



Media Release

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New online platform to help young people on the autism spectrum plan and prepare for their working life

BRISBANE: *myWAY Employability*, a new smart web platform for young people on the autism spectrum, will be launched at 4pm today by Jackie Coates, Head of Telstra Foundation.

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.

Associate Professor Marina Ciccarelli, Curtin University Occupational Therapy Discipline Lead and Project Co-Leader of Autism CRC's *MyWAY Employability* project, said the free online platform has been designed specifically to help autistic young people, ideally aged 14-30 years old.

"*myWAY Employability* supports young people to take control of their future and career planning, improving the likelihood of a successful shift to work or further education," A/Prof Ciccarelli said.

"The platform 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," she said.

"Based on six years of research, trials and evaluation related to transition planning for young people on the autism spectrum, we know *myWAY Employability* can help to improve the self-determination of autistic young people to plan and prepare for their working life. We can't wait to see *myWAY Employability* in the hands of young people all over Australia," she said.

Liam Picen, aged 20, who was part of the original research and development program when he was in high school, thinks *myWAY Employability* has a lot to offer young people.

"I would definitely recommend *myWAY Employability* to anyone who asked, considering it got my perfect job idea first time just from my interests and strengths," Mr Picen said.

"The articles provided by *myWAY Employability* were very relevant. They actually answered a lot of questions I would have had a year or two ago, and one or two of them actually answered some questions I still had," he said.

Mr Picen's advice for other autistic young people? "Don't limit yourself. Go higher. Think bigger."

"It is important to dream big. It's always important to do that. It will get you places," Mr Picen said.

Cheryl Mangan, Autism CRC Research Translation Manager and *MyWAY Employability* Project Co-Leader, said the site was designed and developed in deep partnership with young people.

"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 personalised," Ms Mangan said.

"We engaged with young people and their supporters every step of the way, through co-design workshops, user testing interviews, advisory groups and more," she said.

"While *myWAY Employability* has been developed for young people on the autism spectrum, it is relevant, useful and available for *all* young people. We encourage all young people and their supporters to explore the site and make use of its features," she said.

Andrew Davis, Autism CRC CEO said that more than 300 autistic young people, parents, allied health professionals, disability service providers and educators from around Australia were involved in the co-design and development of *myWAY Employability*.

"On behalf of the Autism CRC, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the research, design and development process that has produced *myWAY Employability*. Without your contributions, *myWAY Employability* would not have been possible," Mr Davis said.

The design and development of *myWAY Employability* was supported by Autism CRC participants Curtin University, Aspect and the Queensland Department of Education, along with technology development partner The Project Factory/WayToBlue, and research partner CSIRO e-Health Institute.

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www.mywayemployability.com.au

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