Centre for Inclusive Employment

Driving success: How collaboration unlocked Mike's potential to work

nacbo National Alliance Capacity Building Organisations | BELONGING MATTERS INC

CASE STUDY

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Mike works at a golf club in Melbourne's southern suburbs, where his responsibilities include washing golf carts, assisting in the pro shop and keeping the pathways swept and tidy. Mike likes everything about his job and is a valued team contributor!

Mike feels most proud at work when he finishes a golf cart and a golfer comments on how clean it is. He also loves working in the golf pro shop where he organises and restocks products and stacks the drinks fridge. Lately Mike has taken up some new roles – sweeping and leaf blowing.

Mike has gotten to know the regular golfers who always stop for a chat. At the end of his shift, he heads to the bar to purchase a drink and catch up with other staff and golfers.

Mike's parents always wanted him to work but they were unsure how it would ever happen. Given Mike's needs, they felt there were so many elements to consider in finding him the right employment. It had to be in the right environment, and they had not found an employment service that they trusted.

Mike using a leaf blower as part of his work.

There were important factors to consider for Mike to succeed. Mike has many strengths but his parents were concerned because he can't read or write and has very limited verbal communication. He can also get deeply absorbed in a task and finds it difficult to know when to move on to the next step or commence another task. For employment to be a positive experience, Mike's parents felt it would be difficult to find a job that met his needs. They also felt that the workplace needed to be a welcoming, low-pressure environment.

Mike with fellow golfers.

Mike's family felt it was very important for them to be involved with the employment service that was assisting Mike to find a job. Mike would not be able to navigate this complex process without them and his verbal language can be difficult for others to understand.

When Mike and his family finally found a service that they felt they could trust, they had several meetings in which they discussed Mike's interests and the conditions that would best suit him. His parents said: *"Although we have only worked with one employment service, we felt that they valued the information and ideas that we offered them. They met with us on numerous occasions, so we felt they took the time to get to know us and Mike. They would offer suggestions and ideas of types of work and we could talk to them about the difficulties or positives of this, what would work or what may not."*

The information shared by Mike's parents was vital information. The employment agency said that collaboration is the essential element in Mike's employment success: *"No one knows Mike as well as his family. The information, guidance and feedback that the family have provided throughout Mike's employment journey has been the key to his success. Mike has been working for over three years but we still collaborate, seek guidance and feedback from the family to build on his career and deepen his relationships with his colleagues."*

Mike's family stated they have witnessed a huge change in Mike since he has started working at the golf club. He speaks more, has increased his vocabulary and has developed his ability to work through tasks quickly and methodically. **He is much more confident in himself and really enjoys telling people he meets that he has a job!** Mike is also taking more initiative with completing household chores. Now that Mike earns an award salary, he can save and use his key card to purchase things he wants.

The job mentor and support worker keep in regular contact with Mike's workplace to ensure everything is going well and then provide Mike's parents with an update. His family works with the job mentor to adapt tasks that might work better for Mike, and the job mentor then speaks to the workplace about these adaptations. These adaptions have included learning how to hold a high-pressure hose, and choosing a sponge that has a strap (so it can be attached to Mike's hand). The job mentor also collaborates with the golf club about changes to Mike's duties, including taking on new tasks or changes to the sequence of current tasks.

Mike's family is still closely involved in his day-to-day life – helping to organise his taxi, making sure he's dressed for the weather, and sitting down with him to go over his pay.

Mike has developed great relationships at work. He has formed a particularly close bond with three of his colleagues, who he often speaks fondly of at home. Mike finds his colleagues calm, considerate and easy to talk to, especially about his work and any adjustments or changes to his tasks.

Mike goes to workplace events including the annual Christmas party. A particular highlight for Mike was when they played lawn bowls – he loved sharing his talent for bowling while getting to know his colleagues.

Through a trusted partnership between his family and a dedicated employment service, Mike has found a welcoming, supportive role at the golf club. By focusing on his unique strengths and adapting tasks to meet his communication and learning needs, this tailored employment has completely transformed Mike's life. **He has grown significantly in confidence, communication, and independence** – both at work, where he is a highly valued team member, and at home.

Watch Mike's employment story: Belonging Matters. [Talks That Matter]. (2024, Jan 16). *Inclusive Employment Matters: Mike and Keysborough Golf Club.* **[Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/m2GkRpzV8Fc**

Key learnings:

- Building trust: Mike's family and the employment service dedicated time to build a genuine, trusting relationship and address concerns about how Mike's complex needs would be supported in a workplace.
- Families are knowledge holders: The agency operates on the principle that 'no one knows Mike as well as his family', treating their insights regarding his interests, conditions and environment as vital expertise.
- The right work environment: Collaborative input from his parents helped identify that Mike needed a welcoming, low-pressure environment to succeed.
- Ongoing partnership: Collaboration extends beyond initial job commencement; even after three years of Mike working at the golf club, the employment service continues to seek feedback from Mike and his family to support his ongoing career growth and workplace relationships.

Mike cleaning a golf cart.

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

Belonging Matters
Website: https://www.belongingmatters.org/
Email: info@belongingmatters.org
Phone: +613 9739 8333

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