A business problem solved, a job opportunity created

Sean’s story

Workers have different strengths and capabilities.

In this story, making use of and extending the capabilities of a worker with disability allowed other staff to spend their time more productively. The workplace culture was also improved, and the worker himself now has rewarding paid employment.

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Sean’s story

Sean is 20 years old and is a valued, paid member of the staff at the Multicultural Development Association (MDA), where he has worked for 18 months.

Sean has Down syndrome but that doesn’t define who he is. When he finished school, Sean’s parents wanted him to have ‘a life as ordinary as possible’ and ‘a chance to make a meaningful contribution to our community’.

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Getting Started

Before joining the team, Sean and his support worker met with his manager, Michelle, to discuss how they could help Sean settle in.

Initially the support worker attended twice a week to help Sean learn his tasks and with practical things, such as learning to speak more slowly. The support worker now only needs to come once a week.

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A Business Problem

An efficiency review at MDA found that staff spent a lot of valuable time on administrative tasks, such as photocopying, which interrupted their priority work with clients.

MDA decided to create a new position to attend to all the routine tasks in the office: copying, preparing information packs, and setting up for meetings.

It was the perfect job for Sean.

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Developing Skills

Sean mastered the routine administrative tasks, and other jobs such as stocking the kitchen, helping with client barbeques, food bank shopping, and deliveries.

Management then discovered Sean’s interest in technology and saw potential to build on his skills. He now surveys clients using an iPad and Survey Monkey, and takes staff photographs.
Benefits for the organisation

Sean’s manager is enthusiastic about the benefits to the organisation from employing Sean.

She says, "...a lot of tasks Sean does are fiddly and time consuming. Creating his job really helped staff with their workload. We love the fact that he gets those jobs done and does them properly. We’re very lucky to have him... He’s a breath of fresh air with a different attitude to work; he’s not judgmental, he’s always willing to work. There has also been a really positive impact on our clients when they see that there are no barriers to Sean’s employment at MDA."

Benefits for Sean

Sean appreciates being part of the team. His parents said, ‘It is important for him to have his own name badge, swipe card, email, and be part of the team.

Sean is on real wages and is treated like any other young employee...He has had one day off sick in the year he’s been at MDA.’

Takeaway Messages

- Providing a job opportunity for a person with a disability can be as beneficial for the employer as for the person gaining employment.
- Some initial planning and preparation may be needed.
- Many employers report that employing a person with a disability often positively contributes to the work environment in ways that they never imagined.

What assistance can you get to employ a person with a disability?

When employing a person with a disability, you may be eligible for financial assistance. Visit the Queensland government ‘People with disability’ site for information (http://www.qld.gov.au/disability/business/employers-colleagues/).

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