

# Living with Disability

## RESEARCH CENTRE

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**After-school jobs for students with  
intellectual disabilities.**

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Losa.

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## **Executive Summary**

Ticket to Work is an initiative of National Disability Services (NDS) that works to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for young people with disability. Over three years, from 2018 Ticket to Work implemented *the After School Jobs* project which aimed to facilitate young people with significant disabilities to transition from school to the labour market by offering work experience whilst they were at school and explore the experiences and long-term effects for students of participating in after school jobs. This type of employment is rite of passage, yet there is limited support for young people with intellectual disabilities to have these experiences. Funding from philanthropic sources and the Victorian State Government enabled local networks of secondary schools, employment support organisations, families and employers across Australia to support individual students to reach their after school job goals.

This study reported here is in two parts. First a literature review about after school work for young people with intellectual disabilities and second a collection of empirical data about the experiences of participants in the *After School Jobs* project.

### **Literature review**

A systematic review of peer reviewed literature reporting research about the experiences of school students with intellectual disabilities participating in work whilst still at school and its impact on their future job prospects identified 12 relevant publications. Research about this topic was very limited and fell into four categories: 1) rates of work experiences during school for students with intellectual disabilities, 2) factors increasing the likelihood of such work experiences, 3) social and emotional outcomes of work experiences and, 4) post-school employment outcomes of work experiences during school. This small body of research suggests the largely positive effects of employment experiences during school. However, there is little understanding about whether work experiences whilst at school improve post-school economic and social participation of young people with intellectual disabilities, or impact on their longer-term well-being and quality of life.

### **Experiences of participants in the NDS *After School Jobs* project**

A small-scale qualitative study explored the experiences of young people with intellectual disabilities participating in the *After School Jobs* project and their perceptions of its impact. During 2019, 18 young people were interviewed about their expectations of having an after school job. Thirteen of these young people secured a job but their lives and work experiences were disrupted by COVID 19 during 2020 and only two were available for a second

interview during 2020 to reflect on their experiences of work. An additional four young people were interviewed in December 2020 about their experiences of having had an after school job.

The young people held high expectations about having an after school job. They anticipated new experiences and benefits but were also nervous about the unknown and anxious about failing. Previous work experiences were useful in knowing what to expect. Many of the students already had clear ideas about job preferences indicating the significance of preparatory work about employment by schools and parents.

All the young people enjoyed having a job which brought many of the new experiences they had anticipated, such as earning money, meeting new people, understanding more about their own preferences, developing skills and building confidence. They overcame challenges such as keeping pace with job demands and managing social interactions. The experience of having a job had helped some young people to understand better their own preferences about the type of work they wanted to do in the future. Most felt well supported by line managers as well as co-workers. These findings affirm the importance of projects such as this working with managers and co-workers to ensure young people receive appropriate types of support. The three young people who were still working at the time of the interview had held their job for over 12 months.

Participation in the *After Schools Jobs* project gave young people grounded experiences that helped them understand more about the world of work and realise they could rise to workplace challenges. These are factors that are likely to strengthen their own expectations and those around about having a job in future.

Overall, it is feasible to conclude that the experience of after school work is of value to students with intellectual disabilities and well received by the students who engaged with it as part of the *After School Jobs* project. Their comments suggest that work education and work placements might be embedded much earlier in school careers of students with intellectual disabilities to raise their expectations and provide grounded workplace experiences, as well as generate high expectations about the potential for future employment from their families and others in their social networks.

## **Literature Review**

### **Young People with Intellectual Disabilities and Work in After School Jobs**

#### **Introduction**

The transition from school involves a journey towards the markers of adulthood such as finding an occupation, living independently, and establishing intimate relationships. Having a job is a key aspect of adulthood and significant in facilitating social participation, financial stability, self-worth, and quality of life (Jahoda et al, 2009; Lövgren et al, 2014). The right to work and gain a living is enshrined in article 27 in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2007). For young people with intellectual disabilities, their participation in the labour market is influenced by social norms, employer attitudes, family influence, as well as individual differences. There is however, limited knowledge about their experiences of employment (Tideman et al., 2017) and the transition from secondary school to employment entails significant challenges (Arvidsson, 2016).

Problems with a smooth transition from school to the labour market of young people with intellectual disabilities are widely recognised, unemployment rates are high (e.g. Siperstein et al., 2013; Eurostat, 2014) and a significant majority are excluded from the labour market (e.g. Arvidsson et al., 2016; Tideman et al., 2017). From an Australian perspective, transition to employment support systems are failing young people with disability, resulting in reduced opportunity for social and economic participation (see e.g. Beyer & Beyer, 2017) and the marginalisation of this group (for an overview see Wakeford & Waugh, 2014). Australia has one of the lowest employment participation rates of people with disability in the OECD (OECD, 2010). Even though some organisations in Australia employ people with disability (Lantz & Marston 2012) the statistics suggest an overall general lack of employment opportunities for people with disability, in particular those with intellectual disabilities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Between 2001 and 2012 the gap in terms of social inclusion between young people with and without disability in Australia widened markedly in 11 areas including employment (see Centre for Disability Research and Policy, 2014).

A more successful transition from school into employment for young people with intellectual disabilities is a societal imperative to enable their participation in society and contribute to an active citizenship. At the same time, higher levels of employment for people with intellectual disabilities increases the number of people contributing to the economy, reduces pension

dependency and improves the financial status of individuals. Federally-funded Disability Employment Services (DES) can assist with preparation and support to source and sustain open employment. In addition, there is likely to be an increasing array of services that aim to facilitate supported employment (see Wakeford & Waugh, 2014).

How best to prepare youth with significant disabilities to participate in the workforce remains an unanswered question. Part-time work whilst still attending school or an ‘after school job’ is one strategy for supporting their transition from school to the labour market. Though the terminology differs between countries in this review we use the term ‘after school job’ to refer to paid employment, usually of a casual nature, outside school hours, in the late afternoon on weekdays, on the weekend or in school holidays. A full glossary of terms are included in Appendix B.

There is however, limited knowledge about student experiences of after school jobs and whether this type of experience improves post-school economic and social participation, well-being and quality of life. This review investigates the research about experiences of young people with intellectual disabilities participating in work while at school and their post-school outcomes.

## **Method**

A systematic review of published peer-reviewed research articles in English from 2005 to 2017 was conducted. Four electronic databases, ERIC, Medline, PsycINFO and CINAHL were searched using the following primary terms:

- Intellectual disability, cognitive disability, mental retardation, Down syndrome, mental handicap and intellectual handicap;
- After school work, or employment, work, placement, internship, transition, work experience and traineeship;
- Student or pupil, special school or special education, inclusive education or high school or secondary school.

The initial search yielded 984 papers (See Table 1 and Figure 1). After duplicates were removed, 731 papers remained. The titles were reviewed, and decisions made by the research team about inclusion based on the criteria that the papers reported: studies in which participants were people with intellectual disabilities who did not only have a diagnosis of

Autism or similar; empirical research; peer reviewed studies that had findings about work experiences for high school students with intellectual disabilities.

Papers were removed on the basis that: 16 reported research where participants only had Autism; 45 reported studies where participants did not have intellectual disabilities; 48 were not peer reviewed; 69 reported studies where participants were not secondary school students; and 346 reported research that was not related to work experiences for high school students with intellectual disability.

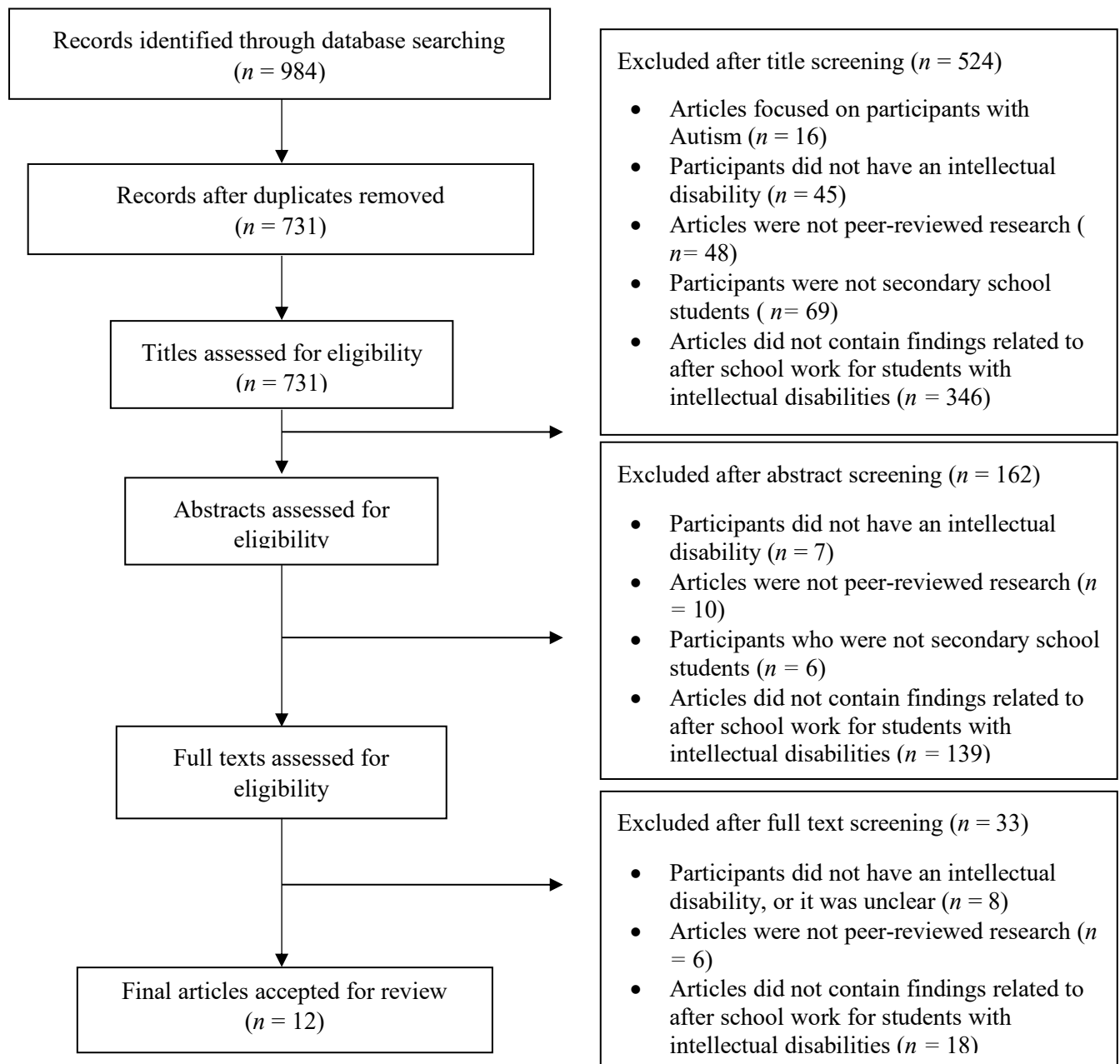
After exclusions, 207 papers remained. A review of the abstracts by the research team resulted in removal of a further 162 papers: 10 had not been peer-reviewed; 6 reported research with participants who were not secondary school students; 7 reported research that did not include participants with intellectual disabilities; and 139 reported research that was not related to work experiences for high school students with intellectual disabilities. The full text of the remaining 45 articles was read by the first author and after consultation with other team members a further 33 were removed as: 8 either did not report studies involving participants with intellectual disabilities, or their inclusion as participants was unclear; 6 were not peer-reviewed; 18 reported studies that did not have findings related to work experiences of high school students with intellectual disabilities; and 1 paper could not be accessed. Twelve papers remained for final review. Key information about the country of origin, the aims, participants, methods and results of the research reported in these papers were extracted and is summarised in Table 2.

**Table 1. Search results by database**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Database</u>	<u>No. of Results</u>
27/03/18	ERIC and Medline combined (hosted by ProQuest)	560
27/03/18	PsycINFO	264
27/03/18	CINAHL	160
	<i>Total</i>	984
	<i>Total after duplicates removed</i>	731



**Figure 1. Flowchart summarising search results**



## Findings

The 12 papers included in the review reported findings about experiences of young people with intellectual disability participating in work whilst at secondary school from the USA (9), Canada (1), Australia (1) and Taiwan (1). The findings were categorised into four broad topics; the rate of work experiences during school; factors that increased the likelihood of work experiences during school; social and emotional outcomes of work experiences and; post-school employment outcomes following work experience during school. Five of the 12 papers reported on several of these topics and the most common topics were the rate and post-school employment outcomes of work experiences during school.

**Table 2. Summary of articles**

<b>Author/s (Year)</b>	<b>Aim/s</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Results</b>
Baer, Daviso, Flexer, Queen, & Meindl (2011)	To investigate the relationships between secondary education inclusion and post-secondary education, career and technical education and post-school employment, and participation in work-study programs and post-school employment.	409 students with intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities.	Examined the post-school outcomes of 409 students with intellectual or multiple disabilities in a Great Lakes state. (USA)	Work study (i.e. school-sponsored work) was not significantly related to post-school employment.
Blustein, Carter, & McMillan (2016)	To investigate the expectations of parents about post-school employment for their children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.	1,065 parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.	Participants completed a survey measuring post-high school expectations, employment goals and barriers, previous employment-related experiences and the role of schools for their children. (USA)	Regression analysis showed that higher expectations of full-time employment were predicted by early hands-on work experiences in the community. It was found that 6.2% of children had either a paid after-school, weekend or summer job, 4.5% had <i>an unpaid after-school or weekend job</i> , and 3.8% had an unpaid summer job. Also, older age, higher functional abilities, living in a rural community, and having more home and community work-related experiences were statistically strong predictors of higher likelihood of early work experiences.
Bouck & Joshi (2016)	To investigate the in-school and post-school transition services and	32,239 students with mild	Analysed data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) (USA).	They found that 71.8% received school-sponsored work, 63.5% received other paid work experience, 31.5% participated in job

<b>Author/s (Year)</b>	<b>Aim/s</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Results</b>
	outcomes for students with mild intellectual disabilities.	intellectual disabilities.		shadowing, and 13.5% had an internship or apprenticeship.
Burbidge, Minnes, Buell, & Ouellette-Kuntz (2008)	To investigate the support needs of students with intellectual disabilities preparing to leave high school.	48 secondary school students with intellectual disabilities.	Forty-eight parents of students were interviewed (Canada).	Three students were involved in employment only, 11 were involved in volunteer activity only, and one was involved in both employment and volunteer activity. Students not involved in either employment or volunteer activity had significantly higher maladaptive behaviour scores than those participating in employment/volunteer activity.
Carter, Austin & Trainor (2011)	To examine the factors associated with early work experiences of school students with severe disabilities (including intellectual disabilities).	1,510 students with severe disabilities, 390 of whom had an intellectual disability.	Extracted data from the NLTS-2 interviews conducted with students and their parents (USA).	31.3% of students with intellectual disabilities had paid work experience. The most common job categories were: maintenance (32.7%), food service (16.9%), clerk (12.4%), and personal care (10.5%). Students' communication and self-care skills, and their ability to independently travel outside the home significantly increased the odds of paid work experience. Having regular household chores and parental expectations of children becoming self-supporting significantly increased the likelihood of paid work experience. Participation in internship, tech prep, or entrepreneurship programs was strongly associated with paid work experience.

<b>Author/s (Year)</b>	<b>Aim/s</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Results</b>
Carter, Austin, & Trainor (2012)	To examine the extent to which student, family and school factors were associated with post-school employment in secondary school students with severe disabilities (including intellectual disabilities).	450 students with severe disabilities.	Collected data from the NLTS-2 and conducted interviews with parents and participants. (USA)	Results showed that paid school-sponsored work and paid community employment were associated with employment post-school, but unpaid school-sponsored work was not.
Davies & Beamish (2009)	To investigate the transition from high school to post-school life for adolescents with intellectual disabilities, through parent perspectives.	218 parents of young people with intellectual disabilities who had recently completed high school.	A survey was mailed to the homes of youth with intellectual disabilities for parents to complete. (Australia)	It was found that two-thirds of the sample had participated in work experience while at school.
Daviso, Baer, Flexer, & Meindl (2016)	To investigate the impact of career and technical (vocational) education, work-study, and school-supervised work experiences on employment for high school students with disabilities.	4,952 students with disabilities.	Drew data from the NLTS-2 (USA).	None of the independent variables significantly were found to predict employment outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities.

<b>Author/s (Year)</b>	<b>Aim/s</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Results</b>
Jun, Osmanir, Kortering, & Zhang (2015)	To examine the employment outcomes of students with disabilities as a function of vocational rehabilitation and school transition programs	7,587 students with disabilities (more than half of whom had cognitive disabilities).	Drew data from the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services database (USA).	It was found that for students with cognitive disability, participation in school transition programs including work-study (school-sponsored work) and Project SEARCH (unpaid internships) positively predicted employment outcomes.
Lindstrom, Hirano, McCarthy, & Alverson (2014)	To examine career development and early employment experiences for four young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.	3 students with intellectual disabilities and 1 with developmental disability.	Mixed-method case-study, longitudinal design. Data was collected from school and rehabilitation records, job observations, and interviews with students, family members, high school special education personnel, employers, and adult agency staff. (USA)	It was found that structured work experiences during high school provided students with exposure to employment settings, and the opportunity to learn basic work skills and become more independent in the workplace. These experiences seemed to influence employment opportunities post-school.
Molfenter, Hartman, Neugart, & Web (2017)	To investigate the characteristics and impact of the Let's Get to Work Wisconsin Program.	62 students with intellectual or developmental disabilities	Longitudinal study, reported on pre- and post-intervention data from the Let's Get to Work Wisconsin Program aimed at increasing post-school employment for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities. (USA)	After the intervention, high school students' participation in paid community work experience increased from 11.5% to 73%. Increase in quality of life score was linked to increase in scores on items pertaining to community participation, independence and work. Self-determination also increased. The Wisconsin Post-School Outcomes Indicator 14 survey data showed a 10 % increase in

Author/s (Year)	Aim/s	Participants	Method	Results
				competitive integrated employment for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities between 2010 and 2015 which may be attributed to the program.
Pan (2011)	To examine transition education and community based instruction in a high school in Taiwan.	High school students with intellectual disabilities.	Students with intellectual disability participated in a curriculum program that involved classes which taught the skills needed to run a car washing business (washing cars, making tea, bookkeeping, guiding vehicles, machine operation). Following this, students marketed the business to the local community, and then operated the business. (Taiwan)	Students' cognitive and operational skills and motivation increased after one semester of the program.

## **Frequency of work experiences during school**

Analysis of data from the US National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS-2) found a high proportion of students with mild intellectual disabilities had some form of work experience or paid work whilst at school (Bouck & Joshi, 2016); 71.8% had school-sponsored work<sup>1</sup>, 63.5% other paid work experience, 31.5% participated in job shadowing<sup>2</sup> and 13.5% in an internship<sup>3</sup> or apprenticeship<sup>4</sup>. Little detail was reported however in this paper about the length and nature of either the paid or unpaid work experiences reported, or longer term impact of school work experiences. In contrast another US study (Blustein et al., 2016) found much smaller rates of work experience among their sample; 6.2% having either a paid after-school, weekend or summer job, 4.5% an unpaid after-school or weekend job, and 3.8% unpaid summer jobs. Another US study found that 31.3% of students with intellectual disabilities had paid work experiences (Carter et al., 2011), with jobs most commonly in maintenance (32.7%), food service (16.9%), administration (12.4%), and personal care (10.5%).

An Australian exploratory study by Davies & Beamish (2009) found two-thirds of their sample of high-school students with intellectual disabilities had participated in work experience<sup>5</sup> while at school. Whilst a Canadian study by Burbidge et al. (2008) found a smaller portion (31%) of their sample of school students with intellectual disabilities involved in either paid employment and/or volunteer activities.

## **Factors that increase the likelihood of work experiences during school**

Carter et al. (2011) examined early work experiences of school students with severe disabilities (including intellectual disabilities). Their communication and self-care skills, and ability to travel independently significantly increased the odds of having paid work. Additionally, students with regular household chores and whose parents expected them to become self-supporting had a significantly increased likelihood of paid work experience. Furthermore, participation in internship, technical preparation, or entrepreneurship programs was also strongly associated with paid work experiences during school. Similarly, Blustein et

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<sup>1</sup> Programs supervised by schools that permit students to work to earn money and/or high school credits.

<sup>2</sup> A program in which a student observes/follows an employee whilst they complete the daily tasks required in their job.

<sup>3</sup> A program, usually offered by the school, in which a student works in either a paid or unpaid capacity in an organisation in the community to gain work experience.

<sup>4</sup> A fixed-term position in which a person works for a skilled employer at low wages in order to learn a trade.

<sup>5</sup> Any experience of work-related activities, such as unpaid school-sponsored work, internships and paid employment.

al. (2016), in their study of the expectations of 1,065 parents about post-school employment for their young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, found that older age, higher functional capacity, residing in a rural community, and having more home<sup>6</sup> and community<sup>7</sup> work-related experiences strongly predicted the likelihood of early work experiences during school.

### **Social-emotional outcomes of work experiences during school**

There is some evidence that indicates the positive social/emotional benefits of work experience whilst students are at school. In Burbidge et al.'s (2008) study of 48 students, those not involved in either employment or volunteer activity had significantly higher maladaptive behaviour scores than the students who had participated in these activities. Molfenter et al. (2017) reported on baseline and post-intervention data collected for the Let's Get to Work Wisconsin program in the USA, which utilised four strategies aimed at increasing employment of youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities. One strategy was locating paid after school jobs for students while still in high school. After the intervention, students reported increased quality of life which was linked to increased community participation, independence, work and self-determination.

These findings about the benefits of paid work whilst at school are supported by the findings of a study by Pan (2011) which examined transition education and community-based instruction<sup>8</sup> in a high school in Taiwan. Students with intellectual disabilities participated in a curriculum program that involved classes which taught the skills needed to run a car washing business (washing cars, making tea, bookkeeping, guiding vehicles, machine operation). Following these classes, students marketed the business to the local community and operated the business. Students' cognitive and operational skills and motivation increased after just one semester of the program.

Furthermore, a mixed method longitudinal case study in the USA conducted by Lindstrom et al. (2014) of the career development of four young adults with intellectual ( $n=3$ ) and developmental ( $n=1$ ) disabilities found that structured work experiences during high school provided students with exposure to employment settings, and the opportunity to learn basic

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<sup>6</sup> Household chores, managing money and discussing future career goals with parents.

<sup>7</sup> Volunteering, attending careers fair, participating in an internship or apprenticeship, and job searching.

<sup>8</sup> Educational instruction in a community environment, providing hands-on opportunities to learn skills.



work skills and become more independent in the workplace. Importantly, these experiences seemed to influence employment opportunities post-school.

### **Post-school employment outcomes of work experiences during school**

Blustein et al. (2016) found that early hands-on work experiences in the community predicted higher parental expectations of full-time employment for their children post-school. As a result of the Let's Get to Work Wisconsin program, high school students' participation in paid employment during school increased from 11.5% to 73% (Molfenter et al., 2017). Subsequently, the Wisconsin Post-School Outcomes Indicator 14 survey showed a 10% increase in competitive integrated employment for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities between 2010 and 2015 (Molfenter et al., 2017) which may be attributed to the increase in paid jobs during school.

A study in the USA by Jun et al. (2015) that examined the employment outcomes of students with cognitive disabilities who had participated in vocational rehabilitation and school transition programs supports Molfenter et al.'s (2017) findings. They found participating in school-sponsored work<sup>9</sup> and unpaid internships positively predicted employment outcomes. Similarly, Carter et al. (2012) found that paid school-sponsored work and paid after school jobs were positively associated with post-school employment. Interestingly, unpaid school-sponsored work was not.

Baer et al. (2011) examined the post-school outcomes of 409 students with intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities in the USA. Participating in school-sponsored work was not significantly related to post-school employment. Likewise, Daviso et al. (2016) investigated the impact of school-sponsored work and school-supervised work experience<sup>10</sup> for high school students in the USA with different disabilities. They found that neither significantly predicted employment outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Work is important for people with intellectual disabilities (United Nations, 2007). It creates daily structure, financial stability and social networks, identity and self-esteem (Ineland, et al. 2013). Schools have the central role in preparing their students for adult life as contributing citizens (Lindqvist, 2012). The importance of preparation during school for a successful

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<sup>9</sup> Programs supervised by schools that permit students to work to earn money and/or high school credits.

<sup>10</sup> Programs in which students work or volunteer in the community and receive training and supervision from special educators.

transition from education to the labour market for young people with intellectual disability cannot be overstated.

There is a very small body of research about after school jobs, which does suggest that experiencing work, in particular paid work, during school is likely to contribute to positive emotional, social and employment outcomes for young people with intellectual disabilities. However, most of these are small scale studies and comparison across studies is difficult as they involve inconsistent groupings of students with disabilities and varying definitions of work, paid work and work experience. For example, work is variously defined as paid, unpaid, school-sponsored or community work experience. In addition, cross country comparison is hampered by the differences in labour markets, educational contexts and support systems for people with intellectual disabilities between countries.

Paid employment during school, and in some studies unpaid work like internships, exposure to employment settings and other early hands-on experiences, were found to be associated with future employment, increased quality of life, community participation and independence. Furthermore, work experiences appeared to increase cognitive and adaptive skills as well as motivation. However, two studies showed no positive effects of work whilst at school on post-school employment. It is important to note that these studies only reported on school-sponsored and school-supervised work, which included unpaid and volunteer positions.

The findings of the current review suggest that paid employment during school has a more positive impact on post-school employment than unpaid school-supervised/sponsored work. They also highlight the need for more rigorous research, especially longitudinal studies about the impact of after school jobs as well as the experiences of work during school from the perspective of young people themselves.

## Experiences of Young People in the NDS *After School Jobs* Project

### Study context and aims

As part of the Ticket to Work initiative, NDS conducted the *After School Jobs* project. It aimed to facilitate young people with significant disabilities to transition from school to the labour market by offering work experience whilst they were at school. NDS contracted the Living with Disability Research Centre at La Trobe University to explore the experiences of the young people with intellectual disabilities who participated in the project. The research questions were: 1) What are the experiences of young people with intellectual disabilities participating in the *After School Jobs* project? 2) What do young people perceive to be the impact of participation in the *After School Jobs* project?

### Design

The study was qualitative, using interviews with the young people to collect data about their experiences at two time-points, the first close to commencement of their involvement in the project (from October 2018), and a second approximately 10 months later (from August 2019). By the end of 2019 one follow-up interview had been conducted and several students had withdrawn from the project. The remaining follow-up interviews were scheduled for the first quarter of 2020. The COVID 19 pandemic interrupted the lives and jobs of the students involved in the study for much of 2020 and inevitably impacted on their availability for follow-up interviews. The research team, despite repeated attempts, could not make contact with many of the students involved in the study. NDS initiated an adjustment to the design to include one-off interviews with several students who had not originally been involved in the study but who had participated in the project. The disruptions caused by COVID 19 and the change of design limit the scope of the study.

### Sample and recruitment

*Pre-job cohort.* Participants were recruited through information circulated through the NDS Ticket to Work initiative networks. Inclusion criteria were that young people attending School, had been diagnosed with intellectual disability and were participating in the *After School Jobs* project. Initially a cohort of 18 young people were recruited (6 males, 12 females) aged from 15-17 years with a mean age of 16, all of whom resided with family members in Victoria (see Table 1 for details). The severity of their intellectual disability ranged from mild to moderate. All participants had good receptive language and were able to communicate verbally.

*Post-job cohort.* Two participants from the original cohort participated in a second interview. One of these was conducted face to face in August 2019 and the other via zoom in December 2020.

*One point in time cohort.* An additional sample of 4 young people who not been part of the original cohort were recruited through information circulated by the NDS Ticket to Work initiative networks. These young people were all male, had intellectual disabilities, were aged 19 years, had participated in the *After School Jobs* project and completed Year 12 in 2019.

### *Data collection*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with young people which asked them to talk about their expectations of having a job and their experiences of having had one, including aspects such as what they thought might be easy or difficult about having a job, what support they received on the job, their sense of inclusion in the workplace and among work mates, and their aspirations for employment in the future. Basic demographic details including age and gender were also collected. Some basic information about whether or not students had secured a job and were still working when the follow-up interviews had been scheduled were provided by the Ticket to Work initiative networks.

### *Procedures*

Approval was given by the La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee and all participants gave informed consent to participate. Participants were given the option to bring a support person to the interviews. Participants were briefed before interviews about the voluntary nature of the study and their withdrawal rights. Their capacity to give consent was confirmed by the researcher via provision of information about the study and asking the young person to relay it back to the researcher. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each young person was allocated a number to ensure they could not be identified.

### *Data analysis*

Data were analysed thematically, by systematic line by line coding and constant comparison of initial and then more focussed coding. NVIVO v.12 software was used to support the management and coding of data. Descriptive statistics were used to collate the basic demographic and employment data.

	Location	Gender	First interview	Age	Job start date	Post Job follow-up	Type of work
Original cohort							
1	Regional	F	05/11/2018	16	No Job	Withdrew	
2	Regional	F	05/11/2018	17	June 2019	Withdrew	
3	Regional	F	05/11/2018	15	Oct 2018	13/09/2019 - not working	Hairdresser
4	Regional	F	05/11/2018	15	No Job	Withdrew	
5	Regional	F	13/11/2018	16	June 2019	Unable to contact	
6	Regional	M	13/11/2018	17	No Job	Unable to contact	
7	Regional	F	21/11/2018	16	March 2019	Unable to contact	
8	Regional	F	21/11/2018	17	March 2019	Unable to contact	
9	Regional	M	21/11/2018	17	July 2019	17/12/2020 - not working	Brewery/pub
10	Regional	F	21/11/2018	16	May 2019	Unable to contact	Retail clothing store
11	Outer urban	M	29/11/2018	15	Oct 2018	Withdrew	Community centre
12	Metro	F	06/12/2018	17	Dec 2019	Unable to contact	
13	Metro	M	06/12/2018	16	Dec 2019	Unable to contact	
14	Metro	M	27/05/2019	17	Apr 2019	Unable to contact	Leisure centre
15	Metro	M	27/05/2019	17	Apr 2019	Unable to contact	Leisure centre
16	Outer urban	F	09/09/2019	16	No Job	Withdrew	
17	Outer urban	F	09/09/2019	16	No Job	Withdrew	
18	Outer urban	F	09/09/2019	15	Sept 2019	Withdrew	Fast food franchise
One point in time cohort							
19	Metro	M	N/A	19	June 2019	Dec 2020 - still working	Retail department store
20	Metro	M	N/A	19	Aug 2019	Dec 2020 - still working	Bakery
21	Metro	M	N/A	19	Nov 2019	Dec 2020 - not working	Supermarket
22	Metro	M	N/A	19	Nov 2019	Dec 2020 - still working	Homeware store

## Results

### Job placement and retention

As table 1 shows, thirteen of the original cohort of 18 students gained an after school job through the project. Of these thirteen young people, seven were no longer working when they were contacted about a follow up interview, and four had withdrawn from the project. The high rate of drop out from the study meant there is little data on the length of time that those who did secure jobs were employed. Neither of the two young people from the original cohort who participated in a follow up interview were still working at the time of the interview. Three of the four one-time cohort were still working and had been employed in their part-time after school job, having had their job for between 11 – 18 months.

Eleven of the original cohort of 18 young people had experienced some form of engagement with work prior to their involvement in the *After School Jobs* project. This was predominantly unpaid and included volunteering (5), unpaid work experience (5), a traineeship (1) and paid employment (1).

### Pre job expectations ‘excited but then nervous’

The young people had high expectations about the types of experiences that having a job would bring. Whilst anticipating a range of benefits with some excitement they were also acutely aware of some of the challenges that having a job would pose for them. The comment from one student who said they were “excited but then nervous” (18) summed up the mixed feelings they experienced in thinking about having a job. We describe these feelings in the sections below under three broad themes of *anticipating new experiences and benefits*, *nervousness and fearing failure*, and *learning from past experiences*. The fourth theme *having a sense of purpose* captured the very clear ideas that many of the young people had about their own interests and the type of job they would like.

#### *Anticipating new experiences and benefits*

Many young people were excited about the prospects of getting an after school job. In answer to questions about how they felt about a job they said for example,

“I’m excited” (9).

[I was] excited. I loved it. I was just like I sung and I cried because I was so happy.

I’m like, “Oh my god, I got the job.” (18)

They anticipated a range of benefits for themselves from getting a job, mostly these were associated with having new experiences, such as learning new things, understanding the

wider world, meeting new people and getting money. In reply to follow-up questions about what excited them they said for example,

...just getting in the kitchen and just doing the job... and learning different types of skills... You get paid for it...Experience. You know how - you will know how to handle money easier. (8)

...just learning new environment than you usually are in...And meeting new people (9)

Because there's jobs and you can try and meet new people...plus I barely like talking to people that much, I'm trying to talk to people more, because I'm more silent around people, other people I don't know talking to. That's why I see jobs can maybe help me cope with that (17)

I think I'll get a job for learning - and earning the money ...well earning money for food or other stuff (6).

Well, for me it's for the experience. You can learn more... Learning new things. I'm not worried about the pay. I just want to learn things (7).

...They asked why I wanted to get a job. "Well, I'm interested in getting a job at Macca's because I want to learn stuff, what they can teach me. Like, it could be kitchen, it could be making the fries, it could be doing the burgers. It doesn't matter. Just I want to do new stuff so I can get used to it and I can be the best person I can when I'm doing it (18).

Having something different and meaningful to do with their spare time was an anticipated benefit of having a job for many of the young people. For some this was linked to understanding a bit more about the world of work and breaking out of the sense of boredom or inward looking routines they were experiencing. They said for example about getting a job,

...if I did quit one of my clubs or something, it would be something for me to do. Instead of just helping my parents around the house, I would be able to do something (5)

I reckon it would be good to get a job because then I'm actually doing something rather than sitting around doing nothing. And because you're growing up more, you want to go do a job, not just be at home for the rest of your life doing nothing (10).

...then, if you're bored, you can go to your job and work and get money (17)

...so that I'm not just staying at home and doing nothing. Like, I want to get out and do stuff...Like getting used to like - How do I explain it? How would it be? So, then like, so then like how you can know how to work, yeah, like sort of like so you know how other people feel about working. (16)

To actually know what it's like to work in an environment like that out of school and during school still. It's good. It's good experience (18)

For some young people getting an after school job was associated with beginning to set themselves up for the future in terms of becoming more independent, getting employment or acquiring experience and skills they would need for this. They said for example, in response to why they wanted a job,

Life skills...How to be independent... Because I'm growing and to be independent. (17)

Because so then next time when I try to get a job in the future, I have my own experience... Because it will get people ready in the future, whenever they try to get enough, like if they want to change jobs or like get them all their own job, they could be ready for the future. (11)

So, I could learn new skills, transferable skills that I can put into the workplace (1).

You get that experience. Like after you finish school, you just get that experience like you already know what you're doing. Like you don't need to wait and get trained a lot. As in when you're at school you know – like during school, you just get the training and stuff over and done with so then when you finish school then you'll just know what you're doing, if that makes sense. (15)

Something that you can put on your résumé, and the experience, and you're more likely to get the job that you want. (14)

### *Nervousness and fearing failure*

The young people were nervous about getting a job, which for some stemmed from a sense of the unknown, as one said,

“I felt nervous because you didn't know what you were doing. Like you didn't know whether he was going to put you on the floor doing stuff you weren't used to doing. (15).



Nervousness also appeared to be associated with self-doubt about their own capability to meet expectations, and a fear that they might fail to meet the requirements of the job because of their lack of skill or ability to keep up the pace of work. The young people said for example.

...a waitress is okay I guess but then I would worry about spilling the food...I am pretty good at carrying stuff around, it is just I am worried about having to carry it around with one hand and not two hands, and the drinks spilling out of the cup. That's what I am worried about (5)

Just getting a job and I don't want to stuff up on the first day...just pretty much nervous about if I do stuff up on the first day. (10)

How I was going to go on the first day...Working like around customers. And how to do the job properly. (14)

I wouldn't really be working at like a fast food place...apparently it is like really fast, hard work and I am like I probably wouldn't be able to keep up really fast so that is a no-go for me in fast food. (15)

...if it's a restaurant it will be hard, but not too hard, depending on how many people they get. If that makes sense....I like to work at like a gradual pace. Take a pace, stay at the pace and all that (9) .

Several were concerned about having the stamina to sustain work or having the time on top of their school commitments.

Maybe the hours of the shift might be hard...Like, I might start early and then I might have to stay on 'til like nine o'clock at night or something. I'll be tired, exhausted and stuff. (8)

Like, probably getting there, and because normally sometimes you have got stuff after school to do as well, like homework and all that (16).

...Just the timing, you don't get that much rest now (15)

### *Learning from past experiences*

As indicated earlier 11 young people already had some form of work experience prior to joining the *After School Job* project. This meant they were able to draw on their earlier positive experiences of work to think about the type of support that was likely to help them in an after school job. This included a supportive understanding stance from line managers and social relationships with other workers.

...the boss told me to be calm. He's like, it's not - what's the word? Not any bad or anything. He goes, well, we've got 300 more if you break a glass (7).

...he [manager] was supportive and he talked us through what the people were about in their jobs and as soon as I heard, got to hear those things it sort of calmed me down a bit...most of the time they do help us through stuff even when it gets hard... And I think that's a really good, that's a really nice thing of them to do...They kind of, give us demonstrations on what needs to be done and - That's about it...when like, it's your first day on the job. They really help you...get through it and they're just really nice and supportive. (15)

The comments from two young people suggested the importance to them of having clear instructions about the work they were to do. One young person's parent explained how anxious she had been before she had started a previous work experience placement and her daughter explained that, "it was because no one really told me what to do" (3). In contrast another young person explained how she had appreciated, that the staff had "showed me what to do first then they said, "Well, just copy what I'm doing and then you'll get the hang of it." " (18)

### *Clear ideas about jobs*

In response to questions about what sort of jobs they were interested in doing the young people had some very clear ideas, many of which were based on their current interests or prior work placement experiences. They said for example,

I think a florist job because I keep doing my garden and upkeeping it. (7)

Probably something like cooking or metal construction or something like that. Like welding...Probably because I'm really good with my hands. I'm really hands on. The cooking aspect, well, because I like cooking (9)

... I really want to be a wellbeing person at a primary school because I love helping people and making them feel like, letting them know that someone cares for them and wants to help them (3).

I want to become a personal trainer...So every time I go to the placement, when I look at all those fitness instructors and personal trainers it gives me inspiration. It says to me yep, that's what I want to do. Like it just gives me an idea...Personal training is something that, fitness is something I've always been passionate about. And especially communicating to customers because I like having that social ability, I like

socialising with people and that's another reason why I want to do personal trainer.  
(15)

I want to work at a child-care centre...I just like looking after little kids. So, that's probably basically what I'm looking for in a child-care centre, is to work towards kids and work with kids to get them more active and running around. (2)

### **Post job reflections**

Six young people were available to interview about their experiences of having had an after school job and three were working at that time. All had enjoyed working and felt they had gained confidence, learned new skills or greater understanding about their own preferences. However, there was also sense of disappointment that the job had not carried over into longer term employment. Their reflections were captured by 4 themes, *enjoying new experiences and rising to new challenges, better understanding of work and preferences, feeling supported, and sense of disappointment.*

#### *Enjoying new experiences and rising to new challenges*

The young people's reflections suggested they had all enjoyed the work experience and, as they had anticipated, it had given them a range of new experiences. In response to questions about the positive aspects of having an after school job, they said for example,

Doing something, meeting new people, trying new things (3).

Mainly the people and all the new experiences because they all give me different jobs. So I was in – I was doing the whole broad range of experiences and jobs (9)

Well, it made me feel good, I guess. Like, I got money and...I learned new skills, new things, how people work and stuff. So, yeah. Yeah, I learned a lot. (21)

Several other young people suggested that they had gained confidence and social skills through being exposed to new people in the work environment. They said,

At first, it was really scary and I didn't like it, but then it really helped with my confidence and I loved it. I don't know, working with [boss] was really fun....It made me feel independent and it made me feel like I was - because all my friends were getting jobs and I can say I had a job as well and I was working (3).

It makes me feel really happy. It feels like you're an adult now which is good. It was really good to have a job because obviously not to stay around the house and do nothing, you have to find yourself a job, what do you want to do in your lifetime

when you get older. As I said having a job now is fantastic, it's really good.....I've achieved more like with talking to customers now (19).

To be honest it gave me more – what's the word – self-confidence...As well other things, like I am more helpful [around the house] than anything....So I'm more productive. (9)

Several had felt particularly challenged by the pace required in workplaces or the social interaction they were expected to have, but felt they had successfully met such challenges and enjoyed the experiences. In response to questions about what had been difficult they said for example,

...when I first started working there because I was too scared to go out and socialise or do something out in the other room, but I also had to go and sweep the floors because there'd be people there, but I couldn't just leave it, so I went out and swept it instead of leaving it for [boss] to do, or instead of [boss] telling me to do things, I would just go and do it.....Sometimes not knowing what to do because [boss] would be so busy, she wouldn't be able to tell me exactly what I had to do. I had to use my initiative a lot, most of the time, I would have to and sometimes it would be scary, but yeah, really good (3)

Probably when it's busier, when the lines are busy you are serving customers and you're stuck and need a hand, it doesn't really stress me, but it depends on what the customers are like (19)

Probably the hard part would be time management...I would start doing something, and then I'll kind of like-...I'll lose track of time. (9)

### *Better understanding of work and preferences*

The young people felt that their job experiences meant they had gained a better understanding of their own preferences about the type of work they would like to do in the future and more about the reality of having a job. For example, one young woman said that although she had “loved working” in a hairdressers it had helped her decide she didn't want to follow in her mother's footsteps, as she had “figured out I don't like touching dirty hair.... it's not really my thing” (3).

Similarly others reflected that he had realised some jobs might not suit them and the importance of finding a job they could be comfortable with. They said:

It makes me think of that you know what to do for the future, even though I'm working in a retail store for a while, you can think of becoming a manager too (19).

...I realised some jobs are not for - they might be for you, but they might not. So, and it's good to try to find a job that you are comfortable and you are happy with, because if you work at a job that doesn't make you happy, there's no point of working there, I feel (21).

One young man had enjoyed working but the experience had helped him realise it also had more mundane aspects. He said,

I mean it makes me happy but sometimes it can be a bit downy but that's all right, it's not always bad...I like speaking to the people and working with good people as well, I enjoy doing that. But it's just frustrating sometimes where you have to stand on a register for eight hours or something, I feel like they should be swapping people round and stuff (22).

### *Feeling supported*

The young people all felt they had been well supported by co-workers or line managers to meet some of the challenges in the workplace. When asked about what had helped them with their job they said for example,

Well, I just kind of liked how the, I guess, environment was. Some of the other workers, they're very kind and very helpful (21)

She [manager] wrote me out lists of things I needed to do and she would show me how to do things step by step. Yeah, she would write out things for me. (3)

It's really helpful to have people to help you, I feel really grateful for that. (19).

...there's always team members around me and stuff...If I needed help, they would give me a hand on the task that I needed help with. (22)

They [team members] would show me new ways of doing stuff so then it would be more efficient and quicker (9).

However, one young person said there had been little follow up from the Ticket to Work initiative once he had secured a job and felt this might have been useful. He said,

To be honest, I'm kind of - I would have liked to had that opportunity more earlier and did that more in length or had heard about it earlier?...Because there's a lot of info and - what's the word - communication between everyone as well as once you start your job you kind of still need to have that service because as soon as we finish it we

start our jobs and then there's no communication at all...It pretty much ceases from that because the last day is interviews...there's no follow up or anything. (9).

Similarly, another participants reflected positively on the support he had received to think about work and find an afterschool job but suggested it could have come earlier in their school career. He said,

I feel it would have been better for me to get this opportunity a few years ago like around Year 10 or Year 9 so can just learn about work more better so I have a better idea what I want to do with my life kind of thing and also pretty much get experience around the work system and all that stuff. (20)

### *Sense of disappointment*

The two of the young people who were no longer working when the interview occurred expressed disappointment in losing their jobs. One young person and their parent explained that the loss of the job was caused by a change of manager and a subsequent drop in commitment to the idea of supporting employment of a person with disability. They said,

[young person]...Like, we had a few difficulties at the start because they were changing bosses around and stuff, but then I got back into the routine of it, and I worked there for a couple of months, but then COVID hit and I had to stop working for a while....they laid me off... And then when we got the new boss, new manager, I started working at least once a week. So, yeah. One day a week, yeah...But, like, aside from my hours getting cut and me getting kind of laid off, I did enjoy it there. So, yeah. No problems, really.

[participant's parent] Yeah, with the old manager it was great. It slowly built up. It got up to three or four days a week sometimes. So, it was really, really good. [the new boss] didn't seem to be committed to the idea of helping at all, and as a matter of fact, made [him] feel rather unwanted in the actions that he took following his take-over, where he restricted his hours...so his employment, it was terminated (21)

Another young person explained that he had not been offered an apprenticeship although he had met the requirements initially set by his employer. When asked whether COVID 19 had affected his job, he said,

I would like to say yes but to be honest probably not because the reason why they wouldn't take me on is because they hired two apprenticeship people already knowing full well that they offered me an apprenticeship and I was going to take it...after

Ticket to Work they offered me the apprenticeship but they wanted me to complete year 12 and my Certificate II in Kitchen Operations. Then I finished it and coming out of COVID they've pretty much, yeah, just bye. (9)

## Discussion

This study suggests that the *After School Jobs* project was successful from a number of different perspectives. There appeared to be a high rate of success in finding after school jobs for the young people in the program. At the time of the first interview in mid 2019, 13 of the 18 young people were working in an after school job. However, for some the job was only short term, as seven of the young people had lost their job before the 10 months follow up interview was due. The interruptions caused by COVID 19 meant we were unable to explore the circumstances which had led to the loss of the job but importantly three young people had retained part-time employment for over 10 months.

The project appeared to generate significant enthusiasm from young people who were very engaged in the prospect of having a part-time job and anticipated gaining a range of benefits from the experience. For some their enthusiasm for being employed appeared to be heightened by their relatively narrow social experiences outside of the school context. More than half of the 18 young people already had some work experience and most appeared to have ideas both about the challenges and benefits from working. That they had clear ideas about the type of jobs they wanted at this time of their school career speaks to the preparatory work about employment that had been done with them either by schools or parents. They also had insights into their own strengths and limitations and many shared some anxiety about keeping up with the pace and social interactions required in a workplace.

The job experiences of the young people matched many of their expectations, they met new people, learned new skills, and had the opportunity to consider their preferences about the type of work they might do in the future. Many appeared to develop more self-confidence and particularly to feel more comfortable in interacting with strangers. It was clear that after school work had given these young people significant experiences that helped them understand more about the world of work. These types of grounded experiences are particularly important for young people with intellectual disabilities who might find it difficult to think about future options in more abstract ways. They also appeared to help these young people to realise they could rise to the challenges in the workplace and perhaps strengthen their own expectations and those around about having a job in future.

The experience of these young people point to the significance of support in the work-place from managers and co-workers to job success, which is a strong theme in the employment literature. These findings affirm the importance of projects such as this working with managers and co-workers to ensure young people receive appropriate types of support. These young people for example were very clear about the need for clear instructions about tasks and clarity about expectations others had of them.

Further conclusions about the success of the project are limited as we were not able to conduct the intended pre - post longitudinal design given the high participant attrition rate relative to the size of the sample and some participants were only interviewed at one-time point as a result of the disruptions caused by COVID 19. For those participants who weren't placed in a job, we were unable to explore their experiences of looking for work or determine whether some had eventually secured a job. To get a sense of the long term utility of the program, a larger longitudinal study is needed.

Overall, however it is feasible to conclude that the experience of after school work was of value to students with intellectual disability and was well received by the students who engaged with it. Their comments suggest that work education and work placements might be embedded much earlier in school careers of students with intellectual disabilities to raise their expectations and provide grounded workplace experiences and as well as generate high expectations about the potential for future employment from their families and others in their social networks.



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## **Appendix A**

### **List of included articles**

- Baer, R. M., Daviso, A. W., Flexer, R. W., Queen, R. M., & Meindl, R. S. (2011). Students with intellectual disabilities: predictors of transition outcomes. *career development for Exceptional Individuals*, 34(3), 132-141. doi: 10.1177/0885728811399090
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## **Appendix B**

### **Glossary**

**After school job:** An ‘after school job’ is a paid job for a student that takes place outside of school hours. This is usually in the late afternoon on weekdays but could also be on the weekend or in the school holidays. The role is most likely as a casual employee.

**Apprenticeship:** A fixed-term position in which a person works for a skilled employer at low wages in order to learn a trade.

**Internship:** A program, usually offered by the school, in which a student works in either a paid or unpaid capacity in an organisation in the community to gain work experience.

**Job shadowing:** A program in which a student observes/follows an employee whilst they complete the daily tasks required in their job.

**School-sponsored work:** Programs supervised by schools that permit students to work to earn money and/or high school credits.

**School-supervised work experience:** Programs in which students work or volunteer in the community and receive training and supervision from special educators.

**Work experiences:** Any experience of work-related activities, such as unpaid school-sponsored work, internships and paid employment.