensus appeared to be two or more years. This is somewhat longer than the 4, 13, 26 & 52 week outcomes expected of DES programs (Australian Government, 2018). However, this study's findings highlighted CE was being utilised to find and maintain employment for people with complex support needs. The very group of individuals that DES providers are reported as not supporting satisfactorily (ABS, 2015; Australian Government, 2021; Meltzer et al., 2019). CE appears to be meeting the previously unmet employment needs of a

particular cohort of job seekers therefore, it can be reasonably expected that costs associated with the provision of CE may be elevated when compared to existing DES programs.

The cost of providing CE in the USA has been disputed but no definitive CE cost data is available (Griffin et.al., 2007). However, it is argued that CE is more cost effective than the alternatives such as day programs, unemployment and sheltered employment (Griffin et.al., 2007). In the Australian context, it has been argued jobs in the mainstream for people with significant cognitive disability generates savings from improved health care and beneficial effects for carers (Aitken et.al., 2022; The Centre for International Economics, 2023; Tuckerman Smith & Borland, 1999). Moreover, it is argued that Customised Employment has the potential to achieve self-sustainability through the NDIS, enhancing employment options and autonomy for participants, offering a compelling alternative to existing employment options in Australia. (Fitzgerald, n.d.).

Customised Employment is a workforce capacity-building instrument (Smith et al., 2018). and NDIS funds can be used flexibly (NDIS, 2023a). This suggests that NDIS funding for employment should be flexible enough to accommodate the individual employment requirements of NDIS participants and the different stages of Customised Employment. However, differing accounts of the ease of accessing NDIS funds for CE was reported in this study. This study highlighted similar previous findings that when NDIS Local Area Coordinators (LACs) and NDIA planners possessed greater understanding they were perceived as "highly helpful" (Hurley & Hutchinson 2022, p.463). This study's participants discussed difficulties encountered when applying for NDIS funds, while others reported difficulty in funds being placed in incorrect support categories or not receiving funds for ongoing supports. These findings highlight the confusion around CE and the importance of NDIS staff knowing and understanding the stages of CE. Given, NDIS staff are the gatekeepers of funding, it is paramount NDIS staff be familiar with not only the advantages of CE but the stages so they can place sufficient funding into correct categories.

Acknowledgment is given to the ongoing 'Blended Payment Trials' (DSS, 2024). Insights gathered from that research may further inform this study's recommendation and contribute to payment reforms.

> **Recommendation 2: NDIS personnel undergo training sessions focussed on stages of Customised Employment costs in alignment with NDIS line items.**

Knowledge/Utilisation of Customised Employment stages

Customised Employment is typically divided into four stages with individual steps within each of the stages. In this study CE's first stage 'Discovery' was clearly articulated by staff as a process of spending time getting to know and recognise the strengths of a job seeker which was vastly different from the usual DES process of meeting the job seeker in an office environment. In the second stage of Customised Employment, staff and carer participants placed emphasis on the significance of the job seeker gaining work experience and cultivating relationships and providing support to employers. The third stage 'Job Development and Negotiation' was punctuated by the importance of job carving meeting the needs of both the employer and the job seeker and creating strong job matches. Staff also noted that the CE process may result in the job seeker opting to initiate their own microenterprise rather than pursuing employment with an employer. 'Post job supports' the final stage of CE was described as regular check-ins to ensure jobs were maintained and advocating for career progression.

Much of staff participant's reported use of the CE stages was in line with the US literature and demonstrated both consistency and flexibility of CE stages, fitting the philosophy of the individualised process of CE (Griffin et.al., 2007). However, two areas staff reported they lacked knowledge were Job Analysis and on-the-job supports. Griffin-Hammis Job Analysis Record (JAR) is a document that predominately outlines a detailed description of the duties, responsibilities, tasks, and requirements associated with the job role. In the Australian context the Job Analysis process has been described as a 'job set up' or 'support agreement' document that records the job tasks, support and training arrangements (Jobsupport, 2019). Staff in this study did not report using documentation for Job Analysis or job set up and requested an Australian version of the USA JAR document.

Furthermore, staff requested more training in the area of providing on-the-job supports. The on-the-job training process is where employees with disability are taught the specific tasks they need to complete in their job. Staff reported using YouTube, show and tell, visual supports and prompts but also requested further information on other training strategies known to be beneficial when teaching work related tasks to people with cognitive disability, such as Systematic Instruction and Social Stories (Bucholz, 2008; Test & Wood, 1997). The importance of staff having knowledge of a variety of ABA training techniques that are used for the on-the-job training is well recognised (Cheng et.al., 2018; Kregel et.al., 2020; Wehman et.al., 2019). Staff lack of knowledge in the area of utilising training strategies for skill development has previously been highlighted (Alexander et.al., 2017; Alexander et.al., 2023; Moskos & Isherwood, 2019; Tansley et.al., 2023).

Empirical evidence has illustrated a relationship between the provision of training to staff and enhanced outcomes for employees with disabilities in the workplace, including higher wages, and more hours worked per week (Kregel et.al., 2020). Yet, most staff in this study reported learning about CE in an informal non-academic format. However, all staff did express an interest in receiving further comprehensive Customised Employment (CE).

Staff also voiced apprehensions about CE being utilised by practitioners who did not confirm to the rigour of CE. This fear is well founded as some employment providers in the USA do not meet established Customised Employment (CE) fidelity standards (Fitzgerald, n.d.). Despite participants in this study being able to articulate their understanding of CE, Australia has yet to formally adopt a set of standards specific to CE (Fitzgerald, n.d.; Smith, 2023a). Hence, it is recommended a consensus of the definition of Customised Employment and its stages within the Australian context be developed. This can subsequently serve as the basis for creating an accredited CE curriculum. This will enable staff to obtain accredited credentials, aiding consistency of the delivery of an Australian CE model.

> **Recommendation 3: Establish a consensus of the process involved in Customised Employment delivered in the Australian context and develop a corresponding curriculum.**

Workplace Counselling

Staff participants in this study mentioned offering counselling support to job seekers. This assistance was provided either by a qualified counsellor or, alternatively, by job consultant staff providing guidance that aimed to bolster the job seeker's confidence and address anxiety. Similarly, US research into staff delivering CE reported one of the most frequent services provided was vocational counselling (Riesen et.al., 2023). Hence a skill repertoire that includes counselling skills would be of benefit to disability employment staff. The introduction of an Employment Counsellor training module is important considering some job seekers may not have access to ongoing mental health or psychological services and counselling topics are not included in the Certificate IV of Disability Employment Services. Hence, it is apparent that disability employment staff could benefit from training in this area.

This is not to imply unqualified staff are or should provide unregistered psychological clinical supports. However, a module on workplace counselling could include information to support client capacity building and when it is necessary and appropriate to refer the job seeker to a clinician.

> **Recommendation 4: An Employment Counsellor training module be developed.**

Links to information about this study can be accessed here:

(1) https://blogs.flinders.edu.au/caring-futures-institute/2023/11/30/customised-employment-in-australia-where-we-are-now/

(2) Plain English Summary Video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQjwHe45LNg

Potential Conflict of Interest

The writer highlights a potential conflict of interest whereby some staff participants interviewed in the study had accessed online recorded Customised Employment training facilitated by the author. Importantly none of the participants had received training directly from the author.

References

Aitken, Z., Beecher Kelk, A., Saxby, K., Ye, L., Petrie, D., Anne Kavanagh, A., & Dickinson, H. (2022). *Impact of Part Time Work for people with disability.*

Alexander, J., Ford, J., Raghavendra, P., & Clark, J. (2017). Nature and extent of on-the-job training for employees with an intellectual disability: a pilot study. *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1080/23297018.2017.1359661

Alexander, J., Gendera, S., Robinson, S., Fisher, K. R., & Howe, K. (2023). On-the-job training supports for people with intellectual disability employed in aged care. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2023.2256075

Analysis Policy Observatory [APO]. (2024). *As one: APS disability employment strategy 2012*. Australian Public Service Commission. https://apo.org.au/node/29524

Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators [ACRE] (n.d.). *ACRE Training Providers*. Retrieved March 2024 from https://www.acreducators.org/view-all-training-providers.html

Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS]. (2015). *Disability and Labour Force Participation (Cat. no. 4433.0.55.006).* Retrieved: https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4433.0.55.006 Accessed March 2024.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2019). Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of findings. Available from: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release

Australian Government. (2018). *Disability Employment Services: Outcome Guidelines V 1.1*.

Australian Government. (2021). *Employ my Ability: Disability Employment Strategy 2021-2031*. Department of Social Services. Retrieved: https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/disability-employment-strategy

Bucholz, J. L., Brady, M. P., Duffy, M. L., Scott, J., & Kontosh, L. G. (2008). Using literacy-based behavioral interventions and social stories to improve work behavior in employees with developmental disabilities. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 486-501.

Butterworth, J., Migliore, A., Lyons, O., Mahoehney, D. C., Eastman, J., Miles, B., Foos, P. & Zalewska, A. (2023). Supporting Employment Consultants to Implement Supported and Customized Employment. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, *61*(6), 468-480.

Callahan, M. (2002). Employment: From competitive to customized. *TASH Connections Newsletter*, *28*(9), 10.

Centre for Disability Employment Research & Practice [CDERP]. (2024). *CDERP College: Customised Employment – CDERP Certified Professional*. Retrieved March 2024 from

https://college.cderp.com.au/?_ga=2.128536332.1089869828.1709784539-772037979.1697420705

Cheng, C., Oakman, J., Bigby, C., Fossey, E., Cavanagh, J., Meacham, H., & Bartram, T. (2018). What constitutes effective support in obtaining and maintaining employment for individuals with intellectual disability? A scoping review. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, *43*(3), 317-327. https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2017.1327040

Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *Disability Employment Services (DES) program to be examined by Royal Commission*. https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/news-and-media/media-releases/disability-employment-services-des-program-be-examined-royal-commission

Dean, E. E., Shogren, K. A., Hagiwara, M., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2018). How does employment influence health outcomes? A systematic review of the intellectual disability literature. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *49*, 1-13.

Department of Social Services (2021). *Employ My Ability: Disability Employment Strategy*. Available at: https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/disability-employment-strategy

Department of Social Services [DSS]. (2024). *Working together to trial blended payments*. Australian Government. Retrieved April 2024 from https://engage.dss.gov.au/blended-payment-model-trials/

Disability Royal Commission [DRC]. (2023). *Final Report - Volume 7, Inclusive education, employment and housing*. https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-7-inclusive-education-employment-and-housing

Fitzgerald, J. (n.d.). *Department of Social Services: National Disability Employment Strategy*. Scope Australia Ltd. Victoria, Australia

Griffin-Hammis. (2024). *Discovering Personal Genius* ᵀᴹ. https://www.griffinhammis.com/ Accessed March 2024

Griffin, C., Hammis, D., & Geary, T. (2007). *The Job Developer's Handbook: Practical Tactics for Customized Employment*. Brookes Publishing Co.

Harvey, J., Szoc, R., Dela Rosa, M., Pohl, M., & Jenkins, J. (2013). Understanding the competencies needed to customize jobs: A competency model for customized employment. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *38*(2), 77-89. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-130622

Hurley, J., & Hutchinson, M. (2022). Carers' experiences of the National Disability Insurance Scheme workforce: A qualitative study informing workforce development. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, *57*(2), 458-471. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.181

Inge, K. J., Graham, C. W., Brooks-Lane, N., Wehman, P., & Griffin, C. (2018). Defining customized employment as an evidence-based practice: The results of a focus group study. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *48*(2), 155-166. https://doi.org/0.3233/JVR-180928

Inge, K. J., Sima, A. P., Riesen, T., Wehman, P., & Brooks-Lane, N. (2023). The essential elements of customized employment: Results from a national survey of employment providers. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, *66*(3), 170-185.

JobSupport. (2019). *Quality Job Matching*. Retrieved April 2024 from
https://jobsupport.org.au/information-for-employers/

Kregel, J., Wehman , P., Taylor, J., Avellone, L., Riches, V., Rodrigues, R., & Taylor, D. (2020). *A Comprehensive Review of Evidence-Based Employment Practices for Youth and Adults with Intellectual and Other Developmental Disabilities: Final report*. Virginia, USA & Sydney, Australia

Meltzer, A., Robinson, S., & Fisher, K. R. (2019). Barriers to finding and maintaining open employment for people with intellectual disability in Australia. *Social Policy & Administration*, 54(1), 88–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12523

Marc Gold and Associates. (2023). *Customized Employment for Federal and State Agencies, Funders and Providers*. https://www.marcgold.com/customized-employment-for-agencies-funders-providers

Marc Gold & Associates. (2017). *What is Customized Employment?* Retrieved March 2024 from
https://www.marcgold.com/what-is-customized-employment

Marc Gold & Associates. (n.d.). *The Comprehensive Customized Employment Course*. Retrieved 19 March 2024 from https://www.marcgold.com/mgacomprehensivece

Moskos, M., & Isherwood, L. (2019). Individualised funding and its implications for the skills and competencies required by disability support workers in Australia. *Labour and Industry*, *29*(1), 34-51. https://doi.org/10.1080/10301763.2018.1534523

National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]. (2021). *Supports in employment*.
https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/supports-funded-ndis/supports-employment
Accessed March 2024

National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]. (2023a). *Flexible NDIS plans and funding: What you need to know*. Retrieved April 2024 from www.ndis.gov.au

National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]. (2023b). *Will achieves his dream through customised employment*. https://www.ndis.gov.au/stories/8517-will-achieves-his-dream-through-customised-employment

People with Disability Australia. (2022). *Ask What We Want: Ensure employment services encourage meaningful work for people with disability*. https://pwd.org.au/des-review-submission/

Riesen, T., Hall, S., Keeton, B., & Snyder, A. (2021). Building Consensus Among Experts Regarding Customized Job Development Fidelity Descriptors: A Delphi Study. Journal of Rehabilitation, 87(3). *Journal Of Rehabilitation*, *87*(3).

Riesen, T., Morgan, R. L., & Griffin, C. (2015). Customized employment: A review of the literature. Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 43(3), 183–193. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR150768

Riesen, T., Snyder, A., Byers, R., Keeton, B., & Inge, K. J. (2023). An updated review of the customized employment literature [doi:10.3233/JVR-221222]. *58*, 27-38. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-221222

Robertson, J., Beyer, S., Emerson, E., Baines, S., & Hatton, C. (2019). The association between employment and the health of people with intellectual disabilities: A systematic review. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 32*(6), 1335-1348.

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. (2023). Final Report. Australian Government: Canberra. Available at: https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report

Smith, P. J. (2018). *A Systems Analysis of Factors that Lead to the Successful Employment of People with a Disability* The University of Sydney.

Smith, P. (2023a). The Evolution of Customised Employment and the Influence of the NDIS on Customised Employment Practice in Australia. *Journal of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences*, *2*(2), 1-10. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33700/jhrs.2.2.81

Smith, P. (2023b). The impact of legislation and conventions on disability employment outcomes in Australia. *Advances in Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, 1-7.

Sorre, O., personal communication, April 17, 2024

Tansey, T. N., Bishop, M., Iwanaga, K., Zhou, K., & Chan, F. (2023). Vocational rehabilitation service delivery: Technical assistance needs of vocational rehabilitation professionals. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *58*(1), 49-62. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-221224

Taylor, R. (2022). *Evaluating the barriers people with intellectual disability face in gaining and maintaining employment in Australia.* The University of Melbourne. Melbourne, Australia.

Taylor, J., Avellone, L., Wehman, P., & Brooke, V. (2023). The efficacy of competitive integrated employment versus segregated employment for persons with disabilities: A systematic review. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *58*, 63-78. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-221225

Test, D. W., & Wood, W. M. (1997). Rocket science 101: What supported employment specialists need to know about systematic instruction. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *9*(2), 109-120.

The Centre for International Economics. (2023). *Report: Specialist disability employment services post 2025. Practices that work: the missing keystone*.

Thies, A., Warr, D., Mallett, S., & Brown, D. (2021). *10 strategies for improving employment outcomes for people with disability*. Brotherhood of St. Laurence.

https://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/12848/2/Thies_etal_10_strategies_improving_disability _employment_outcomes_Dec2021.pdf Accessed March 2024

Training.gov.au. (n.d.). *Certificate of Disability Employment Services*. https://training.gov.au/training/details/chc42008 Accessed March 2024.

Tuckerman, P., Smith, R., & Borland, J. (1999). The relative cost of employment for people with a significant intellectual disability: the Australian experience. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *13*(2), 109-116.

Virgina Commonwealth University. (2010). Australian Open Employment Web-based Certificate Series. In K. Inge & P. Wehman (Eds.). USA: Virgina Commonwealth University.

Voermans, M. A., Taminiau, E. F., & Giesbers, S. A. (2021). The value of competitive employment: In-depth accounts of people with intellectual disabilities. *J Appl Res Intellectual Disability, 34*, 239-249. https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12802

Wehman, P., Schall, C., McDonough, J., Sima, A., Brooke, A., Ham, W., Whittenburg, H., Brooke, V., Avellone, L., & Riehle, E. (2019). Competitive employment for transition aged youth with significant impact from autism: A multi-site randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders.* Advance online publication. doi: 10.1007/s10803-019-03940-2

Wehman, P., Taylor, J., Brooke, V., Avellone, L., Whittenburg, H., Ham, W., Brooke, A. M., & Carr, S. (2018). Toward competitive employment for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities: What progress have we made and where do we need to go. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, *43*(3), 131-144.

Wausbrook. (2022). *A Brief History of Supported and Customized Employment*. Center on Community Living and Careers, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community.

Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center [WINTAC]. (2017). *The Essential Elements of Customized Employment for Universal Application*