



Centre for Inclusive Employment & Disability Employment Australia Lunch & Learn Session | Wednesday, 5 November 2025

Ongoing Support: Best Practice for Long Term Success

Speaker: Lisa McPherson

Host: Sally Karandews (DEA)

SALLY KARANDREWS: Hi everyone, and welcome to this week's Lunch and Learn. I'd like to begin today by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land from which each of us are joining from. For me that's the land of the Darkinjung people, and I pay my respects to Elders, past and present. My name is Sally and I am the policy manager at Disability Employment Australia, and I'll be hosting today's Webinar. These Webinars are a partner between the Disability Employment Australia and the Centre for Inclusive Employment and it is a privilege to be here with you all, especially since we are so early into the first week of the IEA contract and I am sure that you all have plenty going on. Little bit of housekeeping before we get started. If you do need to access the captions, Liv is going to pop some links and instructions into the chat so you can access the captions through those. Today's session will be recorded and a recording, as well as a copy of the presentation will be made available to you after today. Without any further ado I would like to introduce you to Lisa. Lisa is the CEO at Nexus and is joining us today to share on the topic of ongoing support. Lisa has been working in the sector and also in some related roles for quite a few years now and has developed some extensive experience in providing high quality person-centred ongoing support, and has been involved in delivering that on the frontline, but also supporting and overseeing the delivery of ongoing support as well. So without any further ado I will hand over to Lisa to take us through today's session. Thanks, Lisa.

LISA MCPHERSON: Thanks Sally. Okay, so thank you. So my name is Lisa McPherson, I am the CEO of Nexus Human Services. Today I am going to be sharing best practice for creating meaningful and sustainable employment for

people with disabilities. I have had over 30 years' experience in the Disability Employment Australia sector and I am drawing upon our organisational experience and some successful examples on delivering high quality ongoing support.

So today's session isn't just about helping people find jobs, it is about making sure they stay employed, grow in those roles and thrive within the team. We are here to create outcomes that are lasting, impactful and truly life-changing. Today I would like to make the session a little bit interactive, so if you've got questions please pop them up in the chat because I'd really like to answer questions as we go if possible today and then we'll leave some time at the end for questions as well.

I know that people seem to get a little bit - also remember this is a learning space, so no matter what your question is please feel free to ask it, so pop your questions in the chat box. Any question is not a silly question as we all know, so please share those questions and comments in the chat. So let's kick off with making sure that we all know how to use the chat box today. I'd like you to start by popping up some emojis in the chat. Share some welcome to the session today. Great, thank you. Perfect. So good to see that everyone knows how to use the chat. So I am going to kick off with what is ongoing support. Ongoing support bridges the gap between securing a job and keeping it. It ensures participants build confidence, independence and resilience. It is the link between getting the job and keeping it. It ensures sustains success, not just the initial placement. Take a moment and have a think, when you've had a great leader, a role model or coach. That's the type of things that we are looking for in ongoing support. Once an auditor told me that ECC, so employment coaches work is similar to life coaching and every employment coach will have the opportunity to do some life coaching training. At that time I thought, oh, okay, fair comment, but since I have done my life coaching myself I really understand that comment and think it is a really positive one. So I really encourage you when you are doing your ongoing support with your participants to have a think about that and have a think about what type of support you've had in your career, because that's the type of support that we also should be providing to our participants. So why does it matter? Number of reasons, retention. So the tailored support helps people keep the jobs in the long-term. It also helps build confidence by addressing workplace challenges, and employees gain their trust in their abilities and employers also

gain the trust in what the employee's abilities are. There is also the sustainability aspect. So building inclusive workplaces contributes to retention and reduces turnover for employers. So the social impact, so around better health, security and community connection. It also allows people to develop skills to allow for natural career progression.

OLIVIA STAGG: Sorry, your presentation is stuck on the first slide still. So we haven't been able to move through them just yet. Just wanted to let you know that we are still on the first one.

LISA McPHERSON: Okay, that's very interesting. I am unsure why, as I can see them on my screen.

OLIVIA STAGG: Okay. Do we want to just unshare them and reshare them? That seems to have refreshed it, thank you.

LISA McPHERSON: So we are back to why does it matter? So we've talked about retention, confidence, sustainability, the social impact in ongoing support in terms of placement into long-term success stories. That is both for the employee and the employer. So practice makes perfect. We've all heard that saying before, I presume? So providers must extend beyond placement. We are here to build trust and collaboration through the employment journey. So set your clear expectations early to align with participant and employer goals. Measure quality outcomes by tracking growth and engagement, don't just do the duration of employment. Adapt supports proactively to meet challenges in participants' needs for workplace dynamics. Our value lies in being a proactive partner who has strong benefits that benefit both participants and employers. Couple of other tips around what it looks like in practice. Relationships are critical. So the strong relationship between participants providers employers are the foundation of effective ongoing support. Communication, so open proactive communication prevent any issues, problems from occurring, you know such as transport, confidence, attending work on time; all of those different things. Make sure everything is flexible. Early interventions help address issues like transport or stress. Manage them before they become complex issues. Regular reviews ensure that supports involve alongside clients' goals or workplace needs. Trusted

partnerships create the employment needed, environment needed for participants to succeed in the long-term and ensures employers feel confident in fostering inclusive workplaces. I am going to just pause there for a minute. We are going to talk about some real life examples in a moment. I am going to pause if there is any questions and I will have a sip of water.

SALLY KARANDREWS: I haven't seen any come through in the chat just yet, but shall let you know if any do.

LISA McPHERSON: Okay, thank you Sally, that would be great. The role of education. So also when you are doing your ongoing support there is a really specific role in education. It is not about just keeping someone in their current role, it is about helping people to develop further. It is also an important part of career development and progression. So some examples of education that you can be doing with your participants are around communication skills, how to network effectively, work health and safety in the workplace, tax returns, work/life balance. You'll see on the slide, and this slide will be available, there is a few other examples, but this is only a really small part of education that can be done as part of ongoing support. So one thing that I have really encouraged people to do over the years is to develop your own little toolkit which includes the type of education that you can deliver to your participants. So then over the time when you are doing ongoing support if you are having some times when it might be difficult to communicate, or you want to offer a different service offering to somebody, you can go back and look at your little toolkit of education and I have found that has been a very effective way to keep people engaged and also to develop people's skills in their current roles in any further roles or career development that people may like in the future.

So the provider's role. So remembering that ongoing support isn't a one-off activity. It consistently evolves, and the support that you provide needs to be tailored to sustain inclusion and success. So what won't cut it? So calling in saying, "How are you going today?" The answer that you'll probably get will be, "Good." So if any of you have had the pleasure of having children or teenagers you know if you have a conversation with them when you ask, "How is your day? Yeah, good." So same sort of concept. Think about what questions you are asking so that you are actually getting an engaging conversation with people. So potentially better questions, "Any challenges that

you've had today? What was the best part of your day?" So remember it is always about consistently checking in with people, asking the questions so you are getting good quality responses so that you can design and deliver the individual support to people. Always use this strength-based approach, so focus on participant's skills and build on them. Maintain that consistent contact, even when things seem stable. This is a critical part. So always keep that contact. Even if it is a shorter contact for a period of time, at least people, you are still developing that relationship and delivering so that people know that you are there if they need anything in the future. Celebrate achievements. Recognise progress to build confidence. Celebrate the small things. "Okay, this week you got to work on time every day." "You've really nailed around how to do that new task." So all those little things, make sure you celebrate. So by planning responsibility between employees, employers and providers we create sustainable employment models that work for everybody. Some other things for providers to remember is to set clear expectations early, build trust through consistency and empathy. Track outcomes, measure quality, not just duration. So another tip that a data analysis told me recently, and I thought that was a really good way to describe things about measurement and measuring quality, that you don't have data without stories, and you don't have stories without data. So when you are measuring your outcomes and your quality make sure you are collecting your data, but also collect it in the stories as well, because that's an easy way to demonstrate how ongoing support can be done and actually promote your services as well.

Adapt supports as needs or workplaces change. Be an employment partner with all stakeholders, not just a service provider. So your partnership should be with your participant, your employer and other stakeholders or other people that they have in their lives, maybe their family, their carers, and just the community as a whole.

So sustaining ongoing support. Again embed a strengths-based approach, maintain regular contact, even when things are going well. Encourage your employers to own their inclusive practices, their policies, everything around inclusion. Assist testimony to do that if they are not sure, that's part of the role of ongoing support as well. Create your milestones and achievements. Develop support plans. Have a whole different type of support plans, because you are dealing with a range of people with different disabilities, potentially

people with different mental health needs, so with your support plans have a number of them within your Service Delivery model so that then they can be tailored for individuals. Those support plans will come in handy just on a day-to-day basis, but also if there is an emergency, if there is a critical incident, or also just if someone is away sick or on leave those support plans I have found over the years have been a critical part. When you are collecting your data use that, so don't just collect it and sit in on the bookshelf or sit it in your drives, or wherever, use that to improve your support models. Sustainability, planning plus communication and shared responsibility, that's the key takeaway for sustaining ongoing support. I am going to have another little pause. Is there any questions Sally?

SALLY KARANDREWS: I have got a couple more general ones. Do you want me to save those till the end?

LISA McPHERSON: Okay, we might do that then, yeah?

SALLY KARANDREWS: Absolutely.

LISA McPHERSON: Fantastic. Some real life examples now. So when I started to prepare for this I started to reflect on when I first was an employment consultant back in the day, and some of the different types of ongoing support I used to do. This was a favourite part of the job for me. I found that you could become very creative with the types of support and working with people on achieving their goals. So one story that stood out for me was there was a young lady that I was supporting, she was working at a fast food outlet. She had anxiety and some learning challenges. One day I received a phone call from the employer. They said, "Look, she's locked herself in the storeroom and you really need to get out here ASAP." So out I went, got in the car and went out to the employment placement and she was locked in the storeroom, so I gave it a knock and said, "It is Lisa here", and she let me in. She was sitting on the floor, so she sat back down, so she was sitting on the floor until the whole time until I arrived because she was having a very severe anxiety attack. So I just sat with her on the floor and we started to do the breathing exercises. We sat there for a good 5 to 10 minutes and I was just talking her through breathing, slowing down her breathing until she

got to the point where that was okay and we were able to go outside and do a walk and to do some other breathing exercises. Then her anxiety attack passed and she was able to go back to work for the day. But what we did after that, was we worked with her psychologist and we developed a support plan. Okay, so what would happen if this happened in the workplace again? So what we did was we actually wrote out the breathing exercises and we actually trained the staff in how to take her through those breathing exercises, so if she had another anxiety attack then she had some additional support that was on-hand straight away that could help her with that. Another strategy that we put in place which is sometimes used if people have anxiety is she used to wear like a hair band around her wrist, and if she felt that she was going to have an anxiety attack she'd just flick that and that was a trigger for her to know, okay, well I might be going to have an anxiety attack, so I might just take a break or do something else. So we had all that documented so she knew, her employer knew. Another one was around a participant that we had who really struggled to get to work. Once he was there he was okay, he wasn't too bad, but actually that process in the thinking process of getting up and getting to work was a real struggle for him. What I used to do in this situation was I used to do a morning call at 7 am and make sure that he was up for the day. Then what he used to do was have different alarm clocks set around his bedroom at different times. So one triggered at 5 minutes, 10, 15, 20 so that if he didn't get out of the shower that there was another trigger reminding him that he needed to get out of the shower and get ready for work. Then I used to meet him at the coffee shop at 8.45 just below where he worked, because he felt that if he had a responsibility to meet someone, or meet myself there, that he would come to work. So that process, getting in and waking up, he knew then to get in the shower, he had his alarm set, then he knew he had another responsibility to meet me there at the coffee shop. Then he was generally okay for the day. The other thing that he did do was just set alarms on his phone to ensure that he had breaks during the day, because sometimes he'd get really caught up in doing his tasks and duties, he actually worked in the Public Service where he forgot and that would also bring on his anxiety and not give him a great day at work. So he used to set those alarms to ensure that he had those breaks during the day. Some more examples, so obviously the COVID changed the way that we did ongoing support, and most people went to a video conference and we did things a little bit differently, which we found was very effective and we still used to do some of these things and we still do some of these things with our NDIS participants and things as well. Particularly during COVID we used to have a lunch group where our participants could log-on and have their lunch and we just used to have

general conversations with people. So the same as if you were in the lunch room in an office space, we just had the same type of concept just over Zoom so people could enjoy their lunch and have that break and still have some interaction with people as well. One of the most popular things that we had was a trivia group and everyone got quite competitive. So we used to set up and have the trivia online and people used to come on and really enjoy that social interaction as well.

We've also had employment coaches going out with participants to actually teach them their tasks. So an example is around at a fast food restaurant where the employment coach went in and taught them how to actually peel potatoes properly, how to cut the carrots properly, because the restaurant was very particular in the way they wanted things done. That may have been one or two weeks just working on those tasks together. Also breaking down duties into plain English, readable documents is quite a common thing that we've done previously so that people actually know what tasks are there, so just really breaking those down so that they are really easily readable tasks. Obviously there is access, Job Access, so you can use that for workplace modifications as well. So my key takeaway with real examples is that the support needs to be tailored, individualised because everyone is different. So make sure you are looking at those support plans and everything when you are looking at what types of support you are going to be offering.

We are coming to the end, so I really do encourage you if you've got questions to pop them up into the chat or any comments so we can spend a lot of time talking.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off.

LISA McPHERSON: That's okay. If you are at your desk and you've got a Post-it note, please write down some key takeaways that you might have, or you can also put them up in the chat. Some of them are our role is not just about securing placements, we need to help individuals strive in their workplace while fostering those inclusive environments where employees benefits just as much as the employers do, so that ongoing support is that continuum, it is not just a one-off event. Success relies on elaboration and

collaboration. You need to make sure that the relationships you gain the trust of all parties, and that way you can have that lasting employment pathway and contribute to a more inclusive community where everyone feels like they belong. Your goal is sustainable inclusion where people belong and thrive. If you don't have ongoing support as part of your service offerings, I'd really encourage you to go away and talk to your teams, your managers and make sure that you include that. Have a look at your support plans, how you are going to do ongoing support in the new contract, because it is a critical part and it is a critical part of making sure that people with disabilities, mental health issues have successful work placements and also successful career progression. Okay, I am going to leave it for some questions at the moment.

SALLY KARANDREWS: We've just had this one come through just a moment ago. How has ongoing support changed in reporting terms with the new IEA contract?

LISA McPHERSON: That's a really good question and probably not necessarily one for me, as we are delivering the new IEA contract. What's the question around reporting?

SALLY KARANDREWS: Yeah. Look, that's fine, I have got the person that submitted the question, so we can get back to you post-session with some extra detail maybe. If you want me to take that one on later, Lisa?

LISA McPHERSON: That would be great, thank you.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Brendan asking about recording the information. In your past have you recorded your supports from the appointments into ESS web, the new Workforce Australia program, ongoing supports section or were you able to enter them into a third party software program?

LISA McPHERSON: Yeah. So for us we've always entered the ongoing support into a third party software program. We actually were able to customise our software so that we actually prompted our ECs about what we wanted in the notes. So that's how we did it. Then all of our other support plans or anything

else that we did around ongoing support we'd also upload to that third party system.

SALLY KARANDREWS: There is a question whether you could flesh out a bit more about what you mean by respectful relationships and communication as they are broad terms, whether you could talk to those in a little bit more detail?

LISA McPHERSON: Yep. So respectful relationships, I guess is making sure you understand what the person needs from the relationship. There is all sorts of things that come with - we have a set of service expectations, and that means that all the conversations that we have with people are respectful, that we are on time to appointments, that we are flexible in what we are doing. Generally it is just really about how you would like to be treated. One of the things that I always say to our ECs here, or our NDIS support workers is really if you had a son or daughter, brother or sister, aunty, uncle, whoever it may be who has a disability, how would you like them to be treated and respected if they were receiving services? So if you look at it in that term, then you just need to treat the person in that same sort of respectful relationship. Communication is an interesting one because it really does need to be tailored, because some people might have some learning disabilities and their communication needs might be different. So it is about sitting down with people and really getting to know people. You can add these sort of questions in support plans around communication, how do you like to be communicated with? Do you have any language barriers? Do you have any cultural needs that we need to be aware of? All of those questions can be asked during the process of getting to know people which will also assist you with how is best to communicate with someone. I always say that when you are doing a support plan, or you are doing some sort of documentation with people try to make it as natural as possible. You don't want to be sitting here with your paperwork writing down every question they answer. Just try to have that natural conversation. Remember those sort of things in your head and then you can document that later as well.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Good, thank you. There is a question from Jason, Jason, we might need a little more context, perhaps, but Jason is asking about whether people that don't have a CRN are eligible for the services that Nexus

offers. So perhaps that's one - Jason, if you could give us a little bit more context or maybe you and Lisa could perhaps follow that up afterwards might be an option as well.

LISA McPHERSON: I guess under the new contract, yes, people from 0 to 7 can actually access the services, so not actually a question necessarily for Nexus as such, but as for all providers, yes, they should be able to access the services.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Alright. When it comes to scenarios where either the employer or the participant might be hesitant to have ongoing support delivered sort of on the work site face-to-face in person, do you have any advice or experience in how you can still deliver that support and still make it effective even if you can't really be in the workplace?

LISA McPHERSON: Yeah definitely. So obviously disclosure is a person's choice if they want to disclose that they have a disability or want that support actually in the workplace. Look, from our experience most of our participants would disclose, and that's just because they could see the benefit of that so that that workplace support and any adjustments could be made. But in the situation where perhaps they didn't want to disclose, then we would provide that support outside of the employment setting. So in some cases we might be meeting people in the coffee shops, just having a debrief, or doing some of that education work that I spoke about. In some situations people might choose to come into the office and might want to catch up with some of our other participants in a support group type style of support. So there is all sorts of different supports that you can provide, even if you are not in the workplace. The majority of what we did because we did have a mental health specialist contractor as well, was support outside of the workplaces. As I mentioned in the coffee shops, at lunch or as I mentioned earlier as well, when COVID came in and still continues on around that video conferences and things is that flexible servicing as well.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Thank you. Along similar lines there will be a lot of participants in ongoing support that will have just changed providers. So as practitioners are going out and meeting with participants and new employers

and perhaps participants have been with their previous provider for an extended period of time, any advice on I guess just managing or supporting them to manage that change and like kind of maybe some of the steps that you might take if you were going out to meet with a participant who had been receiving ongoing support from another provider for a long time and had now moved into a new provider?

LISA McPHERSON: I would start by just going out and really showing empathy to the person, because it is a big change, it is a huge change for people. As Sally mentioned some participants have been with providers for 30, 40 years. So go out there with that empathetic hat on and just start to get to know them. You don't need to rush in, we need to do this paperwork or support plan, just get to know people. Have those natural conversations, talk about themselves, their likes, their dislikes, their hobbies, talk about what they enjoy about work, what struggles they may have at work. Do they enjoy what they are doing? What would be potentially - start just building those foundations of talking about what their goals might be in the future. So is it going to be yep, I want to stay in this workplace and I just want to feel like I have got a good work/life balance, or actually I want to study and I want to move in the future. So just that natural progression of getting to know people with empathy is what I would say.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Amazing, thank you. Alright. We are drawing towards the close. So I will go back through the chat just in case I have missed anyone and I will follow-up if we have. But thank you so much for coming along today Lisa and sharing your experience and the things that I have learnt in providing that person-centred ongoing support, really appreciate those real world examples that you've shared with us today. A copy of the recording and the presentation will be made available if anyone wants to go back over it or share it with a colleague that hasn't been able to make it today. Also I want to thank Liv and Hanif for doing all the behind the scenes work to make this possible, and in terms of next week we'll be joined by the Australian network on disability looking at employer engagement. So we look forward to having you join us then and hope that you all have a lovely rest of the week. Thank you so much.

LISA McPHERSON: Great, thank you all. Thanks Sally.

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SALLY KARANDREWS: Thanks Lisa.

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