



Tēnā koutou

Welcome to the first quarterly Workbridge Partnership Pānui.

Firstly I want to say thank you for your participation in Workbridge Community Forums in November 2016. Thank you also to Pam McNeill from Disability Responsiveness New Zealand for facilitating these on behalf of Workbridge. Pam, Grant and I certainly enjoyed the opportunity to meet and talk with you about how you see Employment Services now and in the future. Pam has prepared a comprehensive report, a summary of which is attached to this email.

We have met with the Workbridge Council and Board to discuss the community forum summary report and your recommendations. In particular, we believe that the focus should be on these areas:

- Exploring initiatives to support jobseekers with self-employment.
- Having more jobseeker profiles and success stories on our website and social media, where jobseekers can profile their skills to employers.
- Investigating how to create employment opportunities for our jobseekers with other providers.
- Developing workplace responsiveness modules for employers.
- Building partnerships with other providers who can provide our Employment Consultants with specialist support and expertise around particular disability or impairment types (e.g. Blind Foundation, Autism NZ).
- Further discussing the idea of having specific Employment Consultants who are subject experts around particular disability or impairment types.
- Developing a 'My Workbridge' space for jobseekers and employers on the Workbridge and Support Funds websites.
- Investigating future internship opportunities through our employer partnership agreements, Mainstream, tertiary partnerships, etc.
- Providing information to the Ministry of Social Development about what disabled people said at the forums about Support Funds, etc.
- Continuing to build the partnership programme by sending out a quarterly newsletter, having local events, etc. 160 people have already shown an

interest in this programme. Therefore people want ongoing engagement with Workbridge.

Work in some of these areas is already underway. We also believe that it would be good to do future community forums every 12-18 months. We plan to budget for and implement many of the new projects you recommended during 2017-18, and beyond.

Keeping you informed:

- The Support Funds Management contract went to open tender at the end of March 2017 and I am pleased to announce that Workbridge has been selected as the preferred provider and we enter into contract negotiations with MSD in the coming weeks.
- All MSD Employment Service contracts go to open tender prior to July 2018. We anticipate providers will receive notice and details about the tender process by January 2018 so that successful providers can commence or continue to provide service from July 1st 2018.

If you wish to read the full list of Community Forum responses, or would like the summary provided in a different format, please let me know.

If you have any questions or comments please contact me directly.

Ka kite anō

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Community Forums November 2016

Summary of feedback

The following key themes were constant throughout the forums:

- Every forum raised and discussed self-employment as a positive way jobseekers could help themselves into employment. Issues raised concerned the need for advice, training and ongoing support from Workbridge, rather than funding.
- Forum participants expressed the view that Workbridge needs to provide workplace education for managers and staff prior to and after placement, to ensure recruitment and retention of jobseekers.
- Post-placement support was viewed as critical to the ongoing maintenance of employment. It was also suggested that support could be provided to assist people to gain promotion.
- Stigma was discussed as a barrier to employment at several forums. This is prevalent among families of jobseekers, within the tertiary sector and fellow students, and among jobseekers themselves.
- It was reported at most of the forums that online applications are a major barrier to many jobseekers.
- It was suggested that Workbridge film and promote the use of video profiles of jobseekers, along with CVs to employers.

There was general support for Workbridge as New Zealand's disability employment service of choice from forum participants.

Overview of responses to each question

Question one: what are the major issues you face in gaining or maintaining employment?

Ignorance and negative attitudes on the part of employers about the capabilities of jobseekers was the most often reported barrier to employment by respondents. This view was often coupled with reported lack of employer education about disability responsiveness, including lack of knowledge about adaptive technologies, New Zealand Sign Language and information in Easy Read and other formats.

The next most often reported barrier was minimal accommodations and lack of ongoing support to gain and maintain employment. Coupled with this issue are the limitations to current Ministry of Social Development criteria for Support Funds.

Many respondents reported barriers to applying for jobs, such as the use of online application forms which contain misleading questions linked to 'disability'. Health and safety issues and legislation were reported as commonly used reasons given by employers for not employing jobseekers.

Many respondents mentioned the role of volunteering in preventing social isolation. However some people reported not being able to gain access to voluntary work due to stigma.

While many responses from both the forums and online survey focused on specific, disability-related barriers to employment, several noted more general issues also experienced by non-disabled jobseekers in the community.

Question Two: what could Workbridge do to help solve those issues and improve your employment options?

Most responses to this question focused on the provision of a variety of supports needed by jobseekers. This support ranged from ensuring Workbridge staff have greater knowledge and awareness of disability issues and how to respond to these; to provision of more preparation, in-work and post-placement support to jobseekers; and more choice and control over use of Support Funds. It was also suggested that employers need access to employment-related disability responsiveness training, including information about what Support Funds can be used for.

An issue that arose at all ten of the forums and in many of the online survey responses was that of self-employment. It is notable that respondents are seeking collective and individual support from Workbridge, rather than funding as such.

It was noted by many respondents that at least annual contact between Workbridge and key stakeholders is highly desirable, in order for the latter to receive advice and information; and so stakeholder can provide input about what Workbridge services could be improved.

Question three: imagine if you could design employment support for jobseekers in New Zealand, what would this look like?

Although some responses to this question were similar to those gathered from question two, many people took the opportunity to broaden the focus from the support required from Workbridge to that required from the whole of society:

- Greater Government support for individuals and groups of jobseekers to start their own businesses and social enterprises.

- Jobseekers need to be paid to provide disability-related education.
- Quotas were discussed and many people agreed these would be a positive step, particularly in the state sector.
- Funding for jobseekers over 65 who need to remain in work.
- Greater choice, control and flexibility by jobseekers, regarding all disability-related funds.
- Changes to Support Fund criteria and recognition of all adaptive technologies.
- More jobseekers in control of our own sector and not just useful as unpaid volunteers.
- Ongoing support as needed and greater advocacy for disability employment generally
- Correct Government funding levels so Workbridge can concentrate on doing its job instead of endless form filling and compliance for contracted
- Extending support provisions provided at school into employment.
- Abolish the 90 day trial and if used, make employer accountable for the dismissal.
- More funding to support an extended Mainstream Programme.
- Keep jobseekers at the heart of all that is done in our name.

Question four: how do you want to receive service from Workbridge in the future?

There was universal support from respondents to plans for new initiatives, such as the digital strategy, contact centre and the tertiary graduate strategy, outlined by Workbridge Chief Executive: Grant Cleland. The only codicil was a widely held view that online and call centre options should be provided alongside, and not instead of, face to face contact. Positive comments were also received regarding plans to offer jobseekers free Wi-Fi access and a computer terminal in each Workbridge office to undertake job searches. It was noted that these computers must be equipped with whatever is necessary to ensure accessibility, such as screen reading software. "If Workbridge can't get this right then how can we expect employers or anyone else to?"

Suggestions from forum participants for additional enhancement to existing services provided by Workbridge included:

- More forums and online support for people seeking employment.

- Establish an online jobs board like Greyskills, which lists skilled disabled individuals for hire.
- Use the Mainstream Programme where possible to increase number and diversity of placements.
- Establish or support establishment of a programme of disability responsiveness education for employers.
- Market the skills and abilities of anonymous candidates via Facebook, so employers can review these and call Workbridge when they see a match with what they require.

Workbridge Partnership programme

A total of 160 people from the forums and survey have expressed a desire to join the Workbridge Partnership Programme. The purpose of this programme is to enable Workbridge to keep the momentum begun at the forums and through the survey going; to provide information about Workbridge services and any changes which may result from alterations to funding arrangements etc. in future. The partnership programme will also be a useful vehicle for Workbridge to receive advice from jobseekers about their requirements going forward.

Forum evaluation

81% of attendees completed the Evaluation Form and 81.3% of these people rated the forum as very good to excellent.

Workbridge
Where abilities equal employment