

ASID Podcast – Season 3 Episode 4 Employment - Transcript

Gordon Duff	Welcome to season three episode four of the ASID “Research to Practice” podcast. This podcast was recorded on the unceded lands of the aboriginal peoples of Australia. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Gordon Duff	This episode was recorded on the lands of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In this episode we hear from Professor Simon Darcy about research he has been doing with people with a disability that want to start their own business. There hasn't been much research in this area before. Simon and his team at the University of Technology Sydney spoke with people about the problems they face in starting a business, but also some examples of what works, and what more could be done to make starting and running a business more of a possibility. Simon Darcy is a Professor of Social Inclusion at the University of Technology Sydney. He specialises in developing inclusive organisational approaches for diversity groups and understanding the social impact of individuals and organisations, and passionately believes in the rights of all people to fully participate in community life. Simon's research has spanned sport, tourism, events, volunteers, transport, the built environment and disability services. Simon was the past Vice President of the Association of Consultants in Access Australia and a member of the Disability Council of NSW. Simon has recently been working on projects relating to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, National Disability Strategy, disability citizenship and person-centred approaches. One of Simons' research projects examines disability entrepreneurship in Australia.
Gordon Duff	We began by asking Simon why this research was necessary, what it was about, and what questions they were trying to answer?
Simon Darcy:	——We really came to look into this area because we saw some figures that compared the employment rights of people with disability to those people without disability. And we noticed that in self-employment people with disability were about 13.1% were self-employed against about 9.1% for the non-disabled. And being somebody that likes messing around with spreadsheets. When I got the data set one of the


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first things I did was that showed that there's a 43% higher rate of entrepreneurship for people with disability over those without disability. And then we looked at the differences in that rate of self-employment between people with different disability types. And for most it was higher for people with mobility disability, those with a vision impairment, those with hearing impairment and for one group people with intellectual disability, it was slightly lower. So it was about two and a half percent lower than the average person with a disability.

Simon Darcy:

And so our research really focused on trying to understand what the journey was for people who are self-employed or entrepreneurs. And in looking at that journey, what barriers did they experience? What were their motivations? What were the things that really enabled or facilitated them to go into employment for themselves? What were the areas that needed to be improved within that experience of being enabled. And then really importantly, what were the outcomes from that employment experience for themselves? And some of the data that was really striking was that it wasn't just about the box or just about the idea. It was a feeling that they wanted to contribute back to community. So they didn't want to be seen as the recipients of money and care all the time. They believe they had abilities that could then give back to the community in general. And also give an uplift to some other people with disability along the line for the roles. We then started to think about, well, if this is the case why is it so very basic. And we looked at other forms of marginalized identities, those who come from different ethnic backgrounds or identify as being part of different cultural group. First nations people and people from the gay and lesbian communities to see what their experiences that put them into the self employment space.

Gordon Duff

 We asked Simon what the research uncovered about why people with an intellectual disability might want to start and run their own business?

Simon Darcy:

Well, the first thing I'd start off with is that there was a lot of commonality across the different types of disability in why they decided to become entrepreneurs. And the overall reason was what we're describing it in the research as blocked mobility. So literally their experiences of trying to get into employment was either so bad they never got into it, or secondly, once they were in it, they received really poor

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treatment. And there was also just a lack of any form of career development for individuals. So it was a series of things that really got people very disappointed about mainstream employment. And that led on to a whole series of attitudinal reasons for their involvement in entrepreneurship. They found that getting any form of reasonable adjustment was difficult in many workplaces. That there wasn't a real understanding of providing a flexibility for what in the literature they call the impairment effects. So, an understanding that certain sorts of disabilities may require certain accommodations. And it could be as simple as having something, having language in plain English, for example. Which we know or easy English, and please excuse my ignorance I do get those wrong at times as that definitions for what's easy in plain English. But most people benefit from having a very non jargon understanding of what their job is supposed to do. Or the instructions they're given. Or to be able to have a form of alternative communication provided in the workplace. Now that might mean a support worker being there for a period of time to support somebody specially in the early stages of a job. And we know that that's been quite helpful for people with different forms of intellectual disability or diversity as well. And so there was a real hostility by employers or those workmates, supposedly workmates when people started doing the jobs. So they were... They felt that they weren't welcome, they were isolated. They weren't invited to social functions, all those other things that you would expect to do in a workplace weren't there. For people with intellectual disability there was also just a lack of even wanting to have somebody in the workplace that may have looked a little different, mightn't have been able to act as quickly as somebody would have liked. And there wasn't a patience for understanding that the inclusive process may take some time.

Gordon Duff:

How is disability entrepreneurship different for people with an intellectual disability?

Simon Darcy:

I think that one of the first things that I've noticed is that there's a much more engaged want to pursue something that the individuals is really passionate about. Now, all work that's meaningful is something that all individuals need. And I'm not saying you've got to be employed to have a meaningful life. But to have something that is your passion and to be able to follow that, whether it's at a real micro enterprise level where there's some money coming in, but you might never replace

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the various welfare supports. It's so important for people to be chasing their goal whether that's in the arts area, whether it's in the retail service area. As long as that person, it's giving them an opportunity to extend their networks, have friendships, do things that they want to do and feel their own sense of choice and control then it's important for people to be involved in.

Gordon Duff

Simon talked about some of the specific barriers to starting a business that people with disability face and told the researchers about.

Simon Darcy:

One of the first ones is that most of the mainstream self-employment entrepreneur programs didn't have any form of inclusion. So, they're built on a cohort business model that you take a group of people in. The group of people work through whatever the program is. And quite often they're reasonably short, anything from six weeks to 14 weeks. And you're working with a mainstream group of people and you have to keep up or perish. So even the mention of any form of inclusion was hardly there. There were... I think 10% of that specifically mentioned gender. There was only 6% that even identified anything about disability. Most of it had either had to do with mobility disability, or for people who were blind or vision impaired. And there was absolutely no understanding of the needs of people with intellectual disability going into these programs. So that really meant that the standard education that anyone would get around setting up a business or the processes that you need to go through to establish that business entity, the legality, the accounting requirements, where do you find financing, et cetera, et cetera. They just didn't have that breadth of experience that others did who were going into that space. And hence we're behind the eight ball even before they got the opportunity to start.

Gordon Duff

The research has helped establish a new support program that helps people with disability start their own business. Simon talked about this new program, called 'Ignitability'

Simon Darcy:

Settlement Services International were the organization that had a history in doing inclusive programs largely around people who were refugees or migrants and that program was called Ignite. They also saw a need in the disability space. And rather than having one of these cohort-based programs,

they had a range of facilitators who worked one-on-one with an individual. Now, these individuals would come to them with a business plan having been already-identified and started. And if people were referred to them without at least that basic framework for business, there was a referring organization that Ignitability would be able to put these people in touch with. And then after they went through that little startup process they would then come back to Ignite. And what Ignite did was actually work one-on-one with the individual and their support people either paid attendants or informal supports to provide a totally inclusive approach to their framework for developing entrepreneurial outcomes. And this could take a month with one person. Or it might take a year with another person. So it was very much built on an individual basis. And some of that actually came out of the Ignite program, where there was a proportion of that program with refugees, not surprisingly, who also had other areas of life to deal with, predominantly around mental health. And not surprisingly war zones etc or in camps for a long period of time. Different types of mental health issues. And also one that may have also had an acquired brain injury through injuries sustained. So, they noticed that in that space and then they developed a program based around the Sirolli method, which is around passion, and the drive of an individual to want to have their own business then that entrepreneurial area. And they provided a structure and a framework around that. But in a very inclusive and... actually very friendly space in Marrickville. And that program we watched develop over three years and 120 people go through that program with very different disabilities. And also not surprisingly in the entrepreneurial area, vastly different outcomes. Like the Ignite program, there was a cohort who came from different cultural backgrounds. Who had a particular hospitality bent with regards to food preparation and other things. And so they were able to kick off businesses in that space. For others it involved wanting to provide their lived experience as learning for corporations, for community groups, and for people that were also trying to navigate the NDIS. So they were looking at more of a personal services style work. There were others that were just terrific hobbyists in the arts space. And they worked with those people to professionalize and market their artistic offerings. Whether that be at markets and providing candles or other forms of artistic outcome, painting zines et cetera. And there was just a breadth of different types of businesses. Right through to a person down in Woolongong who worked

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in a large shopping center and was literally a coffee caddy for all the workers that weren't able to get out of their shop and get to buy themselves a coffee and lunch and everything. And so they developed this very much of a brokered service where they would sort out their various drinks and food for the day and service those businesses [inaudible 00:14:16]. And they also have you just become known around the center as well.

Gordon Duff

We discussed with Simon how someone with an intellectual disability that is an NDIS Participant, or someone supporting an NDIS Participant could use the NDIS to get support to start their own business, and where they could get support to help make this goal a reality?

Simon Darcy:

Well, the fantastic thing is in 2019 the NDIS released their employment strategy for Participants. They recognized that at the moment 25% of people on the NDIS have a job. And they've set themselves a target. That target is to get that rate of participation up to 33%. It doesn't seem like much, but that's about a 25% increase in a four year period. And that you are encouraged to use your plan to engage with employment desires. And that includes self-employment, micro enterprise, and entrepreneurship. So in an ideal world I would suggest to people that they have a look on the NDIS website, read through the employment strategy, that they start to think about having a short term, medium term, and a long-term goal that looks at either upskilling and educating themselves in the space. If they're already educated in the space, then putting in goals about developing their business idea and their business plan, and then moving forward to maybe engaging with an accelerator program like Ignitability, if you're looking for one-on-one support. Or if you're interested in disability tech solutions to problems facing people with disability Remarkable is another very well-known accelerator program in that space. And you put it in there that that's your plan and your desires. And then work with the Planner to ensure that that becomes resourced either with your specific support needs or with the costs associated with getting entry into those programs. Remarkable, for example, has a bootcamp where a lot of people go in and a certain number are selected. But they also have a series of other activities that you're able to enter into beforehand. With Ignitability it would be making an appointment and talking about what your needs are, and then building that into your plan moving forward. Now that's in an ideal world. You do

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have to make sure that the Local Area Coordinator or the planner are aware of that policy and that they get further information from those people in the NDIA that are in charge of improving employment participation.

Gordon Duff

Simon also mentioned some support organisations around Australia that help people with disability start a business.

Simon Darcy:

There seems to have been a real hive of activity in Adelaide around this area. As early as 2012 the Community Living Project had a micro enterprise program specifically for people with intellectual disability. And they built it around their idea of friendship circles and supporting people to pursue that business idea that they had, and do so in a very supportive environment. This program was particularly successful and it ended up being taken up in WA, New South Wales, and Victoria with option programs run by a range of different organizations. So these micro enterprise models are a really good first step into the employment and entrepreneurship space.

Gordon Duff

He also mentioned some interesting work occurring in other countries

Simon Darcy:

Our friends and colleagues over at University of New South Wales, Karen Fisher and her group had done some interesting work on entrepreneurship in China. And the development of the digital entrepreneur in China and how that's been really uplifting people with disability in China to have an economic foothold that hadn't been there otherwise. The UK have got a group called the Global Disability Innovation Hub. And that's based out of the University College of London. Canada has been most proactive, not just in the disability space, but across refugees and migrants. They're very much a settler nationwide in Australia. So there's an Entrepreneurs Canada with Disability Program run by the Canadian government. If you like the cold weather, you can go up and do a similar program by the Community Association of People for Real Enterprise. It's got a disability stream in Nova Scotia. It'll be cold for me. And of course, across the Ditch, we do like to... Well, we can travel there at the moment too. There's two programs that we found over there. One is the B Lab and it's come out of a very strong background in community inclusion. And it's recently moved into facilitating employment opportunities for people with

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disability and also in the entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurship and self-employment space. And I've seen absolutely amazing work on innovation and entrepreneurship that includes people with disability in India and people living in absolute abject poverty. And there's been a series of really micro grants and loans given to people with disability make up a fair proportion to start their own business, but also educate them through that process. So-lots of really cool things going on all over the place. And also a real entrepreneurial front runner, Israel has been doing some really cool work in that space as well.

Gordon Duff

We asked Simon where he thought there needs to be more research about how to support people with disability start businesses.

Simon Darcy:

The area I'd really like to see is just a broadening of the opportunity in this space for people with all disabilities, but also people with intellectual disabilities. We've actually seen a bit of an explosion of opportunities. I'm not sure of the overall strategy for these opportunities but the NDIS through their ILC grants, capacity building grants have funded a series of self-employment micro enterprise and entrepreneurial programs in their last two rounds. And they're quite geographically dispersed and offer very different approaches. So organizations such as Challenge Community Services, the Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network, Employment Options Visibility Program, Health Group of Companies, and The Healthy Collective with the RED Program on entrepreneurship, Valued Lives Foundation, The Foundation for Young Australians, the Youth Disability Advocacy Network, Aims Australia Business Matters Program, and then Community Living Project. Again, just got another program on micro enterprises exploring more possibilities. So there's this real surge of activity in the space that means that at least people won't have to look because there are things going on. COVID is obviously thrown a little bit of a spanner in the work there because I would imagine that most of these programs had been designed predominantly face-to-face, and it probably going through some sort of reshaping at the moment. So, there's opportunities there. I'd just like to get a better understanding of how the individual opportunities create a greater strategic approach to dealing with these issues across different governments, rural, metropolitan, remote, and how we might be able to better coordinate those for people with intellectual

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	disability and other disabilities as well to turn them into meaningful work.
Gordon Duff	Finally, what advice he would give to someone who is interested in these ideas
Simon Darcy:	It doesn't matter if you've never done anything before in your life. There's some opportunities now that if you've got an idea of something that you want to do, have a go, get in contact with some people that can give you some support and advice. And if you're moving onto the NDIS or you're in the NDIS then push the boundaries of your planners and get them to start to understand that you have some goals that you want to achieve and that they should be there to help you facilitate that desire and that dream. Go out, do it.
Gordon Duff	Thank you, Professor Darcy, for talking with us about your research into disability entrepreneurship and some of the issues people are facing in trying to start their own small business, and some of the good examples of how that could work with the NDIS. We will link to Professor Darcy's research in the show notes. Thank you, listeners, for joining us for episode 4 of season 3. As a follow up to this episode, we would like to hear from people with intellectual disability and their families, who are trying or who have started a small business. What has been your experience? We value your feedback on the podcast. If you'd like to suggest a topic or guest, you can email us at podcasts@asid.asn.au . You can subscribe to the ASID Research to Practice Podcast via iTunes, Stitcher or anywhere you find good podcasts. Keep up to date with all things ASID on twitter via the handle @ASID_ltd, on Facebook @ ASID.asn.au or via the website ASID.asn.au . Or better yet become a member and enjoy access to a number of publications and benefits. Just go to the ASID website asid.asn.au . This episode was hosted by Gordon Duff and produced by Buffy Gorilla, Emily Churchill, and Gordon Duff.