

## What is *myWAY Employability*?

*myWAY Employability* is a smart web platform designed specifically to **help young people** on the autism spectrum **plan and prepare** for their **working life**.

*myWAY Employability* guides young people through a series of questions to help them identify their strengths, interests, learning and environmental preferences, and then matches this information to potential relevant careers and employment pathways. *myWAY Employability* provides scaffolded goal setting, to break goals into smaller action lists to track progress. It also contains a variety of information articles co-produced with the autistic community, covering topics such as Preparing for Work Experience; Getting Around; Creating a Job Application; Pathways to University, TAFE, or College; and Disclosure in the Workplace.

## Do I have to pay to use *myWAY Employability*?

No. Access to everything on *myWAY Employability* is completely free and involves a very simple registration process.

## Why was *myWAY Employability* created?

Autism CRC's vision is to see autistic people empowered to use their diverse strengths and interests. According to ABS 2018 data, more than one third of people on the autism spectrum are unemployed. This is more than three times the rate for people with disability and almost eight times the rate for people without disability. The situation is likely to have worsened in today's COVID-affected employment market. In addition, only 26% of autistic adults attain a post-school qualification from university or TAFE (compared to 45% for people with disability and 59% for people without disability).

Unsuccessful transition to work increases the risk of labour-force and social exclusion, as well as physical and mental health issues. On the flipside, better transition leads to earlier potential for employment, higher job satisfaction, greater productivity in the workplace, and increased capacity for independent living.

Starting with the question, '*How might we increase the self-determination of autistic young people to plan and prepare for post-school education, training, or work?*' we worked with young people to understand how we could support their career planning.

Autistic young people told us that they would be more likely to engage in career planning and goal setting if they had a resource designed specifically for them that was fun, engaging, and delivered personalised and practical information about relevant careers and pathways. To respond to this need, we created *myWAY Employability*.

## How was the *myWAY Employability* platform created and developed?

*myWAY Employability* was developed through collaboration with autistic young people and the adults who support them. Autism CRC believes that improved opportunities for successful transition to post-school life, and participation in higher education, training, and employment, come from solutions that **young people see as relevant, useful, and engaging**.

Adopting a human-centred design approach, we worked with autistic young people to really understand their needs and preferences, explore potential solutions, and ultimately co-design, test, and refine *myWAY Employability*.

In the discovery phase (Stage 1) of *myWAY Employability* we engaged with over 220 stakeholders - young people, parents, health professionals, and educators. A further **90 autistic young people** from Australia, NZ and the UK **were involved in the co-design and development** (Stage 2) of *myWAY Employability*; taking part in co-design workshops, user testing, and/or providing feedback on various elements of the website.

## What makes *myWAY Employability* different to other career planning websites and apps?

*myWAY Employability* has been designed specifically for and with young people on the autism spectrum. Unlike other career planning and information services designed for the general population, *myWAY Employability* provides a personalised profile matched to relevant career information and pathways, scaffolded goal-setting and action planning, and relevant information and resources that are co-produced with other young people on the autism spectrum.

## How can *myWAY Employability* be used in professional practice?

In 2018, the Autism CRC delivered the Better Outcomes and Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A) information and training workshops to young people on the spectrum and their parents, teachers, therapists, employment support specialists, and local coordinators. Approximately 100 people attended these BOOST-A workshops in WA, VIC, NSW, and QLD. This included 15 young people on the spectrum, parents, teachers, allied health professionals, employment support specialists, mentors and local coordinators.

People who attended the workshops told us they felt more knowledgeable and confident to assist adolescents on the spectrum to plan and prepare for employment after learning about the BOOST-A. They agreed it was a useful tool and would use it in future and recommend it to others.

*myWAY Employability* now offers the wider community access to the career exploration and goal setting components of the BOOST-A.

Transition and career planning is important. You might consider how you can support your young person with goal-setting and tracking, work experience, job seeking, and career development, exploration and decision making about further education, professional learning, and training; and development of employability or “soft” skills, such as teamwork and communication skills.

**If you are a service provider and will be using *myWAY Employability* in your practice, we would love to hear how it goes. Please get in touch by emailing [hello@autismcrc.com.au](mailto:hello@autismcrc.com.au).**

## How can I support a young person to use *myWAY Employability*?

Getting familiar with the *myWAY Employability* website is a great place to start. We like to refer to the people using our website as ‘myWayers’. It’s important to stay positive and encourage the myWAYer to be at the centre of their own career planning; in the driver’s seat; taking charge of their decisions and actions.

Findings from the Better Outcomes and Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A) research program identified five evidence-based Employability Principles to support transition planning of young people on the spectrum.

- 1) **Encourage the adolescent to dream big:** Have high expectations and always be strengths-based.
- 2) **Start transition planning early:** In Year 9 or as soon as possible after that.
- 3) **Promote youth-centred planning:** The young person should be an active participant, and work towards becoming the transition planning team leader.
- 4) **Focus on the ‘big picture’:** Support the adolescent to understand what life after school will be like through real life experiences; e.g., work experience, mentoring, volunteering, and part-time work.
- 5) **Have a champion on the team:** A champion is someone who is passionate and enthusiastic, and provides new opportunities and information to support transition planning.

You may also consider how you can help your myWayer to focus on a plan of action and stay on track to achieve their goals, and join them in celebrating every little success along the way.

## I am a teacher – can I use *myWAY Employability* with my students?

We would love to see *myWAY Employability* used in schools and believe it will help students on the autism spectrum with their transition planning from high school. *myWAY Employability* has been designed for young people to use; however, we are also working with Australian teachers to co-design, develop and evaluate a series of classroom resources for educators to use that support the use of *myWAY Employability* in school-based transition planning and curriculum-based activities.

These resources are called *myWAY Employability Educator* – and will be available via [\*inclusionED\*](#), which is Autism CRC's professional learning platform and community of practice for educators supporting students with diverse learning needs.

**We are currently looking for teachers to be involved in the trial of the *myWAY Employability Educator* resources and we welcome input! If you are a teacher and are interested in trialling *myWAY Employability* at your school in Term 4, please contact us at [hello@autismcrc.com.au](mailto:hello@autismcrc.com.au).**

## What is the research underpinning *myWAY Employability*?

*myWAY Employability* is based on the findings of six years of research, trials and evaluation related to transition planning for young people on the autism spectrum, which was originally used to develop the Better Outcomes and Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A) program (BOOST-A).

The BOOST-A is a digital transition-planning tool to help young people on the autism spectrum to plan what they will do after school. In an Australian nationwide controlled clinical trial with 94 high-school students on the autism spectrum, the BOOST-A was considered appropriate, relevant, and easy to use by the students and their parents, and by education and health professionals who support them.

Students who used the BOOST-A reported higher levels of self-determination to achieve their goals for further study or training and employment goals, than students who used the existing generic school-based transition planning processes ([Hatfield, Falkmer, Falkmer & Ciccarelli, 2017](#)).

## How does *myWAY Employability* relate to the Better Outcomes and Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A) program?

*myWAY Employability* incorporates the Better Outcomes and Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A) program. People who have read about or used the research version of the BOOST-A will recognise its features on *myWAY Employability*, even though the look and feel of the website is different. Many of the changes were made to respond to feedback from participants who were involved in the nationwide trial of the BOOST-A about how to improve its usability.

## Who developed *myWAY Employability*?

*myWAY Employability* was developed through a collaboration between Autism CRC and Curtin University. More than 300 autistic young people, parents, allied health professionals, disability service providers and educators from around Australia have been involved in the co-design and development of *myWAY Employability*. Autism CRC also established a *myWAY Employability* Neurodiverse Youth Advisory Group (NYAG) to advise on the engagement elements of the website, content, and user expectations.

The design and development of *myWAY Employability* was led by the team from Autism CRC and Curtin University, along with technology development partner The Project Factory/WayToBlue, and support from CSIRO e-Health Institute, Department of Education QLD Autism Hub, and Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect).

*myWAY Employability* is proudly supported by the Telstra Foundation, funded under the Tech4Good Challenge initiative.