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**Impact Institute**

**Canberra Disability Expo**

**Friday, 12 September 2025**

Captioned by: Malinda Monks

KATE TOTMAN: Hello and welcome. Thank you very much for being here at the main stage of the Canberra disability expo. It is now a pleasure to welcome to the stage Rhiannon from the department of social services. We'll be hearing about workplace adjustments and other support available to help you keep employment. Rhiannon will also be covering changes from the current disability employment services program to inclusive Employment Australia. Let's give Rhiannon a huge round of applause.

RHIANNON: Hello. Just making sure this is pointed in the right direction. Good morning. My name's Rhiannon. I'm from the Department of Social Services. Thank you for inviting us to speak about support and services for people with disability to help find and maintain employment.

The Department of Social Services acknowledges the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, water and community. Today we are meeting on the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal people and I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of these lands and pay my respects to Elders past and present. I would also like to extend acknowledgement and respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present. So a lot of this might be content you might be aware of but let's talk about disability in Australia.

In 2022, the Australian Bureau of Statistics said there were 5.5 million Australians who live with disability. Disability inclusion in the workplace is not just good or nice to have, it's essential for us to access a large pool of skilled candidates. Some people may be aware that one in five Australians live with disability, nearly 8% of our population live with severe disabilities and over 2 million Australians of working age have disability. Up to 90% of disability in Australia is invisible and it's estimated

that around 31% of our population have additional accessibility needs.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics also reported that nearly one-third of businesses say they're having difficulty finding suitable staff to fill jobs and large and medium businesses were more likely to report difficulty finding qualified staff. Hospitality, education and training and retail trade are among the top industries facing skill shortages who have reported difficulty hiring staff. What does this mean for you? I'm here to talk about some of the things the department of social services does to support people with a disability.

The first thing that I just wanted to mention is that the disability employment services program is changing. So, Disability Employment Services is changing to Inclusive Employment Australia from 1 November 2025. Inclusive Employment Australia aims to get more people in to work by providing tailored support to individuals who face barriers to employment. It will support people with disabilities, injuries and health conditions in preparing for, finding and maintaining their jobs while also helping grow their careers.

What are some of the important changes that you might want to know about? At Inclusive Employment Australia, you can be on the program even if you can only work less than eight hours a week. People no longer need to be on an income support payment to enrol with Inclusive Employment Australia. These two changes mean around 15,000 more people with disability will be able to access these services. There will be no more time limits in the program so you can keep working with your provider as long as you need. There will be some new providers and some may have skills or specialisations that are of interest to you. This includes more providers with expertise in working with people with different disabilities or from different backgrounds.

Providers will be able to be more responsive to your individual

employment needs and goals and participants can choose and move to a new provider at any time. So we understand that change is always difficult and we understand the need to ensure our DES participants - did my presentation die? It's back. Thank you. We understand to ensure that DES participants are given timely and clear communications about the implementation of Inclusive Employment Australia. We know for some of our participants it can be a concern and we acknowledge change is difficult. The department is committed to making sure participation is simple, accessible and inclusive. Where possible, it will be made available using different communication types, such as Easy Read and translated versions. To help us make sure our communications are easy to read, we have been testing our materials with current DES participants, disability peak bodies and disability representative organisations.

So some important communications that participants will get are a couple of letters from the Department of Social Services. The first letter will tell you as the participant that the DES program is changing. Participants do not need to take any action as a result of this letter. The second letter you will receive, which should come out shortly, will tell participants and they're staying with their same provider or need to change providers. For some participants, particularly those who have some additional vulnerabilities, for example homeless participants, the letter may be provided to your DES provider so that they can work with you. We anticipate that you might want to talk to your current DES provider for support around the time these letters are received, but we also have what's called a transition line to help you answer any questions you have about the changes from Des to the new Inclusive Employment Australia. The trans line number is 1800 227 337. So, this line has information to help participants with questions you might have and is operated by the department of employment and workplace relations who

are helping us with this change.

This and other information specifically for participants will be available on a dedicated participant web page, which is [dss.gov.au/information-participants](https://dss.gov.au/information-participants). That was a long one. We can give you that written down if you visit us at booth 40.

So, I would like to talk a little bit more about the second letter participants will get. You will not have received this yet. It will come out some time in October. The letter will let you know whether you are changing DES provider to a new Inclusive Employment Australia provider or if you are able to stay with the same provider. Participants will be told of their Inclusive Employment Australia provider but we will give you up to six alternative option physical you think the provider you are placed with may not meet your needs. If you are thinking of changing providers it will tell you how you can go about doing that as well. If you're unsure, you can speak with your current provider or a person that you trust to support you with this decision.

The participant information page will have resources available to help you and your support people make a decision about what provider you might wish to choose. We have a provider choice window from 8am on Wednesday 24 September to 8pm Thursday 16 October. Some participants will need to call the DES transition line if they are looking at changing providers. So, again that transition line is 1800 227 337, and they'll be able to implement your choice of changing providers if you need to. Again, change is difficult and? Participants may find the process confusing, we hope not distressing but we acknowledge this could be the case.

Participants can still lean on their current DES provider during this time and I'd now like to speak about a few other programs that are available to support people with disabilities prepare for, find and keep a

job, now that all the scary change stuff is over with.

The employment assistance fund is run by Job Access and this is available to a person with a disability or their employer. It's used to encourage and support the employment of people with disability and improve their access to work opportunities and workplace independence. The EAF provides reimbursements to an applicant for workplace modifications, equipment and services necessary for a person with disability to perform their employment duties. The EAF can help people whether they are working, able to start work or self-employed. The EAF can cover a range of different accessibility support including computer and software upgrades, modifications to work vehicles, communication and assistive technology devices, adjustments and special equipment for the physical workplace, building modifications, for example to widen doorways so that participants can access maybe the bathroom, maybe another place where they need to conduct employment. It also supports Auslan interpreting and training or technical support to help employees learn to use specific modifications or equipment.

The EAF also provides specialised support and training packages for employees with mental health conditions or specific learning disorders, disability awareness training, deafness awareness and mental health awareness training. Job Access can help you if you need a workplace adjustment to stay in their job through the EAF, a team of adviser and allied health professionals can provide you with free confidential advice on workplace adjustments if you call Job Access.

So, this workplace assessment to help work out what changes might be needed to best support you in your employment is called a workplace modification assessment. This is done by someone from the national panel of assessors who would go to your workplace and look at what you might need to support you to complete your job. You or your employer

can phone 1800 464 800 or visit [job.access.gov.au/employment](http://job.access.gov.au/employment) assistance fund, EAF. Again, that's a long one. We have all of this at booth 40. To find out more on how to start the process for an assessment.

I'm going to flick through an example of a short video from New South Wales-based grazier Anthony Ferris discussing his experience of receiving workplace adjustments through Job Access.

(Video plays)

>> After the accident, I never thought I'd survive, but I'm here. After receiving help from Job Access, I'm beginning to do a lot more things again. Since my initial approach when they helped me with a land-making cradle, they have helped with the funds to purchase a pneumatic size squeeze for sheep, a tractor which can be driven automatically and I can swap the implements from the front of the tractor from the cabin. I am still restricted to what I can do around the property but would be a lot more restricted had I not got assistance from Job Access. It is the everyday work I can do on the property that's really got me to where I am now.

(Video ends)

RHIANNON: As I mentioned, you can find out more information on Job Access at either the Job Access website or that phone number on screen now.

The government also funds programs that help young people specifically find - prepare for, find and keep a job. There are two programs I would like to talk about with the Department of Social

Services today. There are the individual placement and support program and the digital work and study service.

So, the first program, known as IPS, is a service for individuals aged 12 to 25 years old with mental ill health. You can attend in person at one of the 50 Head Space centres around the country who offer employment support and IPS will help you receive - sorry, IPS will help you find work and study options that are suitable for you where you are now and based on your situation.

The second program is the Digital Work and Study Service. It's also run by Head Space is delivered online for anyone who cannot attend a Head Space centre or would prefer to receive these services online. Because it's online, the starting age is slightly older so it is for individuals aged 15 to 25 years also with mental ill health. It is important to note for none of these programs must you be registered with the NDIS. These are independent from the NDIS.

You'll receive the same support through DWSS as the IPS program in terms of what you can receive in terms of work and study options. To access services through Head Space you need to be a client so contact your local Head Space office to engage. Visit [headspace.org.au/headspacecentres](https://headspace.org.au/headspacecentres) to find your local office. A formal diagnosis is not required for the individual placement and support program or digital work and study service. A decision that a person has mental illness can be established by staff at the Head Space centre. For more information, you can go to that website I mentioned earlier, the [headspace.org.au/headspacecentres](https://headspace.org.au/headspacecentres). The address is on the screen. Or you can visit the Department of Social Services website [dss.gov.au](https://dss.gov.au).

So while we hope that people don't have issues with their current providers, we know that sometimes it can happen and it is important that participants know where they're able to reach out for help. So, if a



participant is having issues with a DES service provider we encourage them to talk to their service provider in the first instance however if you're unable to reach a resolution directly with them you can call the complaints resolution and referral service on 1800 880 052 and press option 2.

This service provides an independent, fair, impartial and nationally accessible complaints service, resolution and referral if necessary for people with disability. It doesn't just apply to Disability Employment Services, it also applies to disability advocacy services and anyone with a disability or who is concerned about someone with a disability can access this service. The department also runs the national disability abuse and neglect hot line and this is available to anyone with a disability, their family members, friends or service providers. The hot line is a referral service to appropriate complaints-handling bodies for each state and territory as well as other complaints-handling bodies such as the ombudsman, anti-discrimination boards and various commissions. The hot line provides a way to report abuse or neglect to the appropriate authority for investigation. It does not investigate itself, it refers it to the appropriate authorities to do so. You can call the national disability abuse and neglect hotline on 1800 880 052 and then press option 1.

So, that's lot of information I have just given you verbally. If you want anything written down and to stay up to date with the latest information on disability employment, we invite you to go to the Job Access website, [job.access.gov.au](http://job.access.gov.au), and the department's website at [dss.gov.au](http://dss.gov.au). So, that brings us to the end of today's presentation, so I hope you got something useful out of this and I think one of the main messages that the department wants to say is that you don't have to manage disability employment matters on your own. There are resources out there to help you. If you would like more information again any of

those pages will have content for you but we are also available today at booth 4 so if you walk that way, keep going beyond the beautiful pink tent at booth 40. So, thank you so much (APPLAUSE)

KATE TOTMAN: Thanks, Rhiannon. Let's give Rhiannon a huge round of applause. Thank you so much for sharing that with us, and as Rhiannon said you can see the team at booth 40. Booth 40. They will be here today and tomorrow. Stick around because in about 15 minutes time we will be hearing the talents of the Lost Larrikin on stage. If you are really interested in getting involved in some chats about employment, the Workability expo is happening right now on the other side of the main entrance. There is a workshop happening right now which will be super informative so you can head on over and get involved.

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\*KATE TOTMAN: Well hello and thank you so much for being here with us at the main stage. It's now our absolute pleasure to welcome our first performer for the day. Let me introduce you to Remus Douglas, otherwise known as Lost Larrikin. Remus is a proud queer, disabled performer, storyteller, artist and activist. They perform covers and original songs about living with invisible disability, being queer and whatever else inspires them. Please put your hands together to welcome the Lost Larrikin to the stage. (APPLAUSE)

REMUS DOUGLAS: (Sings)

# Hand in the breeze

# Cross on my knees  
# Letting my body be free  
# I know what I need  
# I jump in the sea  
# No more regrets  
# I'm letting my body be free  
# From my birth to my grave  
# Every step I've taken  
# My body came  
# Through the joy and the pain  
# We danced in the river  
# We sing in the rain  
# My body's my body  
# All through me and of me  
# Oh, god what an honour  
# To see them, to know them, to love them  
# Acne-prone skin  
# Sometimes it's hard liking the body I'm in  
# But it takes care of me  
# Through it I'll breathe  
# What a gift  
# Is being soft, being seen  
# From my birth to my grave  
# Every step I've taken  
# My body came  
# Through the joy and the pain  
# We danced in the river  
# We sing in the rain  
# My body's my body

# All through me and of me  
# Oh, god what an honour  
# To see them, to know them  
# To love them  
# My body  
# I will find you  
# And this world behind you  
# Though this world may betray me  
# You're my home  
# You are my safety  
# Like a garden  
# I am tending  
# We are growing  
# We are mending  
# It's a love with no end  
# My body is my friend  
# From my birth to my grave  
# Every step I've taken  
# My body came  
# Through the joy and the pain  
# We danced in the river  
# We sing in the rain  
# My body's my body  
# All through me and of me  
# Oh, god, what an honour  
# To see them, to know them  
# To love them #

Thank you very much. That first song is called 'My Body's My Buddy', it is

by Tessa Violet and Bri. Would I be able to get ukulele down a little in the foldback? Thank you. This next one's another cover, called the Circle Maker by Spark Bird.

# How strange I am to all  
# How strange to sleep so long  
# Not a soul, not a soul  
# Will meet my gaze or greet me  
# And the carob tree's brittle leaves  
# Rattle hoarsely on the wind  
# You're out of time  
# You're out of favour  
# You are but a cipher  
# You are the circle maker  
# You're out of time  
# You're out of favour  
# You are but a cipher  
# You are the circle maker  
# How strange you are to all  
# How strange to sleep so long  
# How strange to grow so old  
# And to never grow up  
# And to never grow tall  
# And to never grow wise  
# And to never grow anything  
# But smaller and farther away  
# How strange I am to all  
# How strange to sleep so long  
# But in sleep I may dream

# Fairy lights illuminating everything  
# Everyone gathered all around me  
# Singing a song  
# Only the carob tree will keep me company  
# Oh, bitter friend  
# Oh, beloved enemy  
# A symbol of the time gone by  
# And stretching out in front of me  
# The lonely life of any length is like eternity  
# And I am out of time  
# I am out of favour  
# I am but a cipher  
# I am a circle maker  
# Praying for the rain  
# And paying for the prayer  
# And begging for a sign that I was ever  
# Even there  
# How strange I am to all  
# How strange to sleep so long  
# To sleep, to feel seen  
# To sleep, perchance to dream # (APPLAUSE)

>> Thank you. This next one's an original song. It's called Invisible to All But Me.

# Just live life day by day  
# They say  
# Well, I'm living the best way  
# I know how  
# This world wasn't built for

# People like me  
# It's the quiet  
# Want to hurt them most  
# Downing meds  
# Trying to keep everything in  
# They can't see beneath my skin  
# And they say that you're not disabled enough  
# Yet I can't keep up with  
# A part-time job  
# You don't look sick  
# So what are you doing here  
# Why can't I just make these wounds appear  
# And I don't want to dance  
# When my body feels like lead  
# And it's all in your head  
# They say  
# When I'm lying in bed  
# My sickness is real  
# Just invisible to all but me  
# One foot in front of the other  
# It's not certain the path I'm going down  
# But these roads weren't built  
# For people like me  
# The stories we were all told about  
# Bedtime fables cannot help me now  
# Where's happily ever after for me  
# They say that you're not disabled enough  
# Yet I can't keep up with a part-time job  
# You don't look sick

# So what are you doing here  
# Why can't I just make these wounds appear  
# And I don't want to dance  
# When my body feels like lead  
# And it's all in your head, they say  
# When I'm lying in bed  
# The sickness is real, just invisible  
# To all but me # (APPLAUSE)

This next one is other original song, a bit more upbeat, that I worked on with a friend. This one's called Collective Instinct.

# I'm a building up these ideas in my mind  
# All the peace we'll never find  
# Has the truth left us behind  
# To fall  
# Can we only cause them to those we call friends  
# Do we all just play pretend  
# Is it human nature in the end  
# Are we all just cogs in a machine  
# We don't understand  
# All my hope  
# We can't carry all this trauma home alone  
# Do I own the thoughts I think  
# Or has my brain fallen down  
# With generations of collective instinct  
# Can we change things  
# Is it worth it  
# Just to try



# When we're all just scraping by  
# Could we ever touch the sky alone  
# Can we heal this  
# Age of built-up human trauma  
# Passed on to our sons and daughters  
# Is it worth all of the drama  
# To fix  
# Are we all just cogs in a machine  
# We don't understand  
# Am I a person on my own  
# Or just another damaged one  
# I can't carry all this trauma all alone  
# Do I own the thoughts I think  
# Or has my brain fallen in sync  
# With generations of collective instinct  
# So I'll try to brave the storm  
# Remember everything before  
# When the day comes  
# That the mind's upgraded  
# Preachers make the world  
# Say these better places in the sky  
# Waiting up above the sky forever  
# The truth we had before #

Thank you. Got time for one more song? Awesome. This last song's a cover of a song called - it's called Free Fall.

# Called the devil  
# And the devil did come

# Said to the devil do you like cigarettes, dominos, rum  
# Some days end when I need a few friends  
# Now and again I could never hope to keep them  
# Thought to give friends what I thought they wanted  
# Never had they needed a good friend as I've been  
# Don't get me venting on friends who resent you  
# 'Cause all you've ever done is been a noose to hang on to  
# They thought was a necklace  
# And reckless they fell into hell  
# Where you both hang and nothing to do but  
# Scratch, kick, let gravity win like  
# Let gravity win like  
# You could leave it all behind  
# Even the devil needs time alone sometimes  
# You could let it all go  
# You could let it all go  
# It's called free fall  
# It's called free fall  
# Called to the devil and the devil said  
# Quit, can't be bothered  
# Better handing yourself  
# Keep about your wits  
# Keep about your wits  
# Know yourself and who you came in with  
# You can let it all go  
# You can let it all go  
# It's called free fall  
# It's called free fall  
# Talked to the devil and the devil said

# Hey, why you been calling this late  
# It's like 2am  
# The bars are close at 10  
# Hell, it's rule I made  
# Anyway, say you're too busy saving everybody else to save yourself  
# And you don't want to know no help  
# Oh, well  
# That's a story to tell  
# You could let it all go  
# You could let it all go  
# It's called free fall  
# It's called free fall  
# You could let it all go  
# You could let it all go  
# 'Cause nothing's free but falling out  
# That's easy. Let me show you how  
# It's like  
# You could let it all go  
# You could let it all go  
# It's called free fall  
# It's called free fall  
# You could let it all go  
# You could let it all go  
# It's called free fall  
# It's called free fall # (APPLAUSE)

KATE TOTMAN: That was so great. Let's have a huge round of applause for Remus Douglas, otherwise known as the Lost Larrikin. (APPLAUSE)  
That was so, so good. And if we wanted to find you on Facebook or

Instagram?

REMUS DOUGLAS: You can find me on Instagram at Larrikin Found.

KATE TOTMAN: Thank you for sharing your incredible talents with us.  
Let's give them one more round of applause. (APPLAUSE).

...

KATE TOTMAN: We'll get started with our Opening Ceremony on the main stage in just a minute's time, so it's not too late. Come and join us, come and take part as we kick off the official Opening Ceremony.

Well, good morning. Thank you so much for joining us here at the main stage. It's now an absolute pleasure to welcome to you the head of events of ImpactInstitute, Kathryn Carey. Let's now please put our hands together for Kathryn Carey. (APPLAUSE)

KATHRYN CAREY: On behalf of ImpactInstitute, I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the - sorry, I'm losing a book - as the traditional custodians of the lands on which we meet today. I would like to pay my respects to Elders past and present. I'd also like to acknowledge continuing connection to the land, sea and waterways that form the ACT region.

We would also like to acknowledge and also welcome any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be present and with us today at today's expo.

So, we're really delighted to have you at this event today. So, for those of you who don't know me, which is most of you other than my staff. For those of you who don't know me, I am the head of

ImpactInstitute, the head of events at ImpactInstitute, and for those of you who would benefit from a visual description, I am a woman in her 50s. I probably should start saying "late 50s" because I just turned 57. I've got fake orangey-brown hair, wearing black pants and a maroon jacket.

At ImpactInstitute, we are really proud to have brought you the My Future My Choice disability expo series for well over 10 years now. We did the maths at the back there and realised this is our fourth year at Canberra. We're really excited to be back in the ACT. In that 10 years, we have welcomed well over a quarter of a million people and 8,000 exhibitors to our events, which we're really proud of. This year, we also are bringing you the WorkAbility Expo and WorkAbility Expo is about finding meaningful employment for people with disability. So, if you haven't yet seen our WorkAbility employer lounge, it is just to my right near the registration desk. If you are interested in employment for people with disability, I definitely would recommend that you pop across and have a chat to some of our open employers who are with us today. We also have quite a few disability support services, employment support services who are with us as well.

They've all got a pink fascia so if you're wandering around and see someone with a really light pink fascia they are an organisation that is involved with employment for people with disability. So, definitely get along and see those people.

Events like today would not exist without the fantastic work, not only of my own staff, but there are a huge number of volunteers that join us throughout the two days and we value all of their contributions to the event. I also want to acknowledge all the exhibitors and the sponsors who are with us as well at this event.

I've got a couple of special thank yous and mentions to our

sponsors. Thank you to our platinum sponsor, Caring Approach, our gold sponsor 24Care Australia, Clover Care, Tender Loving Care Disability Services, APM, APM Employment Services also helps us with our WorkAbility expos, to our silver sponsors HoliCare Community Services, Focus ACT and Carers ACT. And also to our accessibility sponsor Independent Living Specialists, they provide all of our wheelchairs and our hoists so that attendees who need them can borrow them while we're here.

I also do want to also give a special thanks to Hotel Etico whose staff are here today. They are in the WorkAbility space and the lounge and it is a really ground-breaking program that trains people with a disability with the view that they will go out and work in the hospitality industry. There is literally nothing like this anywhere else in Australia.

This year, we are thrilled to have Logan Firth as our Canberra Disability and Workability Expo ambassador. Logan Firth is a Canberra-based historical fiction author whose debut novel - I have it in my hot little hand here - Sydney Convicts explores the untold stories of Australia's colonial past. As the ambassador, Logan brings her voice, her creativity and, of course, her lived experience to an event that celebrates inclusion, opportunity and the power of community and gathering.

Logan's journey as a writer began with quite a simple question really: Do you like to write? Apparently she does and she's very good at it. That moment sparked a passion for storytelling that led to the creation of this book, her first book, and an audio book and a growing presence in the disability advocacy space. She's involved in organisations like Daydream Machine and also Scouts Australia which has helped build her confidence, find connection and inspire others to embrace their own unique paths.

Living with mental and medical conditions, Logan understands the

importance of having a very supportive network especially for young people navigating challenges like mental health, social media pressures and identity. Through her writing, Logan shines a light on the resilience and brilliance of people with disability past and present, and that's something we are also very passionate about. Her work is a tribute to her strength, endurance and the belief that everyone deserves to be seen, heard and valued.

What I'm going to do now is welcome Logan to the stage. She is going to open the expo and then she and I are going to sit down and have a little chat. So, don't go anywhere. Sit tight and please welcome Logan Firth to the stage. (APPLAUSE).

LOGAN FIRTH: Hello. Welcome to the Disability and Workability Expo. My name is Logan. I am the ambassador for the expo itself. I haven't done a role like this before, so really exciting. So, I welcome you guys to the land of the traditional custodians, the Ngunnawal people, and acknowledge that sovereignty will never be ceded on traditional Country. It is a very special moment be here to symbolise inclusion and diversity in a society that's more adapted to neuro typical people and providing for them, not so much when you're a diverse people and working with youth in Scouts Australia and having mental and medical conditions myself, I understand the difficulties that come out of it and I'm just really passionate about showing people a different lens to it. (APPLAUSE).

KATHRYN CAREY: I was like, "No, I can speak from the lectern," but I can't. Not when I'm sitting down having a chat. All right, Logan, lovely to have you. You're an absolutely amazing young lady and we're really thrilled, as I said, to have you as an ambassador. Can you tell me when was the first moment that you just discovered that real love for writing?

LOGAN FIRTH: Yeah, so it was around late high school sort of period. I was listening to an audio book and it was actually - it turned out to be the wrong story that I originally was hoping to listen to. Listening to it going, "This is very weird. It's not - the name is different, the location's different," but then I actually ended up loving it. The language, the way Australian life was brought before the reader. I then figured maybe I wanted to try some writing, because I was a bit bored at the time. I did all I wanted to do so I decided I wanted to give writing a go.

So, I wrote a really long book and I think I did pretty well. I mean, I haven't published that really long book. It is way too long for people. And since then, I have just been writing books and poems.

KATHRYN CAREY: Fantastic. Also for anyone, I should mention, who wants to speak to Logan after or buy a copy of the book. She does have her books here with her and she will be at the side of the stage ready and waiting to see you after this. Lauren - sorry Logan, my apologies - you have spoken about living - how living with a mental and medical conditions has shaped your journey, but you've also used it to shape your storytelling. Tell us about that.

LOGAN FIRTH: Yeah, so Sydney's Convicts in a nutshell is about human violence, mental health, convicts' resilience and self-identity and we look at how historical human violence and mental health interplays into interactions between human and society. And I felt convicts were such a perfect way to do it because it's a very touchy part of our history but one that lot of people continue to have growing interest in, in understanding the convict world, what brought the convicts here, why they were sent here. And I felt by really toying with human emotions and just going into



the uncomfortable, lot of writers are not really comfortable going into uncomfortabilities out of fear of book rejection or they won't have an audience. But going into uncomfortabilities, we really see the process behind mental health, how one trauma, then another can really start to impact the way people cope in society and the way they respond. But then how, from the trauma, they find purpose. They know they don't want to be stuck in it and they know they're here for reasons. They find that courage to find themselves, to find their own lives.

And Emily Wilson, the main character, symbolises a process where, born into a loving family and thrown into a world which is depriving of a sense of yourself as a human and who you are, to then finding who she ultimately was and what she ultimately wanted to do and I guess then carrying that spirit on to the ending of the book which opens into the sequel which I'm currently writing, is really special.

KATHRYN CAREY: That's a nice plug. Good plug. So, a lot of your writing obviously focuses on historical fiction. What really draws you to the past and how do you use it to inform your writing?

LOGAN FIRTH: Yeah, so historical fiction - I mean, history has always been my passion, having been ex-home schooled. There was just two years straight where all I studied was history. I was not interested in anything else. I just wanted to dive into history. And I guess having lived experience, having survived multiple suicide attempts and things like that and having gone through a lot of trauma, I really felt connected to the complexity of human suffering and mental health and how that can really educate and inform a society that continues to have some stigma.

I mean, certainly society has improved. We are more open about talking in those sort of areas, but definitely still some stigma to break and

I think writing is such a perfect way to do it because writers ultimately are those intellectuals that we really learn from and we look up to as role models in a sense of where to go for change and how to accomplish change.

KATHRYN CAREY: Amazing. So, obviously you're super passionate about history, having just studied it non-stop for two years. That's pretty amazing. Why do you love history so much? What is it about history that, kind of, excites you?

LOGAN FIRTH: Yeah, so I think history, what excites me the most is just the stories. Learning about how the past has shaped the world and society and just learning that - how individual stories ultimately makes up our story today. Without the First Australians, without the convicts, those who went to war and never came back or those who went to war and came back broken and even those today doing it hard, the young people, the homeless, truly are the pioneers that continues to guide society in a way and history is just a perfect example of how one change can make more than just a change.

KATHRYN CAREY: Absolutely. And the thing I like about history personally is it's not just about what happened in the past, it's how do we learn the lessons of the past as we move forward as a society, which is really, really important as well.

So, as well as being a, sort of, history buff, you also work as a tour guide, I believe, in Canberra. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

LOGAN FIRTH: Yes, absolutely. So, I currently work as a tour guide over at Regatta Point. Absolutely fun. The kids are amazing. Very engaging. I

get a lot of kids that's very much engaged because I am donning the approach of not talking at them because I find they're not really there to be talked at. But I get them to really character-play, to place themselves in people's perspective. How the person would have survived, how the city would have been designed, who would have thought about, when they're designing the city, how to plan for the future, sort of thing. So, really getting them to character-play and to think through different perspectives I find has really engaged them and I've certainly got a lot of positive feedback from students, teachers and the general public saying that the program is very informative and I basically do my job really well. So, certainly lots of happy feedback and smiles.

KATHRYN CAREY: That's good. I can see your face just lights up when you talk about that work so it's obviously very important to you and you're making a really big difference.

Obviously, you're here as our ambassador and we love to find people politic yourself within the community who have just amazing stories and do amazing things. Tell us what does being an ambassador actually mean to you?

LOGAN FIRTH: Being an ambassador, I guess it just really means that I get to represent the part of society that gets crushed with stigma, little understanding, a lot of young people, special those with complex medical and mental conditions can feel really left out and misunderstood by a society that's not catering for them, which means that their full potential isn't getting reached.

And, I mean, I've been around a lot of neurodiverse people such as an amazing place called Daydream Machine where I'm a participant and we have a lot of musicians, medians, writers and even an amazing friend

that's made this really cool marble run, like engineers. When we look at neurodiverse people, society is very quick to see the label and to think that because you have this label you can't do this, but it is more than just a label. I say truly that if you have things like autism, PTSD, eating disorder, those sorts of things which I have myself, it doesn't define you. It's a part of your story. It's a part of who you are today, so really it's just about embracing it as a part of you but knowing that you're not disabled, it's just a different way of thinking, seeing and functioning in the world with talents that you just might have never found yourself before.

KATHRYN CAREY: Absolutely. You talked a little bit then about Daydream Machine and how it's, sort of, helped you grow. Can you share a little bit more about Daydream Machine and the role that it's really played in your creativity and your own personal development? You might need to, sort of, walk us through who Daydream Machine is and what they do.

LOGAN FIRTH: Definitely. Daydream Machine is run by, I believe, a local hero, Luke Ferguson. I believe he wanted to create Daydream Machine to really give neurodiverse kids a space to bring out their passions, to achieve their dreams. And the first time I met him, I mean, it was a bit awkward. It was at his old job and he loves music and when I first met him he said, "What's your talent? Do you like to sing?" I'm like, "No." He's like, "Okay, do you like music?" I said, "Only to listen to it." We're scratching our heads and he's like, "Do you like writing? You mentioned it earlier." I said, "Yeah, I like writing." He said, "What if we focus on your writing." I'm like, "That's a pretty good deal." For years now we've focused on my writing and through him I've got opportunities like this to not only advocate for mental health and changes in mental health and disabled people, but also to get my book out there.

KATHRYN CAREY: It's funny you mentioned singing because we thought you wrote and sang songs.

LOGAN FIRTH: I can only do the national anthem but I'm not one to do it in front of other people. I think writing is the talent I best thrive in and best contact.

KATHRYN CAREY: Fantastic. I can't sing either so I'm not going to sing either. You have mentioned the importance of having a team behind you. What advice would you give to young people still searching for that kind of support? What supports are out there?

LOGAN FIRTH: Definitely. For young people it is hard. We see family as someone we can open up to, that we can trust, but sometimes I find your best supports are outside of your family. Your family are definitely cheerleaders but sometimes your friends and support workers are better cheerleaders. When you're stuck and can't move past it, your friends keep reminding you that you have a purpose and once you find your purpose you have the drive to share it with others but then you have that drive to be able to stand up and firmly believe in yourself and to advocate, I guess, for those who aren't so lucky in that sort of position.

KATHRYN: Really good advice. Thank you. As well as Daydream Machine, you also work with Scouts Australia as a mentor, helping young people especially those with disabilities. You help them find their voices. What is that like?

LOGAN FIRTH: Scouts Australia has millions of members world would

from as young as five or six years old through to adulthood. In Scouts Australia, we're divided into five sections, the Joey Scout, Cub Scout, Venturer Scout, Scout and Rover Scout, we go joeys, cubs, venturers because it is a tongue twister saying it all. Working as a Rover, I had the opportunity to then go and volunteer in the joeys section and the joeys really being around kids, it just remind me of how beautiful life can be. Being an adult, I find we're more susceptible to being judged openly, where kids, they don't care about your background. They don't care where you're from. To them, you're just a big friend and the joeys certainly look up to the older members as role models. They see us going out there advocating in communities, working with communities to achieve common goals and they just see that level of influence and power and you see so much positivity going around as they realise that they don't want to do something that could damage their future. They want to be leaders. They want to be leaders, they want to be mentors and it's just really beautiful working not only in the Joey aspect but working with the national team, being one of the youth ambassadors, being part of a new project which we'll be working on, reconciliation within Scouting Australia. And having those opportunities has really enabled me to meet lots of young people who share common goals and to just mentor through young people whether they have a disability or they don't, and to just show them opportunities are waiting out there.

KATHRYN CAREY: It is fantastic. Young people in particular are very influenced by the role models in their live those it is very important work and, again, your eyes light up and you shine when you talk about it, so you're obviously very passionate about it.

In addition to being a writer, you're also involved in horse riding, you read a lot, as you might expect from a writer.

LOGAN FIRTH: Yes.

KATHRYN CAREY: And also like to travel. How do all of those activities support your wellbeing and creativity?

LOGAN FIRTH: Yeah, so I'm currently a riding student at the Forest Park Riding School and I guess at first I was a bit hesitant to open up to them about my conditions, but I ultimately opened up and said, "These are my conditions, but I really want to ride a horse." Because through my dad's side of the family is a little bit of horse history so I think it runs a bit in the blood unfortunately in my family but very fortunate for me. And, yeah, the moment I have been on the horse I just absolutely feel grounded and connected and the support they give me to be able to go and ride on the horse comfortably and just to be around the horse and build that level of trust that's crucial between a rider and a horse in order to achieve common goals, it's been absolutely beautiful.

And, of course, travelling around Australia and the world and reading lots - I mean, I always say to people "once a writer, always a writer", but ultimately the best skills you can have as a writer is travel, talk to lots of people, read lots. You're going to really get to know your English and really shine through the English, but also just your life experience. Ultimately, a lot of writers, we tend to write based on our life experience. It is a heavy influence that drives the sort of work we write about and without your life experience you can't really produce unique books. So, all those skills is an absolute essential, I believe, for any writer out there.

KATHRYN CAREY: Absolutely. I'm not a very good horse rider, I have to

say. The last time I did it I got very sore knees. I'm obviously not built for it but it's wonderful. What do you hope anyone here at the expo today, especially young people, take away from this event?

LOGAN FIRTH: Yeah, so for the young people out there, I'd just say just really have look through the expo, explore the different opportunities out there. You'll be surprised just the amount of organisations that's out there to work with you and even things like Australian Federal Police and that sort of big organisations, like there are a lot of policies and supports out there to support disabled people in achieving those sort of goals. So, just really look around, get to know the space, get to know the career opportunities and I will be floating around, most definitely over at the table to sell signed copies of my book for \$25 each. And if you just want to talk to me a bit about the expo a bit more or about writing or even history, I mean, I can rattle hours on end for history but I won't torture you in that way. But feel free to come over to the table or if you see me walking around don't be afraid to just say hello and just wave to me and talk to me whenever you want.

KATHRYN CAREY: Fantastic. Finally, obviously you've got your book but can you tell us what's next for you? Have you got any projects coming up that we should be on the lookout for?

LOGAN FIRTH: Yeah, definitely. So, I am writing the sequel to Sydney's Convicts which will be called A Bushranger's Glory. The sequel will move into the bushranger era. The twist is that it's the same family through each book, so it goes from Emily Wilson to her child and then ultimately their children. So, continuing through that family perspective while talking about an Indigenous perspective, so really honing in on the European



history of Australia but also our Indigenous history, which has been here for 65,000 years, a very long time and a very special part of our history.

And I won't say too much about the sequel but definitely hold your seats as there will be a lot of drama in the bushranger involved and certainly will involve some law enforcement.

KATHRYN CAREY: Fair enough. That sounds absolutely wonderful. Thank you, Logan. It has been so lovely to chat to you again. Please, please, please go and see Lauren - I keep calling you Lauren. I do not know why, but I do. My apologies. Please go and see Logan. It is a lovely name. Over at the table side of stage straight after this. Thank you so much.

LOGAN FIRTH: Thank you so much for having me.

KATHRYN CAREY: Thank you.

\*\*KATE TOTMAN: Let's give a huge round of applause for Kathryn Carey and Logan Firth. We adored hearing that chat. Let's give them a round of applause as they exit the stage. (APPLAUSE) You can catch Logan side of stage signing books and in half an hour at 12:00 we'll be hearing from Kathrine Peereboom talking about employment readiness for people with disability. We'll see you soon.

...

KATHRINE PEEREBOOM: We're going to go through a lot of things to help you navigate the job market very confidently and we're going to talk about things like identifying your unique skills, matching them to a job and creating a great resume that stands out. We're also going to cover

things like preparing for job interviews, and looking very importantly towards the end about touching on your workplace rights and your accommodations. So, by the end of this hour, I hope that you will be empowered to confidently navigate the job market and if you're already gainfully employed, understand what your rights are within the workplace.

So, just a little bit about me - I am a mum to three profoundly disabled children. They absolutely are the light of my life and they have changed the way that I work and have changed my work. So, I am the country's only trainer of police officers and paramedics to understand the disabled in the field. I have been working with NSW Police Force, Queensland Police force and Victorian police now for close to 10 years. I would love to say that there were more people in this. They're not. It's just me. But if anybody is ever interested, I'm always looking for people who can help and assist.

I'm very much in the disability advocacy space. I help individuals when I can. I am an employer. The majority of my workforce comprises of about 85% disabled in some way, whether it's cognitive or physical disabilities, so I employ a very large force. And that's, kind of, I guess who I am in a very quick nutshell. Thank you.

So, this is what we're going to quickly go through. Not quickly, this is what we're going through today. Identifying strengths and skills. Understanding what a job description is. Building out a standout resume. Preparing for interviews. Your rights and accommodations. And then, of course, there is a Q&A. At any point in time if I'm speaking about something and you're curious about it, please just raise your hand and we can handle questions in the middle of the presentation as well.

So, identifying your unique strengths - everybody has a skillset that sets you apart from another person. Whether it comes from an existing workplace, whether it comes from your hobbies or whether it comes from

daily life. And recognising these skills is really crucial and the very first step in opening new pathways to possibilities.

So, let's have a look at these core strengths that we want to look at. Number one, communication. Communication is a key skill for basically any job and it's not just about talking communications. It's also about writing and understanding others. So, let's have a look at what typically can be used in a workplace. Terms like "active listening", and that simply means just listening carefully and understanding what others are saying.

Expressing your ideas clearly - sharing your thoughts and ideas so they can also be understood. Now, in our community, communication comes in many forms. It doesn't mean that you have to have strong verbal skills. You could be using an AAC device, you could be using writing skills, you could be working from home and emailing if that's an effective way of communicating for you.

Empathy and understanding is something that our community of most communities require and understand the most because we want to make sure that we are - our individual circumstances are being shown empathy and our bosses understand who we are so that they can effectively accommodate us in the workplace.

And negotiation - depending on what your role is, negotiation is simply finding a compromise or a solution in a discussion or a disagreement or it's things like negotiating a pay rise or understanding what your rights are within the workplace and you're negotiating a more favourable term for you. And that could be, "I can't effectively work for 20 hours a week. The best you're going to get out of me is I'm able to work for four hours three times a week. Can we negotiate on how we can make that work?"

Organisational skills - we talk about things such as time

management. And time management is just simply being able to manage and plan and prioritise tasks to effectively meet deadlines. It also means things like showing up for work when you are scheduled to be there, on time. So, if you're starting work at 9:00, you are there at 9:00. And if you're not going to be there at 9:00, providing that communication, which was the very first point, in saying, "I'm terribly sorry. I'm stuck on the freeway," or, "I'm unwell," and making sure those lines of communication are always there. Communication, you will hear it a lot today, but communication is key because if I don't understand what's going on in your world, I can't make effective decisions to support you.

So, I'm not a mind reader - nobody is a mind reader - so if we're able to communicate via text message, email, verbal communication, having an advocate come in and support you so, if it's your support worker, an allied health worker or somebody who is a legal guardian for you, all of these things are effective ways to communicate.

Task coordination - attention to detail and depending on your role, whether it's graphic design, data entry, placing an order, if you're the head cashier at somewhere like McDonald's or Hungry Jack's , making sure that your attention to detail is there. So, if somebody is allergic to onions, we make sure we remove that from the order.

Resourcefulness is again just another way that people try and say, "We just want a creative solution." Problem solving skills, adaptable, just being flexible and for some people change is not something that they can handle very well. And if you know that about yourself, that change is something that you struggle with, then making sure that you communicate that in your job interview and when you are initially liaising with your boss is something that's really important. "I don't manage change very well but if you work with me in this way, I will absolutely help to achieve the team task."

Decision-making - analytical thinking and showing initiative. Showing initiative, for any employer, is something that is absolutely celebrated. So, initiative just means that you've come up with a creative idea for the office, for a project, for a client situation and you're bringing it forth to the team for discussion. And I love those things. I have a gentleman who works for me and he's so beautiful, and he wanted to come in every day into the office and do a boogie, can do a dance, right. So, we have three days a week at 9:00 when he comes in, we all stop, we get the music going, we all have a boogie, we have a dance. It just sets the vibe for such a cool, fun day. That's initiative. It doesn't have to be bringing in a \$20 million client. It's things that create positive environments within the workplace.

So, team collaboration is we're always going to be working with people even if we work from home some of the time, we are going to have to have team meetings, online meetings, things like that. So, when you're part of a team, the things that an employer is typically looking for are reliable, so making sure that we're there and showing up for our team. Just being respectful of one another and remembering that I would like to be spoken to in a respectful way so I'm going to treat others with that same respect and that same kindness.

Conflict resolution - it's talking about managing disagreements. The amount of disagreements I've had in workplaces over silly things like somebody eating too many Monte Carlo biscuits from the kitchen or somebody taking somebody's sandwich out of the fridge because it looked yummy and didn't have a name on it. Okay, we shouldn't have done that but these are the little things that typically come up that can start to manifest and cause tension within an office place so it is a matter of just managing disagreements and motivating others. Again, a positive attitude will always extend outside of that.

Now, we're not going to do any exercises today because we simply don't have time. But if you wanted to do screenshots I'm not too fussed, but it's about taking what we've just learned about those four categories and starting to think about how do they, in my day-to-day life, even if I'm not employed yet, how can I utilise some of those things I do in my day-to-day life and make those apply and transfer to an employable skill? We're going to go through a bit more in a minute where I will give you some interesting things, some interesting strategies.

So, understanding job descriptions - I don't know if you've ever been on Seek or you've spoken to HR recruiters and they use these buzz words all the time and it can be a little overwhelming and a little confusing especially now when they put their job description in ChatGPT to make them sound much more sophisticated when it's not necessary. So, let's have a look at just some of these basic JDs, job descriptions, that people will use.

A team player. And I mean we've already covered that but it means exactly what it says. It's just somebody who is able to work within a team environment, and so how does that apply to your real life? If you are 16 and you're looking for your very first job, think about a scenario at Christmas time where you've got all the family coming over to your place for Christmas lunch and you've been allocated certain tasks. So, your role is to sort out the dining table, it's to make sure that all the placemats are there, all the cutlery is sorted out, you're making sure all the condiments are on the table. Your job is also to make sure the place has been vacuumed and everything is looking pristine. So, you've been delegated certain roles and responsibilities that you have been told to execute. These are transferrable skills, and that's what I'm talking about applying real life into these scenarios.

A self-starter or somebody who is highly motivated is just talking

about somebody who is productive and can remain productive without needing constant supervision and constant reminds.

Attention to detail - I think we've covered attention to detail but it is just for somebody who is - especially in those critical roles of accounting, data management, graphic design, somebody who has got a really keen eye and can manage attention to detail without requiring double-checking or triple checking of work.

Customer focused or customer service skills - so in customer-facing roles, customer focus just simply means they value someone who can provide a friendly service, someone who can talk to customers, understand their needs and solve problems with a positive attitude. If you're working in a cafe or a McDonald's or something where it is a face-to-face role, you're the receptionist of a real estate agent, when people come in you're friendly, able to handle whatever their crisis is and if it is out of your responsibility you say, "Thank you so much. I'll go and get my manager. We are going to resolve your problem."

Adaptable or flexible - another key buzz word that people love to put in their job descriptions. And it just means they're looking for somebody who can adapt to change as new situations arise within a fast-paced workplace. And these things - we're going to talk a little bit later about understanding what your comfort zones are within a workplace. And I use this analogy, like when you're trying to find a partner in life, right. There are green flags and there are red flags when you're looking for somebody in your life, right. Same with employers. When you are interviewing for a job, you are interviewing your future employer as much as they are interviewing you. You're wanting to make sure from the outset that it is going to be a green flag work environment for you. Because if you're seeing the red flags from the interview process, it's not going to be a healthy work environment for you or for the loved

one that you're supporting.

Now, I'm already running behind time. Let's look at this. So, building a standout resume is something that really is going to set you apart immediately from your competition. And no matter what type of job you're looking for, a clear well-organised resume is always going to win over somebody who has got a very highly complex CV. So, let's have a look at what we're looking for in a resume.

So, keep it really simple and easy to read. If writing is challenging for you, use bullet points. Bullet points are absolutely your friend and it is something that is very easy for the person who is reading your CV to cast their eye over a bullet point versus paragraphs and paragraphs of information. So, keep it really clean and simple. Focus on your experiences that match the job. So, in this day and age, in 2025, it would be a positive thing for you to have two or three resumes in your template kit. And a couple of different cover letters as well, so you're matching the job to that particular CV, right. And you want to use - especially in the cover letter - you want to match the buzz words that was in the job description to the cover letter so they understand. Because what happens now is if 300 people apply, they have AI filters now that search for buzz words to see if you match. So, a human being half the time now isn't even looking at the CV. It goes through a filter first so if you match the buzz words then you're absolutely going to get through that first hurdle.

Highlight any responsibilities that you've taken care of. So, instead of just saying, "I helped at a community event." You can say, "I assisted with organising a community event for 50 participants." You want to get into the detail of it. So, just not saying it's a high-level, "I helped at this event," saying, "I made sure it was a safe environment and these were the tasks that I undertook." Showcasing your strengths - so if you're comfortable with it, jot down a few action words that fit your experience



to describe what you did in a very positive way. And definitely include any - we've just lost the presentation, guys - but definitely use any skills and certifications that you have.

So, if you speak multiple languages, if you are a sign - if your able to use sign language, these are all wonderful things to add. If you've done a Saint John's first aid, if you're proficient in Canva, if you're proficient in Microsoft, whatever that may be you want to include those in your CV. Just have a look here at a couple of different CVs and the things that really stand out.

So, you don't have to stick a photograph of yourself there these days, but a lot of people do. The one thing that an employer is definitely going to do if you have been short listed is they're going to look at your social media presence out there. Your Facebook, your Twitter, your Instagram, your SnapChat. They're going to look at your social media presence, so it's really important for us to have mindfulness when we are combatting keyboard warriors, if we're starting to get involved in conversations on there because they can come back to haunt you. As well as things like - I'm not going to go into that one but there are lots of things that people put up on social media that may not be attractive to a future employer. And remember a digital footprint is there forever, even if you think you've deleted it, it's still there.

So, contact information is something that you want at the top of every CV. You want your skillsets, any languages, any education and then a series of what your expertise is. If you are a more mature person trying to reengage into the workforce after having children, after having an accident or you've been made redundant and you're coming back into the workforce, employers do not want to see a resume that starts from 1984. We don't want to see 25 - your past 25 jobs. What we want to see is your past maybe five to 10 years and highlight those in chronological order, so

starting from 2025 and then going backwards.

If you have been, like my dad who's had one job literally for 60 years, totally different scenario, but if you're somebody who changes jobs every 12 to 18 months to further your career, we want to make sure that we only highlight the last five to 10 years max.

Preparing for job interviews - this is a really daunting thing for a lot of people. It can bring about anxiety, it can bring about a lot of stress for people who are really wanting to get gainful employment and I know myself I used to sweat a lot wanting to make sure that I did a really wonderful job, and put a lot of pressure on myself before walking into any role. So, these are some of the things that we can do to prepare our loved ones before going into any employment situation.

So, number one is researching the company and the role that you are applying for. You want to understand what is their ethos? What is their moral compass? Do they - what the company does, are they going to align with what your moral compass is? Check out their social media. Check out if they've been in the news for any good or bad things. You want to make sure that you understand and you've got a couple of questions too to ask them at the end of it "what are your plans for the business for the next five years?" So, researching them a really critical thing.

Practical interview questions that come up in every single job, it doesn't matter what role that you are applying for, these are things that you can use to prepare yourself in advance. Rehearse them. "Tell me a little bit about yourself." Here, we just want a summary of your skills, your experience and what really interests you. "Why do you want to work here?" Focussing then on the job and the company alignment with your skills and your interests. And this one always comes up, "Tell me about a time that you've faced a challenge and how you handled it." Again,

they're just looking for resilience in any situation so it can be a school setting where you were being bullied in school and how did you handle that situation? It could be where somebody has been unkind to you, you had to sack an employer, it doesn't matter what the situation is, they just want to talk about how did you find a challenging situation and navigate that effectively.

It's okay also to have cheat sheets. So, if you want to have an iPad or a little notebook in your interview with some bullet points to help stay back on focus and not lose your tangent, you're absolutely allowed to have those accommodations in an interview just to help you stay on track.

And that goes into the next thing, which is preparing for accommodations. So, if you do require any specific accommodations in the interview process such as extra time to answer a question, a quieter environment, it is absolutely okay to request these in advance but you need to give the person at least 48 hours in order to match those accommodations, right.

And I need to really assert here employers and future employers are legally required to provide reasonable adjustments under the disability discrimination Act and most of them are willing to do so. So, if they're asking you, "How can I best accommodate you?" It is okay to say, "I work better in a quieter office space and if it's okay to work from home three days a week and be in the office part time, that will help you get the best out of me and that's how I'm most effective. Will that work for you?" That goes to what we were talking about at the front, communication and negotiation.

The star method is something that is used a lot these days and it's just asking around behavioural questions. Have you heard of the STAR method? Yes. Wonderful. So, I probably don't need to go into that

but - okay. So, you can see it here. So, it's talking about STAR - situation, task, action and results. So, the situation is we just want to briefly explain the context of the situation. The task is to describe what you needed to do to accomplish that situation. Action - what did you do? How can you explain how you handled that situation and what you did and what the result was? Now, a result doesn't have to be a positive result. It can be a failure. Failures are absolutely accepted in business because you learn from them. This is what happened, this is how I handled it and this was the end result. But next time, I would do this differently to get this result and that goes again back to what we were talking about with showing initiative. Bringing that back into the initiative.

Showcase your unique qualities. Every single human being on this planet is unique. We all have attributes that can bring something to an organisation. So, we want to make sure that you highlight those things that make you so special and so unique. Oftentimes, people will come to me for a specific job that I've advertised. And once I start talking to them, I say, "Have you ever considered this role? Because whilst the I understand that you're applying for this role y think that you would be phenomenal in this space. Not asking you to make a decision on it right now I'd love for you to go away and have a think about it and come back to me because I think you would be amazing in marketing or in this section." So everybody's very unique and we have something to bring to the table.

This is a big one for a lot of people. Let me preface this by saying it is absolutely normal to feel nervous before an interview. We have to look at what works for you. Is it counting to 10? Is it deep breaths? Is it bringing a sensory toy into an interview process that you can squish a ball or hold something that makes you feel more at ease within yourself? And remembering it's our time to shine. We don't have to answer questions in

a rapidfire way. You can take time to process the question and answer that effectively on your own time. So, these are things that you can use to prepare yourself. Get an OT, a speech pathologist, somebody in your multidisciplinary team, somebody who's not mum and dad or their regular guardian, because it's like when you learn to drive a car or whatever and mum and dad are in the car and it's just not a good fit, right. Ah! We want to make sure that it is somebody that can push our buttons in a different way to get that response out of you and you want to get that response because the more you practise, the more you're going to be comfortable in the line of questionings that will come.

All right, we'll do - okay so these are the things that we want to do here for an online interview. Again, we want to research the organisation and make sure that we've got a couple of key notes to ask them in the interview process. Most of the time you will be sent a link, whether it's Google Meets, Zoom, Teams, whatever it might be. Make sure that you check the link before - at least 24 to 48 hours beforehand. We want to make sure that our screenshot that is behind us is appropriate. So, hide our dirty clothes, make sure that there's no alcohol or things - naughty things that are hidden in the back of our screen. And don't use things like, you know, Dragon Z ball as your back screen. We want to make sure it is a professional screen setting so test that screen setting before you go online for the interview.

Make sure your audio and video is working, whether you're going to use headphones, just make sure your microphone and your video is working, and then practise those meditation techniques, again whatever works for you. If you've got a squishy ball, if you've got sensory things, whatever that might be.

In person, it's very basic. Be puncture. Show up to the interview 15 minutes before time. If you're nervous, you might want to go to the toilet

three times before your interview but make sure that you're there at least 15 minutes prior. Be polite. If it's not for you, that's OK. If you're feeling very overwhelmed and this environment is too stressful for you and you say, "You know what, thank you so much, this just isn't for me," but being polite because you will be remembered.

Be prepared, so make sure you've got your questions for the organisation and that you've done your homework on what the job role is. And be positive. I can tell you I've employed so many people who have just had the right attitude over somebody who's got a resume full of experience who is arrogant. I don't want somebody who's arrogant, it doesn't matter how exceptional they are on paper, in my work environment making my work environment toxic. I would rather have somebody who's got a base level line of skills, who is positive and I can upskill them, because that is the right person that I want in my organisation. And these are the things that people are definitely looking for in this day and age.

After the interview, whether it is online or whether it's in person, these are the things that a lot of people forget to do and it will set you apart. Send an email within 24 to 48 hours to say thank you, even if the job isn't for you. Email the employer or the HR agent and say, "Thank you so much for your time. It was such a pleasure to meet you. I'm looking forward to the next interview," or, "Thank you so much. This isn't a right fit for me and I wish you well in your search." They might go, "That person might be better in this departments."

It's also good to just highlight a couple of things you learned maybe in that. And reflection. Reflect on what you did well and reflect on what you can improve on for the next interview. And if that means practising, whatever that means for you, make sure that you reflect because reflection is the only way that we're going to improve and get better each

time.

How am I going? All right. That's it. Before the interview, during the interview and after the interview. They're the core things. All right, the scary stuff. This is where dad's going to get out the camera for pretty much every screen, I think. It's okay. It's really important stuff. So, it's now time to discuss workplace rights and accommodations.

In Australia, the community is protected by very specific laws that ensure we have equal access to job opportunities, safer working conditions and reasonable accommodations to support your success and understanding these rights can give you confidence as you enter or re-enter the workforce. I'm going to have my eyes down on my computer a lot now because it's legal and I don't want to provide the incorrect information, so I'm here if you need a question, holler.

Okay, our number one body, our legal body is the disability Discriminations Act. If you are not aware, the DDA at the moment is asking for contributions to refine and update the DDA. It is a public document. If you've got any contributions, please go to the DDA website and feel free to write a submission because it is being updated from 1992. It is going to be redone for 2026. So, any contributions from the community right now are incredibly valuable.

So, we are protected by the DDA1992. It is the primary law protecting people with disabilities from discrimination. This law makes it illegal for employers to treat someone unfairly because of their disability. So, for example, they cannot deny you a job just simply because you are disabled and they must make reasonable adjustments to help you perform in the workplace.

So, they need to make sure that - the only exclusions are where it would be a financially unjust situation for the employer. So, if you go for a job and the organisation only makes \$150,000 a year turnover and in

order to employ you, your accommodation costs would cost that organisation \$80,000, that's an unjustifiable financial expense to that organisation and that's the only time they can say, "I'm sorry, we're unable to accommodate you in that way."

The second organisation that we've got is Fair Work. The Fair Work Act also supports employees by providing protection against discrimination, including Owen the basis of disability. This Act implies that almost all workplace - and it covers rights such as fair pay, Safe Work environment and protections against up fair dismissal. So, if you're worried about a workplace safety or fair treatment, the Fair Work Act is also an incredibly important support for us. And the third one is workplace health and safety. So, they will then come in and make sure that accommodations in the workplace are there so you can safely and effectively do your job.

As we've discussed already through this presentation, you are legally allowed to ask for accommodations in a workplace such as working from home, such as working in a quieter environment, such as utilising noise-cancelling headphones. Voice communication may not be your preferred methodology of communication so using things like email, voice-to-text, things such as your AAC device, all of these are accommodations that absolutely can be requested. Assistive technology - if somebody doesn't have assistive technology within their workplace, the workplace can provide that. And accessible furniture modifications - so for somebody who has physical disabilities, there are differences in furniture that you can also request as an accommodation within the workplace that needs to be adhered to.

All right, so where's Mel? Is Mel around? Do you want to come up here? This is the part where Mel and I normally do a little bit of a tag team because Mel is an incredible person who has such a wealth of



experience and she always has valuable contributions in this part. So, what we're going to talk about is how and when to disclose your disability. It's important to note you are not legally required to disclose your disability to your employer unless it affects your ability to do the job or if you need specific accommodations.

So, if you decide to disclose, then we want to focus on our strengths and the things that are going to make you such a big success to the team in order to complete that job or what that role is. Disclosing - do you want to have a word on that? Disclosing your disability for an interview.

MEL HARRISON: Whether we should do it or not do it? Yes, OK. Hello everyone. I'm Mel. So, when it comes to disclosing whether you have a disability or not, when you're going for a job, you've got the complete discretion of whether you actually do that. You don't have to disclose whether you have a disability. The one thing I will say though is if you have - or you're going for a job where your disability might impact the fact of you being able to do it, you may want to let them know, because by them knowing they can actually put reasonable adjustments into place to ensure that you can do that job. And a workplace does have the responsibility to put reasonable adjustments into place for you to be able to do that job. They legally can't say you can't but as long as it meets the requirements to do the job.

KATHRINE PEEREBOOM: That's exactly right. So, a couple of questions that will often get asked is: Can you perform the essentials of this role? So, again, feel free to screenshot any of these things if you like. It's up to you. But they are allowed to ask. If you are confident, say, "I'm absolutely confident that I'm able to do this," and then the legal notes are you've always got the DDA, the Disability Discrimination Act, on your side

even in an interview process.

Does your disability affect your ability to work? And this is again a question that they had not allowed to ask within any working environment. So, these are responses that you can utilise. "My disability does not affect my ability to perform the job." Mel's had situations where she has gone for roles, very capable of doing the role, and then she gets there and it's two flights of stairs and she can't get up to the building. So, that would affect her ability to do the job because she simply physically cannot get into the building but it doesn't affect her ability to execute the role from another location.

MEL HARRISON: And I've also had experience where I have been able to get into the workplace and I've had the interview, I've gotten a job but then they've asked me to go in and check out the bathroom to see whether I'd be able to access the bathroom and they said, "If you can't access the bathroom you won't be able to obviously do the job." I'm like, "No, you can actually make the bathroom accessible because if I can do the job you can get modifications to change the bathroom." So it is about knowing what your rights are as well.

KATHRINE PEEREBOOM: We're going to run out of time and I really want to get through to some of the other screens, but these are basic questions that if you think about everything we have discussed from open communication to basic negotiation and just being open with the dialogue and remembering green flags and red flags, you know. If the organisation is a green flag, they will say to you up front, "Hi. Thank you so much for being open with your communication. I would love to support you in this way or this way." And if they say, "You know what, can't help you. If you can't get up the stairs that's your problem." Do you really want to work

for them in the first place? Probably not. So these are the types of questions that a red flag might ask you.

Have you had gaps in your employment history? I think everybody has. Whether it is a medical situation, pregnancy, travelling Europe for a year, everybody has gaps in employment history. Just be forth right in what your answer is and practise what you want to say.

What accommodations might you need in the workplace? Again, is a legal requirement for organisations to make those adjustments unless it will cause them unnecessary financial hardship, which is what we've spoken about.

How do you handle stressful situations? Again, we've covered that one. Dad getting all of them in there.

Can you provide medical certificates or details of your health condition? Mel, do you want to have a word on that one? No?

MEL HARRISON: You need to provide a medical certificate if it's actually going to impact you doing the job, but if it's not impacting you doing the job you do not need to provide that medical certificate because it's no-one's business to know what's going on for you medically or disability-wise.

KATHRINE PEEREBOOM: Correct. What time will you need for health reasons or something that might impact your disability? So, this is a question that may come up and, really what we want to continue to focus on is your strengths and attributes that are going to be brought forward to that organisation. Everybody has time off. Everybody has medical things, children who get sick, different situations that arise in your life. It's not something that is a deal breaker, so just redirect the conversation to your tangent of what makes you such an asset to that organisation.

And tangent, go on a tangent about your strengths and why you are a good fit for that job. Be passionate about why you want to work there.

Are you able to complete all of the physical tasks that are required for the job? Again, it's a disclosed thing, whether you choose to disclose or not, but there are certain roles that will require physical things. So, if you are working in a role that requires you to stock shelves at Woolworths for instance and you're unable to do certain physical things, it may not be an alignment for you. But we want to make sure that you understand that that is a question that they can clarify and ask of you.

Your summary of legal rights - I've got 2 minutes. Disclosure is optional. You are not required to disclose your disability unless it affects your ability to perform the essential functions of the job. Reasonable accommodations are required by law and please feel empowered to ask for those accommodations. Anti-discrimination protections, the disability discrimination Act, the DDA, the Fair Work Act and workplace health and safety are there every step of the way. They are free services, free services there to support you. If you feel that you have been violated. And privacy of medical information - employers are limited to what they can and can't ask you. Yes, I've required a medical certificate because I've taken 10 days off work. But they are not allowed to ask you why. That's none of their business, what your personal medical situation is.

And that's - you've been amazing. Thank you for listening. I know that was an incredible amount of information to, sort of, take in. If you've got any questions, Mel and I are here.

KATE TOTMAN: We do have a mic here if anyone does have a question.

MEL HARRISON: Your microphone is not on.

KATE TOTMAN: Is it not? It's on, isn't it? Yeah, there we go. We do have a microphone here if anyone would like to ask a question of Kathrine or Mel. No, that's because you were so thorough. Let's have a huge round of applause for Kathrine Peereboom and Mel Harrison. Thank you so much for sharing that with us. We absolutely loved it. (APPLAUSE) And in 10 minutes' time we'll be hearing from NDIS talking about employment assistance.

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KATE TOTMAN: Now let me introduce you to Harry from NDIA community engagement team. Harry is based out of Deakin and today is talking to us about the available employment supports for working-age participants. Please put your hands together as we welcome to the microphone, Harry. (APPLAUSE).

HARRY: I am from the New South Wales ACT community engagement team. I am based out of the Deakin office here in the ACT and today I will be talking to you about employment supports for working-age participants.

So, just before we begin y would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the Country on which we meet today and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. I pay my respects to their Elders past, presents and emerging and I extend that acknowledgment and respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here with us today.

A participant needing help with work could be a student of working age wanting after-school work or work experience, transitioning from work, training or education, needs to change occupation because of

disability, already working but having difficulty because of disability, wanting to be self-employed, seeking career change or to advance their career and never had paid work but wants to try to work.

We also have the Let's Talk About Work booklet. This booklet is available online and we do also have hard copies at our booth which is booth number 55 and 56. So let's explore some of the NDIS supports available to help working-age people build their skills and start their employment journey.

NDIS funding can help prepare for work, build aspiration for employment, gain confidence in a working setting, establish foundation employment skills, develop an identity as a future worker through discovery activities and undertake work experience. Find and keeping a job - this can be connecting with the right employer, customising a job that's right for you, on-the-job support which are supports in employment, and capacity-building to manage in a work setting.

Progress at work - this can be skills development over and above employer obligations, career planning and changing jobs. There are various NDIS-funded supports to help participants pursue employment goals. The purple categories are in the capacity-building budget of an NDIS plan. These are generally time-limited supports focussing on growth and development and linked to specific employment goals. Over the next few slides, we will unpack these supports, including employment assistance to build skills for work and finding and keeping a job and employment-related assessment and counselling to help develop a pathway to work.

Supports in employment, shown in white, are for participants who need an ongoing higher level of day-to-day support. This is placed in the core budget of an NDIS plan. Although not specifically an employment support, social, community and civic participation can help participants to

start to develop skills for independence, particularly as they get closer to reaching working age. Skills required to access the community, for example travelling independently, managing money, communicating and socialising, are also useful for work. Participating in the community can also help to build relationships and connections which can often lead to employment opportunities.

Outside of these employment-specific categories, there are also therapeutic services, life-long learning and daily activities which can contribute to the development of skills for work.

So, a bit more about employment assistance as mentioned in the previous slide, these are placed in the capacity-building area of your NDIS plan budget. This funding is for exploring what work means, building essential foundation skills for work, managing and eliminating barriers to obtaining and sustaining employment and specialised job customisation. This funding could benefit young participants of working age who need support to undertake work experience or gain a part-time job whilst at school, people whose disability affects them in these areas of learning, social interaction and self-management to build skills and transition from school to work, participants transitioning from school to tertiary education or training who need support to connect with appropriate services or who require support to obtain employment on completion of a qualification, participants of working age with no or minimal employment history or a history of unsuccessful work experiences who need their skills for work, to find and keep a job, those who need help to build their capacity to run their own microenterprise and those who need help to change jobs and progress their career.

Employment related assessment and counselling is delivered by suitably qualified professionals, eg psychologists, vocational rehabilitation, occupational therapists as well. It can include vocational assessments to

understand a person's transferrable skills, qualifications and interests to help identify potential future employment and/or training options and the help a participant needs to successfully reach their goals. It can provide advice on matches to suitable roles to inform career direction.

Functional assessment - this is help to identify whether a candidate has the physical, cognitive and emotional capacity to perform a job safely and effectively, to recommend reasonable adjustments and inform a graduated commencement or return to work. Counselling, education and support for the participant, the employer and others in the workplace and counselling when a participant's disability prevents their return to their previous occupation to assist them to adjust to a change of career direction.

Supports in employment are included in the core budget of a participant plan and for participants with moderate to high support needs who either have a job and require ongoing support in the workplace or who are about to start a job. These participants are typically less independent in performing work tasks or need frequent prompting and coaching to stay on track, communication with others or manage behaviours and generally these supports are greater than those provided by an employer through reasonable adjustments or by an Inclusive Employment Australia provider.

Supports in employment provide the regular day-to-day supports a participant needs to meaningfully participate and be productive at work in an employment setting of choice. Supports in employment may be provided one to one or within a group-based setting. Completing existing or expected employer supports, funding is based on the intensity and frequency of supports delivered to assist the person to maintain their employment. Supports can include jobs in the public or private sector, microbusinesses or family-run businesses, supported employment



services and supported work experience and volunteering.

With micro-enterprises, like in other employment environments, the NDIS would fund supports related to a person's disability to build their employment capacity and to maintain their employment. For example, the NDIS could potentially fund capacity-building supports for activities like discovery to explore interests, skills, preferred environments and activities, mentoring, capacity-building to understand the opportunities, roles and responsibilities of operating a small business. Please note, whilst talking about the possibility of self-employment, there may be other government or community supports available like the self-employed assistance scheme. You can find more information about this on the Workforce Australia website. This program offers free accredited small business training, business plan development, business mentoring and so on. However, there are specific eligibility requirements and so this may only be relevant to a small number of participants.

Some participants may choose to work in a supported employment service or social enterprise. These are not-for-profit organisations who offer a wide range of occupations and training in industries, including packaging, assembly production, recycling, screenprinting, plant nursery, garden maintenance and landscaping, also cleaning services, laundry services and food services. Disability and social enterprises can provide ongoing support, ongoing employment or act as a stepping stone, enabling people with disability to gain skills and confidence.

We've spoken a lot about the supports that the NDIS may fund to help NDIS participants to pursue their employment goals, however, there are many supports that are not funded by the NDIS. These include things that are the responsibility of the mainstream or are things that everyone would have to pay for regardless of whether they have a disability or not.

Education and tuition fees across all higher education and vocational

education settings are not funded by the NDIS. Any supports including assistive technology for students that primarily relate to their education and training, building modifications to higher education and VET settings, services from a person employed for education purposes by the participant's higher education or VET provider, personalised learning or supports for students that primarily relate to their educational attainment, assistive products which are fixed or non-transportable in higher education or VET settings that enable a student or trainee to access education or training. For example, hoists and specially adapted furniture. Also text books and learning aids, including in alternative formats such as Braille or Easy English and education and training to facilitate transition to employment generally provided in higher education and VET settings.

I'll now run through preparing for your NDIS planning meeting. If you have some big changes coming up in your life, like finishing school or starting a new job or changing jobs, you may need to make changes to your plan. Remember, you don't need to wait for your next check-in to ask for changes to your plan. There are two ways to change your plan. A plan variation or plan reassessment. You should talk with your LAC or the NDIA planner about your goals during the participant's check-in. An NDIA planner or LAC will work with you to determine the most appropriate supports to help you achieve your goals, whether you're still at school or about to transition from school to post-school life. Just note, if you are in Year 12 and do not have a check-in schedule by the time you finish school, contact your local area coordinator, support coordinator or the NDIS to arrange a check-in and discuss your employment goals and supports.

Preparing for your planning conversation. If you have a job and need support at work, ask your employment support provider for information about the support you require to bring to your planning

conversation. This should include the assistance you receive or need to be productive at work, the frequency of support, whether this is the days, hours and times you are supported, the intensity of the support, whether this is the supports provided in group or one to one or maybe a mix of both, and any additional support required such as designing job tasks and customising on-the-job learning tools. These can be in addition to the daily contact hours.

I'll now run over other services and programs. The NDIS can only fund work and study supports that are not better funded or provided through another program or service. We call these other supports mainstream services because they are available to all Australians and are not just for people with disability. There are many services and programs available to help people work and study. There are also many non-government organisations who provide information and advocacy about how to prepare for and develop aspirations, to seek employment and how to find and keep a job. Links to some of these are available at our stand and we can also provide the Let's Talk About Work booklet.

NDIS supports are the extra supports that a participant needs because of their disability. NDIS providers should work together with mainstream services and programs to get the mix for participants. A person does not have to be an NDIS participant to access the Inclusive Employment Australia however many NDIS participants may need additional capacity-building skills funded in their NDIS plan to develop an understanding of their employment potential before they consider utilising the DES supports.

So, what kind of support do you need? So, Inclusive Employment Australia provide independence in the community, understand work skills, interests and capabilities and minimal ongoing support. NDIS supports in employment, need ongoing and frequent on the job to keep your job.

NDIS capacity-building employment supports - this would be if you need to build capacity to understand work skills, interests and capabilities, prepare for work, learn to follow instructions, gain experience in actual work settings with support, find the right job and successfully engage with an IEA partner. And NDIS community participation, this would be if you need to build capacity to access and be involved in the community, including developing skills that can be used in the workplace.

I'll now run through connecting with a provider. Your NDIS local area coordinator or support coordinator can help you find the right providers to meet your needs. You can also research providers and their services by either searching on the Internet, looking at reviews from others who have used that provider, getting advice from friends or family, using the outcomes by provider lists and other materials available on the NDIS website and also speaking with different providers about how they can help you achieve your goals. It is a good idea to meet with new providers before you start working with them.

So, some tips for selecting a suitable provider. Just to remember, you can use one provider or a combination of different providers. You can change providers at any time and you are not locked in to a single provider. Employment assistance should be individualised and help you to achieve your unique goals. The provider comparison work sheet is a resource on the NDIS website to help participants to choose a provider. So, questions to ask your provider - these could include, "What supports and services do you offer? Are supports and services individualised to my goals? How will you assist me to achieve my employment goals and aspirations? Will you provide me with different work experience opportunities in areas of my interest? What qualifications and experiences do your staff have? Do you provide a mix of one-on-one and group-based learning opportunities?" You could also ask, "How many participants who

previously received support from you went directly into employment?" You could also ask, "Can I make an appointment to visit your premises, see your facilities and speak to other participants and do you offer a taster or a trial?" You may also want to ask, "What makes your service different and why would I engage with your service?" That does bring us to the end of today's presentation. I do note there is some time left for questions. If anybody does have any questions I am more than happy to answer them and we do also have some recruitment staff based over there right next to WorkAbility booths 1 and 2 and I am also available at booth 55 and 56.

KATE TOTMAN: Thank you so much, Harry. All let's have a huge round of applause for Harry. What booth can we find you at?

HARRY: 55 and 56.

KATE TOTMAN: If you have questions for Harry and the team, head to booths 55 and 56. Huge round of applause as he exits the stage.  
(APPLAUSE) Next up we hear from Ellie Cole and the power of disability employment. See you soon.

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KATE TOTMAN: Good afternoon and thank you for being here at the main stage with us. It's now a pleasure to welcome our next speaker. Paralympian Ellie Cole is honestly like no-one you've ever met before. After losing her right leg to cancer at age three, in 2021 she became Australia's most decorated female Paralympic athlete with a record-breaking 17 Paralympic medals and an OAM. Today, Ellie is

representing our gold sponsor APM to talk to us about the power of disability employment. Let's please all put our hands together as we welcome to the stage Ellie Cole (APPLAUSE).

ELLIE COLE: Good afternoon. I hope you're enjoying your lunch and the exhibition. I hear there is an incredible petting zoo. I am honoured to be here today as a speaker on behalf of APM and love coming to the disability expos in particular and seeing a lot of passion in the area as well as innovation and what people are doing in the industry of disability lately. My name is Ellie Cole. I am wearing a navy blue polo with an APM logo. I am a Paralympic athlete. I finished 17 years in the Australian swimming team. My son a clapping that. That's great. I have experienced some interesting aspects of life particularly around disability over my time being on the Australian swim team and a lot of observations about being a person with a disability as well, particularly now that I have retired from sport and had a chance to reflect on my swimming career. Before I begin I will give you context on how I acquired my disability. I was born as an able-bodied little girl but one night in 1993y was just two years old, my health took a turn for the worst and overnight I was diagnosed with cancer.

Now, I did mention I was just two years old. We did try a year of chemotherapy and a few clinical trials but this was obviously unsuccessful and then my parents had to make a decision to amputate my leg. Now, as soon as I came out of the operating theatre, I was always all of a sudden branded with this word, disabled. It was a word my family weren't too familiar with at the time. My parents didn't know anybody in their social or personal life that had a disability and at the time their biggest concern for the rest of my life was that I was going to grow up and not have the same opportunities that were afforded to my twin sister because of my

disability.

Now, swimming was never actually mentioned to my family during my rehabilitation in the early few weeks but after a couple of weeks they suggested that and I jumped into the pool eight weeks later and I did go around in circles for a couple of weeks but I was chasing my twin sister so it didn't take me long to learn to swim in a straight line but swimming and sport was a really great way for me to test my limits physically and I remember when I was young I could just take off this really heavy and uncomfortable prosthetic and I could jump in the water and it could - I really did feel just like every other kid around me that was swimming at the time.

Now, I think the important thing to realise is that at these swimming lessons when I was growing up never did I feel unwelcome or uncomfortable. It was a place that I could just be exactly who I was and a place I fell in love with. Now, I was 12 years old when I first saw the Paralympic Games on my television. I was by chance flicking through the TV and came across the Athens Paralympics and I honestly could not believe what I was seeing. I was seeing athletes in wheelchairs playing basketball, people bounding down on athletics track, people with no vision playing soccer with a bell inside the ball. I remember I was in awe of the athletes and from that day I knew I wanted to become a Paralympian. That was when I was about 10 years old.

I did notice however once I discovered the Paralympic world that para sport was completely different to our able-bodied counterparts.

I remember going to our national championships and Paralympic events would be tacked on to the beginning or end of the program so they didn't have to broadcast us to the world. I remember the athletes that I was inspired by so much at the Athens 2004 Games were never featured in any kind of promotional material about any swimming events that were

happening. And then I remember learning about the funding model. At the time, you would see Olympic athletes paid around \$60,000 plus sponsorship money that could be in the hundreds of thousands and of dollars and in comparison our Paralympic athletes never got paid anything at all and often had to pay to go to these events. All of a sudden, I found myself in this world of high performance but it was a world that certainly did make me feel extremely unwelcome and even worse it made me feel less than the able-bodied people who I was always swimming next to.

I remember I just wanted to be like my friends and I was always reminded in a subtle way that I was always a little bit less than that I still put my head down, worked hard and continued on my dream to become a Paralympian one day and even though those early days were very tough.

I made my first Australian swim team at 14 years old which sounds young but you need to remember our Australian swimmers usually qualify for our teams when they're pretty young. I remember finding my people within this team. I found my fellow athletes that had a disability. This team, this Paralympic Australian swim team made me feel welcome and I felt somewhere where I could belong and because of this I would continue to swim for Australia for another 16 years, so I was very, very thankful to have them.

Over these 16 years that I was on the Australian swim team, the world would come to fall in love with athletes that had a disability and through using my sport as a platform, we began to show the world that we necessarily have to be defined by the things that make us different or what has happened to us over our lifetime. Our disability, of course, it's always going to be part of who we are but it is definitely not everything that we are and the only reason that it has to define so much of who we are is because of the barriers that still exist in our societies today. When I reflect on my swimming career now that I'm retired and I think about how



some of these barriers slowly but surely began to shift, you know throughout my career it was moments like racing in front of a home crowd during the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, the only multisport event where para athletes and Olympic athletes compete in an integrated program.

I remember competing at these Commonwealth Games and immediately after my race I was bombarded with kids at the gates, able-bodied kids asking, "How do I become a Paralympian when I'm older?" That was in complete contrast to how I felt when I very first began swimming. And we now see national sporting organisations such as Swimming Australia, Rowing Australia, they finally have an understanding of what kind of supports athletes with a disability need in order to completely thrive on the field of play and be our world's best, which is what we need to be when we compete at a Paralympic Games.

If we fast forward to Tokyo 2020, I did become one of the first Paralympic athletes to join an Olympic training program, was I as fast as the Olympians I trained with? I wasn't but my coach did create a program that was very creative and extremely welcoming. He asked what questions I may need to thrive in that program and provided the accommodations in place for me to be able to do so. Now, speaking of Tokyo 2020, I know it was a few years ago now, but it was a huge Games for our Paralympic movement. In fact, it was the very first Games I Paralympic athletes achieved pay parity to our Olympic counterparts in the form of medal bonuses. It would have been nice as well winning my 17th medal to receive backpay but I was happy to continue , we did see pay parity again at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. Most importantly when I reflect on my career and look at sport now, more kids with a disability than ever before are participating in sport. We are seeing our state institutes and national sporting organisations and federal and

government investing in a Paralympic uplift program as we head into Brisbane 2032 and the steps towards inclusion, equity and opportunity, this is what I've seen in my 16 years in sport.

Now, I left my sport a few years ago now feeling extremely valued as an athlete. I felt this enormous sense of belonging and empowerment over my career, which is very contrast to how I actually felt in the very beginning. You may be wondering why I'm telling you all of these stories about sport, because I understand that very few people with a disability actually have an intention or a desire to be an athlete or a Paralympian for that matter, but I do know that that feeling of achievement that I felt in the sporting field as someone with a disability should never ever be reserved to just those in the sporting field. Now, speaking of that, now that I have left sport I have been working in the employment space for the last five years and I am seeing within the employment space many of the same barriers that I faced as a young athlete.

Now, it isn't okay, of course, in 2025 to still see so many barriers for people with disabilities in everyday life, but the good news is throughout my sporting career I have seen what is possible. I don't need to tell you that one in five Australians have a disability. The simple fact is that people with a disability are people that we all know. Whether it is yourself, your family, your co-workers, your friends, and at the end of the day we all deserve to feel empowered and to feel like we belong and to make our own choices. And this is where the workplace can really come in. Now, I'm fortunate to be an ambassador of APM. We are working extremely hard so that no person with a disability ever feels any less valued than whoever is standing next to them and over my time as an APM ambassador I have met on site so many highly skilled and motivated individuals who are proving time and time again that their abilities far outweigh any perceived limitations they may have on them. I've seen how

so many people with disabilities have developed off the charts r resilience and adaptability and a unique way to solve problems I have never really seen before and these are just lessons that we learn throughout our life experience of being a lived person with disability.

It is common barriers such as inaccessible environments, a lack of understanding when it comes to disability and negative attitudes. To res the most common barriers we face with a desire to enter the workforce as someone with a disability. And the environment that these barriers create I'm going to tell you a few statistics now. 48%, this the per cent of people with a disability aged 15 to 64 that are currently in the workforce. 48%. And in comparison, we're seeing 80% of people without a disability who are currently employed and if you look at these numbers, of course, they're absolutely staggering and numbers that we need to change.

Now, the most important thing that you need to know about somebody that wants to work and has a disability is that every single person, every single person is capable of work, but many people with disability experience significant challenges and barriers to inclusion. Not just in work but in everyday life, even out in our communities. And I have been very fortunate to work very closely with APM to be able to dismantle these barriers but to also educate businesses on the benefits that come with employing people with disabilities.

It is not about meeting a quota or fulfilling a social responsibility. We can actually unlock a wealth of benefits that not only enhance our workplaces but also contributing to building a more equitable society, so really it is a win-win. You can't really lose when it comes to employment with people with disabilities. Not only that but it also make as really powerful statement about the kind of society that we want to build. Now, I have seen this happen before throughout my time as an athlete which is why where shared stories about being an athlete before. When we hire a

person with disability it sends a clear message that every individual, regardless of their abilities, deserves equal opportunities and a chance to contribute to society.

I have done a bit of deep diving and this is some of the research we have found, that an inclusive team on average will be 35% more productive. These teams are better able to lead change, adapt to change or more robust and more resilient, you'll see a 42% improvement in team collaboration because a team that has an inclusive culture clearly respects the voices of everyone and is more likely to have stronger team collaboration and also alongside that obviously happier employees as well. But this is a remarkable - this next statistic, which is an 83% improvement on the ability to innovate. 83%. They will be able to create products that appeal to a much wider audience. Other benefits I haven't actually listed here on this slide, you'll see higher staff retention, in fact, SafeWork Australia reported inclusive workplaces don't just benefit those with a disability but every employee has here job satisfaction and are four times more likely to stay in that place of work.

Because of this, you'll see lower absenteeism, fewer occupational health and safety incidents and you'll also - of course, we all know - experience better brand reputation, customer loyalty and opportunity to win new business. These are just a few of the benefits. There are a wealth of benefits involved when it comes to employing people with disabilities. Of course, if you would like to learn more I can see our little tent over there. We have our APM team here today to discuss what your experiences have been like in this space and whether we can assist you in the employment space as well. We're a very, very friendly team. We actually have probably the best lip balm as well in the world over at that tent. But in conclusion, the benefits of employing people with disabilities, they're vast. I have only touched on just a few of

them today. As we move forward we need to recognise the potential of those with a disability in our community, we also need to actively address diversity and inclusion and the best part of being human in all aspects of life. So, as I mentioned our friendly team at APM is here today to assist you in that. I've also brought along 50 copies of my book Felix and his Fantastic Friends. They're a giveaway for anyone who comes over to our tent to say hello so feel free to come over, meet the team and say hello. I have brought my book. I have my son Felix here, my biggest supporter. He's been clapping me all presentation. If you would like to meet anyone from our team or my little Felix, feel free to pop over and say hello. I hope you enjoyed the presentation and it gave you insight into benefits of employing people with disability. Thank you very much.

KATE TOTMAN: Fantastic. Thank you so much. Let's have a huge round of applause for Ellie Cole today with APM Employment Services. You can have a chat with Ellie and the team at the stand. I recommend the book. I read it with my six-year-old and it is excellent. A round of applause for Ellie as she makes her way off the stage. (APPLAUSE).

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KATE TOTMAN: Well, hello everybody. Thank you so much for joining us here at the main stage. It's now an absolute pleasure to introduce this next group to the stage. First off, I'm going to introduce to you Jessica Grace who is the model-mentor at Model Mates. Let's put our hands together for Jessica Grace. (APPLAUSE)

JESSICA GRACE: Good afternoon, everyone. And we feel very, very fortunate to be here with you and to be able to show you a little bit about

what Model Mates is all about. My name is Jessica Grace, the model mentor, one of the model mentors for Model Mates. Model Mates is a ground-breaking agency that aims to promote inclusivity and diversity in the fashion world. So, Model Mates is challenging beauty standards and also creates a platform for models with diverse abilities and special needs and the models that you're going to see on the runway today are just representing such a platform that we are endeavouring to really make a mark for all types of models in the modelling industry.

The models you're going to see have been under professional training and styling. We have a program that each of these models have graduated from which involves expertise in the industry. It is pretty gruelling. We would like to show you the essence and thanks to the ImpactInstitute we have a video to show you to give you an idea if Model Mates is new to you. Let's give you a glimpse before our models come on the runway about what Model Mates is all about.

(Captioned video plays)

(APPLAUSE)

KATE TOTMAN: Audience, I want to hear a huge round of applause and we'll keep it going as we welcome on to the stage the team from Model Mates.

(MUSIC PLAYS).

JESSICA GRACE: Weren't they fantastic. Let's give them another round of applause. (APPLAUSE) So what you've just witnessed is the model walk they are trained for runway shows so that's what you'll see Fashion Week.

We were in a Westfield last week. As fun as it looks, these models for trained to be able to operate in an industry in a professional capacity and think you'll agree they are professional. They know what they're doing, they know their poses and that doesn't just happen. These models have graduated from an eight-week program where they have industry professionals come in and train them, industry professionals that are currently working. We have an amazing stylist and she is the one that works with each of the models to style them to make sure they have their portfolio so that they can actually be sent out for castings, directors and to make sure that they are landing jobs, which is what we want. We want to see the faces, our models faces in advertising and we are seeing that. We are very excited to be able to report that we have been booking our models for professional jobs. Three of our models have just done a campaign and we've got much more to come but we are doing this so that we can have a mark in the industry and it is very important to us that these models get the same opportunities as other models in the industry to shine and bring their uniqueness.

Part of this - it takes a lot to do this, a lot of people and a lot of partnership and 1 of our partners, amazing partners, is called Thread Together. You may have heard of them. Thread Together is changing the face of sustainability in fashion and they - their work is redirecting clothing to people in need. Now, all of the models you've seen today have been addressed by Thread Together which is incredible. It best thing about Thread Together is it has - it's brand-new clothing that is redirected to people in need and it is clothing that then doesn't go to landfill so we are really proud to be able to have our models dressed by Thread Together because we want our models to have a sustainable approach to fashion because that is important to the vision behind Model Mates as well.

As part of the 8-week training program, the models do one day at Thread Together packing and creating little packages to go out to whether it's a women's shelter because it was important to us to - a lot of our models because of their disability and which is some of the challenges, they are used to being served but we wanted to make sure our models are also a service to the community because that is equally important and it is also empowering for our models to be the person that's not being served all the time but their part of - they can give back. That partnership is very, very close to our hearts at Model Mates but it is very important for us in forming models that are just really intelligent and sustainable and, yeah, just very, very much finger on the pulse of what's happening in the industry.

So, we - as I said, we do an eight-week course. We're starting again in October. If you know anyone that is interested in modelling, that maybe they have special needs and they would like to just - or even just for confidence-building. Our models do pose classes, they do technique, they also do how to speak confidently. One of our other model mentors is a podcaster and a speaker, his name is John. He teaches that. They do confidence. They also do lots of different styling and then, of course, we get them working in front of camera so they work with professional photographers to make sure they come out of the eight-week program with an actual portfolio that is competitive in the industry.

So, if you have anyone that you know or maybe that might be interested, please reach out to them. We also are going to have our models available after the show. They are going to come back on one more time but if you would like to get a photo with our models, we're going to have them at the photo wall and something special before you see them on your screens, you could have a photo with them today.

Also if you are looking to follow Model Mates on social media, it is



actually a really big part of supporting us. So, if you just look up Model Mates on Instagram, Facebook, we are there. You're going to see we have a lot of events coming up in the future and - yes, in the future and we would love to see you there but again if you want to know what's happening on our agenda then subscribe and sign up and do all those things on social media so that you can know what's happening.

KATE TOTMAN: Jessica, I know our models are about to join us. Look, sooner than we thought. I'll let you finish what you were saying.

JESSICA GRACE: So what you just witnessed was the walk that the models would do if they were in a casting or on Fashion Week runway. We are going to have a finale now. This is more fun. So, we would love you to join in just really congratulating our models and just, yeah, showing just how proud you are and we are of them for what they've achieved up until this date. So, please welcome again our Model Mates.

KATE TOTMAN: Huge round of applause for Jessica Grace and, of course, the team from Model Mates as they make it back on to the stage. Keep that applause going, audience.

(APPLAUSE)

(MUSIC PLAYS).

JESSICA GRACE: Thank you so much. They were honestly incredible. Thank you very much. They're so incredible that we didn't want to miss the opportunity for you to meet and hear from the Model Mates. You've heard enough from me, I'm sure. First off, I'm going to ask Lincoln a

question. Lincoln, as I said is a graduate of our Model Mates course. Lincoln, what have you learned through the Model Mates training course? What's one thing that you've learned?

>> How to perfect my posing and more confidence in the level, like being more confident with posing from you, Jessica.

JESSICA GRACE: Thank you. I didn't pay him to say that, I promise. I think we can all say from the posing we just saw on the runway you have perfected that. Congratulations. That was amazing. What is your favourite part about being a professional model?

>> It's probably the energy that people can give and probably the nice clothes from Bernadette that I sometimes get to keep, so - and all the events that I get to go to.

JESSICA GRACE: The perks. Amazing. Okay and this is another Model Mate, Jake. Jake, this was your first time doing a modelling course. What made you want to step into modelling?

>> Just the opportunity and the people that run it are all just very nice and supportive so I thought it would be a good experience and it was actually quite enjoyable and good.

JESSICA GRACE: What was your favourite part of the training?

>> Everything because there's not just one part that's your favourite. All the different aspects was all fun and enjoyable.

JESSICA GRACE: What would you say to someone maybe in the crowd considering doing the Model Mates training?

>> Just give it a go. It builds your confidence and makes you see yourself differently after you do the course and it's just fun and it doesn't matter if you think you're going to stuff up and stuff. No-one cares, it is more about having fun.

JESSICA GRACE: Amazing, amazing. Thank you so much, Jake. Last off, our beautiful modelling Cameron. Cameron, how has being part of Model Mates helped your confidence?

>> It's helped me feel visible and be connected with so many of my long-term friends and it just makes me feel very happy and grateful in myself.

JESSICA GRACE: Wow. Amazing. What is the best modelling tip you've learned from Model Mates?

>> Getting to wear some professional clothing and just looking more beautiful.

JESSICA GRACE: You do look stunning today. Thank you to our stunning make-up and hair artists. Last thing, what advice would you give to someone that's thinking about doing the training?

>> My advice is to believe in yourself and think to yourself that you can do these things and be given so much opportunities to have in your life to come.

JESSICA GRACE: Amazing. Thank you so much, Cameron. Thank you, everyone. So, as I said, our models are going to be available if you would like a photo with our models, they will be available at the photo wall. Please come and join them. Follow us on social media. We have more events and more runways coming up but thank you so much for supporting us and cheering us on today. We have some incredible models and we just want to see them more and more getting their - making their mark on the fashion industry and they have well and truly begun. So, thank you so much everyone.

KATE TOTMAN: Let's have a huge, huge round of applause for Jessica Grace and the team from Model Mates. That was just exceptional. As Jessica said, you can head over to side of stage and meet some of the models. We've got a photo opportunity. Absolutely, come and get involved. Thank you again to the team from Model Mates. Let's give them a huge round of applause.

(EXPO CONCLUDED)

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