
Collaboration – the key to unlocking a successful future for young people with disability

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Executive Summary

The transition from education to employment is critical for the social and economic futures of young people with disability. A successful transition to work can help people to achieve full social and economic participation.

In spite of substantial evidence demonstrating what works, outlined in a series of reports going back more than two decades, the vast majority of young people with disability in Australia continue to experience poor post-school labour force outcomes.

The time has come to revisit the interface between the state school systems and employment and training systems.

Sheppard, Harrington, and Howard (2017) identified six elements surrounding effective transition to employment for young people with a disability. One of which is local cross-agency collaboration.

From Kohler [1993] to the present, collaboration between schools, agencies providing access to employment, and employers preparing people with disabilities for the world of work has been recognised as a key evidenced-based component in creating employment opportunities.

The objective of effective interagency collaboration is to create a system of post-school supports and activities for students over the last few years of schooling so that “their last day of high school can look like their first day after high school” (Kohler et al. 2017, p. 175). To achieve this, exploration, preparation and implementation for employment pathways must occur while students are still attending school.

Evidence from the United States demonstrates that *intermediaries*, who align and broker multiple services across institutional and funding sources, play a critical role in improving employment outcomes for young people with disability.

However, in Australia, the use of intermediaries alone will not be enough. Intermediaries need to be supported to implement evidence-based practice in their region. This *technical assistance* requires funded specialist expertise.

Currently in Australia, no government funding sources exist to support intermediaries and contributions from stakeholder groups (blending) are likely to be limited by state and federal government rules surrounding their use.

Solutions are available.

The establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) offers a potential vehicle for the establishment of intermediary groups in Australia. NDIS policy is consistent with the use of intermediaries and has the potential to be a key driver of improved employment participation for people with a disability.

The possibilities are exemplified by the proven success of Ticket to Work: a national initiative of the National Disability Service (NDS). This initiative is predicated on the notion of promoting collaborative and locally-based partnerships to create better post-school outcomes in terms of social and economic participation.

The immediate challenge is to *agree on* how schools and the post-school sector can work together *with a view to implement measures* to improve school to work transition.

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Introduction

This paper was commissioned by ‘Ticket to Work’, an initiative of the National Disability Services (NDS) to examine the literature and explore interagency collaboration as a mechanism to improve post-school transitions for students with a disability.

Ticket to Work aims to improve economic and social participation for young people with a disability through vocational/career development and early contact with work environments while attending school. The initiative is delivered through networks including schools, employment services, post-school providers and employers and is predicated on the notion of promoting collaboration and locally-based multi-sectorial partnerships that create better outcomes for young people with disability.

Context

Over the last two decades, concern has been expressed internationally about the poor employment rates for people with disability (Benz, Linstrom & Yavanoff, 2000; Crudden, 2012; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza & Levine, 2005). In Australia, employment rates for people with disability lie significantly below those for persons without a disability, with younger and working-age adults being 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than their non-disabled peers (Centre for Disability Research and Policy, 2017). Further, the transition to employment for school leavers with disability is problematic with their unemployed status post-school, being highly predictive of their employment situation in later life (Meadows, 2009).

For many years, collaboration between schools, agencies and employers in preparing people with disability for the world of work has been recognised as a key component in creating employment opportunities. Kohler, (1993) identified, interagency collaboration as one of the most frequently cited “best practices” for transition planning and included it as one of five key practice areas in her seminal work the Taxonomy for Transition Programing (Kohler 1996). In 1999 Morningstar, Kleinhammer-Tramill and Lattin considered interagency collaboration as one of four critical elements for improving outcomes for young people with disability.

In 2002, Agrin, Cain and Gavin argued “by definition transition planning is an interdisciplinary endeavour” (p. 141) and without such collaboration, effective transition efforts would be severely compromised. Interagency collaboration is viewed as “a key variable” (Noonan, Morningstar and Erickson, 2008 p. 133), as “critical” (Oertle & Trach, 2007, p. 38), and “universally cited as necessary” (Trach, 2012, p. 40) for preparing young people with disability for post-school employment. Further, current models of seamless transition practices leading

to employment opportunities have included formal linkages between individual stakeholders and agencies as a central feature (e.g., Butterworth, Christenson & Flipppo, 2017; Luecking & Luecking, 2015).

In the USA, it is realised:

Neither schools, nor workforce investment programs, human service agencies, or any other single system alone can pay for and provide the array of services needed to effectively meet the often complex needs of youth with disabilities. When collectively pooled, however, these resources can produce positive outcomes for youth, well beyond the scope of what any single system can hope to mobilise on its own (National Governors' Association Center for Best Practice, 2004).

It should be recognised that in the US, collaboration is mandated, and transition services in schools must be provided in partnership with the post-school agencies.

In Australia, there is a need to *agree on* how schools and the post-school sector can work together *with a view to implement measures* to improve school to work transition.

In the Australian context, where schools are primarily funded by states and post-school services by the federal government, there has traditionally been the 'siloeing' of programmes in either schools, post-school employment services or adult disability services. There is a need to improve how these sectors can work together by adopting measures proven to work. This has been the mainstay of recommendations of many Australian government enquires and agreements yet remains largely unaddressed (Children with Disability Australia, 2015).

Other countries see the need to adjust the rules associated with jurisdictional funding, allowing schools and post-school services to collaborate and share knowledge and resources. This creates successful outcomes for people with disability by the Blending and Braiding¹ of funding, resources and supports.

¹ Blending and Braiding are strategies that allow funds and resources to be used in more flexible, coordinated, and sustainable way, to improve the educational and employment outcomes.

This paper contains the following:

- A definition and models of collaborative practice
- A review of the international literature on interagency collaboration.
- A review of Australian studies on interagency Collaboration.
- An examination of some systemic barriers to collaborative practice.
- An exploration of the Ticket to Work experience with collaborative practice.
- Recommendation for the Australian situation.

Although the focus of this paper is on collaboration, there are a number of elements highlighted in the literature supporting effective school to work transitions for students with disability, and collaboration is a mechanism to implement those evidenced informed practices.

A definition of and models of collaborative practice

Within the context of preparing young people with disability for post-school life, interagency collaboration is defined as,

A clear, purposeful, and carefully designed process that promotes cross agency, cross program, and cross disciplinary collaborative efforts leading to tangible transition outcomes for youth (Rowe, Alverson, Unrah, Fowler, Kellems & Test, 2015, p.122).

There are many models of collaborative practice. We have highlighted two, the 3C model and Collective Impact.

The 3Cs model

To more precisely define collaboration, and assist collaborative teams to assess how well they are adopting and implementing collaborative practice, Keast, Brown and Mandell (2007) drew from collaboration theory to propose a 3Cs model of collaborative practice along a continuum.

Collaborative relationships can also address systems change when appropriate as this type of activity can assist to overcome many of the barriers that exist when planning for, and providing employment opportunities, and training to school leavers.

Collective Impact model

Similarly, Kanier and Kramer (2011) proposed a Collective Impact Model to facilitate large-scale change in the social sector. Collective impact refers to the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a

common agenda for solving a specific social problem at scale. They argue a single service program may be quite appropriate to addressing simple or somewhat complicated problems. In comparison, Collective Impact is an approach to solving complex social problems.

Kanier and Kramer point to the failure of institutions working in isolation to create change, citing the need for change in behaviour by all stakeholders involved in a particular issue if a difference is to be achieved.

Literature review

One of the most comprehensive and widely accepted models of quality transition practice for student with disability is Kohler's (1996) taxonomy for transition programming. The development of the model occurred following wide consultation with experts on practices considered to provide successful transitions to employment and life after school for students with additional needs. The methodology used to construct the model is based on the concept mapping of practices. These have a sound basis in theory, are supported in the transition literature, and have been socially validated by a national group of transition experts in America.

The taxonomy identifies a number of practices, including those related to interagency collaboration, associated with improved student outcomes. In 2016, the second version of taxonomy was released (Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler & Coyle, 2016).

The taxonomy identifies five factors associated with quality transition practices:

- Student-focused planning,
- Student development,
- Interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration,
- Family engagement, and
- Program structure and attributes.

Each factor contains a number of components, and each component a number of practices associated with positive student outcomes. More recently, many of these practices have been identified as having an evidentiary base (Test et al., 2009; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Mazzotti, Rowe, Cameto, Test & Morningstar, 2013).

The taxonomy promotes two of the key tenets of transition planning, *normalisation* and *individualisation* by providing young people with the

opportunity to plan their own futures and develop the skills required to lead a normal lifestyle once they leave school.

One feature of the Taxonomy is the emphasis on the importance of collaboration between secondary schools, parents, post-school support agencies and community businesses when planning for transition, as these relationships are associated with improved lifestyles for students once they leave school. Collaborative Framework and Collaborative Service delivery are two practices associated with collaboration.

The objective of effective interagency collaboration is to create a system of post-school supports and activities for students over the last few years of schooling so that “their last day of high school can look like their first day after high school” (Kohler et al. 2017, p. 175). To achieve this, exploration, preparation and implementation for employment pathways must occur while students are still attending school. This task will be expedited when there is collaboration between mainstream post-school services. These include services with expertise in vocational training, apprenticeships and the provision of work experience. In addition, disability-specific services with experience in teaching employment skills are also needed to achieve these outcomes.

In an attempt to operationalise interagency collaboration as a predictor of improved student outcomes, Rowe et al. (2015) conducted a Delphi study asking established experts from post-school agencies, researchers and schools to more accurately define interagency activities and list their program characteristics and practices.

Carter, Blustein, Bumble, Harvey, Henderson and McMillan (2016) undertook a large-scale study involving 400 participants across six locations. They invited local transition planning teams, post-school services and interest groups to solicit suggestions on how they could work together to increase employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability. As a result, new collaborative practices were developed and existing good practices were strengthened. These practices assisted in the establishment of promising and productive pathways for collaboration unique to local community resources and requirements.

In a study designed to measure progress towards developing collaborative activity, Noonan, McCall, Zheng and Gaumer-Erickson (2012) used a five-stage model (Frey, Lohmeier, Lee, & Tollefson, 2006) and focus groups to measure the development of collaborative practices by ten post-school agencies prior to and after joining a state-level interagency transition team. Results indicate membership of the state team improved individual connections between organisations. This study demonstrates the value of

belonging to collaborative teams, has on the implementation of recognised collaborative practices. In addition, the study indicated achievement of true collaborative relationships between organisations may not be immediate but develops over time and through working together.

Many initiatives overseas have evaluated the focus on collaboration to improve school transition.

The work internship program study, (Luecking and Fabian, 2000) involved collaboration between schools, employers and the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities. Upon completion, 75% of those participating in the internships were offered positions with their employers and 53% of those were still in employment 12 months later. The authors cite the availability of school staff to collaborate with potential employers as a factor in the program's success.

The TASSEL program evaluated by Aspel, Bettis, Test, & Wood (1998) involved interagency teams comprised of representatives from schools, post-employment services and local businesses collaborating to organise paid work experience and job-shadowing for students in their final years of high school.

The Youth Transition Program, (Benz, Lindstrom and Yovanoff, 2000) was a study examining work experience participation in secondary school to facilitate successful post-school outcomes. Collaborative features included formal contracts between partners specifying the responsibilities of each agency, shared financial responsibility for staff delivering transition services and the responsibilities of all team members clearly delineated. Results indicate the student participants experienced substantially better employment outcomes than those who had not participated in the program. The authors stated they, "believe these positive outcomes are a reflection of the strong partnership at both state and local levels between schools and vocational rehabilitation (p. 63)".

The Transition Service Integration Model (Certo et al., 2003) combined the resources of the public school, rehabilitation and the developmental disability systems to facilitate post-school employment for students with disability at a rate exceeding the national average in the United States.)

Australian studies on interagency collaboration

As can be observed, most of the research literature on interagency collaboration emanates from North America where conditions underpinning transition activities are very different from those in Australia. For example:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990) mandated schools to deliver school to post-school transition planning services. Schools must begin planning for a student's transition to the adult world beginning at age 14, when curricular options within the school are considered and no later than age 16, where a detailed transition services plan must be implemented (Hager, 2002).
- The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014) mandated that Disability Employment/Vocational Services work with schools to provide transition services to all students with disabilities. It requires that the agencies allocate at least 15 percent of their federal funding toward such transition efforts (Diament, 2014). It also indicated that individuals with disabilities age 24 and younger are no longer allowed to work for less than the federal minimum wage unless they first receive pre-employment transition services at school and support from employment vocational services.
- Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act (2016) assures that students with disabilities can receive Pre-Employment Transition Services and all other individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to receive open employment information and career counselling services (Johnson, 2016).
- Further, technical assistance centres, such as the National Technical Assistance Centre on Transition (NTACT) are funded to conduct research into effective transition practices and disseminated their findings widely. These technical assistance centres provide training, information and communities of practice.

These mandates, technical assistance and research initiatives make it more likely that schools and post-school service providers will collaborate to meet the requirements of the legislation. However, in Australia, no such mandates or funded technical assistance bodies exist to support transition activity.

Over some time, the lack of focus on interagency collaboration between schools and post-school services in Australia has been noted. In 2005, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission highlighted poor links between schools and post-school agencies as one factor associated with poor employment outcomes for people with disability. Winn and Hay (2009) described Australian post-school services as “disparate and fragmented” with

a “siloiing” of programs in schools. Difficulties associated with the sharing of resources between agencies funded by the states and federal governments cited as one possible reason for this situation.

The following is a review of the limited studies examining collaborative transition practices in Australia.

As a part of a larger study on teacher practice and student post-school outcomes, Beamish, Meadows and Davies (2011) examined how transition teachers in Queensland secondary and special schools engaged with post-school service providers. They used a benchmarking instrument based on Kohler’s taxonomy for Transition programing. These authors found three of the seven interagency practices listed in the survey rated below the 80% criterion for acceptance, while all of the practices were rated below the 50% criterion for implementation (Odom, McLean & Johnson, 1995), the lowest level for all sections of the taxonomy.

Comments from school personnel on their interagency collaboration experiences included:

There needs to be interagency collaboration. However, this is impossible because of Department restraints and double dipping. I feel strongly that this issue must be addressed.

In this region the post school providers can only work with students when they finish school, there is a great need for departments and agencies to redefine this so that they can be involved in the transition-planning phase.

There should be funding available to place students into post-school services for work experience while they are still at school. It isn’t available at present.

This type of collaboration is a pipe dream.

Meadows, Davies and Beamish (2014) attempted to gain further information about why interagency collaboration practices in the previous study were accompanied by such low levels of implementation. Results indicate poorly implemented interagency practices are those perceived as influenced by external factors such as government, bureaucratic and/or systemic factors.

Sheppard, Harrington, and Howard (2017) identified six elements surrounding effective transition to employment for young people with a disability: that being

- **Expectation:** Young people with disability can work.
- **Local cross-agency collaboration:** Different sectors can work together.
- **Participation:** Young people should engage in planning their future according to their interests and engage in meaningful work experiences during their school years.
- **Skills development:** The development of the skills necessary for employment.
- **Family involvement:** Family-centred transitions have better outcomes.
- **Early transition planning:** Early planning impact outcomes.

These elements mirror the factors in Kohler's Taxonomy and emphasise the interaction and collaboration necessary between students, families and other stakeholders to provide students with daily living and workplace skills, and opportunities for work experiences that correspond with their interests.

Their review noted many transition professionals demonstrate limited skills in collaboration and had a collective lack of optimism on bringing it about. Developing a shared vision and an understanding of each other's roles was identified as a major impediment. This finding implies a lack of professional training in transition and strategies for collaboration.

In another study, examining transition practices of teachers from 75 schools across New South Wales, reference to practices involving interagency collaboration were either, not mentioned at all or at a minimal level (Strnadová & Cumming, 2014).

Other Australian studies mention the importance of interagency collaboration within the context of describing transition programs (e.g. Centre for Disability Research and Development, 1995; Clark, 1994; Clerk, 2015; Hudson et al. 2000; Laragy, 2004; Riches, Wade, 2003).

Overall, these international and Australian studies indicate support for collaborative practices in transition.

Ticket to Work

Through Ticket to Work, 33 interagency networks comprising of 340 members are realising the benefits from collaborative efforts in supporting young people with disability to obtain employment.

Ticket to Work is a national initiative of the National Disability Service that takes the lead to leverage the power of these collaborative networks to improve employment outcomes for young people with disability.

This initiative is predicated on the notion of promoting collaborative and locally-based partnerships; rather than having organisations working independently create better post-school outcomes in terms of social and economic participation.

A survey of members of these networks, (N=48) about their levels of support for 23 specific statements about collaborative practice across four elements of their partnership activities with other agencies. These included the need for partnerships, partnership governance, partnership in action and the impact of partnerships (ARTD Consultants 2018).

Ticket to Work members participating in the survey overwhelmingly agreed the four elements related to the importance of collaboration were valuable, each achieving the internationally recognised 80% criterion for agreement (Odom et al.1995). Regarding the statements referring to implementation, all 19 practices were rated well in excess of the 50% criterion for implementation. A sample of comments made by participants include:

Within the field of education and employment, there are many organisations/people out there looking to achieve the same thing. By having a partnership approach to achieving goals, this adds weight to ideas, processes and initiatives. Partnerships are also a great way to bring a broad range of expertise around one table.

All members created terms of reference and felt valued in every part of setting up the network.

There has been cross over between schools and network members clarifying and understanding needs of students and the workplace

In essence, the group efforts enable our young people to succeed. We have also been able to educate schools and parents about the benefits of Ticket to Work in the process.

(Through Ticket to Work) you can see collaboration in producing support, and cooperation among traditional competitors who acknowledge each other's strengths and work together.

Investment in relationships with partners was seen as the largest work-around for systems problems

Even though it is not without its challenges.

I believe the collaboration is the key, but we as a species are not particularly good at it.

I do agree that collaboration between sectors is of the utmost importance - and Ticket to Work is helping me with this - however in the main collaboration is not happening and it is the students who pay the cost.

(We have a) Silo mentality in spite of defined goals

Competitive service system is making collaboration difficult

In the study of Ticket to Work collaboration, participants desired level of interaction (with nine of the ten partner groups) were rated as functioning either at the coordinated or collaborative level. (ARTD consultants 2018)

These results suggest Ticket to Work networks were proactively engaging with a wide variety of other agencies (e.g., group training organisations, apprenticeships centre, schools, councils and other youth services) and with disability organisations, special schools, Disability Employment Services and disability post school agencies).

Overall, the Ticket to Work network members surveyed identify:

- The need for a partnership approach and the Ticket to Work networks were important for supporting young people with disability to transition to employment
- Working together will continue to help improve the way employment experiences are delivered to young people with disability
- Similar practices existing among partners are coordinated e.g. sharing of information and avoiding duplication.
- Administration, communication and decision-making processes were appropriate
- Networks review and refine working arrangements when necessary
- Network organisations could achieve more together for young people with disability than they could on their own

When you align the elements in the Ticket to Work partnership study statements with widely recognised listings of good collaborative practices cited in this review, there is significant overlap. This adds to the significance of the ARTD study results and consequently for the alignment of the Ticket to Work practices with the literature of the field. Therefore, the ARDT, (2018) evaluation of Ticket to Work indicates the practices of staff working

collaboratively together correspond with the Interagency Collaboration section of Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Planning and Noonan's conceptualisation of good collaborative practices (Noonan, 2014).

NDS is currently developing a guide to collaboration, taking the learning from overseas experience, research and their own experience of developing collaborative network in Ticket to Work. The aim of the guide is to support evidence-based practice in improving school to work transition for young people with disability in Australia.

Barriers and solutions: What is needed in Australia

As indicated earlier in this review the poor post-school labour force outcomes experienced by the vast majority of young people with a disability in Australia suggests the interface between the state school systems and the employment systems requires revising. In this section past reports recommending this revision will be reviewed. Then, two barriers to more successful transitions will be discussed (cross jurisdictional factors) and suggestions made about addressing them.

Past reviews of the transition process

Over the last 20 years, there have been several reports commissioned by government and non-government agencies to investigate the transition from school for young people with disability (see ARTD, 2016 for a listing). Many of these indicate the need to improve collaboration between schools and agencies providing employment opportunities. What follows is a sample of these reports referring specifically to poor interagency collaboration.

In 2005, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission highlighted poor links between schools and post-school agencies as one factor associated with poor employment outcomes for persons with a disability.

In an extensive study commissioned by the Australian Government, (2007) examining the role of inclusive practices in improving the outcomes of students with disability across all ages, the following recommendation regarding the post-compulsory phase of education was made.

Successful high school and post-compulsory settings are those that directly link with employers and focus on the skills and competencies that students need to get and keep a job. This review supports the development of systemic transition to work programs and the 'experience of work' for senior students (p.85).

The Australian National Disability Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011) noted attention needs to be on transition from school settings to employment. It includes a policy direction to improve pathways for young people with disability to further education, employment and lifelong learning by a service system that is “joined up” (p. 56) and provides a number of options. The report also notes a need to establish best practice for transition planning.

A report commissioned by the Queensland department of Education that benchmarked teacher practice in transition (Meadows et.al. 2006) revealed a need for “better communication and coordination between government departments, schools and post-school agencies.” (p. 163).

Children with Disability Australia (2014) investigated the direct transition experiences of young people with disability and their families. They report school programs are “fragmented and uncoordinated” and the responsibilities of all individuals and groups involved in the process are not well defined with responsibility being primarily borne by young people and their families. They note a need for interagency and government funding body collaboration and conclude school staff need to be in constant contact with all stakeholders.

A recent House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training (2018) report made recommendations regarding how to better support students with disability in transition. The committee suggested the Council of Australian Governments draft model legislation to ensure young people with disability access a person-centred post-school transition process beginning as early as Year 9. The report also recommended support to deliver a Ticket to Work collaborative model.

Likewise, the Australian Human Rights Commission (2016) recommended collaboration between State and Commonwealth authorities supporting young people with disability to transition from school to work.

Despite the wide support for improved collaborative practices noted in these reports, continuing poor post-school labour force outcomes experienced by the vast majority of Australian young people with disability suggests the interface between the school system and employment system requires revising. It is apparent there is a need for more interagency collaboration at both government and non-government levels to better prepare these young people for a successful post-school employment transition. However, there are some systemic barriers blocking this.

Cross-jurisdictional factors and solutions

In the Australian context, schools are primarily funded by states and post-school services by the federal government. This creates the ‘siloeing’ of programmes in either schools, post-school employment services or adult disability services. Siloeing of programmes is a major barrier to effective service provision that creates fragmentation, duplication and inadequate levels of support for students (Sitlington & Clark, 2006).

One internationally suggested solution to this problem is the use of blended and braided funding and resources.

Solution: Blended and braided funding, supports and resources

Blending and Braiding are strategies that allow funds and resources to be used in more flexible, coordinated, and sustainable way, to improve the educational and employment outcomes.

Blended funding and resources occurs when members of a collaborative team contribute funds into a pool to engage in strategies that create employment opportunities for young people with disability. This pooling of funds makes the source of the funding indistinguishable. However, blending may require a change or relaxation of funding guidelines for this pooling of resources to occur. These relaxations or changing of rules occurred in America several years ago (see Kruger, Elinson & Milfort, 2006 for examples). Blending can also be used to pool human and other physical resources.

Braiding is a funding and resource allocation strategy that taps into existing funding streams and uses them to support unified initiatives in as flexible and integrated a manner as possible. (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, 2006). Ticket to Work utilises this mechanism. Braided funding differs from blended funding in that in braiding the funding streams remain visible and are used in common to produce greater strength, efficiency, and/or effectiveness. This allows resources to be tracked more closely for the purpose of accounting to state and federal administrators.

Blending and braiding not only applies to pooling funds; human resources can maximise group members’ skills

In Australia, there are potential difficulties associated with the use of blended funding as the traditional roles and responsibilities of the states and the commonwealth would come into question. Stafford, Marston, Chamorro-Koc, Beatson, and Drennan (2017) identify recommendation 5.5 of the current National Disability Strategy to “identify and establish best practice for transition planning and support through all stages of learning and from

education-to-employment.” They note, “the National Disability Strategy also clearly identifies that improving transition to work and increasing economic participation of young people with disabilities requires the intersection of, and improvement in, all policy areas” (p.6). This recommendation could be achieved through the application through coordination of blending and braiding.

Blending and braiding strategies both require collaboration, coordination, and cooperation across multiple programs, agencies, and systems. The level of collaboration and coordination is not easily achieved unless there is some mechanism to facilitate it, such as an organisation or agent acting as an intermediary between the involved agency and service system partners. (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, 2006).

Solution: The use of intermediaries

In the United States, this coordination successfully occurs by using *intermediaries* who align and broker multiple services across institutional and funding sources. Intermediary organisations have been found to play a critical role in improving employment outcomes for young people with disability. Kruger, Elinson, & Milfort (2006) define intermediaries as an entity that:

...convenes leadership and brokers relationships with multiple partners across multiple funding streams; brings together workforce development systems, vocational rehabilitation providers, businesses, labor unions, educational institutions, social service organisations, faith based organisations, transportation entities, health providers, and other Federal, State, and community resources which youth with disabilities need to transition to employment successfully (p.2-2).

Moodie and Crane (2002), highlight the benefits of intermediaries for employers, educators, young people with disabilities, and the broader community. *Intermediaries* are brokers who assist young people and their families to navigate the multi-agency post-school service sector.

Intermediary organisations possess a detailed knowledge of the local services available and match agencies with client needs. Intermediaries can also assist agencies to identify and focus on their service delivery strengths to avoid service duplication and assist reduction in interagency competition and promote collaboration.

The intermediary group is analogous to the *backbone* condition in the Collective Impact model of collaboration cited earlier in this review. In Collective Impact, the role of the backbone organisation is to provide a supportive infrastructure to the collaborative group and bring a specific set of

skills to guide vision and strategy, support aligned activities, establish procedures for measuring progress towards objectives, advance group policies and explore sources of funding (Turner, Merchant, Kania, & Martin, 2012). The existence and strength of the backbone organisation is viewed as essential for collaborative teams to succeed (Kanier & Kramer, 2011).

The US Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) have identified that by aligning and brokering multiple services across institutional and funding sources, intermediary organisations can play an important role in supporting employment outcomes for young people with disability.

The Ticket to Work strategy in Australia is essentially a backbone organisation functioning largely through the use of intermediaries. In America, intermediary organisations are sustained by funds from legislated sources (e.g., School to Work Opportunities Act, 1994) or by drawing from the budgets of its partners in return for being an efficient single point of contact for schools, employers and agencies.

Currently in Australia, no such government funding sources exist to support intermediary or backbone groups and contributions from stakeholder groups (blending) are likely to be limited by state and federal government rules surrounding their use. However, as mentioned earlier, the National Disability Strategy has recommended COAG investigate legislative mechanisms to overcome this barrier.

Intermediaries and the NDIS

The establishment of the National Disability Insurance scheme (NDIS) is a potential vehicle for the establishment of intermediary groups in Australia. Four NDIS policy documents support this collaborative approach.

First, the 2019-23 National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Corporate Plan, (National Disability Insurance Agency, 2019) states the Scheme aims to increase the employment of NDIS participants from a baseline of 21% in the 2016-17 financial year to 30% by the 2022-23 financial year. The use of intermediary organisations have in other places, demonstrated that employment levels for persons with a disability can be raised.

Second, the current terms of reference for the NDIS Participant Employment Taskforce (Department of Social Services, 2019) aims to address and focus on developing effective systems rather than programmatic responses to the issue of disability employment. The use of intermediaries has been proven effective across many areas of social change.

Third, The NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Framework (Disability Reform Council (COAG), 2015) sets out policy parameters for Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC). It explains,

ILC is the component of the NDIS that provides information, linkages and referrals to efficiently and effectively connect people with a disability, their families and carers with appropriate disability, community and mainstream supports. ILC will also ensure the NDIS establishes and facilitates capacity building supports for people with disability, their families, and carers that are not directly tied to a person through their funded package. ILC will also promote collaboration and partnership with local communities and mainstream and universal services to create greater inclusivity and accessibility of people with disability (p.1).

Focus on providing supports at significant life stages and transition points, to build capacity and enable people with disability to participate in economic and social life. (p.3)

ILC will be able to deliver disability specific early intervention, prevention and capacity building supports to people that can prevent, reduce or delay their need for the more intensive supports provided through an individual funding packages. This will contribute to the efficient implementation of the NDIS because timely support will reduce people's need for funded supports over time. (p. 3)

This policy is clearly in concert with the concept of the intermediary organisation. In Australia, the ILC framework fits with the role of Ticket to Work as an intermediary group as the majority of Ticket to Work members (79% are mainstream service providers and 21% NDIS providers). The networks build the capacity of both mainstream and NDIS services which aligns with the stated purpose of LAC.

Fourth, one of the streams of ILC, which provide support to people with disability, their families and carers, and community and mainstream services is Local Area Co-ordination (LAC) The role of the LAC is to:

...connect across each of the streams of ILC, which include information and linkages and individual capacity building as well as working with mainstream services and communities to better enable access and participation (p.14).

LACs could be funded, based on an intermediary model, to create an environment that supports successful transition from school to work. The role of the LAC as conceptualised in the ILC framework corresponds with the

intermediary role in supporting young people with disability to transition to work. This is because their role incorporates:

- A focus on providing supports at significant life stages and transition points,
- it build capacity and enable people with disability to participate in economic and social life
- building the capacity of other community and mainstream services to respond to the needs of people with disability, their families and carers and to develop natural networks of support around people with disability
- capacity building and locally based, practical solutions.
- supporting the concept of a wide entry gateway
- building and supporting support systems
- working with individuals and their families to achieve their goals by building new networks and accessing support and services in their community;
- this approach has shown to prevents the escalation of support needs.

Local Area Coordination, as a place-based approach, could also contribute in these collaborative efforts given their knowledge of local services.

Clearly, NDIS policy is consistent with the use of intermediaries and has the potential to be a key driver of improved employment participation for people with significant disability. Research by Long (2015) estimates when fully implemented, the NDIS could lead to between 25,000 and 40,000 new jobs for people with significant disability. He estimated a potential GDP gain of up to \$23 billion, which is significant in macroeconomic terms. The use of intermediary organisations could be a strategic mechanism in supporting this goal.

Coordination is essential, as the NDIS or any single system or agency is capable of providing all the required support for a young person to meet his or her goals. Instead, as young people move from the classroom into the workplace and adulthood, they often need to access services from multiple services (both mainstream and NDIS supports) at once to achieve their goals and have their needs fully met.

However, the use of intermediaries alone will not be enough. Intermediaries need to be supported to implement evidence base practice in their region. Schools, post-school providers and NDIS supports will require the use of effective practices including collaborative practice that support people with more significant disability into work.

Evidence-based practice, skills and knowledge

There are clear benefits in using intermediaries within the NDIS, as a critical element in a comprehensive transition strategy, and to ensure the implementation of evidence-based practice.

There is a need for support to ensure all sectors, schools, post-school service providers and NDIS service providers have access to evidence-based practice, transparent data, and support to possess the knowledge and skills necessary allowing them to collaborate effectively, using evidence informed practices to improve transition outcomes. In the other jurisdictions this has been achieved by the use of Technical Assistance Centres.

Solution: Technical Assistance Centres

Technical Assistance (TA) is broadly defined

as support to... acquire any specialised service or skill that is not currently resident within the organisation, but which it may need in order to operate more effectively or strengthen sustainability. (The Center For Nonprofit Resources, 2019)

In the United States many Technical Assistance centres are funded to ensure evidence-based and promising practices are used to support young people with disability. This includes conducting research and disseminating information regarding evidence-based practices in transition support for young people with disability through tools, mentor support and professional development. Examples of some of these Technical Assistance centres are:

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth)

NCWD/Youth offers a range of technical assistance services to state and local workforce programs to ensure all youth including those with disability have full access to high quality services in integrated settings to gain education, employment and independent living. www.ncwd-youth.info/

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT)

NTACT assists Education Agencies, vocational rehabilitation/employment providers implement evidence-based and promising practices to ensure students with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, graduate prepared for success in post-secondary education and employment.

<https://transitionta.org/>

TransCen, Inc.

TransCen, Inc. provides training and technical assistance in school to work transition initiatives, systems change in education, career development of individuals with disabilities and related research and dissemination.

<https://transcen.org/>

Transition Coalition

Transition Coalition maximises professional development opportunities for secondary transition and college and career readiness of youth with disabilities. <https://transitioncoalition.org/>

Center on Transition Innovations (CTI)

CTI provides information, resources, demonstration and research on pathways to employment supporting youth with disabilities to gain access to integrated competitive employment to the fullest extent possible.

<https://centerontransition.org/>

Other TAs providing support to implement evidence informed practice for employers, parents, customised employment practitioners, youth agencies, and inclusive higher education providers include:

- The National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth (NCLD/Y) www.nclld-youth.info
- The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) <http://www.wintac.org/>
- The LEAD Center www.leadcenter.org/
- Youth Technical Assistance Center (Y-TAC) <https://y-tac.org/>
- Think College www.thinkcollege.net/
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN) <https://askjan.org/>
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability (EARN) www.askearn.org/
- National Parent Centre on Transition and Employment www.pacer.org/transition/
- Griffin- Hammis Associates(Customised Employment TA) <http://www.griffinhammis.com/>
- Marc Gold & Associates (Customised Employment TA) www.marcgold.com/

Many aspects of the Ticket to Work model, and the advice given to Ticket to Work network members originate from the research and practice knowledge of these TA organisations.

NDS takes the role of a TA in supporting better outcomes for students with disability. NDS's role in Ticket to Work is:

- Practice: Promoting, exploring and supporting communities to implement evidence-based practice that improves outcomes for young people with disability. This includes delivering workshops, webinars, and community of practice, etc.
- Research: Exploring, identifying and highlighting good practice through research in school-to-work transition for young people with disability.
- Policy: Influencing good employment and education participation policy development at local, state and national levels.

The need for TA support in Australia is evidenced by lack of implementation of evidenced based practices. For instance, in the evaluation of the NSW Transition to Work initiative [the forerunner to NDIS School Leavers Employment Supports (SLES)] programs' results were hugely inconsistent. 22% of providers never obtained an open employment outcome, 19% only one placement whereas another 14% achieved 75% and higher outcomes. (Xu and Stancliffe (2017)

Alexander, Ford, Raghavendra, and Clark (2018) conducted a study into the use of evidence-based training strategies used by NDIS employment support staff in Australian Disability Enterprises. They found only a limited number were being used, consequently employees with intellectual disability were missing out on the necessary training to enhance their employment skills.

Burns and Lawn, (2013) revealed that many employees in the Disability Employment Service sector had little experience or training in dealing with the complex employment needs.

A Department of Social Services. (2014) evaluation of Disability Employment Services identified the need for better training and skills for support staff so that staff can better provide employees with disability appropriate supports.

Technical Assistance Centres can provide transition professionals with a rich source of theoretical and practical knowledge, resources and activities.

In Australia, there are no government funded technical assistance bodies to research and support transition activity and good practice in disability employment. There is a need for a body (or bodies) not only to conduct research into transition practices but to disseminate practical advice based on research findings on good practice in all aspects of effective school to work transition, particularly collaboration. This body could be hosted within a university, government agency such as NDIA or in another organisation such as NDS.

Conclusion

Transition from education to employment is critical for the social and economic futures of people with disability. A successful transition to work can help people to achieve full social and economic participation.

As the evidence demonstrates, the practice of collaborating with key stakeholders via place-based networks to support school to work transitions for young people with disability will improve their social and economic outcomes.

One potential role of collaborative teams is to address systemic barriers to the employment of young people with disability. However, in Australia the issue of collaboration and cross-jurisdictional factors remains an issue.

Despite the substantial evidence base and government enquiries recommending the need for collaborative practice and early intervention while students are in school, the will to remove the structural barriers to effective collaboration remains elusive

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