



Centre for Inclusive Employment & Disability Employment Australia

Lunch & Learn Session | Wednesday, 29 April 2026

Understanding Down syndrome in the workplace

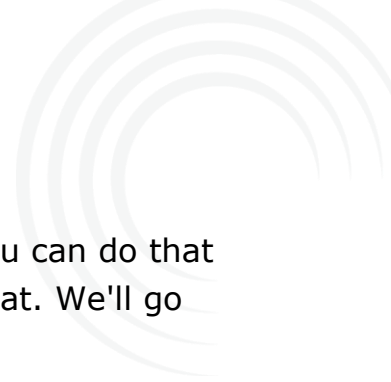
Speakers: Liz Christodoulou, Project Manager at Down Syndrome Australia & Eoin Gibson, International Ambassador at Down Syndrome Australia

Host: Sally Karandrews, IEA Policy Manager at Disability Employment Australia

SALLY: Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us this week. My name is Sally. I'm the IEA policy manager here at Disability Employment Australia. I would like to begin the session by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which each of us are joining from today. For me that's the land of the Darkinjung people. I pay my respects to Elders past and present and recognise this is sovereign land that was never ceded and I extend that acknowledgment to any First Nations people that have joined us today.

These lunch and learn sessions are delivered in partnership between the Centre for Inclusive Employment and Disability Employment Australia. The Centre for Inclusive Employment is led by the team at the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University. They're joined by a consortium of members that include Disability Employment Australia, national peak for employment service providers as well as National Disability Services, Inclusion Australia, Family Advocacy and the University of Melbourne.

Together the Centre and its consortium members will work together to provide practical resources, tools, tips and training to ensure the high-quality delivery of the inclusive employment for Australia program. Today's session is going to be recorded and that recording will be made available after the conclusion of the session. Along with the transcript and wherever possible copies of any presentations and resources that are shared today.



You will also be able to ask questions throughout the session. You can do that by putting them into the Q & A session or posting them in the chat. We'll go through those questions at the conclusion of the session.

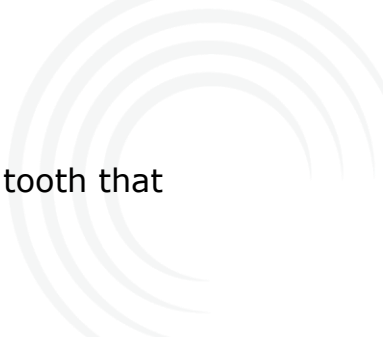
So I would now like to introduce you to our presenters for today. We are joined by Eoin, who is a Disability advocate, Liz, the Project Manager and Christine from Down Syndrome Australia, Eoin will be sharing his lived experience as well as other information around misconception around, to people with Down syndrome in the workplace. So I will hand over to you. Thank you so much.

LIZ: Amazing. Thank you so much, Sally. Eoin, Christina and myself are excited to be here today for this lunch and learn session. I will just share my screen. So we can get this one started. Wonderful. So today our session is all about understanding Down syndrome in the workplace. I have Eoin with me today who will start us off with also our acknowledgment to country. And then we'll delve into some of the tips and tricks and the wonderful thing about hiring a person with Down syndrome. Take it away, Eoin.

EOIN: Thank you, Liz. I like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present.

LIZ: Wonderful. Thank you, Eoin. And as I said, my name is Liz. I'm the national project manager for our employment connections program here at Down Syndrome Australia. Eoin wears many hats. Eoin is our international ambassador for Australia, working with Down syndrome international. He's also an employment ambassador here in Queensland and does a lot of wonderful things for us in Queensland in the employment sector.

Today we'll delve into what is Down syndrome. Some of the common characteristics of Down syndrome, language and communication, workplace tips and tricks and then we'll hear from Eoin himself about some of his adventures and wonderful things he does in his life.



So Eoin, if you please like to introduce yourself to everyone here tooth that would be amazing, mate.

EOIN: Hello everyone. My name is Eoin Gibson. I am from Australia. I have three jobs. I love sports, of course, I am at present a sports fanatic. I'm here to help you hire people just like me.

LIZ: Awesome. Thank you Eoin. I'm sure everyone will be appreciative of your knowledge and expertise. We're now going to hear from Eoin's boss. So Eoin has been working at Coles for a very long time.

EOIN: About five years, by the way.

LIZ: About five years. He is absolutely valued within his team. So we'll hear a few little words from Darren.

(video plays)

DARREN: Employing Eoin was an awesome story. He turned up on one day and asked to see me at the service desk. It started with a high five, I'll never forgot it. Straightaway I could tell there was something about Eoin that we needed. It was something he was going to bring. The energy that he had. The confidence that he had. And he was just going to make this place a better place by having him as part of our business. It took me a little while to get it all sorted. And I had Eoin turn up every week, same thing, high five, happy smile. Asked how my weekend was. And nothing is really changed in that time since we put Eoin on. He'll always ask how my family is, he'll ask our team members how their families are. He'll always remembers. That's something so lucky to have in our store.

LIZ: Eoin have a very valued member of the team at Coles. Coles works very closely with us at Down Syndrome Australia and Down syndrome Queensland, transitioning Eoin into different areas of the workplace and Eoin, you're now working independently in the fruit and vegetable section. I'm I correct in



thinking that.

EOIN: Yes. You are.

LIZ: Awesome. What is Down syndrome? Down syndrome is not an illness or a disease. It's a genetic condition that can affect how a person learns and develops. It can also affect some physical features and parts of a person's health. Every person with Down syndrome is different. So these things can be different for each person. Down syndrome is present in all racial groups socioeconomic groups. It's across all countries. It's not specific to a certain age group of people or a certain geographical location of people. People with Down syndrome are born absolutely everywhere.

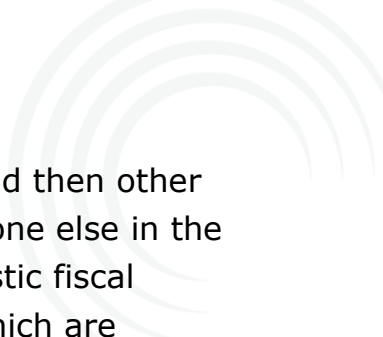
At the moment there's roughly between 13,000 and 15,000 people in Australia living with Down syndrome. Eoin is now going to speak a little bit about what he loves to claim he's one of the 'homies with an extra chromie'.

EOIN: Down syndrome is most common genetic cause of intellectual disability. It is caused when a person is born with an extra chromosome. There are approximately-

LIZ: That's OK.

EOIN: Approximately 13,000 people in Australia who have Down syndrome.

LIZ: Very good. Alright. So our key message here is that Down syndrome, it is a genetic condition. There are three different types of Down syndrome. There is no scale for Down syndrome. You either have Down syndrome, or you don't have Down syndrome. Every single person with Down syndrome is different. So people with Down syndrome can work, they live very full lives just like you and I. There are a lot of misconceptions out there about people with Down syndrome. You either have it or you don't.



People with Down syndrome may also have areas of strengths and then other areas which they might need a bit of extra support in, like everyone else in the community. Some level of intellectual disability, some characteristic physical features, an increased risk of some health conditions. Many of which are treatable. Some development delays. No two people are the same. There are over 120 characteristics that a person may have with Down syndrome. So it is important to remember it's not a one size fits all model. There are different characteristics for different people just like you and I.

Eoin, would you like to do the next slide for me.

EOIN: Yes. Thanks. It is common for a person with Down syndrome to have another diagnosis such as hearing aid, autism, ADHD and other medical conditions.

LIZ: Yes. Thank you, Eoin. It's very, very common for a person to have a co-occurring diagnosis with autism with Down syndrome as well.


EOIN: Speaking of which, when I say autism, for example, of course, his brother, he does have autism.

LIZ: Lots of people in our society do. So Eoin, we have many - you have many benefits of having a job and things that you love. Can you share with people what you wrote down in our slides about the benefits that you feel about having a job. What it's done for your life.

EOIN: Independence, earning money and learning skills, meeting new people. Building, confidence, belonging, achieving and succeeding, feeling valued, having a purpose.

LIZ: Exactly. So having a job means a lot to you?

EOIN: Yes, it is, because I like to be independence of course and will be good.



Yes I do get paid of course. It's also so good to be out in the community because it is good to meet all the new people.

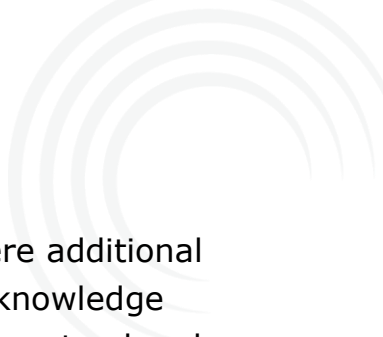
LIZ: Exactly. And you're very good at customer service I have heard. That's a good thing.

EOIN: Yep. You always get that right, Liz.

LIZ: Exactly. Some of our benefits for employers. Research shows that having people with Down syndrome employed has a very positive effect on organisations. Employers generally find that an employee with Down syndrome displays a high degrees of loyalty, enthusiasm of their job and have a high attendance rate. In general there's a positive impact on an organisations reputation, their client satisfaction and their team culture. We've spoken to a number of employers, and they have said that the job loyalty and enthusiasm for their job for people with Down syndrome is the highest that they see within the workplace.

A high attendance, there are very limited sick days. Very, very - there's not a high turnover of staff. People stay in their jobs. A really positive brand reputation, really positive client customer satisfaction and also team moral and culture is just amazing. Like Darren at Coles said, his team absolutely thrives and Eoin you thrive in your workplace as well which is absolutely fantastic.

Alright. So in our workplace, one of the most important things we can do is to get to know your new staff member like you would any new employee. It's get to know your staff member. Analyse job tasks and apply training techniques to workplace training. Visual aid, tailored supports, everything that meets the individual learners needs. Deliver constructive feedback, implement reasonable adjustments and gradually reduce supports to encourage long-term independence and success. That is one of Eoin's main goals at work is to become more independent. That has definitely happened. Paragraph so providing feedback and adjusting your support will help promote that independence. As we said gaining and understanding of your employee is with Down syndrome is crucial for supporting a productive working environment when you hire a person with Down syndrome.



So in your workplace it is essential that you determine areas where additional supports may be required. Identify the employee's current skills knowledge and role understanding. Learn the most effective way for the person to absorb and retain that information. And recognise the employee's strength and how they can be utilised in their role. Eoin, incredible at customer service, I hear you are absolutely wonderful in helping people out in the workplace.

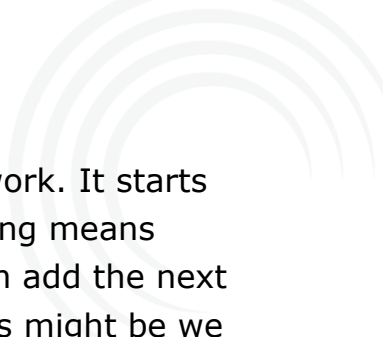
EOIN: Yes. People like me, of course. They like talking to me because I'm always friendly to everyone else. And of course, I like talking about my sports to them every time.

LIZ: Of course you do. Alright. At DEA we have our employment connections program. We go out to work places, and we help with the training and onboarding of new staff members. It is very essential to utilise different kinds of strategies. Various strategies. Breaking tasks into smaller manageable steps. Known task analysis, allows individuals to learn processes in a very logical order. Techniques like chaining which I mentioned before. We have some videos to show you on chaining. Helps teach complex multi task sets by gradually introducing new steps and then re-enforcing completed steps along the way. So you follow a chain.

It is essential in a workplace to add visual aids for a person throughout your workplace. Adding prompts into people's work and then adjusting strategies to fit that individual.

And as I said before we do have a training course which will be released very soon. And it's one design for people in the workplace who have Down syndrome. We have filmed some strategies and techniques. Here is a bit of a snippet of a couple of the videos. And our first one I believe was for chaining.

(video plays)



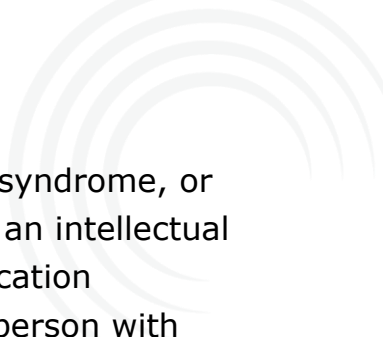
SPEAKER: Forward Chaining is a practical way to teach skills at work. It starts at the beginning of tasks and builds step-by-step. Forward chaining means teaching the first step first. And once we have that step, you then add the next one and then the next one. Let's look at washing a cup. Our steps might be we take the cup to the sink. We turn on the tap. We add soap. We wash the cup. We rinse the cup. And then place it back on the rack. With forward chaining you start by teaching the first step. You support the rest of the steps. And then once that first step is confident you add the second and then the third. Over time, more steps are added and eventually the person completes the whole task from start to finish. Forward chaining works well when tasks follow a clear order. Each step builds on the last.

LIZ: Alright. So that is just one of the teaching methods we'll use in our chaining videos. Our next one just last little snippet of a workplace training technique which is total task training. This one works very well with Eoin at Coles we've implemented this training technique. It will explain it in the video exactly how it does it. We find a lot of our workers respond very well to total task training.

(video plays)

SPEAKER: Total task training is about practising the whole task each time. Support is given where it's needed and then it's reduced over time. The task is broken into steps, but the person practices the full routine from start to finish. Let's look at answering a phone. The steps may include: Answering the call. Greeting the caller. Listening. Taking a message. Ending the call. And placing the phone back. With total task training, the person practises all steps each time. Support is given only when it's needed. Over time, support is reduced. Confidence and independence grow with practice. Total task training helps people understand how all the steps fit together. It is useful for tasks like answering the phone, making tea or following workplace routines.

LIZ: Awesome. Alright. Now we'll move on to language. Language plays an incredibly important part in introducing a person into your workplace. And then also in just everyday life of a person with Down syndrome or with disability. It's important that - we do teach at DEA we put a person first and you don't focus on their disability. We use what is called person first language. So we'll



say people with Down syndrome or for example, Sally has Down syndrome, or Eoin has Down syndrome, person with a disability or person with an intellectual disability just the disability comes second. Some of our communication principles are always communicate and engage directly with the person with Down syndrome. Explain things using clear and simple language. Try and avoid jargon. No acronyms and no complex terminology. Be specific. Don't use abstract concepts or open-ended questions. And with your written communication try and use plain English and develop easy Reid document. If you haven't done an easy read course I would absolutely suggest you do an easy read course. They're easy to find everywhere. It helps with communication with a person with Down syndrome.

We did speak to a group of individuals with Down syndrome and ask them what they really wanted and what they wanted people to know about communication and language. And they told us quite distinctly that they would like people to assume competence. Very often people with Down syndrome can understand a lot more than they can express with words. They said they always want to be communicated with and engaged directly with. Please don't talk to the person that's with them. Please talk to them.

And ask if they need support and provide it according to their individual requirements. So have patience also. Please don't answer for a person. Allow a person that time to think and then respond.

Eoin, you have some practical strategies for us now in the workplace. These are some of the things that you have picked up and some strategies that you can share with the team to hopefully help a little bit with some of the things in the workplace. So off you go, Eoin.

EOIN: Don't assume all people with Down syndrome are the same. Respect the team and establish a good communication system support does not mean being a mum or dad. Don't rush the person. Talk directly to the person.

LIZ: Exactly. And that was one of the main things that we talked about, Eoin, wasn't it that you didn't want to be treated like a child. So someone supporting you don't mean they are your parent. You don't want to be treated in that way.



Is that correct.

EOIN: Yes.

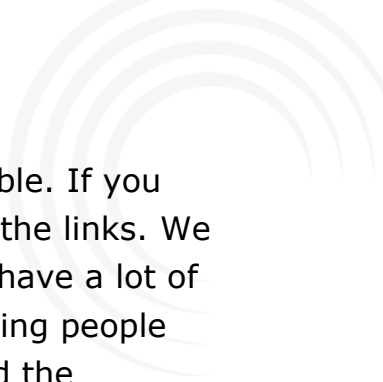
LIZ: Alright. Some more practical strategies. Do not provide multiple talking points at once. Break the information down into smaller parts. Which allows time to process the information. Background noise and lighting can be very distracting for people. One of the most important things that you can do is just to have patience and don't rush a person with Down syndrome. And if the person is feeling rushed, or anxious, it can then impact their speech.

So people with Down syndrome are known to have very, very good receptive language and if they are feeling very rushed, very anxious, then their expressive language really does - it does become a lot harder.

So we have spoken to a lots and lots of different employers and another one of our wonderful staff member, Clare who is on the board here, she works at the Children's Hospital in Queensland. Clare is a very valued staff member. She's worked at the Queensland hospital for, she's part of the furniture. A very, very long time. Her boss has worked very closely with us in implementing Clare into the workplace and then continuing very long-term employment. In his words for hiring people with Down syndrome, are quite - they may seem really simple but quite impactful.

(video plays)

SPEAKER: Anyone can do anything. When you have the right people and the right support, that's really the key. And it's not just people, it's for everyone who has any issue coming into a workplace whether it's mental health, intellectual, social, emotional, et cetera, it's about the workplace supporting them to get the best out of them. We're big on the inclusive culture, in this setting with trust, respect and, yeah, it's great seeing it everywhere.



LIZ: There you go. Alright. So we do have some resources available. If you head on over to www.downsyndrome.org.au then you can follow the links. We have our right to work and employment website there where we have a lot of information on our employment connection service. Which is placing people into our open employment. We work with both the employers and the employees. Deliver workplace training to the employers and like I said we will have our course up online very, very soon. There's also some success stories. You'll see Eoin on there. And a little bit more information about our ambassadors. So if you want any more resources please just reach out. It has all of our information on the website and then how to get in contact with myself or one of our ambassadors just like Eoin.

It's time for questions. Are you ready, Eoin?

EOIN: Yes, I am. Thank you, Liz.

LIZ: They maybe football questions. We'll see what we get.

EOIN: OK.

LIZ: Do you have some questions Christine.

CHRISTINE: Thank you both for your presentation. It's been really, really informative. We do have some questions that have come through and if anyone has any more questions, please feel free to pop them in the chat or in the Q & A function in Zoom. So Eoin, the first question is for you. What is one thing that Coles does to help you in your job?

EOIN: OK. Everyone at Coles helped me a lot when I started my job. Now I have a schedule, and I work independently in the food section.

CHRISTINE: Thanks, Eoin. That's great. Liz, this one's for you. Is there any help available if organisations are looking to help hire someone with Down

syndrome?

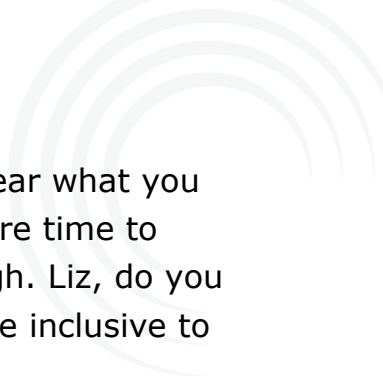
LIZ: For sure, yes. Definitely. So we have a lot of resources available in our employment connection service is exactly that. So we work very hard with employers to make their organisations job ready. We'll help carve out jobs. We will help with education, information about Down syndrome and we have a very person-centred focus. So we will understand a lot about the person they have hired and then we will work with their families and then take that training to the workplace so it can be very specific, setting people up for success. Not just the person but the employer as well.

CHRISTINE: Wonderful. Thanks, Liz. And would you mind just explaining what job carving is for the people on this webinar that might not know.

LIZ: For sure. A lot of times we'll have jobs advertised. They are what they are. But with job carving we work out a person's strengths and then we work out the things that people are very, very good at. The way that can then be incorporated into the organisation and we will carve out a job. Really specifically like we've done with Eoin, at Coles, is carving out that actual role and creating that role for him that will set him up for success.

CHRISTINE: That's fabulous. Thanks, Liz. I'm just looking to see if we have any more questions from our audience. If anybody has any more questions, please feel free to pop those through for Liz and Eoin. Eoin, I might ask you a question myself. What's your favourite thing about working at Coles?

EOIN: Well, like I did mention before, I just like meeting all the new people and actually, yes, some old people are still working there, but we have new workers who come to work with us too. Yeah, I do have two support workers like Monique and Bell, of course. So that company that Monique has is unique. Then those ladies also work with like Shelly and Alison. Yes, they have been working and help me, but I also help them to do their stuff. But I have to do it four years ago, yeah.



CHRISTINE: Thanks, Eoin. That's a great answer. It's great to hear what you love about working at Coles. That's given everyone a little bit more time to think about some questions. I do have some more coming through. Liz, do you have any tips on how to advertise jobs so that they could be more inclusive to encourage people with Down syndrome to apply?

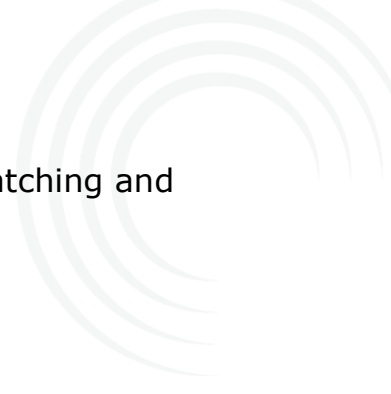
LIZ: Definitely. Yes. So I'd like to think outside the box a little bit. I like to make the job. I'll answer in two-parts. I'd like to make the job advertisements as accessible as I can. So I will seek out organisations who can help me then promote the jobs. So that's reaching out to the states and territories of Down Syndrome Australia and helping them promote the actual job. But I also like to make the job as accessible. The person with Down syndrome can actually read it and understand it or hear it. So making it an ease read making it in plain English and having a version where you can click and hear an audio description of what the job is as well. So it's utilising not just your Seek platforms, they're not incredibly accessible for a person to read the job ad. So it's reaching out to networks as well. So to get your right target audience.

CHRISTINE: Thanks, Liz. That's really helpful. And through the employment connection service are you able to work with organisations to help them develop these job advertisements.

LIZ: Absolutely, yes. We absolutely do.

CHRISTINE: Wonderful. Thank you. The next question. Liz, I might get you to answer this one. What types of learning approaches or formats best support and encourage active engagement in training?

LIZ: OK. So all different types. You've really got to know your person first. I know that's probably a very obvious answer. So the learning approaches would be - I would - if it's a person who has very limited reading capabilities I would make sure then I am prompting and showing and using a lot of visual techniques. And then if it's a person who can learn quite well on a computer and its digital training then it's sitting and sun porting if that's what the person needs. A lot of the times Eoin, I know for you it's been getting in and doing the things with the person so they can also understand and learn. So it's a lot of



those copycat behaviours so it's hands on instructions, doing, watching and then doing again. Eoin, would you agree with that, mate.

EOIN: 100%.

LIZ: Yes.

CHRISTINE: Great. Thank you both. That is all the questions that we've had come through. But thank you both so much for your presentation and for answering the questions.

LIZ: No worries.

CHRISTINE: You've been really helpful.

EOIN: Liz, any sports questions by the way?

LIZ: I don't think there were any sports questions, mate. Who will win the footy tonight - not tonight, Thursday night?

EOIN: Well, I want the Maroons actually.

LIZ: Talking Origin.

EOIN: Yes. I do want the Maroons to win, but my tip - I tipped the Dolphins.

LIZ: Good choice.

EOIN: Of course, I want the Cowboys to win. The reason I tipped the Cowboys

and want them to win because I was born in Townsville. That's why.

LIZ: Exactly.

EOIN: I'm always loyal to my own team.

LIZ: Yes, you are. Thanks.

CHRISTINE: And thanks Eoin for answering that really important question. I'll hand back to Sally.

SALLY: Thank you so much. Thanks Eoin. Thank you, Liz and Christine. Thank you for joining us today and for sharing your experience and for all that information and tips as well. It's been great to have you all here. Thank you also to Liv who is keep things going in the background. If you have any questions after the session please feel free to reach out and the recording and all the associated documents will be made available after today. Yes. Once again thank you for joining us. We look forward to seeing you back here in a fortnight's time. Have a lovely rest of the day everyone.

EOIN: Thank you. Happy to be on. I'd like to say I just came back from Melbourne, by the way, because I was working with AO, Australia open tennis.

LIZ: You sure were. Eoin, we'll let you get back to class, mate.

EOIN: I'll have lunch first.

LIZ: Go have lunch. See you Buddy.

EOIN: Thank you everyone. Thank you.