Centre for Inclusive Employment

Beyond the bus: Harvey's path to real work

Harvey's family always held the expectation that he would work, like his older brother.

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CASE STUDY

When Harvey left school, he joined a program at a day service that promoted itself as a job skills readiness program. Harvey participated in large social activity groups, which he found boring and there was little offered to prepare him for work. Harvey's time was spent entirely in group program outings on the organisation's bus, surrounded by much older people with whom he felt he had little in common.

Instead of building his independence, stamina, social skills and confidence, his family felt the programs were diminishing them with rigid routines and structures. Every day as he arrived, he watched the reality of the program: groups of participants arriving and departing, remaining entirely segregated from the broader community. **Harvey knew he wanted something different**. He wanted to be a part of the world, not just a spectator to it.

Real change began to occur when Harvey and his family found another service to support him to find employment. This service traded programs for a deeply personal approach. Harvey was allocated a dedicated job coach to spend time with him and his family. Over several months, the job coach learnt about his interests, skills, routines and preferred environments. When the job coach started looking for suitable work, **they focused on Harvey's strong interests of swimming, gym and AFL, and his strength in helping others**. It was important that the job was busy, active and in an ordinary community workplace and team.



Harvey working at the local swimming and fitness centre, sharing brochures.

Harvey with colleagues at the swimming and fitness centre.



The job coach found a workplace that matched Harvey's criteria and approached a local swimming and fitness centre for a meeting. After a very positive conversation with the business manager, Harvey was offered a job! Harvey's role started as paid work experience, bypassing the traditional, highly verbal interview barriers, allowing Harvey to demonstrate his competence, strong work ethic and reliability directly to the employer.

Before he could commence the job, the job coach and his family worked with Harvey to complete necessary training, such as completing a first aid course.

With the support of his job coach, **Harvey's role developed over time**. He started in the swim school but found it chaotic, leading to sensory overload. Harvey moved to a customer service role, where he truly flourished. Harvey continues to work with this employer, where he welcomes customers, assists at the service desk and takes payments, as well as stocking and tidying the merchandise area. He said, *"I love helping people – the customers, serving customers and putting money in the till"*.

Harvey's employment service discovered that although finding the job for Harvey was relatively easy, support and attentiveness were required for Harvey to maintain his job. Because workplaces constantly change – people move on, roles shift, technology advances and expectations rise – **the employment service regularly reaches out to the workplace** to discuss any updates regarding Harvey's roles, and they occasionally provide advice with any concerns.

At the commencement of Harvey's employment, the job mentor and the family developed a 'consistent approaches' document. This communication tool reframed workplace interactions – for example, understanding that Harvey saying "no" to a new task signals uncertainty rather than refusal. This enables co-workers to modify requests, utilise visual modelling (showing rather than telling) and provide explicit details.

Originally Harvey's family were apprehensive about Harvey finding employment. This was because his verbal communication can be difficult to understand and he often only used a few words. Harvey is naturally confident, which is a big strength. He is learning to communicate his ideas clearly, so they are well understood and relevant to his position.

Through **working alongside his co-workers**, he has learnt many new skills and become clearer about what is expected at work. This is something that he did not have the opportunity to learn at the day program. Harvey's vocabulary has now broadened and his confidence in what he likes and dislikes has grown – enabling him to make choices and give feedback to his family on what is working and what is not.

Harvey feels like part of the team. *"I feel really welcome at work. I go to staff activities outside of work, we have BBQs in the park"*. Harvey has also met a lot of people in the local area through his workplace.

Harvey enjoys spending the money he earns. In good weather he rides his bike to work and, on the way home, he often stops in at the local shops to buy himself a donut from the bakery or a bouquet of flowers for his mum. He likes to save up to buy nice clothes.

Harvey's proudest moment at work was when he first started. One day a customer collapsed. While others may have panicked, Harvey was calm, remembered his first aid training, placed the customer in the recovery position and immediately sent for help. An ambulance was called and the customer made a full recovery.

Behind Harvey's success is a respectful partnership between Harvey, his family and the employment service. The employment service felt working alongside the family was an integral part of the picture when finding the right job for Harvey because the information they provided about Harvey's skills and strengths enabled them to propose a customised role with the workplace.

Harvey's family felt it was important they didn't get directly involved in his role at the workplace, as this isn't a typical requirement for a man in his 20s. Their expectation was that the employment service would do this, and keep them in the loop with regular updates and emails. This meant they had objective insights about Harvey's progress and any support he required to keep his job. This led to a good relationship between all parties. A personalised service built on staff consistency is essential to Harvey and his family. They thrive with a team that demonstrates commitment through action rather than talk. This has allowed them to establish a strong partnership of trust and shared confidence.



Harvey sorting merchandise at the local swimming and fitness centre.

Harvey's family still assists Harvey by ensuring that he is presentable and ready on time, and choosing how he will commute depending on the weather.

Today, when Harvey goes to work, he sees the arrival and departure of the disability group he used to be part of. He watches them move together, still largely separated from the broader community. Although Harvey always says hello to the group that he used to be a part of, **he is proud to now be an employee at his local swim centre!**

Watch Harvey's employment story: Belonging Matters. [Talks That Matter]. (2022, July 26). *Working at Waves.* **[Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/DHD8I-yh3vk**

Key learnings:

- Genuine inclusion: Harvey moved from a segregated, isolating day program to a real job in the community tailored to his specific strengths and interests in sports and helping people.
- Personalised support: A dedicated job coach bypassed traditional interview barriers with a paid work trial and created a communication tool ('consistent approaches') to help co-workers guide Harvey visually and effectively.
- Strong partnerships and understanding roles: Success was driven by a trusting relationship between Harvey, his family, and the employment service – with his family providing support to Harvey at home while enabling the agency to handle direct workplace management to foster independence.
- Real impact: Harvey is now a proud, paid employee who feels like a true team member, manages his own money and actively participates in his local community.

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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