

Report of findings from the Gold Coast Partners in Recovery Employment Forum

Introduction

On 30 June 2015, 76 people came together to explore how we can better enable people with a lived experience to access and keep jobs, or enter relevant employment pathways. Participants included individuals with a lived experience and representatives from government, employment, health and not-for-profit sectors.

The following is a record of our conversations.

1. Why is it important to include people with a lived experience in the workforce? What are the benefits and for whom?

Employment supports people to live well	Engaging individuals in the workforce challenges misconceptions about mental illness and promotes acceptance in society
Work gives people a sense of purpose	Inclusion helps to break down barriers and enable change
Work promotes wellbeing & belonging	Inclusion promotes awareness
Work strengthens dignity and self-esteem	Inclusion reduces stigma
Work promotes independence	Individuals bring valuable skills and creativity
Work promotes a sense of self-worth and contribution	People who have experienced exclusion and want to work, are likely to make highly motivated employees
Social interaction supports well-being	It helps the economy
Employment helps people overcome boredom which can lead to depression	Social justice
Everyone has the right to work	Everyone matters
Inclusion is important and a right	Society must embrace everyone
Everyone has the right to belong	Everyone benefits
Employment stops people from being marginalised	

2. What are the barriers to people with a lived experiencing accessing and/or sustaining employment?

The top 4 barriers identified:

1. Insufficient understanding and misconceptions of mental illness in the workplace
2. Employer concerns regarding performance and reliability
3. Stigma
4. Fears held by individuals that they will be judged, exposed or won't fit within the workplace

Workplace barriers	No.	Personal barriers	No.
Little understanding of mental illness in the workplace / lack of education / ignorance	16	Fear of disclosure, being judged, not fitting in and/or attending appointments	9
Concerns re absenteeism, efficiency, reliability and/or performance	12	Social phobia / anxiety / depression (i.e. stopping access)	4
Stigma	10	Financial barriers – insufficient funds for transport and work clothes	3
Insufficient support for individuals in workplaces	5	Transport	3
Pre-conceived judgements	5	Shame of having mental illness	2
Discrimination	4	Past experiences of failure or insufficient support	2
Inflexible working arrangements e.g. start & finish times, part-time and job share options, leave	3	Side effects of medication	2
Lack of empathy	3	Self confidence	2
Unrealistic expectations	3	Coping with the symptoms	1
Disclosure – it's encouraged, but it can be a significant barrier	2	Concern that work will exacerbate the illness	1
Fear of mental illness	2	Can't overcome physical health conditions that contribute to illness	1
Employers don't have the right information and support to create the best environment	1	Mental illness has interrupted education / work history and led to a loss of assets	1
Misconceptions of capacity	1	Presenting behaviours	1
Employer imperative to make profit affects expectations in the workplace	1	Motivation	1
Not enough jobs are available	1	Inflexible doctor / therapist appointments	1
Workplace culture	1	Unrealistic expectations	1
Eligibility	1	Uncertainty re what job is appropriate	1
Barriers experienced by / within Employment Services	No.	Other systemic issues	No.
Insufficient skills, qualifications or experience of clients	4	Process	2
Employment consultants not providing follow-up support	2	Insufficient graduated welfare to work pathways	1
Registration pathways i.e. Centrelink	1	Funding resources appear to benefit service providers more than clients	1
What employers are approachable?	1	Financial incentives degrade individuals	1
Boundaries with clients	1	Individuals don't always feel included in decisions that effect them	1
Inappropriate job matches	1		
Difficulty getting employers on board	1		
Unrealistic employment goals	1		

3. Some of the changes on the horizon that will impact upon employment access

- a) **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS):** The NDIS will provide more choice to eligible individuals through the provision of individualised packages. This means that eligible individuals can choose to manage their own funds instead of the funds being provided directly to Employment Service providers. It's worth noting that only 7% of individuals with a lived experience will be eligible for a package under the scheme. It's uncertain at this stage if the Gold Coast will be selected as a trial site. No-one living with a disability will be disadvantaged as a result of the transition to the NDIS.
- b) **National Disability Employment Framework:** The Australian Government's Department of Social Services has established a taskforce to review the current support system and develop a new National Disability Employment Framework. The focus of the taskforce is to determine how we can create better employment outcomes for people with a lived experience of physical disability and/or mental illness. It's anticipated that this will lead to improved employment access and support.

- c) **Job Active:** As of 1 July 2015, a new national employment service system, Job Active, will focus on increasing workforce participation by helping more job seekers move from welfare to work. There will be an increased emphasis on employment outcomes, preparing people for work and a focus on sustainable employment. This will replace Job Service Australia.

4. What does barrier-free access to the workforce look and feel like?

Sami Hall and Janelle Reeves provided us with the following overview of what barrier-free access to the workforce could look and feel like.

- ✓ Seeking employment is an enjoyable experience
- ✓ The obligations of both the individual seeking employment and the employment provider are clearly explained at the outset. **Note:** This information is outlined in the Service Guarantee provided by employment providers on commencement of service. The Service Guarantee sets out the minimum level of service each job seeker can expect to receive, as well the requirements they need to meet while looking for employment.
- ✓ The approach is flexible. For example, there is flexibility around appointment times and employment providers help to negotiate start and finish times that meet individual needs.
- ✓ The approach to finding employment is strengths-based and focuses on finding work matched to individual strengths and interests.
- ✓ Employment Consultants (ECs) are appropriately trained in mental health first aid. ECs work with individuals to understand their triggers and focus on finding appropriate job matches. ECs are skilled in listening and understanding.
- ✓ Additional therapies and support are available to facilitate access.
- ✓ More job share positions are available on the Gold Coast.
- ✓ ECs provide on-going support post-employment. They play an advocacy role on behalf of the individual if needed.
- ✓ Everyone involved understands that it takes time to build trust.
- ✓ There is awareness that many individuals have fears around disclosure.
- ✓ There is an understanding that travel can be challenging for some people (the distance, insufficient public transport routes and cost).

It was acknowledged that many Employment Consultants (ECs) are highly skilled in working with individuals with a lived experience. ECs face their own barriers at times in providing flexible and tailored services due to contractual requirements, which have a strong focus on employment outcomes and a limited focus on gaining job readiness skills.

5. What actions, projects or initiatives will enable individuals to access and keep meaningful & appropriate jobs, or enter pathways such as training or volunteering?

Participants worked in groups to determine the following initiatives for further consideration. **Note:** Initiatives 1 to 8 have been further developed as per the draft project plans included in Appendix A. Initiatives 9 to 12 were not selected for further development.

1. Support employers with tools and knowledge:

- ✓ Create an induction module to support colleagues in the workplace (for distribution to GC employers)
- ✓ Encourage employers to promote mental health awareness through education and training (Mental Health First Aid and Mentally Healthy Work Place)
- ✓ Trial Mental Health Workplace Champion positions in the workplace (role models) i.e. workplace buddy system supported by role description + workplace poster campaign + suggestions box
- ✓ Develop inclusive policy and procedures to embed flexibility and demonstrate this in the workplace
- ✓ Initiate workshops for employers provided by people with a lived experience of mental illness sharing their stories and the benefits of hiring. Note: Sami and Janelle are providing these workshops already through PIR.

2. Create alternative and tailored employment pathways:

- ✓ Create a safe and informed environment in the voluntary sector for people to contribute to their community as part of their recovery journey
 - ✓ Create a pre-DES program to help people prepare for DES - travel / money . job trials / expectations , Career Information Centre
 - ✓ Co-create pathway planning – holistic , create capacity building activities , □driven by the individual
 - ✓ Create safe places for non-traditional apprenticeships and traineeships (e.g. art, music)
 - ✓ Match job opportunities to skills available in job seekers
 - ✓ Develop internship program linking job seekers to employers as a stepping stone to employment
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- ✓ Implement try-a-trade model to provide workplace experience for individuals
 - ✓ Create the space & opportunities to recognize informal training and work experience to enhance job prospects (re-training, work hubs)
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3. Create social enterprise:

- ✓ Create alternative employment pathways e.g. social enterprise run by people with a lived experience to build skills
 - ✓ Social enterprise to foster employment pathways , social version of shark tank , profit for purpose , funded by philanthropic, individuals, organisations and/or private industry
 - ✓ Establish a viable social enterprise on the Gold Coast
 - ✓ Create more opportunities for social enterprise
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4. Implement mentoring for job seekers, employers & employees:

- ✓ Establish a mentoring program to strengthen job readiness
 - ✓ Establish a mentoring program for employers
 - ✓ Provide on the job support for employees and employers
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5. Establish a workplace mental health support role to operate in the sector:

- ✓ Establish a dedicated co-ordination role within the sector to support employers in developing workplaces of well-being (e.g. Health and Well-being Officer roles)
 - ✓ Advocate for more government funding to support employers (e.g. Well-being Officers & training)
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6. Inform and educate employers about resources and benefits:

- ✓ Engage Rotary Club to instigate an employer forum to explore opportunities for removing barriers
 - ✓ Develop Employer Network – information , training sessions , Wellness Officers , Pledge a job BNI / Chamber of Commerce , Share successes , Employers of Choice
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7. Research and promote the benefits of including individuals with a lived experience in the workplace:

- ✓ Identify employers / business champions to quantify the benefits of diverse workforces
 - ✓ Conduct research into quantifiable benefits of workplace diversity
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8. Educate students (HR, Managers etc) about mental illness before they enter the workplace:

- ✓ Establish a mechanism to link individuals with a lived experience with universities, TAFE & business courses, to share their experiences and capabilities with students
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9. Establish peer workforce training:

- ✓ Funding for peer workforce training – at all levels of employment
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10. Strengthen collaboration between employment providers:

- ✓ Provider collaboration – share vacancies, resources & training , Jij Project
 - ✓ Purchase transport – bus sharing to get people to interviews and/or work , fleet , subsidised , investigate what's already operating e.g. Able Transport & GC Community Transport
 - ✓ Create an inter-agency network – partnership , pathway , advocacy Note: There is already a South Coast Inter-agency. Please contact sciq@goldcoast.qld.gov.au if you are interested in attending.
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11. Create a showbag of resources for job seekers:

- ✓ To include a Go Card, photocopy card, example resume and information on interview skills and working with Employment Consultants
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12. Other possible actions / projects / prototypes:

- ✓ Use popular culture to dispel stigma e.g. Neighbours
 - ✓ Support PHAMs on job support – service integration , Co-servicing models
 - ✓ Create a database of 'employers of choice' for job seekers
 - ✓ Focus on developing empathy & understanding in school based education
 - ✓ Happy / Positive News Day (to promote mental health for everyone)
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