



Pathways to
Possibilities

Community Stories

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SSI For equality
of life.

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Acknowledgement of Country

SSI Group acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First and Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their continuous connection to water, sky and Country. SSI Group remains committed to reconciliation and to working with First Nations peoples to realise “Makarrata” – a Yulngu word meaning the coming together after a struggle.

Cover illustration by Thomas, Blend Creative

Foreword

I am delighted and honoured to present our Community Stories booklet for Pathways to Possibilities.

These stories represent an important compilation of personal experiences celebrating success and achievement. They include inspiring tales from people with disability on their career journey, and noteworthy examples of employers making their workplaces more inclusive and accessible.

We know that there is an untapped talent pool of one million people with disability looking for work¹; bridging this gap and making our workplaces welcoming for all is a crucial undertaking that has benefits for businesses, communities, and individuals alike. These stories show that people with disability have the skills, tenacity, and compassion to participate meaningfully in the economy and make indelible impacts on workplace culture and performance.

The contributions to this booklet share common themes of resilience and ambition, but differ in crucial and unique ways, demonstrating that instigating change and fostering inclusion must be born out of a person-centred approach. Whether this involves creating more avenues for entrepreneurship and self-employment, increasing access to training and resources for staff, or simplifying recruitment processes based on accessibility needs, there is so much that employers can do to ensure that people with disability feel supported and encouraged in all aspects of employment.

Despite great strides in social justice over recent years, some of these accounts feature upsetting instances of discrimination and bigotry. Business leaders and colleagues alike must remain committed to eliminating all forms of prejudice at the workplace, ensuring that these environments not only make people with disability feel welcomed, but celebrated.

We are hoping that this booklet, together with our formal Pathways to Possibilities report, represents a clear blueprint for the future of open market employment for people with disability. By committing to long-lasting and far-reaching improvement, businesses will witness first-hand the remarkable ways that people with disability can lead, design, and thrive in workplaces across the country.



“These stories show that people with disability have the skills, tenacity, and compassion to participate meaningfully in the economy and make indelible impacts on workplace culture and performance.”

**Violet Roumeliotis,
CEO, SSI**

SSI CEO Violet Roumeliotis at the Pathways to Possibilities launch event.

This booklet helps underscore the significant contributions made by people with disability to our society, and emphasises the substantial benefits to be gained by individuals and their communities through greater workplace inclusion and diversity. I am proud of the achievements of people with disability and the ways in which they make the world a better place.

**Violet Roumeliotis,
SSI CEO**

1. ¹Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *People with disability in Australia*, Labour force participation, April 2024, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/employment/labour-force-participation>

Lauren's ancestral awakening

Lauren, a Darug woman, has always felt a deep connection to the land. As a child, she found solace in nature, often wandering through the bush, imagining the footsteps her ancestors took long before her. This connection was more than just a passion; it was a responsibility rooted in her culture - a duty to care for the land as her people have done for thousands of years.

Lauren dreamed of becoming a fire practitioner, a guardian of the land through the ancient art of cultural burning. To pursue this path, she completed a National Park Indigenous traineeship, but her journey was far from easy. When she needed to obtain a manual driver's licence to continue her work, debilitating panic attacks became a barrier. She turned to horticulture studies, yet mental health challenges stemming from her bipolar disorder and autism made it difficult to maintain her employment.

Despite these struggles, Lauren's connection to the land never wavered. Her psychologist suggested the Fire Sticks mentorship, a program teaching traditional fire-burning techniques, as a path for job opportunities and personal healing. Lauren embraced the opportunity, and it changed her life.

The mentorship introduced her to a gentle and consistent method of burning, passed down through generations. For Lauren, these traditional burns were more than just a job; they were a source of healing. The act of caring for the land in the way her ancestors had brought her a renewed sense of purpose and significantly improved her mental health.

In addition to this continued exploration of her heritage, Lauren's studies in Indigenous Tourism at TAFE have also opened new possibilities. She began to envision a career where she could share her knowledge with others, creating immersive cultural experiences that highlight the rich history and traditions of the Darug people. Through her work, she hopes to educate others on the importance of preserving Indigenous practices and respecting the land's original custodians.

Lauren's journey has been marked by challenges, but her resilience is a testament to the power of cultural connection and self-discovery. She continues to seek support from her psychologist and her community, emphasizing the unbreakable connection between culture and wellbeing.





Allianz's Glenn Slater speaking on a panel at the Pathways to Possibilities launch event.

“It produced a ripple effect where it positively impacted our people...and it's getting more and more traction.”

**Glenn Slater,
Allianz**

Allianz's Alliance: From Strength to Strength

Even as one of the world's largest insurers, Allianz was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting the need for more temporary employees to handle claims processing.

Recognising an opportunity for both business and social impact, Glenn Slater, Senior HR Business Partner at Allianz, initiated a partnership with a disability service provider in April 2021. What began as a discrete project of four neurodiverse trainees in the Motor Claims team has now grown to an established program across four states with nearly 50 trainees at its peak.

“It produced a ripple effect where it positively impacted our people... and it's getting more and more traction,” says Slater.

The project's scope and the effectiveness of these recruits exceeded expectations. The initial team reduced a backlog of 2500 motor claims assessment reports to 50 within two weeks, showing the value of specifically designing roles that match worker capacity. Allianz immediately recognised the initiative's value and senior leaders sought to expand the recruitment

of people with disability into appropriately matched jobs. The Allianz traineeship program was born.

Given the partnership's success, trainees with disabilities have been assigned to various teams such as Dispute Resolution, Workers Compensation, and Remediation, processing claims and assisting with customer service enquiries.

“It solved a real-life business issue, and it's really benefiting our customers,” says Slater.

Other aspects of Allianz's business model have also benefited. The Learning & Development department, for example, has adopted elements of the ‘Train the Trainer’ model used by the disability service provider, creating training materials that simplify complex roles and reduce risks.

Since October 2023, 21 trainees with disabilities have transitioned into permanent roles, including one now serving as a Team Coordinator. This has highlighted the importance of diversified leadership roles to better represent the workforce and reflects an aim of the program to provide opportunities for the advancement of trainees.

Engagement from Allianz coworkers is high, with many feeling pride in the achievements of their colleagues. This engagement encourages participation in advocacy initiatives, while trainees feel a strong sense of loyalty to their workplace, especially with the prospect of sustainable permanent employment opportunities.

Emmanuel's Journey of Healing Through Art

Content warning: this story contains self-harm.


Emmanuel arrived in Australia from Ghana filled with hope, viewing it as a fresh start brimming with opportunity. But soon after landing in his new homeland, he found himself facing unexpected challenges, including racism. As a new migrant, he struggled to fit in with his peers at school, facing daily encounters of exclusion that affected his mental health. The weight of this isolation took its toll on him.

It was not long before Emmanuel's teachers noticed something alarming – self-harm scars on his wrists. They acted quickly, and soon, Emmanuel was diagnosed with depression and anxiety. Sleepless nights, loss of appetite, and a constant sense of vulnerability became his reality. The stigma and judgement surrounding mental health in Ghana meant that Emmanuel hid his struggles from his network there, only able to accept support when connected to a counsellor from Headspace, in Australia.

After graduating high school, new obstacles arose. Due to his visa status, Emmanuel was ineligible for Centrelink financial assistance, leaving him in a precarious position. With no support, finding a job became his only priority, but physical health issues held him back from roles that demanded fitness. Misunderstood by many, he was accused of being lazy for not working. In these moments of despair, art became his escape. His counsellor, recognising the power of this passion, encouraged him to think more deeply about his creative potential.

A turning point came when Emmanuel was referred to SSI. Through their “Our Voice” program, he learned public speaking – something he never imagined he could do. Though shy by nature, the program built his confidence, and with it, a new door opened. He soon realised that his lived experience, paired with his artistic talent, had the potential to become more than just an emotional outlet; they could be a career.

Small paid gigs began trickling in, and for the first time, Emmanuel saw art not just as a hobby, but as a potential career path. As he continued working with SSI, they connected him with the Ignite program, which provided the guidance he needed to launch his own business, Emmanuel Asante Arts. With their help, he turned his passion into a sustainable livelihood.



...the program built his confidence, and with it, a new door opened. He soon realised that his lived experience, paired with his artistic talent, had the potential to become more than just an emotional outlet; they could be a career.

Ghanaian artist
Emmanuel Asante.

Now, Emmanuel is thriving. As a board member of “We Are Studios” at Blacktown Art Centre, he is ensuring that artists with disabilities have a space to create and flourish. His art has been showcased across local councils and even at iconic venues like the Sydney Opera House. His workshops inspire others, and he has become an advocate for mental health and disability, merging his personal experiences with his art.

If you or someone you know is in crisis and needs help now, please call triple zero (000). You can also call Lifeline on 13 11 14 – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Charlie's Story: Driven to Success

Charlie*, an 18-year-old man who lives with autism, has been passionate about cars for as long as he can remember. "I have worked with cars since I could talk; I have a really big passion for cars," he said. This lifelong enthusiasm has driven Charlie to pursue his dream of owning a car and becoming a mechanic.

The first milestone in Charlie's journey was obtaining his driver's licence, made possible by accessing supports included in his NDIS plan. He participated in a specialised driving course where he not only gained the skills needed to pass his driving test but also built his confidence and determination.

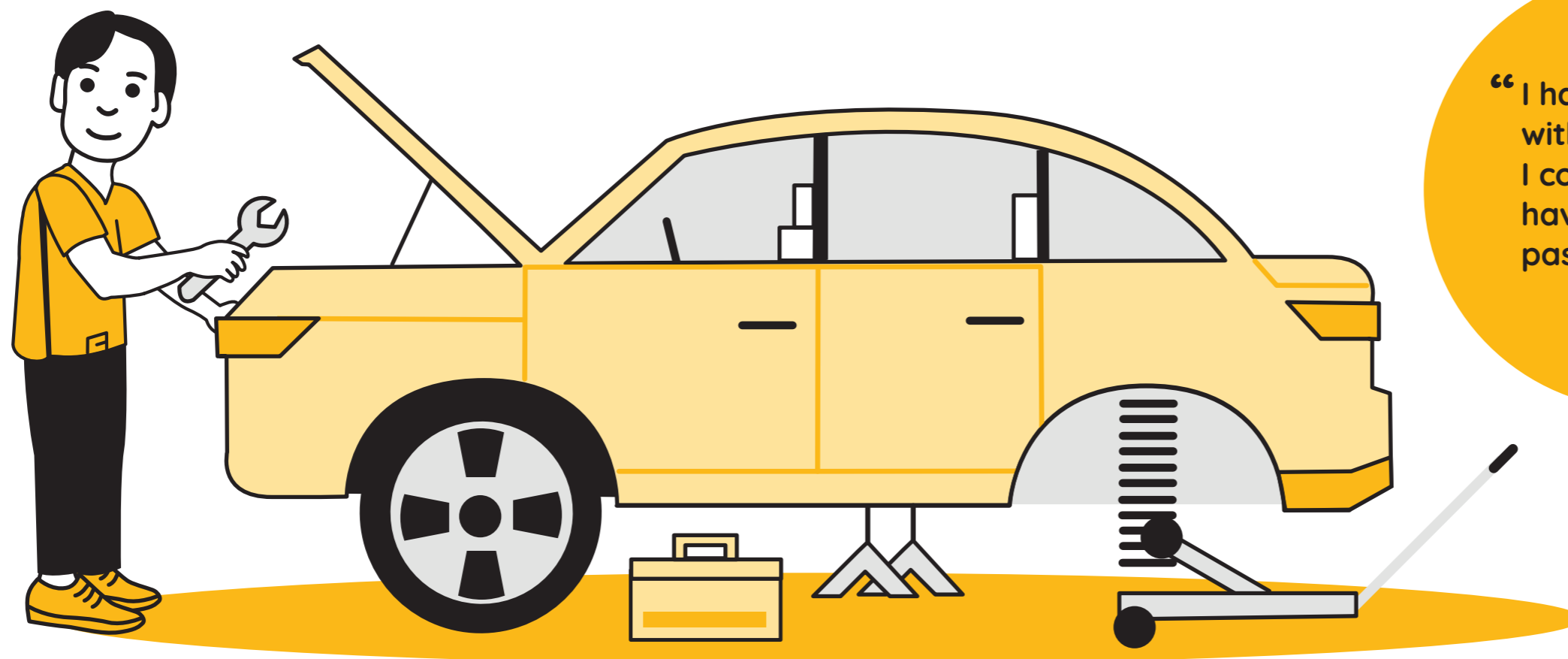
Since he started working at a local restaurant at the age of 14, Charlie had been saving money. His hard work paid off when he finally purchased his first car after getting his licence. Driving his car provided him with newfound independence, freedom, and a sense of validation that he was on the right path.

This achievement brought Charlie one step closer to his dream of becoming a mechanic. With the support of the SSI LAC program who linked him with mainstream supports, he secured an apprenticeship and went on to qualify as a detailer through TAFE. "Detailing is just as fun [as mechanics], and if you know what you're doing, it's absolutely amazing," he said enthusiastically.

Charlie's journey has not been without its challenges. While studying to become a mechanic, he often felt overwhelmed by the amount of information he needed to learn, which sometimes shook his confidence. However, Charlie employed strategies he had learned over the years to manage his anxiety and regain his focus. Simple actions like taking detailed notes helped him navigate these tough times.

His mother Lenora admires his persistence and the positive attitude he has consistently shown throughout his career path. She proudly shared that if he sets his sights on something, he understands the effort required to achieve it.

Now, equipped with the skills and confidence needed for his profession, Charlie is ready to find a job as a mechanic in an environment where he can thrive. His journey reflects not only his dedication to his craft but also the resilience and determination that have brought him this far. Charlie's story is a testament to the power of passion, hard work, and the support of a community that believes in his potential.



"I have worked with cars since I could talk; I have a really big passion for cars."
Charlie

**Pseudonym has been used*

City of Sydney's Council Commitments

The City of Sydney is leading the way in fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce, proudly accredited as a disability-confident recruiter by the Australian Disability Network. As a member of the Australian Human Rights Commission's IncludeAbility Employer Network, the City of Sydney is dedicated to breaking down barriers and ensuring every employee feels valued, supported, and empowered to contribute their unique strengths.

The recruitment process is designed to deliver tailored support to individuals with disabilities; those who meet the minimum role requirements can be fast tracked to interviews, ensuring that opportunities are accessible to all.

This approach is part of a broader commitment to inclusivity, outlined in the City of Sydney's Inclusion (Disability) Action Plan. Developed in collaboration with the independent Inclusion (Disability) Advisory Panel, the plan focuses on removing obstacles to meaningful employment. Guided by the principle of "Nothing about us, without us," the City of Sydney is co-designing its next action plan alongside people with disability, their families, carers, and disability organisations to further amplify employment opportunities.

Flexibility is a cornerstone of the City of Sydney's workforce. Accommodating individual circumstances and caring responsibilities, they offer flexible working arrangements to ensure everyone feels they belong.

Partnering with specialist recruiters and initiatives such as Inclusion Works at the Council for Intellectual Disability has led to the recruitment of neurodiverse individuals. These efforts are part of the City of Sydney's ongoing commitment to building inclusive employment pathways in partnership with disability organisations.

Inclusion is woven into the fabric of the workplace culture at the City of Sydney. Mandatory training ensures all employees understand and embrace diversity, with additional training provided where needed, including for mental health and invisible disabilities.

Employees with disability and allies can become advocates and champions of change with regular events that raise awareness, promote wellbeing and bring people together to connect. These include International Day of People with Disability, R U OK Day, Mental Health Month and Carers Week.



Employees with disability and allies can become advocates and champions of change with regular events that raise awareness, promote wellbeing and bring people together to connect.

City of Sydney employees Ari, Frazer and Matt.
Credit: Tanisha Lafitani.

In 2024, these efforts were celebrated when the City of Sydney received the Local Government NSW Excellence Award for its diverse employee networks, including the newly established Disability Employee Network. Additionally, the City of Sydney's results in the Diversity Council Australia's 2023-2024 Inclusive Employer Index surpassed the national benchmark, highlighting how deeply diversity and inclusion are embedded in the organisation's culture.

With a clear focus on empowering individuals and creating an inclusive workplace, the City of Sydney is setting the standard for diversity in the public sector.

Katelyn's Puppy Love

Katelyn, a determined 25-year-old with both hearing and vision impairments, has always been passionate about animals. However, her journey into the veterinary field was not easy. Despite her love for the work, Katelyn faced significant challenges, from navigating a competitive job market to struggling in an unsupportive work environment.


Through her connection with the Local Area Coordinator (LAC) program at SSI, Katelyn found the resources and encouragement she needed to pursue her dreams. With the help of Julie, her dedicated LAC, Katelyn was introduced to essential services, including JobAccess, who assessed her in the workplace, and recommended she source an amplified stethoscope, which became a game-changer in her career. This fundamental tool not only improved her ability to perform her job but also boosted her confidence, enabling her to contribute more effectively to her team.

Now her experience as a veterinary nurse has become a rewarding one, marked by five years of dedication and growth. She has gained unwavering support from her employer, and recently celebrated the completion of her dog training course—a pivotal step toward her dream of becoming an assistant dog trainer.

Katelyn's passion for helping individuals with disabilities through dog training has fuelled her determination, and she's begun making strides in her volunteer work, working with puppies. Her next goal is transitioning to working with adult dogs and enhancing her skills through opportunities at her workplace, like puppy preschool.

But Katelyn's aspirations go beyond just training dogs; she envisions a future where she's not only training assistance animals, but also providing services and animal therapy for individuals with PTSD and other mental health challenges. For her, there is nothing more fulfilling than training dogs to meet people's specific needs, educating them about responsible pet ownership, and enjoying the heartwarming moments of caring for animals at every stage of their lives.

In the past year, Katelyn has blossomed in her personal and professional life, gaining confidence, and stepping into leadership roles. She now leads a group of primary school children in a church program, honing her ability to inspire and guide others. With her growing skills and a heart full of compassion, Katelyn is well on her way to making a lasting impact—both in the world of dog training and in the lives of those who need it most.



...Katelyn found the resources and encouragement she needed to pursue her dreams.

Veterinary nurse Katelyn.

Mary's Mission: Part of the Family

Mary, a hiring manager for a McDonald's licensee, oversees recruitment for ten bustling restaurants stretching from Liverpool to Campbelltown and down to Mittagong. Her passion for inclusivity shines through in everything she does. "I believe in giving everyone a chance to work at McDonald's", she said.

It all started when a local disability employment agency approached Mary, eager to help find opportunities for their candidates. She gladly accepted their request. These individuals, each with their own unique set of abilities, were looking for a place where they could contribute and grow.

From that moment, her recruitment process took on a new dimension. The interviews transformed into more than mere exchanges between employer and candidate; they provided valuable insights into how to best meet the needs of applicants. With the help of support workers, the process became a collaborative effort, with each person given the space to express what they could bring to the table.

When hired, the new employees attended orientation with their support workers. They received their uniforms, learned company policies, and most importantly, felt welcomed into the McDonald's family. To make sure the recruits were comfortable over those first few weeks, their support workers stayed close for guidance and support, and Mary confirmed that all necessary workplace adjustments were being met.

Their tasks were as varied as their interests. Some enjoyed working in the kitchen, others loved greeting customers at the counter, and a few took pride in keeping the restaurant sparkling clean. The sense of teamwork was palpable, and each employee brought their own energy to the McDonald's experience.

One story stands out for Mary. A young woman, once so shy she could barely make eye contact during her interview, has since flourished. She now confidently welcomes customers with a smile, making them feel at home.

As word spread about the success of Mary's inclusive hiring practices, more agencies reached out, eager to connect their candidates with opportunities. The impact has been profound. For Mary, it's not just about filling positions – it's about transforming lives.

By embracing employees with disabilities, McDonald's has created an inclusive environment rich with diverse experiences. Each person brings something special to the table, making the organisation stronger – and Mary would not have it any other way.

"I believe in giving everyone a chance to work at McDonald's."

**Mary,
Hiring Manager**



Doing the Heavy Lifting with Marco

Marco grew up in a supportive family environment where his parents encouraged him to try new things. Before he even started looking for a job, Marco would accompany his dad to work. Despite some uncertainty due to his cerebral palsy, Marco jumped at any chance to help his dad with his role in the construction industry.

Under the supervision of his father and his co-workers, Marco learned to navigate excavators. Although he was initially worried about triggering something inside the machine, he found that everything was conveniently located on the right-hand side, which suited him well given his left-sided weakness. This experience solidified his interest in vehicle operation, and he decided he wanted to go for his driver licence.

After attempting the Driver Knowledge Test seven times, Marco declared “enough was enough!” and decided no more. Feeling defeated, Marco took time to recover from this setback. He later decided that a driver’s licence wasn’t essential since he lived close to everything he needed. Instead, he set his sights on obtaining a forklift licence.

Through connections, Marco enrolled in a TAFE course and studied diligently for months. Successfully obtaining his forklift licence was a huge achievement and boosted Marco’s confidence significantly. He soon began taking on roles in warehousing and fencing to get his foot in the door at workplaces where he could demonstrate his new skills. Despite making tough decisions to move on from one job due to the complexities he faced, and job instability in another, Marco’s family and friends encouraged him to keep moving ahead.

Eventually, Marco landed a job where he started by picking stock and plastic-wrapping products. He built strong relationships with his management team and peers. After years with the business, Marco’s manager, Pino, asked him if he had a forklift licence. Proudly, Marco confirmed he did, but Pino was curious how he could operate it. Marco asked Pino to “get out [of the forklift] and I’ll show you”. Getting comfortable in the seat of the forklift, Marco’s left hand dropped on his lap, right hand operating, he started loading up. Impressed, Pino offered him a job as a forklift driver.

Marco has been operating forklifts for over a year, and his sense of joy in the role is palpable. However, he is always mindful of safety risks and remains



Marco has been operating forklifts for over a year, and his sense of joy in the role is palpable.

Marco at the Pathways to Possibilities launch event.

vigilant whenever operating the forklift. Marco recalled a particular encounter with the forklift that made him hesitant to get back on. After discussing his feelings with Pino and his family, who fully supported him, Marco decided to face his fear and got back onto the seat the next day, knowing it would only get harder if he delayed.

Continuing in the role today, Marco demonstrates the strength of his resilience, determination, and the power of a supportive community.

Scott's Stamina: Making a Difference in the Community

After noticing that the listing for a role at SSI strongly encouraged people with disability to apply, Scott Taylor's decision was an easy one to make. His time being unemployed had been disheartening, with his extensive experience as an advocate and consultant often looked over.

Scott recognised that working for SSI would not only mean making a difference in a community-minded sense, but also working for an organisation that resonated with his core values. Through a conversation with his leader, a hybrid work policy allowed Scott freedom to have increased flexibility with his work arrangements. Another access need, a height-adjustable desk, has allowed Scott to work comfortably in the office. These workplace adjustments are simple steps that can make a world of difference to those that request them.

As a Disability Confident Recruiter, SSI works with individuals to understand what they need, whether it be throughout the recruitment process, during onboarding, or on an ongoing basis. SSI's Head of Disability Services, Nicole Smith, says that "building in that flexibility is often straightforward. We have seen huge advantages to hiring talent with disability."

Through Scott's work as a Community Development Officer within the Local Area Coordination (LAC) program, he is focused on delivering projects targeting community engagement and capacity building outcomes for people with disability and the broader community. Working with businesses and community leaders to raise awareness around the challenges that people with disability face, as well as devising solutions to those barriers, has allowed the voices of those with lived experience to come to the fore in conversations that may have previously shut them out.

His perspective as a person with disability has been crucial in the co-design and development of a range of internal projects and initiatives at SSI, including the Pathways to Possibilities report and the International Day of People with Disability launch event, the latter of which he acted as MC. "Scott is an exceptional communicator and has strong skills in facilitation and advocacy that have been hugely beneficial to our business and sector," says Nicole.

Scott's ability to thrive in his role, as well as generously give back to the communities he serves, has been a clear indication that hiring people with disability can lead to impressive outcomes and refreshingly diverse workplaces.



“Scott is an exceptional communicator and has strong skills in facilitation and advocacy that have been hugely beneficial to our business...”

Nicole, SSI

Scott Taylor in his MC role at the Pathways to Possibilities launch event.

Blair's Journey of Mateship and Motivation

Blair, a determined 23-year-old with a heart full of dreams, had always wanted to work. However, the path to finding a job was not easy. Blair faced unique communication challenges that made it difficult for others to understand him. Even though he did not have a physical disability, people often realised something was different about him only after he started speaking. This made it tough for Blair to connect with others, especially in workplaces where social groups had already formed.

Blair tried different jobs, but none of them worked out. The environments were often unfriendly, with cliques that made him feel excluded. This, combined with the anxiety that Blair sometimes felt, made these experiences difficult. Adding to that, transportation was another hurdle. Blair wanted to be independent and travel to work on his own, but the challenge of navigating public transport made it seem impossible at times.



Blair did not give up, through the supports included within his NDIS plan, Blair's situation began to change. His NDIS plan underwent a reassessment, and a decision was made to include additional supports in employment to help him achieve his goals. Connections were made with different services, and Blair was given the opportunity to gain work experience in a new environment – one that suited his interests and skills.

Blair started working at a landscaping company called CPS, where he also took on cleaning services. It was a job that allowed him to be outdoors, which he loved, and to work with his hands. What made this experience different, was the team he worked with. His coworkers were a cohesive group, and Blair found himself enjoying their company. They would joke around, have lunch together, and for the first time, Blair felt like he was truly part of the team.

One day, Blair's supervisor overheard him talking to his coworkers after forgetting to hang up the phone. It was a simple conversation, but it made his supervisor proud. Blair was comfortable enough to be himself at work, speaking freely and fitting in with his team. It was a sign that the workplace had become a place where he belonged.

For Blair, having a job is not just about earning money – it's about being part of something bigger, making connections, and living life to the fullest.

Unlocking Abraham's Potential

With a passion for accounting and both a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Business and Commerce, you wouldn't expect Abraham Darouiche to struggle finding a job as an accountant. Yet, recruitment barriers saw Abraham moving in and out of jobs, often in unrelated industries.

"People look at you and they assume, and that's the most dangerous thing," Abraham says.

From the outset, Abraham faced challenges trying to identify suitable roles, as information regarding workplace accessibility was rarely provided in job descriptions. Then, applications featuring time-sensitive tests didn't accommodate his motor skill impairment, placing him at a disadvantage despite his qualifications.

"Some recruiters never responded at all," says Abraham. "You lose your confidence. People say don't give up, but how much can you apply for before you burn out?"

Fortunately, a government grant from the Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program was given to the association that Abraham volunteered for, the Diversity & Disability Alliance (DDA), providing him with a more stable income, though employment in Abraham's desired field of accounting remained elusive.

A networking event eventually provided Abraham the opportunity to bypass the ruthlessness of online recruitment systems and present himself directly to potential employers. This led to securing an ideal part-time role as an Accounts Manager at Hope & Care.

Reflecting on his job search journey, Abraham acknowledges the challenging task of achieving a truly egalitarian job market but suggests simple initiatives for employers. He advocates for volunteer and internship programs targeted at jobseekers with disabilities that allow gradual assessment of recruits' strengths and alignment of tasks with their skillsets.

"People with disability are willing to work and be involved," Abraham says. "They just have to be given that chance."



"People with disability are willing to work and be involved. They just have to be given that chance."

Abraham

Disability advocate Abraham Darouiche at the Pathways to Possibilities symposium.

Abraham encourages employers to proactively accommodate individuals with disabilities in both recruitment and workplace environments, recognising the untapped potential within this community. Currently, Abraham's advocacy work as part of the Disability Reference Group at SSI aims to highlight the issues affecting culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people with disability, and he hopes his efforts in co-designing several new projects and policies can act as a catalyst for more open dialogue and sweeping change in our workplaces.

Brendan's journey of overcoming adversity

After becoming visually impaired at the age of ten, Brendan found himself facing new and unknown challenges. Acquiring vision loss at an early age made Brendan's school experience daunting. He was the only student at his school with his disability, leaving him feeling isolated and struggling to keep up.

Despite accessing supports and adjustments throughout his educational years, as Brendan grew up, he faced many barriers beyond the school setting. After completing his high school education, Brendan secured part-time roles in hospitality and retail environments. However, he was frequently moved by his employers to various areas of the business due to difficulties with reading point of sale technology, which was by-and-large inaccessible and hostile to users with vision loss.

After achieving a degree in Quality Management and Business, Brendan was job ready. He began seeking graduate job opportunities, but many of these roles required a full driver's licence, and he was legally unable to drive due to the level of his vision impairment. He applied for roles regardless, hoping that he would be employed based on his academic achievement and experience.

Then came an opportunity – a job in Graduate Retail Management.

Brendan applied and secured a place in final selection interviews. However, during the final stages, he was advised this role was complete with a company car. Having not disclosed his disability on the application and knowing he was unable to obtain a driver's licence, Brendan had to explain this. He was challenged for not sharing this information at application and was not successful in securing the role.

Brendan reflected and continued to seek employment opportunities without the requirement of a driver's licence. "I had to lower my expectations of a graduate job and look at entry level roles" he recalled. Brendan applied for a customer service role in financial services. During the application stage for this role, he disclosed his disability and necessary adjustments required to be successful. Having the support of human resources as an applicant with a disability, he secured the role. However, when he began the job, adjustments and assistive technology were not provided. Brendan could not meet the performance expectations without them. Subsequently, he was dismissed and the company denied that he had ever disclosed his disability. Being legally proven as unfairly dismissed, Brendan noted the exhausting and disappointing processes he experienced.



“Accessing a disability confident line manager and continuing the conversation has allowed me to get the right support and understanding that I need.”

Brendan, SSI Local Area Coordinator

Brendan Buchanan speaking on a panel at the Pathways to Possibilities symposium.

Taking on further studies, Brendan secured employment in Local Government, providing careers education and guidance to young people and adults. Brendan thrived, recalling this as “a professional crossroads, which led me down a path of supporting the most vulnerable people within the community.”

Brendan's journey eventually brought him to Australia, pursuing employment in a new country. In 2021, he found his current role as a Local Area Coordinator (LAC) at SSI, providing support to people with disability in the community. Brendan worked with his DES provider and managers, ensuring he received the right supports to do his job effectively. Brendan explained that “accessing a disability confident line manager and continuing the conversation has allowed me to get the right support and understanding that I need.” Brendan continues to enjoy his LAC role, particularly when supporting people who are facing difficulties in securing work as he once did.



Attendees at the Pathways to Possibilities launch event.

Acknowledgements

SSI Group would like to acknowledge the story tellers featured in this booklet for contributing their personal experiences. We thank them for generously donating their time in sharing their journeys, and for their continued support throughout the editing process.

We would also like to acknowledge the City of Sydney, whose support toward the Pathways to Possibilities launch in November 2024 led to an impactful and memorable event.

Learn more about
Pathways to Possibilities at:
[ssi.org.au/policy-advocacy/campaigns/
pathways-to-possibilities](https://ssi.org.au/policy-advocacy/campaigns/pathways-to-possibilities)

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We're SSI.
We stand for a world in which everyone
has access to equal opportunity.
We are driven by equality, empathy,
and the celebration of every individual.

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