Centre for Inclusive Employment

Rachel's first job

Two and a half years ago, Rachel landed her first job at Knox Leisureworks. She works in customer service and she has built a genuine connection with the team and her local community.

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CASE STUDY

Rachel says what she likes most about her job is: “Chatting to people, meeting new people, getting paid, and I like running into regular customers and people I know around the neighbourhood.”

Rachel's teachers and career advisors at school held no expectation that she could work, and steered her towards segregated pathways such as day services. Even though Rachel has an intellectual disability, **her family always held the hope that she would one day be able to work.** Her mother met a teacher who held a different view from others at her school who believed with the right encouragement, in the right direction, Rachel could do more with her life than attending segregated activities in a program. Her mum was encouraged by this and when Rachel left school, she looked for employment avenues for Rachel.

Rachel's mother shared: *"I did not think that she would ever get a paid job, but getting a job has changed her life. She has matured so much. She feels a lot more confident when meeting new people, starting conversations and answering questions."*

The journey to find the right job match began when Rachel and her mum partnered with a small, local employment service. From the start the service took a personalised approach. Through a detailed Discovery process completed over several months, they sat down with Rachel and her family to understand her likes and dislikes, skills, interests and passions. They paid attention to how she connects with people, solves problems, and works through familiar and unfamiliar tasks. They also explored how many hours Rachel wanted to work, her preferred location of work and conditions for success.

The employment service went to work behind the scenes, and followed up on a lead with someone who had a connection with Knox Leisureworks. They believed this workplace would be an ideal job match for Rachel as she identified an interest in retail, sport, especially swimming and gym, helping people, having routine tasks and being busy. The employment service arranged a meeting with Knox Leisureworks to explore opportunities and discuss possible roles. Following this meeting the employment service mapped out specific tasks where Rachel could thrive and had a discussion with Rachel and her family.

Next, they met with Knox Leisureworks to discuss the roles and tasks that would benefit the business. Knox Leisureworks was keen to go ahead, and an informal interview was arranged. Knox Leisureworks provided the questions Rachel would be asked in advance, so she could prepare and practice her answers with her job coach before the interview. Rachel was supported at the interview by her job coach.

Rachel and her family were very excited when she was offered a position. Rachel's family attended some of the initial meetings with the employment service to ensure that they had the information they needed to support her well and that they had her best interests in mind. Prior to commencing, Rachel needed to obtain her first aid certificate, which the employment service supported her to complete.

Like any parents, Rachel's family had their fears. Their biggest worry was that she wouldn't fit in or be truly accepted. They felt that while many workplaces claim to be inclusive on paper, people with disability are too often left on the sidelines rather than being genuinely included. Rachel was also very nervous about getting a job, and had no idea about what to expect.

At first, Rachel did not have the confidence to interact with her colleagues and customers. Due to previous experiences Rachel's family were also worried she would be bullied and isolated – how would she stand up for herself and would she report these behaviours to a supervisor? After listening to these fears, Rachel's job coach was able to support her by developing strategies to increase her confidence, and get to know her colleagues. They developed talking points such as asking her colleagues about their weekend and always saying hello to people as you pass. **The great thing about having Rachel's family involved was that they could practice these strategies with her at home until she became confident in doing this at work.**

Now, **Rachel is well connected in her workplace** and has strong relationships with her colleagues. She chats freely with them and is confident to initiate conversations with customers and all staff. Rachel also feels confident in seeking out her manager if she needs help and asks colleagues for assistance. Rachel feels her colleagues are understanding, take time to show her new things and give her ample time to learn. Rachel has found a good group of people, similar in age to her, who embrace her as a valued colleague. The team is led by strong management which models positive relationships with Rachel, which has filtered down to all areas of the business.



Rachel working at reception assisting visitors.

Since commencing work, Rachel ensures that her uniform is washed and ready for her next shift and has also learnt how to catch the bus to work. This has given her increased confidence to catch the bus independently in travelling around her local area. She has also become more financially independent, paying for everyday items such as bills, her phone, food and going out with friends. She also plans ahead, saving her money for holidays or purchasing a more expensive item.

The involvement of Rachel's family was the vital anchor that made her success possible, transforming what could have been an overwhelming process into a safe, deeply tailored transition. Because this was Rachel's first job, **her family acted as the ultimate knowledge base, sharing the crucial insights about her passions, strengths and needs that allowed the employment service to map out a role where she could truly shine.** By actively attending the initial meetings, her family were put at ease and felt her best interests remained a priority. They also shared their fears with the job coach, which led to helpful insights to develop practical strategies for Rachel to develop positive relationships at her workplace.



Rachel working in the centre's merchandise store.

Beyond the initial hiring process, her family's ongoing daily support has been essential. They support Rachel so she's ready for work on time, dressed appropriately for the weather and encourage her to maintain a positive attitude. This unwavering family backing gave Rachel the confidence to master her new role, her bus commute and grow as a person, proving that their involvement didn't just help her find a job – **it completely unlocked her independence in everyday life.**

Rachel's family said she has really matured since getting a job. She is more motivated to learn new things, is more confident in speaking to people and has developed more competency in her job. Rachel has also started public speaking and sharing her story about finding work, which is something she did not think she would ever have the confidence to do!

To bring Rachel's story full circle, her hard work and growing confidence culminated in a milestone she will never forget. Her **proudest moment came when she was invited to present her story at an International Women's Day function**. Speaking in front of a crowd was a powerful testament to how far she had come, but what made the day truly unforgettable was that her work colleagues and manager from Knox Leisureworks came along to cheer her on!

Watch Rachel's employment story: Belonging Matters. [Talks That Matter]. (2025, April 7). *Inclusive Employment Matters: Rachel and Knox Leisureworks.* **[Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/lE1gR94EG5Y**

Key learnings: the power of active partnerships

- The power of establishing a solid family and employment service collaboration directly affected outcomes for Rachel which has led to long-term retention, confidence, and overall independence.
- Overcoming negative attitudes: Despite school staff steering Rachel toward segregated day programs, it took one teacher to believe in Rachel, hold high expectations and steer her family towards open employment.
- The importance of Discovery: Rachel's family partnered with the local employment service to identify Rachel's strengths, interests, ideal working hours and successful working conditions.
- The family is an anchor: Rachel's family collaborated with her job coach to practice social talking points at home. On an ongoing basis, the family helps ensure she is work-ready, properly dressed for the weather and maintains a positive attitude.

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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