Employment Support Practice Guidelines: How to support disabled people to get the job they want

November 2017

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# Foreword

Access to secure employment is a high priority for disabled people, not just because of the increased financial security it can bring, but because of the difference it can make to people’s health and well-being. Paid work really matters and is essential to a good life. The employment participation rate for disabled people is half that of the general population. Disabled people, employers, the labour market and the New Zealand economy are all missing out on the contribution that disabled people can make.

Employment support services are a critical investment by government, the disability sector and the community. They are aimed at improving both the employment participation rate of disabled people as well as the economic and social benefits that accrue as a result – for disabled people and society as a whole. It is therefore essential that employment support services offer a level of quality that provides assurance that these outcomes can be achieved. NZDSN initiated a project to develop the **Employment Support Service Practice Guidelines** as one way of providing this assurance.

The guidelines are an essential “how to” for supporting disabled people to get the job they want. They are based on a set of principles and practices that are informed by evidence that has accumulated over many years of research, evaluation and endeavour. Developing the guidelines has been the result of a cross sector collaboration involving disabled people’s organisations, provider umbrella groups and government.

A large number of sector leaders, practitioners, academics and disabled people (including those who are or have used employment support services), have contributed to the development of the guidelines – as members of the project governance group or the project working group, and by critiquing and providing feedback on a series of draft consultation documents.

The project has been managed by Gordon Boxall who led the consultation, research and development process that has produced the final publication. He has shown extraordinary patience, perseverance and determination to see that the desired project outcomes were achieved. His generosity also needs to be acknowledged, given the actual time that he contributed to the project.

It is our hope and intention that the guidelines be used by all those who have a stake in high quality support services that achieve great employment outcomes for disabled people. The guidelines can be used by:

* Disabled people and family members to inform and guide consumer expectations
* Providers of employment support services to guide self-review and continuous quality improvement
* Funders to inform service specifications and contracted outcomes
* Training providers as a resource for workforce development
* Independent auditors and evaluators as a benchmark for service quality.

The Governance Group has committed to ensuring that the guidelines become an ongoing touchstone for quality by actively promoting their use in whatever spheres of influence they have available. The guidelines documents can be found on the websites of each of the organisations that were members of the Governance Group.

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| [www.nzdsn.org.nz](http://www.nzdsn.org.nz) | [www.platform.org.nz](http://www.platform.org.nz) |
| [www.inclusive.nz](http://www.inclusive.nz) | [www.sams.org.nz](http://www.sams.org.nz) |
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| [www.msd.govt.nz](http://www.msd.govt.nz) |

The Governance Group acknowledges funding support for this project from:

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| [www.workingtogether.org.nz](http://www.workingtogether.org.nz) | [www.msd.govt.nz](http://www.msd.govt.nz) |

# Introduction

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, New Zealand is committed under Article 27 to “recognise the rights of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others.” The initiative to develop Employment Support Practice Guidelines was set up by people and organisations who believe that disabled people deserve and require better access to jobs and careers of their choice. It builds on the work of Inclusive New Zealand, ASENZ and others that have identified and promoted good practice in supported employment providers. Partners, listed in Appendix 1 included representatives of disabled people, government agencies and providers that specialise in offering employment support services. This ‘co-design’ approach reflects the paradigm shift of ensuring the personal experiences and expertise of disabled people are included in anything that affects them.

The process has included looking locally and internationally at what practices have been successful in supporting disabled people into jobs and careers of their choice. It has also involved getting feedback on these practices from the wider sector.

Whilst it was beyond the terms of this initiative to consider the specific characteristics of individual disability groups, the accompanying *Companion Document - Evidence and Resources* details the extent of the review with some important pointers as to what works in particular circumstances. However, it is recognised that there are important cultures and approaches that would be important to develop further resources for (e.g. working with Deaf people and the deaf community). There will be many others.

Similarly, some providers specialise in services for a particular culture and/or impairment type and there is considerable scope to expand the evidence review and add resources over time.

The Employment Support Practice Guidelines are aspirational and it is recognised that all agencies involved may be at different stages of the journey to identify and deliver best practice.

Initiatives to provide employers with more confidence to employ disabled people, and the expansion of Enabling Good Lives are examples of change that will build higher expectations, as well as offering more choice and control to disabled people and families.

It is within this context that the work of the governance group that led this initiative will continue. Members will also seek to influence the necessary policy, assessment, funding, contracting, reporting and training and qualification changes that will be required over time to create optimum conditions for disabled people to be able to get the job and career of their choice.

The ongoing work will ensure these Employment Support Practice Guidelines are regularly reviewed and updated. The next steps will include creating opportunities for employment support providers to commit to the Employment Support Practice Guidelines, and to build on the self-review framework as part of a developmental evaluation process.

These Employment Support Practice Guidelines define employment as working in the open labour market in a job not reserved for a disabled person and paid at or above the minimum wage, or being self-employed.

# Key terms defined

The following terms are used throughout this document, the Evidence and Resources Companion Document and the Self-review Framework.

* **Disabled people/disabled job-seekers -** the term ‘disabled people’ is as utilised in the NZ Disability Strategy and covers people defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which includes people with psychosocial disabilities/mental illness. We do however recognise that many people prefer other terms including ‘people with disability’ or ‘people with lived experience of disability’. It is therefore important that people take the lead from the people they are supporting and use the terminology they are comfortable with.
* **Employment Support Providers -** any government or non-government agency involved in the provision of employment support services to disabled people.

# Underpinning Values and Principles for the Practice Guidelines

There was consensus within both the Working and Governance Groups that The Practice Guidelines needed to align with the following:

* United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and particularly *Article 27 – Work and Employment* but also Article 26 (Right to Habilitation and Re-habilitation).
* The New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026 and particularly *Outcome 2: NZ employment and economic* security.
* The 8 Principles of Enabling Good Lives (2012).
* ACC’s *Living My Life – A new approach to disability support (*2016).

The following values and principles were agreed to:

* The belief that *everyone* can contribute to their community through employment – defined as working in the open labour market, in a job not reserved for a disabled person and paid at or above the minimum wage, or being self-employed.
* Employment is seen to provide an important way to enhance quality of life and mana for disabled people, including within their family and whānau and throughout their community.
* Improved economic wealth and overall wellbeing are achieved by having employment, and are key ingredients of citizenship.
* Opportunities to access employment need to be based on the aspirations and preferences, strengths and skills of each person.
* Disabled employees must receive at least the same wages and conditions on an equitable basis with their non-disabled workplace colleagues.
* Employment support practices need to be evidence-informed.

# Who the Practice Guidelines are for

* People who use employment support services (and their families and whānau), so they can know what to expect from a high quality employment service.
* Providers of employment support services, to enable them to get and maintain the best employment outcomes for people supported by their service, and their funders.
* Funders of employment support services, so they know what providers are committed to, and to support the implementation of evidence-based practices through their contracts and monitoring arrangements.
* Evaluators of employment support services, to assist with the monitoring of performance and measurement of outcomes for continuous learning and improvement.
* Trainers and educators working in the field of employment support, to inform their ability to contribute directly to the design of courses and the development of consistent national qualifications.

# How to use the Practice Guidelines

Consider the values and principles that underpin the Practice Guidelines and particularly what they mean to you, your role, your rights and your responsibilities whether as a disabled person, service provider practitioner/board member, family member/advocate, or funder.

Take time to work through the 8 employment support practices that need to be in place to improve the likelihood of more disabled people getting a job.

Consider what to look for when matching each of the 8 Practices to an employment support provider, again from your perspective as a disabled person, family member/advocate, service provider practitioner/board member or funder.

**Please note that the Practice Guidelines are available in a range of accessible formats. You can go to the NZDSN website to access these.**

For people working in employment support, two further documents are available to aid in imbedding the *Employment Support Practice Guidelines* into practice - the *Companion Document – Evidence and Resources* and the *Self-Review Framework Templates*.

The *Companion Document – Evidence and Resources* has been created that outlines the journey undertaken to complete the Practice Guidelines. Importantly, it provides detailed information about the evidence that was drawn on with direct links to examples to illustrate how to achieve best practice.

The *Self-Review Framework Templates* provide templates for employment support providers to reflect and evaluate how effective their work is against the 8 Practices. It is intended that providers will look for evidence from within their own experience and that of their organisation to demonstrate how well they measure against each indicator for the 8 practices, and that they develop an action plan to improve quality.

# Employment Support Practice Guidelines (Things that need to be in place to improve the likelihood of more disabled people getting a job)

1. Any disabled person who wants to work has opportunities to receive skilled support to get work.
2. The disabled person’s goals and aspirations drives the uptake of employment support.

1. People and agencies involved in a disabled person’s life are encouraged to understand the importance of work as an achievable outcome.

1. Disabled people experience a personalised service. This means getting individually tailored, ongoing employment support to get and maintain a job.

1. Employers know about and have confidence in employment support services, the benefits of employing disabled people and the importance of building natural supports in the workplace.
2. Providers of employment support have the knowledge to support each disabled person to get a job and develop a career of their choice.

1. Providers of employment support services direct and lead their organisation in ways that promote these employment support practices in partnership with disabled people.

1. Providers of employment support services measure how good they are at getting people into work and strive to continually improve their employment services to disabled people, to employers and to funders.

# What to look for when matching an employment service’s practice to each of the Practice Guidelines

## Practice Guideline 1 – Any disabled person who wants to work has opportunities to receive skilled support to get work

* Their website and promotional information regarding their service indicates their commitment to the values and principles of the Practice Guidelines.
* They demonstrate a clear attitude that a disabled person’s declared desire to work and willingness to do what it takes to get employment shall be the only requirements to access employment services.
* They are well known to disabled people’s networks in the areas in which they work – they have positive relationships with the disability community and are able to tap into that wider expertise as required.
* They are well connected with other employment support agencies (both locally and nationally).
* They actively work with local Māori, Iwi and Hapū to ensure disabled job-seekers who identify as Māori are engaged in a culturally appropriate way.
* They actively work with local community groups to ensure disabled job-seekers who identify as being from other ethnic backgrounds are also engaged in a culturally appropriate way.
* Information they provide is accessible in a range of formats, the way in which they interact with a disabled person demonstrates an understanding of disability, and their buildings are welcoming and easily accessible.
* They know about changes in the disability sector and how they will impact employment support, and are open to new ways of working that follow on from this.

## Practice Guideline 2 – The disabled person’s goals and aspirations drives the uptake of employment support

* It is clear that the disabled person is listened to and enabled to explain their aspirations.
* Any work assessment should be underpinned by the strengths and interests of the disabled person.
* They will ensure the disabled person determines the type of work they want and identify imaginative and practical solutions to ensure any barriers to get that work are minimised/removed.
* They will work with the disabled person to identify and obtain any skills, training or qualifications that will be necessary to get any particular job.
* They will recognise that the degree of support a disabled person requires for daily living does not prevent them from seeking work. Indeed, such support could enhance, rather than reduce, their opportunities to get a job, including self-employment.
* They will be able to demonstrate success stories where they have worked in partnership with a disabled person to successfully overcome barriers to work.

## Practice Guideline 3 - People and agencies involved in a disabled person’s life are encouraged to understand the importance of work as an achievable outcome

* The benefits of work are clearly set out and they are prepared to discuss these with disabled people, families and whānau.
* They are encouraging and welcoming to families and whānau.
* They are active in seeking to understand the importance of a person’s background and culture.
* They don’t make assumptions but will be guided by the disabled person and the people/agencies they want to involve in the process.
* They offer their expertise in the value of work to other professionals.
* They actively promote the benefits to businesses and the wider community of disabled people being more visible in the workplace.
* They are committed to disabled employees receiving the same wages and conditions as their non-disabled colleagues.

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## Practice Guideline 4 - Disabled people experience a personalised service. This means getting individually tailored, ongoing employment support to get and maintain a job

* Staff are encouraging and optimistic that they can find work opportunities based on a disabled person’s unique situation.
* They lead by example in employing a diverse workforce that reflects their local demographics.
* They will listen to individuals (and their close “supporters), get to know jobseekers well and show they understand their unique circumstances.
* They will focus on getting people into work first and to train on the job because that is what is proven to work best.
* Sufficient time will be available to work together on what is needed to prepare well for job applications and interviews including time afterwards to review what went well and what could have been improved upon.
* They will assess what is needed in terms of supports or workplace adjustments and how these can be created/sourced in a timely manner.
* Guidelines 4 and 5 need to be considered together. There is common language within Practice Guidelines 4 and 5, with the focus for Guideline 4 being on the job-seeker. The work of the employment support provider is to connect, broker and build rapport between the two to mutual benefit. Therefore they will work together with the disabled job-seeker and prospective employer in the following ways:
* People are always matched to jobs to the mutual benefit of the disabled job-seeker and the employer.
* They will identify what is needed to prepare the employee for the commencement of duties.
* When the job has started, they have the skills and the time to be available for the employee, as required.
* They work out with the employee what to do if things don’t go as planned.
* They will have purposeful, regular on-going contact to assist the employee to build confidence and positive relationships in the workplace. As well as ensuring the job is working out for the employee, this process can support the building of supports that naturally occur in workplaces and it can also provide opportunities to identify potential steps for further career development.
* They will remain available to the employee until it is clear that they are no longer needed and will be responsive to any change in circumstances thereafter.

## Practice Guideline 5 - Employers know about and have confidence in employment support services, the benefits of employing disabled people and the importance of building natural supports in the workplace

* They can demonstrate that they are known to local employers and their representatives.
* They show they understand the local labour market and its requirements.
* They have positive relationships with schools and liaise with them about the skills disabled students will require to have the best chance to access the local labour market, including supporting work experience.
* They are successful at promoting the benefits and advantages of employing disabled people.
* They keep employers in touch with what’s available to assist them to employ disabled people.
* They support prospective employers to understand individual jobseekers skills/talents/strengths as well as their learning/development needs, and disability support needs.
* They have the skills to consider how a person’s strengths may fit an employer’s needs, being able to suggest adaptations to an existing role or to create a new role as necessary.
* Guidelines 4 and 5 need to be considered together. There is common language within Practice Guidelines 4 and 5, with the focus for Guideline 5 being on the employer. The work of the employment support provider is to connect, broker and build rapport between the two to mutual benefit. They will work together with the disabled job-seeker and prospective employer in the following ways:
* People are always matched to jobs to the mutual benefit of the disabled job-seeker and the employer.
* They will identify what is needed to prepare the employer for the commencement of duties.
* When the job has started, they have the skills and the time to be available for the employer, as required.
* They work out with the employer what to do if things don’t go as planned.
* They assist the employer to consider how natural workplace supports can develop and enhance the experience of the employee over time.
* They will assist in building the employer’s capacity to support the disabled employee but will remain available until it is clear they are no longer required and, if the circumstances change, be ready to step in again.

## Practice Guideline 6 – Providers of employment support have the knowledge to support each disabled person to get a job and develop a career of their choice

* They understand the income support systems (Work and Income, ACC), have a good relationship with Work and Income/ACC staff and can enable disabled people, families and whānau to understand the impact of work on their financial circumstances.
* They have expertise in knowing what subsidies, training and other supports are available to disabled people and employers.
* They understand tax law and can enable disabled people, families and whānau understand how this will impact their circumstances for any given job.
* They understand employment law and particularly around what the rights and responsibilities of employees are in the workplace.
* They are familiar with Health and Safety requirements in the workplace and can ensure these are not used as inappropriate barriers to employment.
* They are familiar with Privacy Legislation, thereby enabling disabled jobseekers to maintain control over their personal information and ensuring employers understand their responsibilities in handling personal information.
* They know about the rights of disabled people as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and in the New Zealand Human Rights Act.

## Practice Guideline 7 - Providers of employment support services direct and lead their organisation in ways that promote these employment support practices in partnership with disabled people

* They can demonstrate their commitment to do the things that are proven to be successful.
* They recruit and keep great staff who are skilled in employment support.
* They actively recruit disabled people.
* Employment specialists are actively encouraged to be innovative, developing new approaches/ways of working and contributing to an understanding as to what works effectively in NZ environments.
* They can show how disabled people influence the way the agency is governed, directed and managed through having people with personal experience of disability on their boards and within their leadership teams.
* They can demonstrate they work well with other agencies.
* They are actively involved in local and national employment support networks including mentoring new providers/practitioners.

## Practice Guideline 8 - Providers of employment support services measure how good they are at getting people into work and strive to continually improve their employment services to disabled people, to employers and to funders

* They publish their track record for getting employment outcomes.
* They regularly survey the people who use their services about the things that matter to them and make changes as a result of the feedback.
* They regularly survey employers about the things that matter to them and make changes as a result of the feedback.
* They participate in research to progress evidence-based practices and to test the effectiveness of new things that they try out.
* They are committed to assessing/evaluating the wider impact of employment on the well-being of disabled people and their families and whānau.

# Appendix 1

People and agencies who participated in developing the Employment Support Practice Guidelines

**Governance Group:**

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* Cindy Johns – People First New Zealand – Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi
* Esther Woodbury – Disabled Person’s Assembly
* Garth Bennie, Sarah Halliday and Sara Georgeson – New Zealand Disability Support Network
* Marion Blake – Platform Trust
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* Fiona Williams and James Carr – People First New Zealand/Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi
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