Centre for Inclusive Employment

Centre for Inclusive Employment & Disability Employment Australia
Lunch & Learn Session | Wednesday, 15 July 2026

The Sibling Effect

Speaker:
Zane McKenzie and Wade Costley, Cerebral Palsy Australia

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

SALLY KARANDREWS: Hi everyone and welcome to this week's Lunch and Learn. It is lovely to be here with you all today. Thank you for joining us. My name is Sally and I am the Inclusive Employment Australia policy manager here at DEA and I will be taking you through today's Webinar. Let's begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which each of us are dialling in from for me that is the Darkinjung people and I pay my respects to Elders past and present. The Lunch and Learn Webinars are delivered in partnership between the Centre For Inclusive Employment and Disability Employment Australia. The Centre For Inclusive Employment supports employment providers with practical resources, tools and training to help deliver high quality employment services to people with disability. DEA is the National peak body representing Disability Employment Service Providers. The centre is delivered through a National consortium, and it is led by the centre for social impact at the Swinburne University of technology. The centre brings together research, lived experience and sector expertise as well.

If you would like to turn on the captions, Liv is going to post instructions on how to do that in the chat. If you have any questions that you would like to can our speakers throughout today, please pop them into the Q&A section and we will get to those at the end of the presentation. Our session is also being recorded and a copy of that recording, along with any resources or other information and links that are shared will be made available to everyone after the session concludes. The topic for today's Lunch and Learn is supporting successful people

with cerebral palsy. We are joined today by Zane who is the inclusion and belonging manager at Scope as well as the Board Chair at Cerebral Palsy Australia. We are also joined by Wade Costley and Wade is the Chair of the lived experience advisory panel at Cerebral Palsy Australia, and a Board Chair as well. I have also got Evelyn, the general manager supporting the delivery of today's workshop as well. Both Zane and Wade come to us today with their lived experience of cerebral palsy. So without further ado I will hand over to them.

ZANE McKENZIE: Thank you very much Sally and thank you for the opportunity to participate in the board.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Wade, do you want to maybe jump in just while Zane is a bit frozen.

WADE COSTLEY: I hope Zane will be able to join us shortly. Again as Zane was saying, thank you for letting us present today. We are really looking forward to it and hopefully this will be a beneficial session for all of you attending today. I think Zane is back.

ZANE McKENZIE: I am, thank you Wade.

WADE COSTLEY: I will let you take it away.

ZANE McKENZIE: I think today is a great opportunity for us as a group to discussion cerebral palsy in a bit more detail and understand how we can support people with cerebral palsy with their work goals and ambitions as well as the impact that some of that has on our broader lives. By way of the agenda we want to give you a bit broader understanding of what cerebral palsy is and how it manifests for different people. We want to talk about common workplace barriers and challenges, why employment matters for people with cerebral palsy and tips for best practice around supporting people with cerebral palsy in the workplace, and then Wade is going to talk us through my CP guide and a few other really important resources that might be able to assist you in your role in supporting individuals with cerebral palsy in the work that you do, which is a very important role in the community. So thank you all for being here.

We will go to the effects slide Evelyn. So as I said, we want to kick off today by talking a little bit about what cerebral palsy is and my key message, our key message in this part of the day is that if you meet one person with cerebral palsy you've met one person. So Wade and I are both here today and that means you are on the front-foot because you've met two already. But what you'll notice about Wade and myself is that in both our cases cerebral palsy manifests itself quite differently. My mobility is different to Wade's, our speech is slightly different, the way our cerebral palsy affects us as individuals is different. But there are a few common things that I like to talk about that summarise cerebral palsy. It is first and foremost a life-long physical disability and it is caused by damage to the developing brain. Typically when a person is very young, before the age of 2. Primarily cerebral palsy affects movement, posture and coordination and the variance is quite substantial between individuals. So some people may have more mobility issues, while for some others speech can be affected, different forms of paralyses and fatigue and pain can vary between individuals, and the types of workplace adjustments that a person with cerebral palsy might require would look very different for me as opposed to Wade and if we had 10 other people in the room with cerebral palsy none of us would be identical in terms of the support that we require. So getting to know the individual and understanding the individual is my number 1 tip and our number 1 tip at Cerebral Palsy Australia as we try to be the National voice of people with cerebral palsy and helping our communities build that understanding. Thanks Evelyn, we'll go to the next slide.

Hello, we've missed a few slides in this one, have we? Have we got the right presentation up?

EVELYN: Yeah, sorry, I will just go back to the beginning.

ZANE McKENZIE: Okay, no worries. Always a few tech issues in these environments, isn't there? That's what we love about online presentations. Okay, so I think we are getting somewhere. So just a few key facts that I think is worthwhile knowing just to paint the picture of cerebral palsy in Australia. Currently it affects around 37,000 individuals who live with cerebral palsy.

About 28,000 of those, 75% of that population are adults. That's quite a big number when you think about it, and important because it talks about that life-long aspect of the disability. When we consider family and friends and support providers and other networks about 259,000 people are impacted by cerebral palsy, and an estimated cost of something like $5.4 billion. About 400 new babies, bless their hearts are born with cerebral palsy and that equates to about 1 in 20 hours over the course of the year. So it still is a fairly common condition, although the treatments over the years are getting better and better for a lot of us. About 47,000 plus people are predicted to be living with cerebral palsy at a $6.9 billion cost. Globally about 50 million people live with cerebral palsy, and about 350 million family members and carers are affected. So why is that important? Well, we need to understand that when we speak about cerebral palsy and the impacts and how they are all very individualised we are not really talking about a small group of people. So the nuances are many and they are varied. Thanks Evelyn, we'll go to the next slide.

In terms of some of those nuances like me, about 1 in 3 people with cerebral palsy are unable to walk and many will use a mobility aid, whether that be a motorised or manual wheelchair or some other walking aid. 1 in 3 also can't use their hands to manipulate objects, picking things up and that sort of dexterity can be very challenging. 1 in 4 do not communicate using speech. 3 in 4 live with chronic pain. As you can imagine there is quite a bit of discomfort associated with that. It is worth noting though that there are other conditions that coexist with cerebral palsy. They are not though part of cerebral palsy itself. So as I said earlier, cerebral palsy is a physical disability. But about 50% of people with cerebral palsy also live with an intellectual impairment or some kind of impairment. About 25% of people experience epilepsy, and another 25% have a behaviour disorder, 20% have a sleep disorder and about 10% have some degree of vision impairment. That is important because the distinction is important. We need to understand that while these things sort of exist alongside cerebral palsy, they are not part of cerebral palsy so they don't apply to everybody that you might meet or support in your life or your work. So hopefully that makes sense. So in my case all of my symptoms are physical, but I have got to make sure I take care of my health. I have got to make sure that I maintain a healthy weight and things like that so that some of these other conditions are lessened and the likelihood of them are lessened. Thanks Evelyn.

So what you need to bear in mind when you consider all of those potential

differences with individuals is that you should never assume appearance or mobility or communication style is going to be the same for an individual or individuals with cerebral palsy. We are all going to experience cerebral palsy differently and getting to know the person and the support they require is the key. Having cerebral palsy or living with cerebral palsy does not determine a person's intelligence, capability, qualifications or potential to work or have any form of career, although there are some things that are more difficult that can impact that. So accessing work, accessing acquisition, accessing education can be a bit different and we'll talk about that as we go along. But generally none of those things around capability or intelligence are actually affected directly from cerebral palsy. (Acquisition.) As I said before the way cerebral palsy works for individuals is different for each person. So when you are supporting somebody, whether it be me or Wade or somebody else, I think one of the best things you can do in providing that support is to understand that the person is the expert in their own experiences and their own lives. We will know best the support that we need. When you are looking at ways to support an individual your focus should be on the goals and strengths and support requirements rather than you knowing that a person has cerebral palsy, or, in fact, any other type of disability. So it is that person-first, it is that power of seeing the person getting to know them, their strengths, their capabilities and the support that they need that is going to support you in your work. Thanks Evelyn.

So I just wanted to give you a quick rundown of some of the common challenges and barriers in finding and keeping work for people with cerebral palsy. One of them is we often start work later in life, and because we may have gone through a different pathway or not been educated in the same way as the mainstream community we might have low expectations and bias for ourselves. So that can affect our own perception of our capability and our productivity, and we can fall into the trap of making assumptions about our own disabilities. I know for many years that I did that. But so can the broader community, and those things can have an impact. Another important barrier is that in the recruitment process, but also in the onboarding process and in the employment lifecycle employers don't often understand the workplace adjustments that can potentially support a person with cerebral palsy. So often we don't make those adjustments, and therefore people don't succeed, whereas when those adjustments are effectively put in place, the disability becomes less of a factor. Often recruitment processes, traditional interviewers, traditional AI recruitment platforms, those kinds of things can screen people out and again that is about adjusting the process to tailor to the individual. Things that, processes,

systems, et cetera that exclude people with disabilities, particularly people with cerebral palsy. So I support a team member for example who can't get into our people system because he can't use his hands, so therefore I have to go in currently and analogue his annual leave when he wants to put an annual leave day in. They are the types of systems that we need to think about as a broader community in terms of improving accessibility and access so that we can create equitable experiences. But sometimes it is about the timeframes we have put on work, things like that. We also as I said before often don't get the levels of work experience or build the networks that we often see others build. That can mean that we get less opportunities to work because we get less exposure to career development and education. We might meet fewer people who can actually present us with those opportunities. So they are the barriers in terms of recruitment. Thanks Evelyn, we'll keep going.

Workplace barriers can be anything from physical accessibility things like whether or not a building has the right access, whether or not someone can access transport, whether or not workstations are well designed or meeting rooms are well set up. Being able to manage fatigue and plan tasks effectively can fluctuate. So flexibility is important and one of the things that I often ask for is additional rest breaks throughout the day, that's an adjustment that my employer has been able to grant me, as well as the ability to sort of manage my own time to work when I am at my best. Things like role design can come into being, things that I am not suited as doing that other members of the team might be better at. I am sure Wade you would have experienced some of those things across your experiences as well.

WADE COSTLEY: Often, yep.

ZANE McKENZIE: Often the other thing is, and I mentioned it earlier, but people communicate differently. But that can lead to assumptions being made about someone's cognitive ability or their intelligence, and that's just not true, but it can often mean that people don't get roles that they are really well suited for. The team member that I mentioned before in my team is a great example, he is 45. This is the first time he has said that he's felt like he's had a meaningful role, but he's our DEO lead and he managers our disability Action Plan, and I really can't think of a better person to do that work because the variance of lived experience that he brings to that work is extraordinary.

When we speak about those workplace adjustments that I spoke about before and they can be anything from that additional time, adjusted timelines, they can also be building modifications, different computer software and tools, et cetera, often those things take a long time to get put into place. When that happens it just means that the individual can't be at their best. If we get these reasonable workplace adjustments into place quickly, that often removes the barriers that enable people to succeed in the workplace. So it is really important for you in your role to think about how you can support the individual to both have those conversations and navigate them and where they might go for some of those supports. Thanks Evelyn.

Finally, or almost finally, I just want to talk to you a bit about why employment matters, because I think this is really important. So if we go to the next slide I just wanted to highlight that employment gives us income. Income gives us more of an opportunity to participate. It also gives us a sense of purpose and achievement and personal growth in our lives. People with cerebral palsy among the rest of us, deserve those equitable opportunities as well as the chance to connect meaningfully to their community and have some independence. We talk about in our sector all the time we talk about choice and control. One of the best ways to give people choice and control is to give people independence, but what is at the core of independence? It is income. How do you get income? You go to work. So it is incumbent upon all of us to support and create those opportunities, and all of these things will lead to a better quality of life for people with cerebral palsy. These are not outcomes in terms of therapeutic outcomes, this is a human rights issue. These are human rights. They are in the universal declaration of human rights for people with disability. So we should not shirk our responsibility to do this work as part of our broader communities. Thank you Evelyn.

So what does best practice actually look like? I think there are probably 5 key things that need to be considered, and they are on this slide. The first thing is as I said earlier, we want to lead with strengths. When we are talking to people with disability, and this includes people with cerebral palsy, you want to understand what their skills are. Where does their experience and expertise lie? What are their interests? What are their aspirations? Often people get pigeon hold into particular types of work because they might be seen as the subject matter expert, but is it the work that a person really wants, or is it where they

feel their expertise really is?

If you are going to implement the adjustments that are needed you need to understand what the impact of the disability, in this case cerebral palsy, is for the individual. Be open about having those conversations and create an environment for the individual to properly speak to their needs. In doing that what we start to do is we start to normalise workplace adjustments, they just become part of everyday conversations. So we have flexible ways of working, we create hybrid work, we talk about accessible workstations and adaptive equipment. Some people will use voice recognition software, so I do, I find typing very difficult - not so difficult when the computer itself can do that for me. We want to make sure that things like parking and extra breaks might be in place to manage that fatigue. We want to provide ongoing support, so these conversations are not one and done, we want to constantly review adjustments, talk about whether they are working, and most importantly, talk about opportunity for career development, sustainable employment and not just placement because it is convenient. You know, this is a job you can do, so let's give it to you. That's not what it is about, that's not the way we want to work as a community, so why would we expect that of people with disabilities and people with cerebral palsy? So they're some really key principles that we'd love you to remember, and we look forward to the opportunity to unpack some of those with you today and beyond if you'd like to remain in contact. This does not need to be a one and done conversation. Thanks Evelyn.

A few recommended resources, we created a white paper at Cerebral Palsy Australia on work pathways and employment experiences for young people with cerebral palsy. That's a great paper, that dives a little bit deeper into some of what we've been able to touch on today. It is important that you get an understanding of workplace adjustments so that you can guide people on that journey, and the Employee Assistance Fund through Job Access is a great place to start. They also have a guide to disability employment. Then we have my CP guide, which is part of our work at Cerebral Palsy Australia we I'm now very happy to throw to Wade to talk about for a few minutes.

WADE COSTLEY: Thank you very much Zane, and great information there. As Zane said I'd just like to talk to you about another platform that is part of Cerebral Palsy Australia which is my CP guide. It is Australia's first continually

updated CP hub and it is codesigned, trusted, accessible and stage relevant website for the CP community. You'll see now our home page and the platform includes information resources. We have over 1,000 of those, a page of essential websites related to disability, health and wellbeing, support for carers and parents and disability funding in Australia. In addition my CP also contains a large number of graphs that showcase the diversity and the accomplishments of the CP community. On the next slide as you can see we provide a full range of overall topics, and you can see even the work category there on the lower right-hand corner. We need to filter by subtopic and life stages. All of the information resources that we feature are reviewed and validated using an information governance framework, so you can be ensured that they are all trusted and reliable.

On the next slide for you one of the most relevant resources that we offer is an employment journal handbook for people with CP which we codeveloped with our friends at the cerebral palsy support network which is a service provider here in Victoria.

On the next slide you'll see the comprehensive handbook includes a wide range of employment topics, such as employment challenges that people with CP face and that is something that Zane touched on before. The handbook offer tips on how to manage the transition from school to work, including the importance of establishing early foundations of support such as encouraging participation in social activities, setting goals, maintaining a positive attitude, et cetera. Also working with teachers to focus on those goals and achieving them and emphasising the strengths that students have, and adaptable, how to pursue tertiary education. It also includes a list of employment support programs. On the next slide you'll see that for jobseekers the handbook discusses the importance once again of setting goals and how volunteering can lead to employment. We also have online platforms that you can use for job searching an advice on how to disclose that you have CP to the potential employer. Also how to prepare for interviews, and how to discuss the supports that you might need.

On the next slide you'll see that the handbook is also helpful for employers, as it contains advice on the benefits of an inclusive workplace. I'd like to expand on that particular point. People with CP spend their lives thinking outside of the box

because we had to live in a world that was not designed for us. So often we were quite good at coming up with new solutions that others might not have thought of. The handbook often includes the legal obligations for employers and dispels the misconceptions about hiring people with CP. It also includes supports services for hiring people with CP, and describes the types of reasonable adjustments in the workplace. As well one can find funding for these adjustments and resources for that. To cater for the culturally and linguistically diverse communities, we've also published a handbook in simplified Chinese, Hindi, Italian and Vietnamese. On the next slide you'll see that we also provide an employment resource written in easy English for people with low literacy skills which talks about the benefits of work, some challenges that people might find at work, workers' rights, how to self-advocate at work, external supports that can help you and what to do when you can no longer work. This can be due to an injury or when you reach a certain age.

On our next slide you'll see we have our blog which includes lived - it has perspectives on employment. As Zane said on the next slide you can read how Sophie, and adult with CP shared her story about navigating the challenges of tertiary education, and Joseph turned work experiences into long-term employment, or how Briar our Deputy Chair persevered until she found the right job for her, or how I thrived in a fulfilling career. That's a bit about my CP guide. On the next slide if you'd like to keep up-to-date with the latest on my CP guide you can subscribe to our newsletter, either by scanning the QR code on your screen or visiting our website, mycpguide.com.au. Now I think we have got time for some Q&A.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Thank you so much Zane and Wade, a huge amount of information and resources there and we'll be sure to include links to the my CP guide, the blogs, the white paper and all of the other things that came out in that presentation when we send out our notes in post-session. In terms of questions we've had a couple come through. The first one is around the DSP, Disability Support Pension and whether you've encountered many situations where people are not being approved for DSP, whether that's a common occurrence that you are aware of?

ZANE McKENZIE: Well, I might start if I may Wade? What I will say is that over the last few years the criteria for the DSP has sort of been revised from what it

originally was. I know when I first applied for the Disability Support Pension, the number of hours that you couldn't work was different to what it is now. So now I think you've got to - and correct me if you know the answer to this Wade - but I think now you've got to not be able to work more than 15 hours a fortnight. But when I applied it was actually double that, it was 15 hours a week. I think that that means that some people who might have been eligible years ago, perhaps aren't eligible now. But I also think the messaging that I would like to put forward is it is incumbent upon us as a community to actually create meaningful opportunities for employment for as many people as we can. I mean the DSP is a wonderful resource for those who need it. But there are a lot of people with cerebral palsy who are very employable and I guess that's one of the key messages that I want to leave people with today is really the welfare system is wonderful and it is a great part about being an Australian, but we are really here today to talk about the employment of people with cerebral palsy and in all of our roles that is what we should focus on. So I don't mean to diminish that question, I hope you don't feel that that's what I have done, but Wade would you like to add anything?

WADE COSTLEY: The only thing I'd like to add is that people with disability, including cerebral palsy want that opportunity to work and I think something that employers need to realise is that often the adjustments that one with CP might require are often very minor adjustments and can be easily done. So that's one thing. Another thing would be if we had more people with CP employed, I think employers do need to be aware and Zane touched upon this earlier in his presentation about the incumbrances of today, AI discriminate against people with disability, when people are on camera and they allow a certain time on the phone or as a response. So I think that people should be more aware of what they can do to make adjustments and often they are very minor.

SALLY KARANDREWS: I think that's a fantastic way of framing DSP, it is a great and important option to have available; however, yeah, it is that focus on employment that should be centred and making sure that those opportunities are available to all people who are seeking it. Looks like you've actually inadvertently answered our other questions along the way. There is some great stuff in the CP guide that has talked about how employers could potentially frame conversations, so win there. Just finally just as a double check back with a couple of spots, if people have a potential person that they think might be a

contributor to your blog that has a story that they might like to share, can they reach out to you guys and perhaps send that through and see if that can be lined up?

WADE COSTLEY: Absolutely. We look forward to publishing as many blogs as we can. So the email for that potentially you have dropped that into the chat, but it is info@cerebralpalsyaustralia.com.

SALLY KARANDREWS: Thank you. Other than that there is just lots of thanks and appreciation for both your presentation and the resources coming through. So awesome. I would like to add to that and thank both Wade and Zane and Evelyn for coming on today and sharing their experiences, their knowledge and the resources that you've clearly worked incredibly hard on. It is great to see the guide available in both other languages and Easy Read. So, yeah, that's really cool to have those available to people. So thank you and thank you also to Liv who has been making everything work in the background. Liv is about to launch a quick feedback poll, so if you wouldn't mind sticking around for a moment just to pop your responses in there that would be greatly appreciated. Also please don't forget to log your CPD points for attending today's Webinar. In two weeks' time on the 29th of July we have our next Lunch and Learn session, and we are going to be talking about Inclusive Careers for People With Disability Through Apprenticeships, which will be another fantastic topic and resource for people to be able to access. So again, thank you so much Zane and Wade and everyone for attending, it has been fantastic to have you all here today.

ZANE McKENZIE: Thank you.

WADE COSTLEY: Thank you all everyone.

(End)