

Providing pathways to real employment

Jigsaw prepares people with disabilities for work through the real-world experience of work.

Laura Santamaria didn't like her previous job. It wasn't the work itself that was the problem, though. "I didn't like it because I got treated horribly," she says of the experience that robbed her of confidence.

Australia has one of the highest unemployment rates for people living with disabilities within the OECD, which makes Laura one of over one million people of working age who are in and out of work.

While there is the government-backed Disability Employment Service (DES), statistics show that on average it takes six months to find a position and then, after that long, arduous and often soul-destroying search for work, more than two thirds will lose their job within three months and have to start all over again.

There's a real-world cost to this. Not only is this devastating for candidates, modelling by Deloitte Access Economics shows that increasing employment for people with disabilities would add billions to the Australian economy.

"The only solution is to design and build tailored pathways for people with disability to prepare for and transition into open employment," says Jigsaw co-founder and chief executive Paul Brown.

Jigsaw is an alternative social enterprise founded on the idea that the best way to prepare people for work is through the real-world experience of work.



Jigsaw plans to soon add Canberra and Perth to its current four-state network.

"People with disability first gain skills and training, then are employed at award wage in our commercial document and data management business," Brown says.

"After that, we support them in their transition to open employment in the right role with the right employer."

Brown co-founded Jigsaw with siblings Laura and Jordan O'Reilly. Having grown up with a brother with quadriplegic cerebral palsy, the O'Reillys saw first-hand how the limited services available had failed him, so in 2011 they started Fighting Chance to create systemic change through action.

Fighting Chance creates sustainable social businesses that address key

challenges faced by people with disability. These include Avenue, Base Housing Collective and Jigsaw.

"Our model has been designed to respond to the failings of the current system, which include a lack of access to work experience, ineffective training in transferable skills and lack of long-term support for job retention," Brown says.

It's a model that's working, with Jigsaw outperforming the DES benchmark at a fraction of the cost.

"Since we started in 2014, 91 per cent of people employed – or transitioned into employment – by Jigsaw retain their employment to this day," Brown says of

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having supported more than 500 people across four hubs in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide, with plans for Canberra and Perth next.

In Melbourne, its Abbotsford hub can provide up to 110 traineeships at any one time. With a focus on school leavers (those aged between 16 and 29 years old) Jigsaw is giving young people with disabilities, like Laura Santamaria, a chance at a financially stable and socially inclusive future.

"My work experience at Jigsaw has been interesting, challenging and given me more confidence in myself to be able to say that I can look for a job," she says.

This is precisely why they exist, Brown says. "By accessing Jigsaw, many people with disability start to rebuild their confidence which has been damaged by lack of opportunities or bad experiences with Australian Disability Enterprises or the DES system.

"Jigsaw graduates also experience improved wellbeing due to the sense of contribution, purpose and identity that employment brings," he adds.



Jigsaw

Do you have NDIS funding and a goal of mainstream employment?

Jigsaw's 'prepare for work, through work' employment pathway is an innovative alternative to a DES or ADE, and offers people with disability:

- ✓ A work-based training program in 20 core transferable work skills
- ✓ Supported work experience
- ✓ Award wage job opportunities in Jigsaw
- ✓ Graduation to open employment with ongoing placement support

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