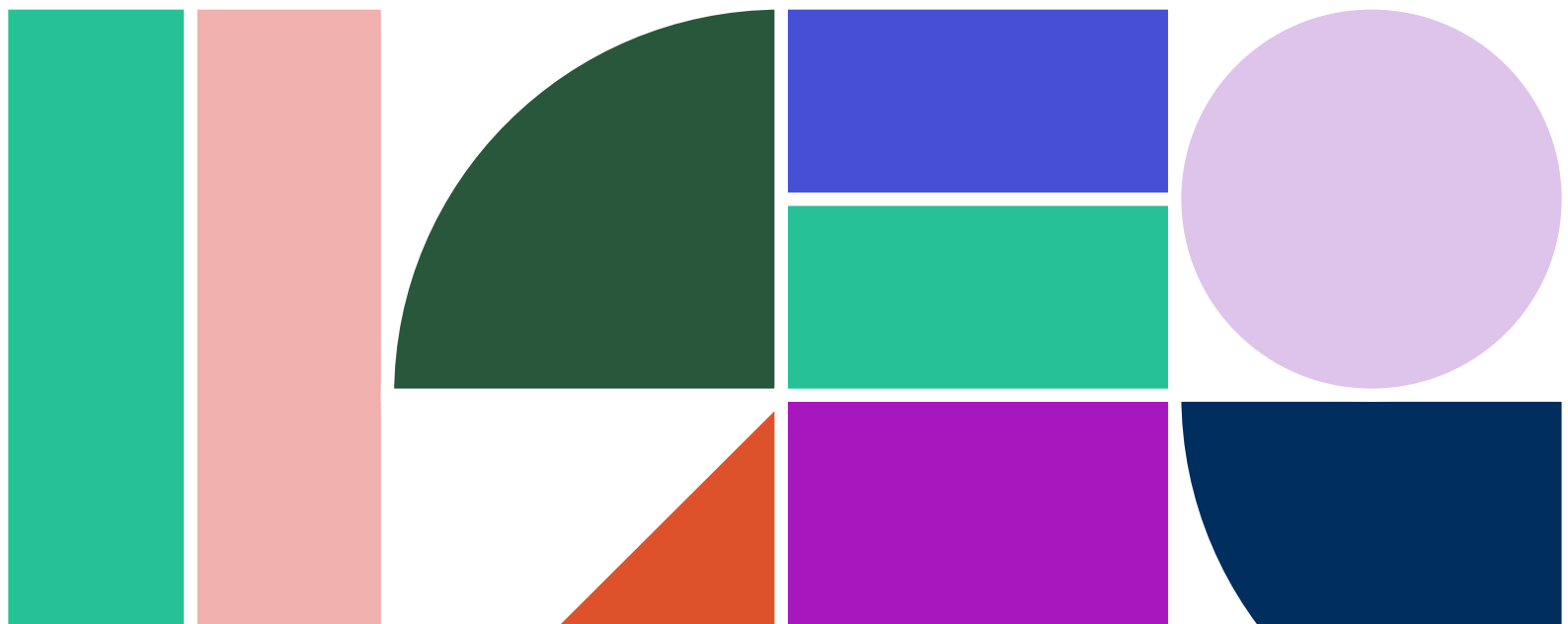




Pioneering Inclusive Employment through Strategic Collaboration: A Review of the uLaunch and Menzies Aviation Partnership

February 2024





Abstract

Despite advancements in disability inclusion, significant employment barriers remain, highlighted by the stark contrast in labour force participation rates between individuals with and without disabilities. Using a recent innovative collaboration between uLaunch and Menzies Aviation as an example, this paper provides an overview of the benefits of strategic partnerships between employment service providers and employers in facilitating an inclusive workforce. By focusing on inclusive hiring practices, this partnership not only facilitated meaningful employment for individuals with disabilities but also demonstrated operational success and organisational benefits, including enhanced corporate social responsibility for Menzies Aviation and innovative employment solutions from uLaunch. The program's success in hiring and training individuals with disabilities as Passenger Mobility Agents at Sydney Airport serves as a model for replication across sectors and geographies, advocating for strategic collaborations to address the complex challenge of disability employment. This paper underscores the transformative outcomes of such partnerships, including improved individual well-being, professional growth, and the broader organisational and societal benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce. It concludes by emphasising the potential of strategic partnerships in fostering a more equitable and inclusive employment landscape and extends an invitation to other organisations and stakeholders interested in championing inclusivity to collaborate with us.



1. Introduction

The employment services industry in Australia plays a crucial role in facilitating job opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities. However, despite progress made in disability empowerment and inclusion in mainstream society, jobseekers with disabilities still face numerous barriers to employment, including physical inaccessibility and limited vocational guidance (Ruhindwa et al., 2016). Indeed, as evidenced by the labour force participation rates, around only 53% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 84% for those without disabilities (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2020). This disparity underscores the need for innovative employment strategies to enhance accessibility and inclusion for jobseekers with disabilities in the Australian labour market.

As raised by the recent Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services (Australian Government, 2023), one potential solution for addressing this issue is for employment services providers to form strategic partnerships with employers to create opportunities specifically tailored for individuals with disabilities. As such, this paper describes a recent effort in this regard conducted by uLaunch in collaboration with Menzies Aviation. The implementation of this collaboration not only provided valuable employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, but also had a transformative impact on the employer, showcasing the benefits of collaboration between job-placement specialists and employers in facilitating better job matches for people with disabilities (Murfit et al., 2018). Before introducing the collaboration and the lessons learned from it, the following section provides a brief review of the barriers faced by jobseekers with disabilities in accessing employment and the importance of enhancing accessibility in the Australian employment services industry.

1.1. Background

The importance of work in promoting the well-being of individuals cannot be overstated, as employment provides not only financial security but also a sense of purpose, dignity, and social inclusion (Mellifont et al., 2023). Unfortunately, however, people with disabilities are dramatically underrepresented in the Australian employment market, with lower labour force participation rates and higher unemployment rates compared to the general population (Edwards et al., 2010). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, only 53% of people with disabilities are employed¹, compared to 84% for those without disabilities (ABS, 2020). These alarming figures are largely due to the personal barriers faced by individuals with disabilities in finding employment, including but not limited to, lack of accessible transport,

¹ Approximately 40% for those with an intellectual disability (ABS, 2020).



limited access to vocational guidance, education, and training opportunities, physical barriers in the workplace, and discriminatory hiring practices (Devine et al., 2021; McKinney & Swartz, 2021). Additionally, negative attitudes and misconceptions about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities by employers often contribute to their exclusion from the labour market (Mahasneh et al., 2023).

Moreover, when people with a disability are employed, specifically those with an intellectual disability, they often experience poor working conditions in the form of sheltered employment, that is, employment whereby the individual is segregated from other employees and members of the public (Meltzer et al., 2019). Such practices perpetuate the cycle of exclusion and limits their opportunities for growth, advancement, and social integration (Burke et al., 2013). Conversely, inclusive, open employment practices have been shown to have numerous benefits for both individuals with disabilities and employers (Olney et al., 2021). 'Open employment' in this sense refers to mainstream employment opportunities, where individuals with disabilities have equal access to job openings, are supported to succeed in their roles, and work alongside colleagues without disabilities (Meltzer et al., 2019).

Research in this area has consistently found positive outcomes associated with participation in open employment for people with disabilities. Compared to those in sheltered employment, individuals in open employment tend to have greater control over their lives, experiencing higher levels of self-determination, autonomy, and empowerment (Jahoda et al., 2008; Kober & Eggleton, 2005; Wehmeyer & Bolding, 2001). Additionally, they often exhibit better well-being, self-esteem, and skills for daily life, such as independent living, literacy, and communication (Beyer et al., 2010; Jahoda et al., 2008; Kober & Eggleton, 2005; Meltzer et al., 2019). These positive outcomes, combined with the premise of equal wages and working conditions, make open employment a highly beneficial option for individuals with disabilities (Meltzer et al., 2019).

Indeed, research has shown that the hiring of people with a disability is not only beneficial for their general well-being, but it is also beneficial for the company. For example, in their systematic review Lindsay and colleagues (2018) found the reported benefits of hiring jobseekers with a disability included:

1. **Enhanced Profitability:** This includes boosts in financial gains and cost efficiency, improvements in staff turnover and retention rates, heightened reliability and timeliness in operations, increased employee dedication, and an enhanced corporate reputation.
2. **Augmented Competitive Edge:** This encompasses attracting a more diverse clientele, fostering greater customer loyalty and satisfaction, encouraging innovation, improving productivity and work ethic, and enhancing workplace safety.



Powered by **akg**

3. Cultivation of an Inclusive Work Environment: This focuses on fostering a workplace culture that values and respects diversity and inclusivity.
4. Increased Awareness of Abilities: This pertains to recognizing and appreciating the unique skills and talents of each employee, contributing to a more effective and harmonious workplace.

Of course, this is all well and good, but the challenge lies in actually implementing inclusive hiring practices and creating an environment that supports the successful integration and retention of employees with disabilities. A recent effort that exemplifies the successful implementation of inclusive hiring practices is the partnership between uLaunch and Menzies Aviation. The following section details this collaboration.

2. Project Background

The collaboration between uLaunch and Menzies Aviation initially began as a response to the growing need for assistance for *passengers with restricted mobility* (PRM) at Sydney Airport. However, instead of hiring additional staff without lived experience to address this need, the two companies saw an opportunity to create meaningful employment for individuals with disabilities. Through their collaboration, uLaunch and Menzies Aviation implemented a program to hire and train people with disabilities to assist passengers with restricted mobility at the airport.

To do so, uLaunch in collaboration with Menzies Aviation developed a pre-employment program to identify and select suitable candidates currently enrolled with uLaunch employment service providers to become employed as PRM Agents. The program, conducted over three days, encompassed several components, including:

1. Initial assessment and screening of candidates to ensure they met the requirements of the role, such as good communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and a customer-focused approach.
2. Physical assessment and strength training with qualified fitness professionals
3. Training on airport procedures and protocols, including familiarization with the airport layout, passenger assistance techniques, and safety regulations.
4. Assistance with the application process, including, cover letter and CV preparation, computer literacy training, and interview skills training to prepare candidates for the job application process.

Following the completion of the pre-employment program, candidates were encouraged to apply for the PRM Agent position. By requiring the participants to apply for the prospective role, as opposed to guaranteeing employment at the end of the training program facilitated a process of empowerment and choice for the job seekers, key factors in job seeking capacity and work performance (Carter et al., 2018;



Jahoda et al., 2008; Kanfer et al., 2001). Indeed, this initiative between uLaunch and Menzies Aviation has seen remarkable progress in terms of ongoing employment for participants with many securing long-term roles as PRM Agents at Sydney Airport. This enduring employment not only exemplifies the personal growth and professional development opportunities afforded by the program but also highlights the sustained commitment of both organisations to inclusivity and diversity within the workplace. The ongoing collaboration between uLaunch and Menzies Aviation continues to evolve, reflecting a deepened commitment to creating more inclusive employment opportunities and setting a benchmark for similar partnerships. Through this continued effort, both entities demonstrate a proactive approach to diversity and inclusion, serving as a model for the wider industry and beyond. This sustained success paves the way for discussing the transformative outcomes and broader implications of such strategic employment initiatives.

3. Transformative Outcomes and Broader Implications

The transformative outcomes of the uLaunch and Menzies Aviation partnership highlight a significant advance in inclusive employment for individuals with disabilities. This section examines the impact of this partnership regarding the personal growth of participants and the strategic benefits to organisations, reflecting on operational successes and the broader societal impact.

3.1. Enhanced Individual Well-being and Professional Growth

The program's initial success was marked by positive feedback from participants. For instance, participants reported substantial improvements in their personal and professional lives, including increased energy, enhanced social interactions, and greater job satisfaction:

Participant A:

"I used to do nothing...I am now a more energetic, social, and disciplined person and that makes me love myself and want to do more for that. I love what I do, who I do it with, who I do it for... I love everything!"

Participant B:

"It's really amazing. I ask if they can extend my shift because I don't want to go home, I love it. The people I work with are very nice as well, so I like coming in to work with them. I always wanted to work at the airport and now I am here working!"

Following the heartfelt testimonials from participants, it becomes evident that the strategic partnership between uLaunch and Menzies Aviation transcends mere employment opportunities for these participants. Indeed, such narratives reinforce the value of these partnerships in not only enhancing



employment opportunities, but also enhancing the self-esteem, social interactions, and overall quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

3.2. Operational Success and Organisational Benefits

The operational success of the program not only underscores the practicality and benefits of inclusive hiring practices but also highlights the role of Menzies Aviation as a leader in corporate social responsibility. Their commitment to diversity and inclusion sets a precedent within the industry, showcasing how businesses can contribute positively to societal challenges. Similarly, uLaunch's innovative approach in creating open employment opportunities for their clients exemplifies their dedication to breaking down the employment barriers mentioned earlier in this review. This partnership has proven that when organisations think creatively and commit to inclusivity, they can achieve remarkable operational success and organisational benefits, paving the way for a more inclusive future in the workplace.

3.3. Scaling and Replication of the Model

The success of the uLaunch and Menzies Aviation partnership offers a blueprint for extending inclusive employment practices across various industries and locations. By transparently sharing the journey with relevant stakeholders, including both triumphs and hurdles, this initiative can serve as a guide for others aiming to implement similar strategies. To broaden the impact of such employment initiatives, it's crucial to consider a multifaceted approach involving policy development, active advocacy, and the cultivation of public-private partnerships. These strategies could facilitate the adaptation of the model to fit different organisational needs and cultural contexts, promoting a global shift towards more inclusive workplaces. By encouraging the adoption of these practices through policy incentives, coupled with robust advocacy efforts, it is not farfetched to expect substantial enhancements for the model's scalability and replicability. Furthermore, fostering collaborations between governmental bodies, non-profit organisations, and the private sector can provide the necessary support and resources for successful implementation across Australia and internationally, thereby ensuring that the benefits of inclusive employment are realised far and wide.

4. Towards an Inclusive Future: A Call to Action and Collaboration in Employment Services

In conclusion, the uLaunch and Menzies Aviation collaboration exemplifies the transformative power of strategic partnerships in promoting inclusive employment. This alliance not only addresses the critical issue of employment for individuals with disabilities but also showcases the broader benefits of such practices for organisations and society. As a beacon of innovation and social responsibility, this partnership underscores the value of diversity and inclusion as key drivers of organisational success and societal progress. It calls upon organisations across sectors to adopt similar inclusive hiring practices, leveraging



Powered by **akg**

the strengths of strategic collaborations to overcome challenges and harness the advantages of a diverse workforce.

As a pioneer of innovation and social responsibility, uLaunch is keen to share its insights and learnings to inspire and guide similar ventures across various sectors. We invite interested parties who are eager to explore the realms of diversity and inclusion within their workforce to reach out. uLaunch is committed to leading the way in the employment services field, offering blueprints and guidance for facilitating these critical processes. By doing so, we aim to not only replicate the success of the uLaunch and Menzies initiative but also to encourage a broader movement towards more equitable and inclusive employment practices. Together, we can transform inclusivity into a workplace standard and create a more inclusive future for all.

References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020). *Labour Force Survey*.
- Beyer, S., Brown, T., Akandi, R., & Rapley, M. (2010). A comparison of quality of life outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities in supported employment, day services and employment enterprises. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 23(3), 290–295. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-3148.2009.00534.x>
- Burke, J., Bezyak, J., Fraser, R., Pete, J., Ditchman, N., & Chan, F. (2013). Employers' Attitudes Towards Hiring and Retaining People with Disabilities: A Review of the Literature. *Australian Journal of Rehabilitation Counselling*, 19(1), 21-38. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jrc.2013.2>
- Carter, W. R., Nesbit, P. L., Badham, R. J., Parker, S. K., & Sung, L. K. (2018). The effects of employee engagement and self-efficacy on job performance: a longitudinal field study. *The international journal of human resource management*, 29(17), 2483-2502.
- Devine, A., Shields, M., Dimov, S., Dickinson, H., Vaughan, C., Bentley, R., Lamontagne, A. D., & Kavanagh, A. (2021). Australia's disability employment services program: Participant perspectives on factors influencing access to work. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(21). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182111485>
- Jahoda, A., Kemp, J., Riddell, S., & Banks, P. (2008). Feelings about work: A review of the socio-emotional impact of supported employment on people with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 21(1), 1–18.
- Kanfer, R., Wanberg, C. R., & Kantrowitz, T. M. (2001). Job search and employment: A personality–motivational analysis and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Applied psychology*, 86(5), 837.
- Kober, R., & Eggleton, I. R. (2005). The effect of different types of employment on quality of life. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 49(10), 756–760. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2788.2005.00746.x>
- Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Albarico, M., Mortaji, N., & Karon, L. (2018). A Systematic Review of the Benefits of Hiring People with Disabilities. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 28(4), 634-655. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-018-9756-z>
- Mahasneh, R., Randle, M., Gordon, R., Algje, J., & Dolnicar, S. (2023). Increasing employer willingness to hire people with disability: the perspective of disability employment service providers. *Journal of Social Marketing*, 13(3), 361-379. <https://scite.ai/reports/10.1108/jsocm-08-2022-0174>



Powered by **akg**

- McKinney, E. L., & Swartz, L. (2021). Employment integration barriers: experiences of people with disabilities. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(10), 2298–2320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1579749>
- Mellifont, D., Smith-Merry, J., & Bulkeley, K. (2023). The employment of people with lived experience of disability in Australian disability services. *Social Policy and Administration*, 57 (5), 642-655. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12898>
- Meltzer, A., Robinson, S., & Fisher, K. R. (2019). Barriers to finding and maintaining open employment for people with intellectual disability in Australia. *Social Policy and Administration*, 54(1), 88–101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12523>
- Murfitt, K., Crosbie, J., Zammit, J., & Williams, G. (2018, June 26). Employer engagement in disability employment: A missing link for small to medium organisations – a review of the literature. <https://doi.org/10.3233/jvr-180949>
- Murfitt, K., Crosbie, J., Zammit, J., & Williams, G. (2018). Employer engagement in disability employment: A missing link for small to medium organisations-a review of the literature. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 48(3), 417–431. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-180949>
- Olney, S., Devine, A., Karanikolas, P., Dimov, S., Malbon, J., & Katsikis, G. (2021). Disability and work in a health and economic crisis: Mitigating the risk of long-term labour market exclusion for Australians with disability through policy coordination. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 81(1), 163-180. <https://scite.ai/reports/10.1111/1467-8500.12500>
- Rebuilding Employment Services – Parliament of Australia. (2023, November 30). https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Workforce_Australia/Employment_Services/WorkforceAustralia/Report
- Ruhindwa, A., Randall, C., & Cartmel, J. (2016). Exploring the challenges experienced by people with disabilities in the employment sector in Australia: Advocating for inclusive practice- a review of literature. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 7(1), 4-4. <https://doi.org/10.36251/josi.99>
- Wehmeyer, M. L., & Bolding, N. (2001). Enhanced self-determination of adults with intellectual disability as an outcome of moving to community-based work or living environments. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 45(5), 371–383. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2788.2001.00342.x>



Appendix B

Jodi: Turning Challenge into a successful Career



Powered by **akg**

Meet Jodi Conroy, a determined 37-year-old from Australia who has navigated life with a strong determination to improve her situation. Despite encountering obstacles, she exemplifies how perseverance can lead to achievement.

Challenges Faced:

Jodi faced physical and emotional barriers due to a spinal disorder and caring responsibilities. She also confronted limits in endurance and manual dexterity. These hurdles could have halted her progress, but she tackled them head-on.

Overcoming Barriers

Jodi's journey was not solitary. She connected with uLaunch and the support of her Employment Consultant became instrumental in her success. With the organisation's help, Jodi's goals crystallized. Despite a waiting period for a required blue card, she remained unwavering. They worked together to explore diverse paths for sustainable employment and education, showcasing her resilience.

Challenges and Achievements:

Jodi's independence, while a strength, posed a challenge. Seeking work in Cairns while planning a move to Mossman required delicate navigation. The support from uLaunch played a pivotal role in identifying suitable work options that aligned with her career goals, enabling a seamless transition and brighter prospects.

Today, Jodi thrives as an Administrator at Prosaw Australia, a testament to her triumph over adversity. Her journey took an exciting turn with an offer to travel across Australia, supporting training and administration—a true reflection of her growth and dedication.