**TRANSCRIPT #2
“When the rubber hits the road”:
EMPLOYMENT AND DISABILITY**

TESSA DE VRIES - Welcome to One in Five, the Melbourne Disability Institute podcast, bringing you the latest in disability research from the University of Melbourne. I'm Tessa de Vries.

In this series we will be looking at how research can tackle some of the biggest issues facing people with disability and their families. Join us as we talk to a range of people about new research findings, possible solutions and policy ideas.

JESSE OLSEN-Many employers do have this fear, or this misconception that adjustments are going to cost a lot of money, and that I better not ask because I might have to pay a bunch of money to, you know, rebuild this or do these other things, when in fact, many adjustments are not that expensive. And a lot of times it's just the flexibility, kind of an adjustment where you modify hours or you modify location.

TESSA DEVRIES Welcome to part two of our employment and disability episode. You just heard from Jesse Olsen.

JESSE OLSEN - I'm a senior lecturer of management,

TESSA DEVRIES - Today we will be looking at how to employment right, the role of government and how businesses can become inclusive employers. If you haven’t yet listened to Part One, it might eb a good idea to do that now.

 Now let’s go back to Jesse, who was part of a team at the Centre for Workplace Leadership who looked at best practice in organisations that are getting disability employment right.

JESSE OLSEN - We went out to organisations, we talked to managers, we talked to people with adjustments, and we identified basically best practice so that we could look at the good stuff that rather than focus on a lot of the, you know, the media, you see a lot of the bad stuff. So what should we be doing to be more inclusive?

TESSA DEVRIES And what does best practice look like?

JESSE OLSEN - We found that a lot of times, you would have these reasonable adjustments or workplace adjustments, or some kind of a system in place. But the really best practices do have certain features. And one of those features is that this would be a more formal kind of system. That's not to say that informal systems aren't successful, sometimes they are. But when you have an informal system, that is where you just kind of its ad hoc what will give this person this thing because we found out about it, where you have that a lot of the success will depend on the manager and the manager’s commitment to inclusion. And if you don't have a manager like that, then you probably aren't going to see much success.

So the formality will kind of make that component part of the whole organisational structure and culture and it relies less on the quality of manager. Hopefully you do have supportive managers. And that is important as well, but at least have this kind of formal system in place. And that's something that people can rely on.

The formality around workplace adjustments would start from recruitment efforts. If you're calling someone to come in for an interview, you might ask, is there anything that we need to do to make this interview possible? Or is there anything that we need to know about in terms of accessibility? And this kind of question wouldn't be a question that you ask of people who you just suspect have a disability. This is a question you would ask of everyone, and not really worry about the disability.

I think an important point to make here is that a lot of these best practice organisations will talk about what is it that you need to do to get your job done, rather than what disability do you have? We shouldn't have to rely on disclosure of disability, we just need to really focus more on what kind of environment to make for various people to be able to do their work.

TESSA DEVRIES - We asked Alex how he felt about disclosing his disability, whether he felt pressured to do so.

ALEX WALLACE - That's a good question. I think I play it by ear. Like, I'll go into the interview, if I get a, it depends what sort of vibe I get off them. Like if I see them as someone might be so open minded about that sort of thing, I might mention it, but sometimes if they'd be rigid and maybe I maybe I just don't feel comfortable. I won't say anything. So to answer your question sometimes yes and sometimes no, depending on the potential employer.

TESSA DEVRIES - And what do you think – should employers adjust and accommodate for psychosocial disability?

ALEX WALLACE -I think in 2019 Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I mean, I think you know, if if you provide a wheelchair ramp for someone in a wheelchair, you should provide certain compromises and, you know, things for people experiencing mental health issues, because it's the same sort of thing.

You know, just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's not there, it doesn't mean that it doesn't sometimes really, really, really affect you. I think if you don’t make a big deal out of it, but acknowledge that it's there, because you don't want to be highlighted, like under the spotlight, this person has a mental illness, you know, rada rada rada ra ra, because that's almost just as bad, you know, in a different way.

JESSE OLSEN -One of the things that comes up across the board is this idea of, whenever you have a flexible work arrangement or an adjustment or something for any reason, you have to start thinking about whether that's going to be stigmatised, am I going to feel like, you know, I'm doing something I ought not be doing or am I going to feel different in sort of a bad way

When we're offering flexible work arrangements, we don't really need to ask if there’s a good reason. What we need to ask is can you do the job, you know, the central duties of the job under this arrangement, you don't really need to ask whether the person is taking a flexible work arrangement because they have to pick up kids because who cares if they're doing the job, you don't need to ask if it's because they're taking care of ageing parents, you don't need to ask if it's because they have some kind of mental health issue or because they have some kind of physical disability that requires them to you know, have rest every you know, every once in a while, whatever it is, you don't really need to ask that you need to ask whether they can do the job. And if you allow anybody to use flexible work arrangements, or you know, make reasonable adjustments for people to do their work without really worrying too much about the reason for that, you start to de-stigmatise it.

KEITH MCVILLY - I think there are there are two fundamental attitudes that have come out in some of the work that we’ve done. One is an attitude of fear and hesitancy about what this person might do. And the other is what I would call the tyranny of low expectations, that we don't have the expectations that people with disabilities can contribute to the workplace can contribute to our community and indeed the economy. And time and time again, we see that even people who have some of the most complex support needs with severe and profound disability can make a meaningful contribution.

TESSA DEVRIES - That's Keith McVilly. He's Professor of Disability and Inclusion at the University of Melbourne. Keith works primarily on projects related to intellectual disability and employment comes up a lot.

People with an intellectual or cognitive impairment are the other main disability group that are significantly and negatively impacted when it comes to employment.

KEITH MCVILLY **-** Look, the situation for people with disabilities in the employment space is not a good space at the moment. But there is great potential and great enthusiasm, and the impetus at the National Disability Insurance Scheme to support what is referred to in the in the language of the scheme as economic participation in whatever form that might take. I think people need to recalibrate their concept of what constitutes a job or a task. And there are many things within particular jobs or tasks that could be broken down.

TESSA DEVRIES - We asked case about how people with intellectual disability get their first job, their foot in the door?

KEITH MCVILLY-Well, we're just working on a project at the moment looking at the employment of people with intellectual disabilities. And what we're looking at is a range of entry level positions that people might be interested in and that people might be able to do with some minimal support and instruction.

And what we're doing is we're building a model to support the Victorian public sector to onboard train and provide long term careers for people with intellectual disability. As part of that, we are looking to using some processes which go under the umbrella of the title of Customised Employment.

 And this process is a very person centered in depth planning process, rather than taking place in an office, Customised Employment processes typically start with a facilitator, meeting the person in their home and getting to know them in their home and in their local neighborhood, finding out from those visits, not only what they're interested in, but what is their current skill set.

The Customized Employment process also is not like a typical job process, which is just between the employment broker and the person. Customized Employment typically involves the persons circle of support and the network. So there are conversations with family members about the person's skills and interests. And in that process, we're also looking for people in that person's immediate network, who might be able to support them into a job.

TESSA DEVRIES - It might be worth noting that the Victorian Government has committed to doubling its rights of employment of people with disability from 6% to 12% in the public sector, they're trying to do this in a range of ways and customised employment is one of them.

KEITH MCVILLY - Without preempting too many of the results for the project. we foresee that it's going to be important that provision is made with in the state Service Award system to allow for the onboarding of people at the entry level. The State service entry level positions have largely disappeared. So the types of positions that many people with disabilities might be eligible to apply for have actually disappeared from the award scale.

So I think there's going to need to be some industrial creativity in creating the appropriate places within the award structure to enable these people to be on boarded. I think there's going to need to be consideration as to how positions are advertised. And also how applications are received and interview processes are conducted, it's also going to be important to take on board, the careful matching of a new employee and their immediate workplace supervisor, who's probably going to need to be skilled up in how to provide some systematic instruction to this employee. So there I think a number of things that we need to start to work on to make this process a reality.

CALVIN - My name is Calvin, I work for the warrants unit at Records Service Division.

PAMELA - And my name is Pamela I'm unit manager of Police Enquiry Service, and I manage Calvin.

TESSA DEVRIES – Three years ago following a change in procedure at the Records unit at Victoria Police, unit manager Pamela found herself with large backload of administrative work needing urgent attention.

Our workload increased by 400%, so there was there was a lot of administrative, repetitive tasks, but high volumes of work that we needed to complete. So we identified a task, that work that Calvin actually does now where we could recruit to support that admin role.

So Calvin is registered with job supports a disability agency, and we actually interviewed Calvin, he went through the whole process, he gave us a resume and we made sure that Calvin’s skills aligned with what we needed and he was a good fit for the organisation and it all just went from there. So it moved pretty quickly, because we actually needed the support. And we needed Calvin to come on board to help us. And there was certainly a lot of work then wasn't a Calvin,

CALVIN -There was too.

PAMELA – just piles and piles of documents. And yeaah..

CALVIN- I think my mum got a call from job support and you’re getting a new job soon I think she said, you’re going to work for Victoria Police and I was like, oh, what! I never expected that !

When I first started I was happy and excited, I remember there were a lot of people around the office, there were a lot of computers. I was surprised there were a lot of computers and people.

PAMELA – Calvin works through lots and lots of high volumes of warrants. He actually has a real eye for detail. And he very rarely makes mistakes. He actually is good at picking up other people's errors often. But, I needed the work to be done and I was concentrating on how that would get done, and you’re it.

CALVIN- I reckon some of the stuff is easy and some of the stuff is hard, but, I’m learning new stuff all the time.

PAMELA – So Calvin has daily key performance indicators, he actually has targets and he knows what he has to get done every day. And he has a daily structure.

CALVIN - I don’t get frustrated at all, no.

PAMELA – So always having someone to turn to Calvin, and always having someone to go to that understands what you do I think that’s important, you’re not on your own, you’re included in absolutely everything, its not like your disability prevents you from doing any of the work you do- you do absolutely everything that all the other staff participate in, I think that’s important.

TESSA DEVRIES – We asked them about some of the biggest challenges

PAMELA- I think initially, it was tiring for you to work five days a week. Yeah, it was a big thing for you to transition to come here every day. And the working now three days a week where you have the rest on the Tuesday and the Thursday. So I think that was quite challenging for you to start with.

CALVIN – That was challenging.

PAMELA - I think, personally, organizationally, this is quite a fast moving situation and need for the organization. So if we, in hindsight, slowed it down a bit, I probably could have done with some training in recruiting people with intellectual disability. I was always conscious of, into how I interacted with the agency and Calvin, and not understanding that industry, and I was always not wanting to offend anybody and use the right terminology. So I think if anyone's going to consider this some sort of training into recruiting, anybody with a disability would be helpful. I mean, Calvin and I have a really good working relationship, and we understand each other. But that's taken time, and if we'd slowed it down a little bit, the transition for you coming into the area might have been a little bit better, we probably could have done that a bit better. Not that it was bad.

CALVIN – No!

PAMELA - But we could have done it better, we could have done it a lot better.

I think there was a lot of barriers initially, I just kept pushing through it all. There was a lot of no's. You can't do this, you can't do that. You know, because we are such a secure and information needs to be kept secure and private. There was a lot of will this work in this space, with people with an intellectual disability. For us it's all worked out positive, but I just think don't give up. Because look at the benefits and the rewards that we've all we've all got out of this experience.

CALVIN - Maybe the other organizations should be doing the same thing too. Because outside it’s hard to get a job. So not just one organisation, different organisations. Yeah.

ALLISON MILNER- Yeah, so when we think about employment, it's very interesting because most people when they think about disability employment, think about unemployment, and employment, and that’s kind of where people get to, but we know that employment is actually something that's like a continuum.

TESSA DEVRIES - That's Alison Milner again.

ALLISON MILNER - So there's unemployment at one end, and full, stable, meaningful employment at the other end. And in the middle, there's all these other things that people go through. So, underemployment is sort of in between being employed and not being employed. So it's where people might be working some hours but want to be working more and feel that they have an ability to work more hours than they're currently being offered. So underemployment is something is very, very high in Australia and quite prevalent. And then following on from that you have things like precarious work, where you may be employed in a contract that is very, very short, where you don't have conditions around say leave or health care access, or these, these sorts of additional benefits that are usually offered in full employment jobs.

And leading on from that you might have something that's a poor quality job. So we're exposed to a lot of stresses, for example, discrimination or low control or demands, and then moving up the ranks again towards full and meaning employment, you have jobs that are progressively better, both in terms of the conditions they offer people in terms of the employment contracts. And in terms of the things that are around those employment contracts.

So there's, it's more of a spectrum of employment. So really, government strategies today have kind of focused on just getting people with disabilities into work. And this is what the DES system was, you know, it's premised, the statistics and reports against are really around how many people were placed in a job. And we haven't really considered the whole lifespan of someone's relationship with work.

And that begins from when someone is quite small. So it begins when someone's in school and someone starts talking to you about career aspirations or what you should be doing after school, or the type of subjects you select. And that then progresses onto when you start to think about going into either higher education or going into work or going into other additional training services or training, education providers. And again, that translates all the way through to when you retire.

So it's it's, the relationship with work is not something that we should be considering as a one static time in someone's life, it is something that follows us throughout our entire life period.

So when we started thinking about that in relation to people with disabilities, particularly if you think about children who acquire disability or who were born with a disability, how these impacts from a fairly early age, the likelihood of being able to end up in sustainable work, sustainable work that fulfills them and makes them feel satisfied and makes them feel as though they are that they are actively contributing to society, and doing everything else that good work should do.

So we decided to write some conceptual words around this and we called it disabling working environments. And we described this as the processes through which people go into work. So if we're thinking about people with disabilities, young people with disabilities may not be encouraged to go into certain types of jobs or encouraged to go into other types of work. So for example, if you are only encouraged to go into a job that's relatively low skill, regardless of what you want, there is a high chance and some of these jobs that you're going to be more exposed to a number of factors that may be different from people without disabilities.

So there may be discrimination, there may be greater pay inequity, they may have greater chance of being in low control jobs or jobs with higher insecurity. And we've also shown, sort of follow someone throughout a life course showing that people with disabilities are more likely to become unemployed than people without disabilities. And they're more likely to leave the labor force for other reasons. So really, it's a way of describing the whole situation of which work can impact a person with disability’s health, from a young age to an older age group. And we were trying to call attention for policymakers and researchers and advocates to consider this at a much deeper level rather than just we need to get people with disabilities into work. Really, we need to think about intervening early and we need to think about the lifelong consequences of poor quality work on someone's health.

ALEX DEVINE - There are definitely pockets of good practice opening up, particularly since the introduction of their National Disability Insurance scheme, where mental health organisations are trying to encourage more supported employment models of intervention.

ALEX WALLACE -If you have a job that really, you know, I think we're meant to work - it keeps us in the game, you know, it looks like the book ends on the books in your mind instead of having them all stacked on top of each other waiting for them to sort of fall you know, it's like, okay, everything's good. They're getting up. I'm going to do this, this, this and this, and I think it's like so sets off a chain reaction, you know, because if you have to go to work, you have to get up early. It keeps your confidence up, he gives you structure. So I think having a job really puts everything into place properly.

ALLISON MILNER - So if we can get this right for young people, if we can get jobs that are well suited to young people with disability, this will set them off on the life course of having better outcomes for both their employment, but also their health. So it's really important to try and get that relationship right.

TESSA DEVRIES - That was Allison Milner closing out this episode of one in five. Allison's work has made a huge contribution to improving our knowledge about the relationship between disability and employment, just one of many areas of her research. Her commitment and intellectual vigor, were matched by compassion and good humor, and she will be missed both professionally and personally by all of us at MDI and the University of Melbourne.

You've been listening to One in Five. We have lots of links and information related to the research in this episode up on our website, visit disability.unimelb.edu.edu.au , check it out and maybe sign up to our mailing list.

We’d love to hear your thoughts and we hope you join us next time, on One in Five.