

Belonging Matters' Podcast

Transcript

Series 2 Episode 3: Community Living Project: Micro Business Project

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Series Two, Episode Nine, Community Living Projects' Micro Enterprise Project Jayne Barrett has been employed by Community Living Project incorporated, CLP, since 1984. CLP is an agency that facilitates highly individualised and inclusive community living opportunities for people with disabilities. In 2011 Jayne managed the design and training of a new project, CLPs' Micro Enterprise Project. This assists people who live with significant disabilities to have their own small businesses as an alternative to day programmes. This podcast was first published as an article by Belonging Matters in the periodical, Issue 30, "Thinking About Micro Businesses", and is narrated by Wendy Butler, the current Manager of Community Living Projects' Micro Enterprise Project.

People who live with significant disabilities have traditionally and routinely only been offered day minding/recreation services in day programs, or possibly sheltered employment in segregated settings. Community Living Project's Micro Enterprise Project (MEP) is a service which offers employment for people who have traditionally not been seen to have the capacity to work.

The MEP framework is designed specifically using principles which underpin the goals of the NDIS working collaboratively with the person, their family, personal networks and community members.

Operating since 2013, primarily through benevolent funding, MEP now has a proven framework that can be accessed by people via their individual NDIS funds. Currently MEP is assisting 15 people in various stages of operating their own micro enterprise in Adelaide's metropolitan area.

The MEP framework inspires and supports people with assistance to create a micro enterprise matched to their personal interests, gifts, talents and resources. MEP is an alternative option for people who are seeking greater community inclusion and participation.

How it works

A MEP Consultant is contracted to work with each person guiding them through a process of enterprise Discovery, Creation, Operation and Maintenance, a process that usually

takes around 3-6 months. In the Discovery phase, the enterprise focus (product or service) is developed via understanding the person's gifts, talents, interests and capacities; consideration of their personal stamina to establish the hours of business and tasks to be performed. As well, understanding the personal resources that may be available, such as individualised support funding, NDIA budget, space and place, equipment available to operate the enterprise and people in their personal networks who might be interested in supporting the enterprise.

The person uses their NDIS funding allocation and is assisted to recruit and employ a specific paid worker in the role of enterprise Personal Assistant (PA). Recruiting a PA who has skills in the particular business focus is critical and they do not undertake any other home or community support role. The PA only works during the enterprise business hours assisting and supporting the owner with enterprise tasks and is pivotal to the success of the business. Each person has an Enterprise Management Group (EMG) which includes 3-5 invited community members with expertise in the enterprise focus, who give freely of their time. The EMG has an oversight management role, setting pricing and costing of the enterprise product or service; marketing; financial matters; product or service standards; recruitment and supervision of the right PA; enterprise tasks and routines. The EMG members, including the enterprise owner, community members with expertise in the business focus, and often (but not always) the key loved one/s, usually meet 4-6 weekly for about 1.5 hours as a formal management group, guided by the MEP Consultant.

Benefits we see

Enterprise owners benefit from the pride they feel in providing a high standard of service or highly desirable product and having their contributions acknowledged by their customers and local community members. Having a set routine each week helps people understand the need to be ready for work on time, to know the daily tasks of their enterprise and to feel comfortable with building confidence in the rhythms and tasks of their week. We see people building skills and increasingly being able to be involved in most, if not all, of the daily enterprise tasks. Having an enterprise name that the person has been part of deciding helps that person to take ownership, as does being involved as a key member of their EMG. Also having a little extra spending money or a growing bank balance is a direct reward for their work efforts!

Each enterprise is centred in local community, using local business for purchasing their supplies; having a base of local enterprise customers that they visit regularly; and using the local banks and other utilities regularly. Gathering social capital and being part of the local economy is key to building a mindset shift in understanding the skills and capacities of the enterprise owner and their contribution and participation in the broader community.

Some comments from people involved.

“Now he has a role in life that other people value - because everyone values a job.”

“Her enterprise gives her the opportunity to make connections and build relationships in her community.”

“He looks forward with keen interest every day about what he’s going to do. When he’s finished his work he comes in and says what a good day..... he has that inner feeling of accomplishment and he gets a lot of pride out of that.”

“What a buzz to make something that people like enough to buy.”

“I love to see people’s eyebrows go up when he says he has a business, and then they start talking about what it is.”

“He relates to the idea that he is working and has a business, like his Dad. He responds with a smile when this comparison is made”

“She is making use of her strengths and attributes making a contribution in her community.”

“Working on enterprise tasks alongside his PA, is a new life experience and learning which he is really enjoying.”

Our vision is that all people with significant disabilities living in Australia, have the option to choose to pursue their individual careers by establishing their own micro-enterprise project. MEP has been successful over the last 8 years in changing the lives of the people involved. Given the staggeringly low employment rates for people with significant disability, MEP offers examples in which low expectations and gross underemployment have been challenged to produce substantial employment, community contribution and

participation outcomes for people with disability. Through the enterprise support network created around each person, a further key outcome has been the reciprocal impact of changing community expectations and building community capacity. When most of us meet somebody new one of the first questions we ask, or are asked, is “what do you do?” Our aim is to give people the dignity of having a good answer to that question!

Enterprise Examples

David Oakey Timbersmith: David renovates solid wood furniture and creates new unique pieces from hand picked recycled timbers. Each unit retails from \$30 to \$200 (or more). David sells his products to several artisan gift/nursery and coffee shops and some cellar door outlets.

By Jocelyne: Jocelyne produces and sells beautifully presented boxes of delicious and all-natural dried fruit, treat bags. Units retail at \$30 for a box of 10 bags. The product is being marketed to local shops, business and workplaces.

Flowers by Fleur: Fleur produces small elegant vases of flowers created for café tables and reception counters. These are refreshed weekly and maintained and sold for \$4 a vase. These are sold to regular customers on the local high street.

Art by Jules: Jules enjoys selling her paintings as well as having images of them reproduced to greeting cards which are sold in local shops. The art and paintings are of landscapes and beautiful colours which reflect the seaside and holiday neighbourhood in which she lives.

(Helen Neale relates her family experience.)

Helen Neale

In the middle of 2016, I heard of CLP's Micro Enterprise Project through a friend and I immediately became interested in what they could offer my son Tom who would soon be leaving school. Tom was not at all interested in working in supported employment and we felt that he wasn't being encouraged by school to do anything else. It was a relief to come across CLP who had the same vision for our son - to work in the local community doing something he was good at and loved! Tom had been doing some work experience at a nursing home helping the groundsman and he also enjoyed cutting our lawns. With the assistance of the Micro Enterprise Project, we helped Tom set up his own lawn mowing business, Ground Control by Major Tom! Through a gradual transition, Tom was able to finish school and go straight into working in his own micro business. This really helped him feel less anxious about life post school and it raised his self-esteem to be able to tell people what his plans were. As Tom is eligible for day options, we have been able to use this funding via CLP to employ Craig as Tom's Enterprise PA three days a week, from 9.30am to 3.00pm. Having Craig assist Tom on the job means that he can offer a full, top quality service, as Craig does the things Tom can't do such as, drive to the jobs, whipper snip and remember to bring home all the equipment! Tom has been very fortunate to have lots of support from family, friends and the local community. The local Lions Club donated Tom's equipment and he already has 12 regular customers. Ground Control by Major Tom has a Facebook page with nearly 200 likes and Tom also regularly

does his own mail box drops to obtain new customers. Being an outdoor job, the major challenges have been the weather and stepping on dog poo! However these are quite easily overcome and the benefits far outweigh any problems. Tom has become fitter, grown a foot in self-esteem, and generally is very happy. We believe that Tom is at his best when surrounded by supportive people in the community and our common goal is for Tom to be working in a satisfying role and contributing in a positive way to society. So far Tom having his own lawn business has fulfilled this goal and he is enjoying his independence and post school life very much.

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