

# CUSTOMISED EMPLOYMENT

Work First Customised Employment Outline



CENTRE FOR DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

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# CDERP - Work First

The Centre was been established to provide a singular focus on improving the evidence base for disability employment practice in Australia. We believe that for employment outcomes to improve, there must be a shift to a whole of life approach for people with a disability. Current disability employment practice centred on economic philosophy fails to recognise employment as one part of a larger picture.

To achieve change, we gather like-minded practitioners and researchers to work on the issues and develop the evidence base to support change in disability employment practice. We draw on resources locally and internationally to ensure that our work meets the standards for critical peer review.

The Centre conducts research, advocacy and training that focuses on policy and practice change through advising business and government on policy and practice direction based on rigorous research. Training that starts with organisational change that supports real change and staff practices to provide better client outcomes that are based on the best available evidence. We also work with individuals and families to promote self-determination and self-advocacy focused on employment through our Work First and Glide In programs.

The evolution of employment services under the paradigm shift of the NDIS, and the move to client choice and control will require organisations to create individual solutions unique to their setting. In a sense this is the same process that clients will demand of service providers; unique, individualised custom solutions that meet their dreams, expectations and future career goals.

We create solutions based on research that informs practice, along with practical experience to ensure that it works!

With the steady progression of DES towards real choice and control; it isn't difficult to envisage a different future for disability employment. Real choice, real control and real portability that will usher in demands for a new type of service that isn't merely about a job, but one that is individually meaningful, promotes self-determination and supports real inclusion and community cohesion.

The Work First program brings together the best practice and evidence to support a whole of life journey that starts in school and supports your employment journey through life and different career transitions.



Work First

# What is Customised Employment?

The term “Customised Employment” originated during a series of discussions within the Clinton administration’s then Committee for People with Disabilities. This later became known as the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), a part of the US Department of Labor formally creating a permanent focus on disability employment in 2001. In 2001, ODEP funded its first grants to validate customised employment as an effective workplace practice for employing people with a disability previously perceived as not employable.

During the 1980s various forms of what we now call Discovery were evolving out of sheltered employment and segregated schooling. Professor Lou Brown and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin had developed a narrative format known as an inventory strategy for characterising student performance and characteristics. It targeted discrepancies between student performance, and their current and subsequent environments as goals for Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in education. The process became known as the Ecological Inventory Strategy. They concluded that the best place to teach employment skills was in the community and workplace.

In 1986, Nesbit and Callahan used the concept to create a Vocational Profile Strategy (VPS) at Syracuse University. Following on from this Mike Callahan and United Cerebral Palsy Associations (UCPA) conducted a series of demonstrations of the VPS. Between 1987 and 2000 a variety of Vocational Profile and Person Centred Career Planning concepts started to evolve. Victoria Commonwealth University (VCU) adopted the processes espoused by Griffin and Hammis in their Vocational Profile and Person-Centred Career Planning manual (1996).

By 1998, the term “Discovery” was adopted by Mike Callahan at Marc Gold and Associates (MGA) as an alternative to Profile Strategy. Griffin Hammis Associates (GHA) developed the term “Discovering Personal Genius” (DPG) as the descriptor for their method of discovery that focused on finding the evidence to support the emerging vocational themes as a guide to informational interviews which they had been conducting.

Today there are several adaptations of the original Discovery document that reflect Callahan’s statement that open employment should be based on interpreting the relevant legislation. CDERP has developed a version of Discovery that is practice informed and evidence-based for use in Australia that reflects that principle. That version, the Individual Discovery Record – Australia (IDR-A) simply reflects both the culture and operating environment that is Australia.

The common and important trait is that they are all person-centred and all put the client at the centre of the process and in control. It’s never about the system and its needs.

The key to successful Discovery is that every client will get “their” version of it, true person-centred practice.

At its purest, Customised Employment (CE) is a unique model of engagement that focuses on bringing people together to negotiate an employment opportunity or a career path.

t is defined as “competitive integrated employment, for an individual with a significant disability that is based on an individualised determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability and is designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer.” (Jorgensen Smith, Dillahunt-Aspillaga, & Kenney, 2017).

It's important to understand that there are several defining characteristics that are the hallmarks of good Discovery and Customised Employment. Inge et al., (2018) conducted research to define the characteristics of customised employment. Sampling twenty-eight subject matter experts, their analysis distilled twelve practices that define Customised Employment (table below).

During their analysis, they found several of the CE practices aligned with qualitative research methods, such as the researcher going to places where the research subject is engaged. In the CE process that comfortably aligns with the idea of seeing the client in their environment.

Customised Employment Practice		
1. Physically meet at location of the individual's choice	2. Build rapport and get to know the individual	3. Mindfully listen to the person
4. Identify the individual's interests, skills and abilities	5. Conduct in-depth interviews with family and friends concerning the person's interests, skills and abilities	6. Observe the person in daily activities in a number of different community settings
7. Arrange for the job seeker to observe at local businesses that potentially match the job seeker's interests, skills and abilities	8. Conduct informational interviews at local businesses that match the job seeker's interest, skills and abilities	9. Observe the job seeker engaging in job related tasks
10. Assist the job seeker to identify work experiences refine / identify job interests, skills and abilities	11. Collaborate with the individual, family and friends in confirming the individual's interests, skills and abilities	12. Negotiate a customised job description

# The Process of Customised Employment

The underlying process of CE is known as Discovery. In the 1990's, rather than continually using comparative quantitated assessments to drive employment, the method of Discovery was proposed as an alternate qualitative technique to gather the information necessary to guide the employment pathway (Callahan, Griffin, & Hammis, 2011).

Discovery is characterised by the following concepts:

- seeks to identify existing information rather than creating information to formulate a new evaluation or diagnosis.
- creates a direction for employment possibilities based on a translation of the person's existing life experiences.
- finds the ecological validity for actions and skills rather than predicting potential from a functional assessment.
- reveals information that can be used as a guide for job matching, not as a method of exclusion.
- encourages a "buy-in" at all levels and empowers families, friends and community members to be part of the solution-based framework.

Discovery is an in-depth, person-centred investigation of the individual's life and seeks to find key information, skills, interests and abilities that are expressed in many ways through a range of diverse environments. Trust is placed in the narratives told by people of significance, to cross-reference information that is aimed at answering two important questions;

Who is this person and,  
What are their ideal conditions for employment?

Discovery's strength also resides in its desire to respect the rights of the individual by developing self-advocacy skills through the process of self-determination. The ability to self-determine through a range of personal goals, including employment has been shown to support better medium to long-term outcomes and an increased chance for independent living (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, & Little, 2015). It also develops the skills of self-regulated problem solving leading to better decision making, career and job development (Dean, Burke, Shogren, & Weymeyer, 2017).

As a tool to support transition planning, Discovery has shown early promise. When compared to the more traditional methodology for transition planning, the flexibility of the qualitative person-centred approach of Discovery appears to provide some advantage (Jorgensen Smith, Dillahunt-Aspilla, & Kenney, 2015; Molina & Demchak, 2016; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016).

# From Discovery to Employment

Although an essential and effective tool for job development, Discovery alone provides very little in securing a place of employment. For CE to be effective, Discovery must provide the direction for job developers when designing their job search strategy. It provides guidance toward employment environments that are ecologically aligned with the person's skills, interests and abilities.

However, synthesis of the Discovery profile into meaningful data requires well-trained staff that have they high a high level of competency (Harvey, Szoc, Dela Rosa, Pohl, & Jenkins, 2013).

Synthesis of Discovery information is done through a thematic review of the data. Emerging themes become transparent as layers of information are reviewed. In the GHA methodology, three vocational themes are generated. Themes are broad categories of interest; they are not jobs or job descriptions.

Themes could include animals, transport, tinkering, assembly, ordinance, care, patience etc. The challenge of the job development team is to assess the types of workplaces that would require these skills. Under the GHA methodology, each theme should generate a minimum of twenty workplace options. Thus, three emerging themes should generate approximately 60 workplace descriptions. It is these descriptions that set job development in motion. Authentic themes cannot be established without a rigorous period of Discovery (Griffin et al., 2007; Griffin, Hammis, Keeton, & Sullivan, 2014).

This methodology, therefore, highlights four major points: (a) person-centred data, drives job development (b) the individual is always central to any decision making (c) the job development team cannot simply use the next job vacancy as an employment option and (d) CE meets the UNCRPD charter or respecting the rights of the individual during their employment and career development.

Gathering critical information about potential employers increases the chances of a successful placement. Just as CE uses the person-centredness of Discovery to determine the interests, skills and abilities of the job seeker, CE also respects the needs of the employer by conducting a range of conversational style meetings to determine:

Who is this Employer and,  
What are the requirements of this business that can lead to a successful  
the business case for employing this individual?



One of the significant differences with CE is that it respects both parties, the employee and the employer in the negotiation process. A good relationship that is mutually beneficial to both parties is desirable for a sustainable future. To assist in attaining this outcome, techniques such as Informational Interviews are used. These conversations are designed to gather information, not to secure a job. They are extensive and provide the opportunity for the employer to tell the stories behind their business and take you on their journey and expectations for employment.

Apart from sharing key information in the development of a business case for employment, this conversational interview also determines the suitability of this employer for our job seeker. Essentially this is just as much a “candidacy interview” for the employer as it is about a place of work. Informational Interviews also take away the inappropriateness of asking for a job without any understanding of the environment the job seeker will be entering (Harvey et al., 2013).

### Is Customised Employment an evidence-based process?

Good job development should always be embedded in good evidence-based practice (Inge, Graham, Brooks-Lane, Wehman, & Griffin, 2018). Customised Employment is based on sound, evidence-based principles and excellent training programs that provide ongoing support to service providers and also families (Harker & Desenberg-Wines, 2017).

That evidence base continues to grow in Australia through the efforts of our research and practice partners. Projects such as the Workforce Innovation Project that saw CDERP trial its innovative CE teaching curriculum in partnership with the University of Melbourne training provider staff at three providers to use and test practice variations. Partnered with Brite Services and Tasty Plate to test the CE methods in metropolitan and regional areas, along with partnering with Possability Group in Tasmania to trial practice methods.

Work First is demonstrating how CE works in schools pre-transition and post-school. This has resulted in the development of the Glide In school transition program that supports student capacity building and meaningful transition from school.

# Work First - School and Beyond

Work First Employment is an innovative suite of person-centred services underpinned by Customised Employment delivered with fidelity to the evidence base for practice. Our approach is based on local and international evidence for best practice and supported with the input of leaders in disability employment across the world.

Work First Employment works with individuals who are self-managed and plan managed participants of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Age is no barrier to accessing our services. Participants may still be in school needing support to understand their potential employment journey, about to leave school or simply have finished school and haven't been supported to undertake a journey to employment. Our clients are as young as thirteen and well, we don't put a limit on your age. Your age shouldn't be a barrier that prevents you from pursuing your employment dream.

Our Work First program delivers unique one on one services to NDIS self-managed and plan managed clients who are looking for a transition program that is as individual as they are.

Community based and delivered in your setting, we use our expertise in Discovery to craft a program that helps you develop a stronger sense of self through our emphasis on self-determination, self advocacy and workplace behaviours.

You'll learn skills by doing, by exploring different workplace settings and being in the community. Our program is flexible and works with you, your family and your timetable.



Work First



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