

Peter: I have worked in a café for 2 years... doing many jobs to keep the café clean. I enjoy the friendly staff and **keeping customers happy** with a quick service. I like meeting new people in my local area...when we meet up in the street we say hello."



# Down Syndrome – An Employer's Guide

## People with Down syndrome can make a huge contribution to your workplace

People who have Down syndrome can achieve great things when they are given the opportunity. They can, and do, leave home, form relationships, work and lead independent and active lives.

Opportunity, attitude and support are the keys. Down syndrome is a genetic condition. All people who have Down syndrome have some degree of learning disability.

If someone has a learning disability it means that they may not learn things as quickly as other people and they may need more help and support to learn.

In 2015 only around 6 per cent of people with a learning disability are employed. There are so many more people who want to work and can make a valuable contribution to the workforce.

People with Down syndrome want to work so that they can be independent, earn their own money, learn new skills, meet new people, feel valued and develop good self-esteem.

Give a person with Down syndrome the chance to work with you and you will get a keen, reliable, flexible worker who is ready to start at short notice.

Down Syndrome Victoria wants to make sure people with Down syndrome have the same choices and chances as the rest of the population. We would like you to help us make this a reality.

## Advantages of employing people with Down syndrome

The McKinsey Report (March 2014) found: "there are mutual gains when people with Down syndrome are included in the workplace. People with Down syndrome involved in such initiatives have a better quality of life and opportunities for development, while the companies that employ them often report significant improvements in their 'organisational health'."

Employees with disabilities generally stay in jobs for longer than non-disabled workers. They have a strong commitment to work, are punctual and have low absentee rates. Employers also recognise that a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community they work in, is good for public relations.

Employers tell us that employing people who have Down syndrome has:

- improved staff morale
- reduced staff turnover
- improved staff attendance
- given them access to an untapped pool of labour
- given their other staff the chance to step up to a supervisor or mentor role
- improved teamwork.

The HR Manager of Carlton Football Club says  
**"Dan's role is crucial** to maintaining online product availability"



**Dan Palmer**  
Carlton Football Club

Dan has been working at Carlton Football Club, in their merchandise store, two days a week, in the valued role of maintaining stock inventory. He also works at Woolworths one day a week. Dan loves his jobs and is a well liked employee in each workplace. He has a great sense of humour and is a keen sportsman, playing football, cricket and knee boarding. Dancing and drama are two more of Dan's passions, which he pursues two days a week.

## Tips for employing people with Down syndrome

People with Down syndrome have a range of abilities. Mostly they are visual learners and respond well to tasks in written or picture form. Many people prefer set tasks that they have learnt by doing. Tasks will need to be repeated to cement new learning but once learnt the tasks will be done consistently.

People with Down syndrome may find it more difficult to understand social situations and the 'unwritten rules' of the workplace might need to be explained. Don't assume that someone knows what is acceptable and what is not, for example that they can take a lunch break or that they have to tell a supervisor when they need to go to the bathroom. It can be helpful to add planned breaks for morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea into the daily task list. People will need training and support to do their job, which can often be provided by a job support agency. It's important not to make assumptions about what someone can or can't do. We all have varying skills and abilities, and people with Down syndrome are no different.

People who have Down syndrome may need more time to learn and you may have to make adjustments to your usual methods of training or induction. We all need support to be able to do our jobs. People with Down syndrome need this too, except that the type of support they need is sometimes more obvious. You can find out what support they might need by discussing this with the employee, their family, a support worker or a Disability Employment Adviser.

Many people with Down syndrome have short attention spans, so a variety of tasks that they can tick off once completed makes for a productive employee.

People with Down syndrome generally find change difficult. Consistency, repetition and order in daily life reduces stress. This can be to your benefit as an employer; once a person has learnt a task they will carry it out meticulously!

## What you can do to make it easier for an employee with Down syndrome:

- Make sure your procedures are simple and easy for an employee with learning disabilities to follow.
- Understand that you may need to make changes to the job or hours of work as part of making 'reasonable adjustments'.
- Nurture the 'natural' support provided by work colleagues and consider offering shadowing or support from a more experienced worker.
- Speak clearly, avoid jargon, use short words and sentences, avoid metaphors and if someone doesn't understand try asking the question in another way. Make sure that each person has understood and, if necessary, repeat the instructions.
- Break the job down into separate tasks, write them down or use pictures or photos. A photo of the employee doing the task correctly can be very useful.
- While giving information and instructions about the job, show the person how to do it.
- Ask the person to perform the task and, if necessary, show them again. Ability to learn can fluctuate from day to day. Once a task has been learnt, it will be retained but revisit a task over a period of time to make sure.
- If a person develops their own individual way of accomplishing the task and it still gets the job done, allow the person room for development and creativity.

## Useful publications

**The McKinsey Report: The value that people with Down syndrome can add to organisations**  
(March 2014)

[www.mckinsey.com.br/LatAm4/Data/The%20value%20that%20people%20with%20Down%20syndrome%20can%20add%20to%20organizations\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.mckinsey.com.br/LatAm4/Data/The%20value%20that%20people%20with%20Down%20syndrome%20can%20add%20to%20organizations_ENG.pdf)

**Employing people with learning disabilities - a handbook for employers (Joseph Rowntree Foundation)**

[www.jrf.org.uk/report/employing-people-learning-disabilities-handbook-employers](http://www.jrf.org.uk/report/employing-people-learning-disabilities-handbook-employers)

**Australian Network on Disability - Resources for employers**

[www.and.org.au/pages/resources.html](http://www.and.org.au/pages/resources.html)

**Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Employ Outside the box**

[www.acci.asn.au/sites/default/files/uploaded-content/field\\_f\\_content\\_file/improving-the-employment-participation-of-people-with-disability-in-australia-acci-response.pdf](http://www.acci.asn.au/sites/default/files/uploaded-content/field_f_content_file/improving-the-employment-participation-of-people-with-disability-in-australia-acci-response.pdf)

## Useful organisations

**Down Syndrome Victoria**

We can assist you with information about Down syndrome and provide general training to staff on how to support a person who has Down syndrome. We may also be able to connect you with potential employees who are members of our association.

[www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au](http://www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au)

**Phone:** 1300 658 873

**Disability Employment Services** - find one in your area

Some individuals may already have an agency supporting them to find work. These agencies can provide on the job training and information about the supports that are available to employers and the employee with a disability.

[disabilityemployment.org.au](http://disabilityemployment.org.au)

[jobsearch.gov.au/serviceproviders](http://jobsearch.gov.au/serviceproviders)

Tara works as an artist for QART where she is paid a wage to produce pieces for commercial use.

