Centre for Inclusive Employment

# Including families: Employment service perspectives on collaborative jobseeking

nacbo National Alliance Capacity Building Organisations | BELONGING MATTERS INC

CASE STUDY

This article was derived from interviews with an Inclusive Employment Australia provider and a small bespoke employment service offering one-to-one employment mentoring. The aim of the interviews was to gain their perspectives on the impact of active family involvement in the employment process for jobseekers with an intellectual disability.

The bespoke employment service sees families as invaluable sources of information, especially for people with intellectual disabilities. They offer a unique, historical understanding of the jobseeker's strengths, preferred conditions and what truly works for them. **By actively engaging families in the Discovery process, the employment mentor can build a holistic profile of the individual.**

Families also support the employment journey in other practical ways such as ensuring pre-work training and other requirements (e.g. first aid certificates and police checks) are completed. The family can assist in developing resources needed for a job or applying for a job, such as information to develop a resume.

One of the benefits of actively engaging with families is their potential connections. In one example, a family member had a connection to an area manager of a large retail chain. The family member did not feel comfortable to pursue the lead themselves, so introduced the employment mentor and employer to each other. **After the introduction the family member stepped back, and the employer and the employment mentor worked together to carve a role.** The job would not have happened without the family connection, and as a result the person is still employed on award wages 6 years later.

Excluding families from the employment process introduces potential risks. Without well-rounded information, a jobseeker with intellectual disability might be placed in an unsuitable role, leading to a negative experience for both the employee and the employer. The employment service recognises that they may need to navigate the fact that families can operate from a safeguarding position and may be concerned that their loved one will be viewed as a burden, face bullying or experience rejection if the job fails. The service counters these fears by leading with the firm belief that open employment is possible, showcasing real success stories and openly discussing workplace risks and how they can be addressed with the employer before the first day on the job.For example, when a workplace bullying issue arose, the employment service followed up with the CEO and resolved it swiftly. This showed that workplace concerns could be handled professionally without pulling the family into workplace disputes. **By acting as a strategic advocate, the service maintained a constructive, solution-focused dialogue with the employer, preserving a positive relationship for the family.**

**To protect the longevity and stability of employment, ongoing collaboration between the service and the family is imperative.** Families are the first to notice subtle changes in behaviour when something is wrong at work. By working intentionally together through all the stages of the employment process, areas of concern can be addressed early. The service states they maintain strong and frequent communication of regular check-ins, phone calls and progress photos, providing encouragement, confidence and reassurance for all parties. A good working relationship is built on mutual trust, respect and actively valuing the family's input.

The Inclusive Employment Australia job coaches spend multiple fortnightly sessions getting to know a jobseeker. With permission from the jobseeker, family involvement can play a role in this process. Jobseekers grant permission for their families to be involved; while most consent, it is important to respect the privacy of those who choose to navigate their journey independently. The Inclusive Employment Australia service have found that it is possible for some individuals with intellectual disability to navigate the employment journey without the involvement of family, though it may take a little more time to get to know them. They acknowledged their independent participation might be dependent on the disability of an individual.

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A man employed at a warehouse organising products on shelves.



When families have been involved, they provided support by clarifying information and offering feedback on proposed roles. Conversely, excluding family has led to information gaps that only become apparent after employment begins. For instance, the provider recalled a jobseeker who declined family involvement, but on commencement of a job, struggled to learn the tasks during workplace training. Family support was requested to salvage the job. They revealed their son required structured, one-on-one training of tasks and written checklists rather than verbal instructions.

The Inclusive Employment Australia provider identified some challenges when involving families in the employment journey, particularly when their goals conflict with those of the jobseeker. A frequent example is when families wish to limit working hours to protect the jobseeker's disability pension, while the jobseeker desires to work more. Additionally, Inclusive Employment Australia providers may need to work through timelines, role suitability, and employer practices. For example, explaining to families why cold-calling large corporations or local councils that advertise 'inclusive' hiring isn't always the most effective strategy because these businesses can involve lengthy, complex application processes, and their day-to-day hiring practices don't always reflect their public ethos. Also, **being up front about timelines is also important**. The Inclusive Employment Australia job coaches are allocated approximately two hours a fortnight for each jobseeker, making it difficult for the job coach to follow up on these requests. They will also develop relationships with specific businesses who they contact when they have a jobseeker that might suit an advertised position.

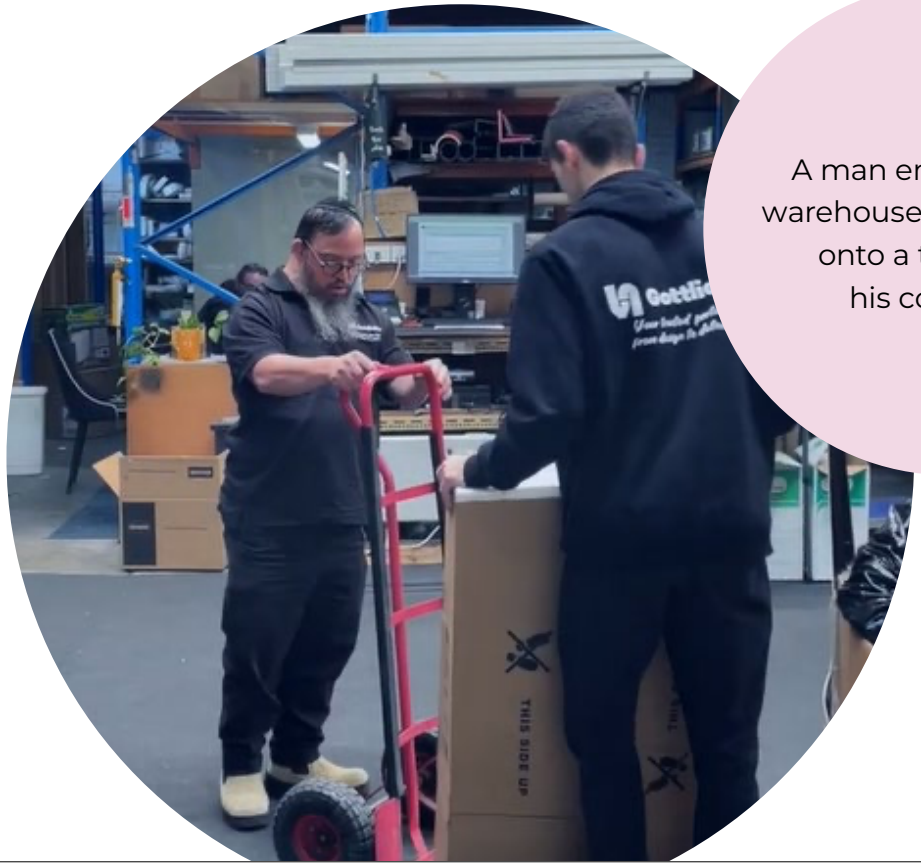
The bespoke employment service's advice to other employment services looking to improve their practices, is to **actively seek permission for family involvement from day one** rather than waiting for them to ask. Adopting a holistic, collaborative approach not only creates sustainable career paths, but is encouraging and nourishing for parents to witness their loved one's true potential.

Interviews with an Inclusive Employment Australia provider and a bespoke employment service highlight that a strong partnership between families and employment services creates the most sustainable pathways for jobseekers with intellectual disabilities. As primary sources of insight, families offer vital knowledge regarding a jobseeker's unique strengths, assist practically, and can even leverage personal networks to uncover hidden opportunities. While some individuals choose to navigate employment independently, **engaging families fills critical information gaps and can ensure the jobseeker's specific training needs are fully met** from day one.

This partnership approach allows jobseekers, families and services to work together to navigate the employment journey smoothly. By maintaining open, frequent communication, services can help ease natural family anxieties and constructively align goals. When workplace challenges arise, the service acts as a strategic ally, handling employer relations while allowing families to focus on offering stable, at-home encouragement and support. Ultimately, involving families from day one creates a foundation of mutual trust that helps jobseekers with intellectual disability thrive in their careers and reach their full potential.

## Key learnings:

- The value of family involvement: Families serve as invaluable sources regarding a jobseeker's unique strengths, preferences, and specific conditions needed for success. They also assist with practical preparation (police checks, resume building) and can leverage personal networks to uncover hidden job leads. Excluding families can lead to critical information gaps.
- Role of employment services: services can serve as skilled connectors to workplaces, who can handle workplace issues, address family anxieties, and maintain frequent communication with a workplace and family.
- Core recommendation: services should proactively seek permission from the jobseeker for family involvement from day one to build mutual trust, bridge communication gaps and secure long-term, sustainable employment outcomes.




A man employed at a warehouse loading boxes onto a trolley with his colleague.

# Acknowledgement

This resource was created by Belonging Matters, a Victorian organisation that works alongside people with disability, families and communities to strengthen inclusion, belonging and opportunities for people to live meaningful lives.

Belonging Matters (VIC), is a member of the National Alliance of Capacity Building Organisations (NACBO), alongside Community Resource Unit Ltd (QLD), Family Advocacy (NSW), Imagine More (ACT), JFA Purple Orange (SA) and Valued Lives (WA).

NACBO brings a unique and critical lens to the national conversation on inclusive employment. Together, the alliance draws on more than eight decades of collective experience supporting families of people with developmental disability, with over 10 years of collaboration as a national alliance. NACBO's work is grounded in long-standing relationships with individuals, families and communities, and focuses on building capacity, shifting mindsets, changing attitudes and supporting inclusive, person-led practices.

** This resource is part of a co-branded Centre for Inclusive Employment and NACBO suite of inclusive employment resources, including a workshop presentation (Family Advocacy), guide, checklist and employment roadmap (Imagine More), family template handout (Community Resource Unit) and written case studies (Belonging Matters).*

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**For more information about this resource, please contact**

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