

The employment journey for people with cerebral palsy



myCP
Guide



Cerebral Palsy
Support Network

This resource is for people with cerebral palsy (CP), their families, support networks and employers to learn more about employment.

It was developed by Cerebral Palsy Australia and the [Cerebral Palsy Support Network](#) (CPSN) for [My CP Guide](#). This resource includes insights from interviews with people with CP, who shared their personal employment experiences, and offered advice on how to make the employment journey more inclusive and accessible for everyone. Information was collected from 20 adults with CP, who are members of the CPSN lived-experience advisory group (The Tribe), with varying levels of the Gross Motor Function Classification System (GMFCS). Many of these contributors have been in the workforce for almost 40 years.

The research was funded by the CPSN Futures Fund to explore issues and opportunities for people with CP in the workplace. This research will also inform the development of CP-specific training for employers.

People with CP have the right to work in a meaningful job and, with the right support early on in life, can develop their confidence and skills to contribute to the workplace like everyone else.

'It's a huge confidence boost to be able to say, "I have a job" for myself, my family, and my friends.'

A 27yo male, GMFCS Level 4



Challenges of employment for people with CP

Employment is important for people with CP, just like it is for everyone.

Having employment that is productive and meaningful is a basic human right, yet people with disability experience a higher level of unemployment than the rest of the population.

Having a job provides

income



social connections



personal growth



independence



sense of purpose



The ability of someone with CP to find and maintain a job depends on a number of things, such as the quality of access to education, skills development programs, employment opportunities, and the right support and services to maintain a job.



Challenges of employment for people with CP (continued)

Lack of employment opportunities is a common experience for people with CP. Research shows that employment outcomes for people with CP remain poor and do not appear to have changed in the past 13 years.¹

People with CP who are looking for work are often disadvantaged by:

- inadequate pathways from school to training and employment
- a lack of transition support
- low expectations of their abilities among parents and carers, teachers, trainers and employers
- discrimination
- insufficient support and services in the workplace.

'People with cerebral palsy not only need to be able to share their honest experiences around employment—the challenges and disappointments, and what has contributed to any successes they have had—we also need to consider how organisations can pool this knowledge and approach employers and education institutions to advocate for a vastly improved experience for people with cerebral palsy.' **A 32yo female, GMFCS Level 2**



Benefits of inclusive workplaces

Improving employment outcomes for people with CP will provide significant benefits to workplaces, the economy, the community and to individuals.

People with CP can contribute meaningfully to the workplace when given the opportunity. They will have some physical impairments, but with workplace adjustments, supports, training, understanding and acceptance, they can be productive and valuable staff members.

'What people with cerebral palsy can do, and the wide range of transferable skills and ways of thinking that our lived experience gives us, needs to be more strongly showcased.' A 32yo female,

GMFCS Level 2



Transitioning from school to work

For young people with CP, one of the most important parts of transitioning to adulthood is making sure they have access to resources and support, which can provide information on higher education, job and vocational training, and employment opportunities. They also need to feel supported and feel confident to talk with family, friends and other trusted relationships, to help make decisions.

During the final years of high school, there may be conversations with school teachers, careers counsellors and support services about options and opportunities beyond school. This road ahead may be filled with excitement, fear, nervousness or concern.



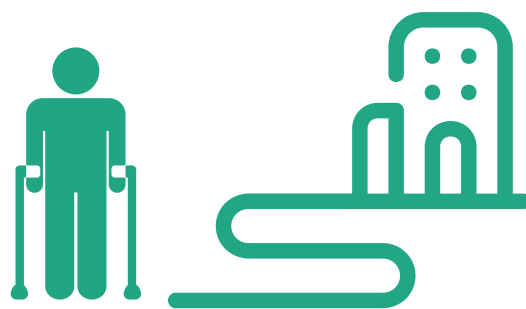
Transitioning from school to work *(continued)*

There are programs and support available to manage the transition from school into employment. These can include:

- **school leaver employment supports (SLES)** funding from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which helps build a person's ability and confidence to enter the workforce
- **engagement with a Disability Employment Service (DES)**, which is the Australian Government's employment service that helps people with disability find work and keep a job
- **supported employment services**, which are known as Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs). ADEs are generally not-for-profit organisations that provide supported employment opportunities. They employ people with disability with high support needs across Australia
- **workshops, expos and programs** run by community services organisations
- **supported work experience and volunteering** opportunities.

Building employment skills, experience and confidence will mean that young people with CP:

- understand the nature of work and can choose a post-school pathway to employment that suits them
- are more likely to successfully transition from school to work
- can benefit from the financial, social and community inclusion aspects of work.



Establishing early foundations

Family and support networks, as well as role models with CP, play a significant role in building confidence for young people with CP who are stepping into the workforce.

One of the best ways to support people with CP in their childhood and teenage years is by establishing foundations for developing confidence and independence in life—and it's never too early to start planning for the future.

Members of the CP community say that positive and proactive family support makes a huge difference to setting and achieving employment goals.

Building confidence and independence will be different for every child, depending on their strengths in different areas.

'I think my mum set me up for success, and she did it from a young age. Success doesn't automatically happen in adulthood. It's right from the start.'

An adult with CP

Some ideas to help children build confidence and independent skills include:

- **encouraging them to participate in social activities**, such as sporting teams, clubs and other group activities. These experiences can help them build important social skills that will be valuable in the workplace
- **encouraging them to participate in vocational training, work experience programs, volunteering and internships**. These experiences can help them build work-related skills and gain practical experience in real-world settings
- **encouraging them to set goals and work towards achieving them**. Celebrate their successes, big and small, and help them learn from their mistakes
- **looking for casual employment opportunities for teenagers**
- **encouraging them to have a positive attitude**. This quality will be valued by employers and will help with success in the workplace.



Working with teachers

Collaboration between parents, teachers and schools is essential in supporting children with CP to build the necessary skills to transition to the workforce after they finish school.

Parents can work with teachers and schools to support their child's transition into the workforce by:

- **communicating regularly with teachers** so they understand the child's strengths and challenges, and to help parents understand how the school is supporting their child's development
- **working with teachers to develop an individual plan** that outlines a child's strengths and goals. This can help guide the child's education and ensure they are receiving the support they need to build the skills required for entering the workforce
- **requesting that the necessary support is put in place** to enhance a child's learning and development, such as accessible classrooms, modified assignments and extra support from a teacher's aide.

Parents can also ask schools about:

- **vocational training** – which may include work experience programs or vocational courses that teach specific skills relevant to a child's career goals
- **social skills development** – which may include school clubs or activities to enhance social skills development as part of a child's education
- **career counselling** – which can help a child explore career options and identify their strengths and interests. This can also help them develop a clearer understanding of their career goals and the skills they need to achieve them.



'For my job, actually, my school helped me because when I was at school, I had work experience where I work now, and now I work four days a week part-time.'

An adult with CP

Seeking support

The transition from school to work can be challenging for any student, but it can be particularly difficult for students with disability. Support is available to help individuals with CP and their families to progress the employment journey. Many schools, disability organisations and service providers, and community services run workshops, expos and skills development training.

Tertiary education

Deciding to do further studies after high school can set someone on their career pathway by giving them new skills and qualifications to improve the chances of getting a job.

Tertiary education can also help someone to build confidence, develop critical thinking skills, and make new connections and professional networks.

Having CP might mean a student requires extra support to complete their studies. With the right support in place, tertiary study can be exciting, rewarding, and career-defining.

Many tertiary institutions have:

- a student wellbeing team
- learner advisors
- inclusion advisors.

Tertiary education providers may be able to provide assistance to support a person's full inclusion in their studies, such as:

- practical assistance to support them with tasks
- alternative examinations or test arrangements
- transport between campus venues
- disability parking permits
- a recharge or storage station for mobility equipment
- accessible formatting of course reading materials
- extensions to assignments
- flexibility in attendance requirements
- accessible teaching spaces and ergonomic furniture.

For more practical information on starting tertiary education, visit the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training at: <https://www.adcet.edu.au/students-with-disability>.

'The education system, especially after leaving secondary school, is very often unequipped or unwilling to cater for students living with disability, and the problem is not with academic ability or motivation to succeed, but rather with accessing reasonable adjustments and having access needs met.'

A 23yo female, GMFCS L1



Finding employment

Employment can contribute to a sense of identity and self-worth. It can have positive health impacts for people with CP. It also gives them the opportunity to showcase their talents and skills, and develop new ones.

Employment provides people with income and can create financial independence for them. This allows many people with CP to move out of the family home and live independently. This experience can include managing finances, paying bills and setting household budgets.

Businesses that employ people with CP benefit from the diverse range of skills, talents and qualifications that they have to offer.

Research has shown that workers with disability have higher rates of retention, better attendance, and fewer occupational health and safety incidents than those without a disability.²

Employing people with disability makes good business sense. There are significant business benefits when employing someone with disability—benefits beyond just filling a job:

- It's good for business, it can boost performance, and can have positive effects on culture.
- Hiring people with disability contributes to an organisation's overall diversity.
- Employees with CP have overcome multiple personal obstacles – their perspectives, creativity and innovation can offer unique problem-solving to get the job done.
- It can have a positive impact on an organisation's brand and help reach new audiences and markets.

Members of the CP community shared that sometimes they have a lack of self-confidence when trying to enter the workforce. This is made worse when there are preconceived ideas about their disability. Some employers and families have low expectations about what people with CP can achieve and what skills they offer.

Depending on the type of employment, more often than not, someone's CP has little to no impact on their ability to perform the job. With the right support and access in place, people with CP can excel and thrive in the workplace.

88%

of working age people with disability do not require extra support from their employer to work



82%

of people with disability don't need to take time off because of their disability



Setting goals

Before applying for work, it's important for a person with CP to think about:

- the kind of job they want
- the kind of workplace they would feel comfortable in
- what skills and previous experience they have
- what support is required for them to do their job well.

These are important because they can determine what kind of jobs someone will be looking for. Role models or mentors can also provide advice and support while they figure out employment goals.

'It would be useful to have a mentor to talk to about challenges in the workplace both for empathy and practical suggestions.' **A 37yo female, GMFCS L3**

Volunteering

Opportunities for volunteer work can be a useful pathway into employment.

Volunteer work can:

- help to develop skills
- help individuals to better understand their passions, interests and motivations
- improve a resume/CV
- showcase someone's talents to a prospective employer.



Many local councils and community organisations offer volunteer opportunities to all members of the community.

For more practical information on volunteering visit Volunteering Australia at: <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org>.

Work experience can also provide an employment pathway. Using informal networks such as friends, family members and wider connections, may provide meaningful work experience opportunities that help with career aspirations and could possibly lead to an employment opportunity.

'I self-selected a better job and began as volunteer then got paid work at same place in a variety of positions.' **A 55yo female, GMFCS L1**

Looking for employment

A common way for someone to find a job is by using online employment platforms such as:

- **Toozly** – Australia's largest job search website for people living with disability at: <https://www.toozly.com.au/>
- **Workforce Australia** – where Australians can search and apply for jobs, or find more information on their pathway to employment at: <https://www.workforceaustralia.gov.au/individuals/>
- **The Field** – an employment site connecting people with disability who want to work with organisations that want to hire more inclusively at: <https://www.thefield.jobs/Job/Home>
- **Ethical Jobs** – shares jobs from around 8,000 Australian charities, not-for-profit organisations and social enterprises at: <https://www.ethicaljobs.com.au/>
- **SEEK** – one of the largest job sites in Australia and New Zealand at: <https://www.seek.com.au/>

Other ways that someone can find out about job opportunities include:

- asking friends and family members
- recruitment agencies
- community job pages on Facebook
- community noticeboards
- asking local groups they are involved with.

Eligible National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participant job seekers may be able to use NDIS funding to learn or strengthen the skills they need to find and keep a job. Visit the NDIS website at: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/finding-keeping-and-changing-jobs>.



Disability Employment Services (DES)

Job seekers can also receive support from Disability Employment Services (DES) to find work. DES is the Australian Government's employment service that helps people with disability find work and keep a job.

Members of the CP community have had mixed experiences using DES.

For more information on Disability Employment Services, visit JobAccess at: <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/>. JobAccess is the national hub for workplace and employment information for people with disability, employers and service providers. It is a service created by the Australian Government that has information and resources to support job seekers.

'My experiences with DES were mostly negative as I found it a waste of time. They would tell me it's easy to get a job but I still struggled and felt I had no support.' **A 52yo female, GMFCS L1**

'Find a good quality DES provider who focuses on the skills and interests of the applicant rather than hitting a numbers target.'
A 30yo female, GMFCS L4

Applying for work

Preparing a job application is an opportunity for a job seeker to showcase their skills and experience.

When developing a resume and cover letter, job seekers should include:

- education history
- skills and experience
- previous work and volunteer experience
- other experiences that demonstrate they are fit for the role.



Many organisations provide direct support when someone wants to apply for a job. They can provide support to prepare an application, as well as help with interview preparation.

There are many websites that provide tips on preparing resumes and cover letters. Visit the IncludeAbility website at: <https://includeability.gov.au/resources-people-disability/writing-resume-and-cover-letter>.

Disclosing CP

Job seekers are not legally required to tell an employer about having CP, so they do not have to share information about their disability with an employer or potential employer. This information is private and the decision to tell others is up to the job seeker.

Job seekers may choose to write about their disability in their application, explaining how CP affects them and what modifications or assistance are needed for the job's responsibilities.

Being positive and explaining how daily challenges are overcome can demonstrate problem-solving in a job application. Applicants can also explain that they can fulfill the requirements of the job with workplace adjustments.

If a job seeker with CP can do the role with reasonable requirements in-place, it is beneficial to let the employer know.

Being open and honest about CP can help an employee to talk with an employer and other work colleagues about what CP is and how it affects them, and to correct common myths and misunderstandings.

Some members of the CP community shared that they felt employers often make assumptions about their capabilities, and make decisions without asking or getting them to demonstrate they can do the job.

Find out more information about disclosing your CP from IncludeAbility at: <https://includeability.gov.au/resources-people-disability/identifying-person-disability-workplace>

Members of the CP community suggest:

- If you are comfortable to do so, be open and honest about your disability.
- Discuss CP during the interview and, if required, ongoing to dispel assumptions and misunderstandings about it.
- Tell the employer openly about what you can and can't do.
- Encourage the employer to ask questions.
- Ask if the employer would like links to further information regarding CP to improve their knowledge.

'Be honest with the prospective employer... that's what I would do if I was going for a job now. I would work with someone around how to word it so that it also shows my strengths.'

A 52yo female, GMFCS L1

'You are discriminated against as soon as you say you have a disability. People make assumptions about my capabilities; they decide without even asking or getting me to demonstrate if I can do the work.'

A 46yo male, GMFCS L1

Preparing for an interview

Preparing for a job interview is a very important step in the application process. It is the opportunity for a job seeker to demonstrate their skills and eagerness for the role.

It can be challenging and many people, regardless of ability, are nervous before meeting a potential employer. Interviews can be undertaken in many different ways, each employer will have their own style and approach, and questions will vary.

It is a good idea for the job seeker to learn about the employer organisation. Information can generally be found on the internet. By doing some research, jobs seekers can understand aspects of the organisation, such as values, history, mission, different departments, senior staff and customers.

Not all interviews will lead to a job offer, but by attending many interviews, job seekers can develop confidence, improve communication techniques and learn how to make a great impression.

Many members of the CP community suggest that working with a mentor to undertake mock interviews can be useful.

Find out more information about preparing for an interview from IncludeAbility at: <https://includeability.gov.au/resources-people-disability/preparing-interview>

Being prepared can help calm nerves before an interview. Most interviewers will ask questions such as:

- Tell me a bit about yourself.
What are your skills?
- Why are you interested in working here?
- Tell me about a time when you had to work to deadlines. How did you do it?
- Describe a situation where you had to handle a problem.
What did you do?



Support

After accepting a role, an employee can further discuss the support they require to help them in their role with their manager or Human Resources team.

These supports are different for everyone, depending on how they best manage their CP. Supports from an employer can include:

- accessible parking
- work-from-home options
- shorter days
- rest breaks
- modified workspaces
- assistive technology
- understanding how to best communicate with you.



The Australian Government Disability Employment Support Service helps people with disability who need support in the workplace to keep a job. Find out more about support at: <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/people-with-disability/available-support>.

'Consider parking proximity/ location, access to bathrooms, adjusted desk and chair, and accessibility of the kitchen.' **A 56yo female, GMFCS L2**

'Educating the employer about disability and any possible limitations provides opportunities to modify tasks and environment if required so the employee can fulfil work requirements.' **A 55yo female, GMFCS L1**

'Adjustments and accommodations in the workplace should be available for those that need them.' **A 52yo female, GMFCS L1**

For employers

Tips for employers

Hiring a person with CP

There are many reasons to create an inclusive workplace that welcomes employees with CP.

Organisations that promote diversity help to develop a culture of respect and inclusivity. This leads to a more productive and motivated workforce, as employees feel valued and appreciated for their contributions.

Hiring a person with CP can provide a valuable perspective on accessibility. They can offer insight into how to improve the workplace environment to better support others with disability and create a more inclusive culture. This not only benefits other employees with disability, but also the wider workforce and customers.

Because people with disability often face multiple barriers in everyday life, many have strong skillsets in innovation and problem-solving.

Employees with disability can also positively impact an organisation's bottom line. Studies have shown that employees with disabilities have lower absenteeism rates, higher job retention and lower turnover, leading to cost savings and increased productivity.

Legal requirements

Creating an inclusive workplace helps employers comply with legal obligations to provide equal employment opportunities and accommodations under disability discrimination laws. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, a person with disability has a right to the same employment opportunities as a person without a disability, provided they can do the main requirements of the job.

If a person with disability can do the main activities or requirements of a job, then they should have an equal opportunity to do that job.

Find out more about the Disability Discrimination Act at: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/know-your-rights-disability-discrimination>.

'People with cerebral palsy can work if they are given the opportunity.' **An adult with CP**



Perceived barriers to hiring a person with disability

Despite the numerous benefits, many employers still might have misconceptions about hiring a person with CP.

MYTH

Hiring people with disability is expensive and requires significant accommodations.

FACT

Many accommodations are simple and low cost, such as adjusting work schedules or providing assistive technology.

MYTH

People with disability are not capable of working in skilled jobs.

FACT

This is a harmful stereotype that underestimates the skills and talents of individuals. With the right accommodations and support, people with CP can excel in a wide range of roles and industries.

MYTH

CP is an intellectual disability

FACT

CP is a physical disability and can be described as a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and maintain balance and posture.

People with CP have a clear understanding of their abilities and are unlikely to apply for jobs they cannot do. Many people living with disability do not require any changes to their work or workplace.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2018 [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia, Summary of Findings](#) showed statistics about working-age people living with disability who were employed, including that:

22.5% worked as professionals



13.2% were clerical and administrative workers



15.2% were technicians and trade workers



10.8% were managers.



Perceived barriers to hiring a person with disability (*continued*)

MYTH

People with disability require constant supervision and may negatively impact productivity.

FACT

Research shows that employees with disability have similar productivity levels to people without disability, and can be highly motivated and committed to their work.

With only 53 per cent of people with disability of working age who are employed, there is a vast number of talented, skilled and knowledgeable people who may currently be excluded from your recruitment due to perceived barriers. For more information, download the [Employ My Ability strategy](#).



Support to hire people with CP

In Australia, there are several options available for employers who are considering hiring a person with disability. These options aim to support employers in creating inclusive and accessible workplaces, while also providing assistance to employees with CP:

- **JobAccess** is a government-funded service that provides information and assistance to employers and employees regarding disability employment. The service offers a range of supports, including workplace assessments, workplace modifications and job-matching services. JobAccess also provides a range of financial incentives to encourage employers to hire people with disability, including wage subsidies and funding for workplace modifications. Find out more about employer supports at: <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/people-with-disability/available-support>.
- **The Australian Network on Disability** provides resources and support to employers to promote inclusive and accessible workplaces. It offers a range of services, including disability awareness training, accessibility audits and policy development support. It also provides a job-matching service that connects employers with potential candidates living with disability. Find out more about employer supports at: <https://www.and.org.au>.
- **CP awareness training** can help people examine their own understanding and beliefs about how CP affects people and their employment potential. By attending training, employers will have a greater understanding of the causes and symptoms of CP, how it impacts people and how employers can support people with CP to be valued team members. Find out more about training with CPSN at: <https://www.cpsn.org.au>.



'No-one thinks they need disability training, but it really pays off.' **An adult with CP**

Reasonable adjustments

When hiring a person with CP, it is important for employers to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that the workplace is accessible and inclusive.

Reasonable adjustments are modifications or adaptations that enable an employee with CP to perform their job duties to the best of their abilities:

- **Physical modifications** can include installing wheelchair ramps, accessible parking and modifying office spaces to accommodate mobility devices. Adjusting workstations, desks and chairs can also help employees with CP to perform their job duties more comfortably and effectively.
- **Flexible working arrangements**, such as part-time work, job sharing or working from home can provide employees with CP with greater flexibility and work-life balance. This can also help employees to better manage their health conditions.
- **Job restructuring and accommodations** can involve modifying job duties or changing the work environment to better suit the needs of employees with disability.
- **Assistive technology and equipment**, such as screen readers, speech recognition software and ergonomic equipment, can support employees with disability to perform their job duties more effectively. Employers can provide these tools to employees or arrange for funding to help employees purchase them.



Reasonable adjustments are essential for creating an inclusive and accessible workplace for employees with CP.

'Employers need to understand people with cerebral palsy may need just a little bit of assistance to be able to do their job, [but] everyone needs some sort of assistance in life.' **A 46yo male, GMFCS L1**

Tips for employers

Reasonable adjustments (continued)

'Employers should listen to the individual and trust that they know themselves and their challenges best.' **A 52yo female, GMFCS L1**

'Privileged/close parking is made available where possible in most jobs, but bathrooms/kitchens were up to 400m and a few staircases away in some cases.' **A 56yo female, GMFCS L2**

There is funding available to help with the costs of reasonable adjustments.

The JobAccess Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) is available to eligible people with disability who are about to start a job, are self-employed or who are currently working. The EAF provides funding to cover the costs of making workplace changes, including buying equipment, modifications or accessing services for people with CP. It is also available to people who need Auslan assistance or special work equipment to look for and prepare for a job.

Find out more about JobAccess funding at: <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/people-with-disability/funding-changes-workplace>.



Final words

Most people with CP who can work, do want to work in a meaningful job that fulfils their passions, interests and skillsets. Often the job they are applying for is well within their physical capabilities, but may require minor modifications to equipment, environment and flexible hours of work.

The challenge is for employers to separate the CP from the person, to consider the role of the position and the ability of the applicant to fulfil the role requirements with minimum disruption to the workplace, while providing maximum access and accommodations to the employee.

For more information, visit:

My CP Guide at: <https://www.mycpguide.org.au/>

Cerebral Palsy Support Network at: <https://cpsn.org.au/>



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June 2023



This publication has been developed in partnership by Cerebral Palsy Support Network (CPSN) and Cerebral Palsy Australia for My CP Guide.

Original research in this publication has been funded by the CPSN Futures Fund.

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