BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING PEOPLE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

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DISCLAIMER

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BACKGROUND

- 164,000 Australians have autism (ABS, 2017)
- Lowest labour force participation rates (40.8%) (ABS, 2017)
- Cost of autism is AUD $8.1 – 11.2 billion (Synergies Economic Consulting, 2011)
- Reducing employment gap between people with and without disabilities would result in rise to GDP of 0.85% (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011)
- Workforce participation provides social inclusion, economic independence, improved health and well-being to individual
- Increasing diversity within workforce may lead to broad organisational benefits
AIMS

- Identify potential benefits of employing people on the autism spectrum
  - Individual
  - Family
  - Organisation
  - Economy
METHOD

- Focus groups or 1-to-1 interviews
  - Trainees \((n = 21)\)
  - Family members \((n = 6)\)
  - Co-workers \((n = 42)\)
- DHS co-worker survey \((n = 188)\)
- Economic analysis
INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS

- **Sense of purpose**

  “...the job provides a purpose [...] a challenge, it's a positive challenge like the puzzle that's continually ahead of you [...] you're looking forward to getting up in the morning to go to work.”

- **Contribution**

  “...he can be a contributing member to the household [...] it’s massive to his self-esteem and his ability to say he can better himself, and that he has more potential than he realizes [...] he has got a very positive out-look about his future now...”

  “...instead of becoming a financial burden, I actually became a significant augmentation to the house income.”

- **Financial independence**

  “In my previous job I was getting paid the minimum wage [...] which wasn't much, barely enough to live on [...] I was barely able to keep my car serviced [...] but this one I was able to have a lot more money to become more independent”
INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS cont’d

- **Self-belief**

  “...it has shown that I can do anything, anything regardless of my diagnosis [...] the Dandelion Program's given me a lot of things to believe in [...] anything is possible and I can do anything...”

- **Self-esteem**

  “...with me, the change for me has been [to] greatly increase [my] self-esteem relating to other people...”

- **Pride**

  “It has certainly been great to have a cool job that you can talk about with all your friends and associates rather than [...] the alternatives there being that you’re [...] on unemployment benefits and stuff like that...”
FAMILY BENEFITS

- Financial

  “...he has bought a house and moved out of home...”

- Adaptive skills

  “...he’s [...] more capable of going places, getting himself to places, jumping on the transport and just going to town, and going to wherever he wants...”

- Motivation

  “...he sets two alarms because he likes to stay in bed but I don't get him up by quarter-to, he does get himself up....”

- Quality of life

  “At one point [...] we hardly had ever gone [out] on our own [...] we were at the point of actually cancelling our wedding anniversary. We are able to now and we would be more comfortable in [going out] now if we choose to...”
ORGANISATIONAL BENEFITS

Figure 1.

Co-worker perceptions of the value of the *Dandelion Employment Program* to the organisation (*n* = 188 responses)

- *The Dandelion Program serves an important purpose*
- *The Dandelion Program is a good strategy for this organisation*
- *I believe in the value of the Dandelion Program*
ORGANISATIONAL BENEFITS cont’d

Figure 2.

Co-worker perceptions regarding impact on their own work resulting from implementation of the Dandelion Employment Program

(n = 187 responses)
ORGANISATIONAL BENEFITS cont’d

“Talking to other staff I've heard only good things. I think it's a great program...”

“I'm a massive supporter of the Dandelion project. It fits with our culture of inclusivity and diversity...”

“I've always known that DHS is a supporter of diversity and our culture is of inclusivity. To me personally I'm very happy that the Dandelions are here. They give us an extra length and breadth...”

“I like what its vision is, I guess for the future [...] it's a great opportunity for the men and women that have been involved...”

“They've actually helped sharpen up some of the thought processes amongst the teams. They'll ask questions where others fear to tread...”

“I feel like I'm working for a happier place...”

“I'm always proud to say that I work in an organisation that accepts diversity and in fact looks at it as an advantage...”
“...the quality of the work that that team did for testing was absolutely fantastic [...] focused, driven, competitive in a good way [...] I have some comparative data to be able to compare that to in terms of previous projects and testing results that we've achieved. **It was very, very good quality.**”

“...much of the process is quite repetitive and some of the Dandelion staff have actually built tools that we can use whilst we're performing our job and that's actually **made my job easier.**”
GOVERNMENT SAVINGS

- Economic modelling of current Dandelion DHS implementation
  - 38 individuals started program, 30 remain (79%)
  - Reasons for leaving: Graduate program in DHS ($n = 2$), external competitive employment ($n = 1$), return to study ($n = 1$), did not pass probation ($n = 1$), personal reasons for leaving ($n = 3$)
  - Previous employment HX = part time, 12 hrs/week (median)
  - Current = 30 hrs/week (average)

- Government savings over 3 years (58% baseline unemployment, average work hours, previous employment, education)
  - Welfare savings = AUD $550,592
  - Tax gains = AUD $712,868
  - Unemployment services savings = AUD $102,600
  - Total savings = AUD $1.4 million over 3 years
SUMMARY

- Impacts exist on multiple systemic and inter-related dimensions, including the individual, family, organisation, and community.
- We identified and provided support for benefits to the individual, their family, the organisation and colleagues at work, and savings to the government.
- Each employee on the autism spectrum brings a unique set of skills to the workforce leading to unique opportunities to organisations that are willing to support and embrace diversity @ work.
- Our results provide a framework for future research assessing the benefits of increasing employment opportunities for those on the autism spectrum, who have traditionally been disadvantaged in obtaining meaningful employment.
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PUBLICATIONS


Under review
