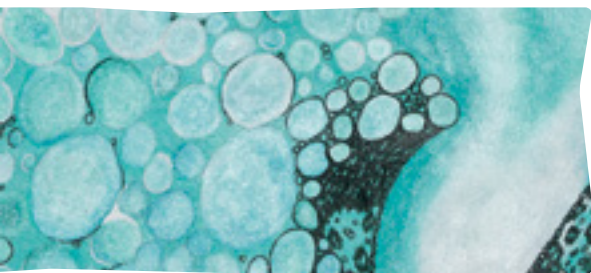
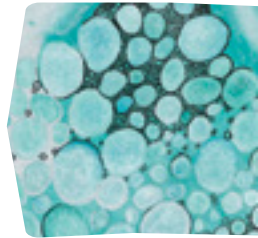




Australian Government

# Employ My Ability



DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY



### **Acknowledgement of country**

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Department of Social Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their ongoing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

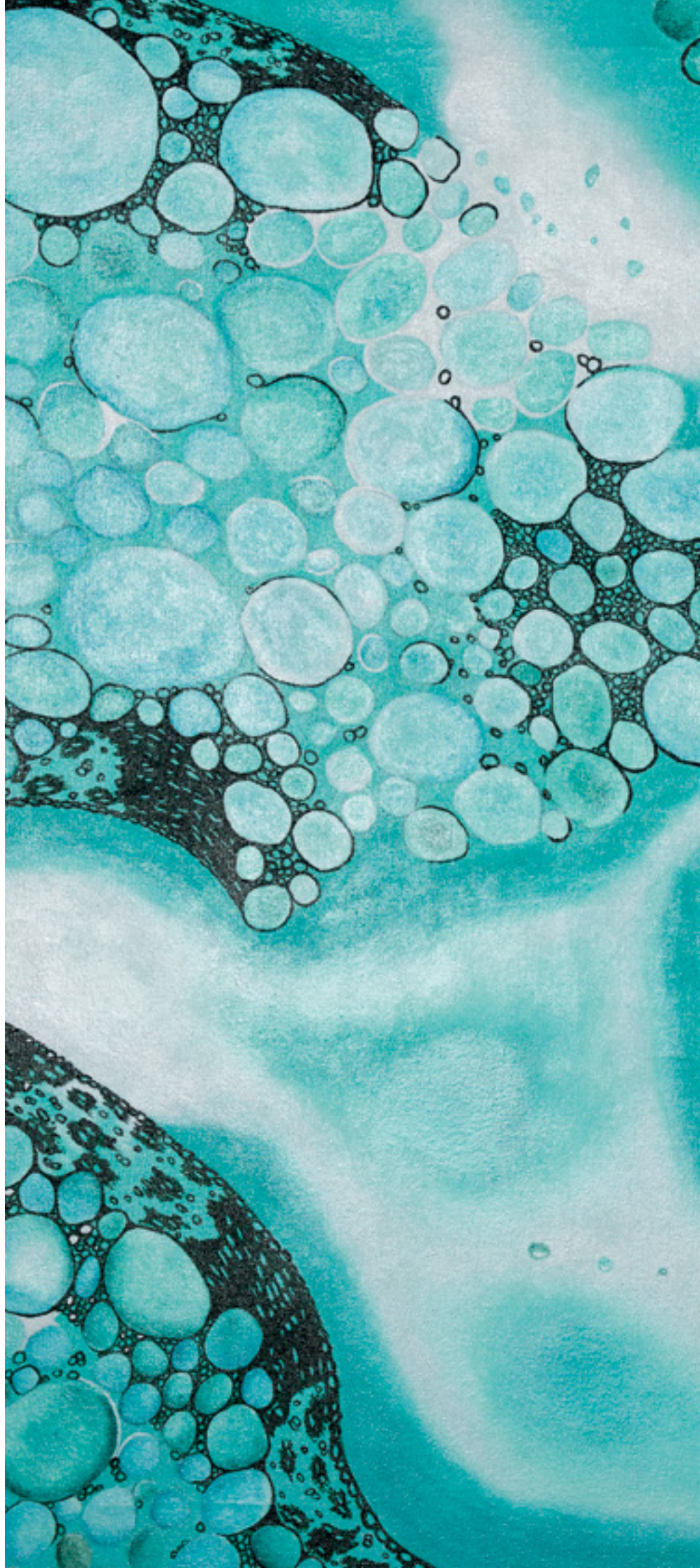


## **Shelby Gardner**

Shelby works with canvas and ceramics. She has a strong eye for detail, creating realist paintings through carefully controlled brushstrokes.

In 2019, she exhibited at the State Trustees' 'Connected' show at Federation Square in the heart of Melbourne.

**MELBOURNIAN PLANT CELLS (2018)**  
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS



# Employ My Ability

The title 'Employ My Ability' was chosen to highlight the strengths of people with disability. People with disability, employers and other key stakeholders indicated that a focus on ability would clearly demonstrate the value people with disability bring to a workplace.

The language used is not intended to diminish an individual's identity as a person with disability. It is recognised that appropriate use of language varies between individuals and disability communities.

The Department of Social Services acknowledges the importance of having conversations with individuals about their preferred language.

---

## Alternative formats

Alternative formats of Employ My Ability, including Easy Read and Auslan, are available at [dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/disability-employment-strategy](https://dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/disability-employment-strategy) or by contacting the Department of Social Services through [dss.gov.au](https://dss.gov.au).

---



## Ministerial Foreword

—

Having a career is so much more than just the means to pay bills. It contributes to a sense of identity and brings social, health and wellbeing benefits to individuals and their families.

This is why I am very pleased to introduce *Employ My Ability* – the Disability Employment Strategy.

Developed in association with *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*, this document is a 10-year commitment to improving employment opportunities for people with disability.

It puts the focus on the ability and capability of every single person.

People with disability are enthusiastic, committed and have a good reputation as employees.

This strategy is a guiding framework for governments, employers and the broader community towards a workforce that values diverse talent and where people with disability can reach their full potential.

The strategy's vision is clear: we want to create *inclusive workplace cultures where people with disability thrive in their careers*.

While attitudes need to change across the whole community, this strategy recognises that employers have a particularly powerful role to play.

...

**'We should all be  
made to feel like we are  
being included in society'<sup>1</sup>**



**This new strategy highlights the many benefits to employers who focus on inclusion, such as increased revenue and productivity, happier staff and greater customer satisfaction.**

Disability-confident employers send a clear message to the community that people with disability have skills and talents that are valued in the workplace.

Businesses, clients, the community and the economy all benefit when more people with disability have jobs. Collective collaboration will be the driving force behind the success of this strategy.

**We all have an important role to play and the time to start is now.**

This document has been informed by the voices of people with disability, their families and carers, advocacy organisations, peak bodies, employers and service providers.

I want to thank each and every person who has contributed, particularly the members of the Disability Employment Advisory Committee.

I look forward to working on the focus areas outlined in these pages, and to seeing our vision realised so Australians with disability thrive in their careers.

**Anne Ruston**

Minister for Families and Social Services

# Our Vision

**Inclusive workplace cultures where people with disability thrive in their careers.**

**We all have a role to play**



## **Employers**

Can actively work to build their disability confidence and create inclusive workplaces.

## **Government**

Can provide high quality and timely information, supports and services.



## **Parents and Carers**

Can play an important support role, building ambition and providing encouragement.

## **Teachers and Career Practitioners**

Can ensure that young people with disability have the same opportunities and choices as their peers.





## People with disability

---

This Strategy is based on a social model of disability. It recognises attitudes, practices and structures can be disabling. They can act as barriers that prevent people from fulfilling their potential and exercising their rights as equal members of the community.

This Strategy focuses on removing these barriers, so that workplaces are inclusive, and people with disability can thrive in their careers.

People with disability include, but are not restricted to, those who have long-term physical, mental, cognitive, intellectual or sensory impairments.

This Strategy recognises people with disability are diverse and have different experiences, backgrounds and points of view.

This diversity needs to be understood, acknowledged and celebrated.

Policy responses and strategies which assume the experiences and impacts of disability are the same can fail to take into account the unique needs of individuals.

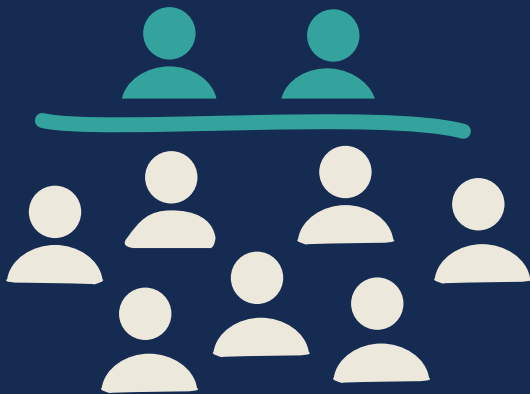
Actions taken under this Strategy will put people with disability at the centre.

Details on reporting and implementation can be found at pages 24-25.

# Groundwork behind this Strategy

More than  
**30** targeted meetings

with key stakeholders including people with disability, disability peak bodies, disability service providers and recruitment agencies.



**133**

**submissions**

received as part of the Disability Employment Strategy public consultation process.

Various research papers, reports and surveys.



Discussions with the **Disability Employment Advisory Committee**, which included representation from people with disability, carers, employers, peak bodies, community organisations and government agencies.





**Targeted interviews** with people with disability through Services Australia.



Findings from the 2019 and 2020 National Disability Strategy consultation processes, which involved over **3,000 people**.

## What we heard



### People with disability

Want to work and want their skills and suitability for a role to be the primary consideration for employment.

### Employers

Want information and support that is easy to find and suits their business needs.



### Organisations representing people with disability

Want employment systems to empower people with disability to have choice and control over their employment journey.

# Where we are in 2021

Did you know

About **4.4** million people in Australia have a disability.

That's around

**1 in 6 people**



Just **53.4%** of people with disability are in the labour force, compared with **84.1%** of those without disability.

...

This gap of **over 30%** has remained largely unchanged since 2003.



The unemployment rate for people with disability **is double that of working age people without disability** (10% compared to 4.6%).



More than **113,000 people with disability** are currently unemployed and looking to work.<sup>2</sup>

...  
**'I want to work, I want to contribute to the economy. Please support me to do this in a safe way that honours my right to dignity and respect.'**<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, people with disability report they still face a range of barriers when looking for and staying in work, including:

- 1.** Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours during recruitment.
- 2.** Bullying, experiences of discrimination and lack of support in the workplace.
- 3.** A lack of assistance in finding, securing and maintaining employment.
- 4.** Difficulty in accessing skills training and education.
- 5.** Difficulty negotiating reasonable adjustments/ accommodations in the workplace.
- 6.** Negative attitudes in the community, including that people with disability can't work, or don't want to work, and that employing people with disability would be costly or risky.



# Benefits to employers

Of the 1.1 million working-age (15-64) people with disability participating in the labour force, 90% are employed.<sup>4</sup> This means there are around 1 million people with disability making valuable contributions across every industry and in all kinds of roles.



**‘Mark has a caring nature. He cares about everyone, and always ensures they are okay.’**

Linda, manager

---

## The benefits of hiring people with disability include:



Increased **revenue**.

Improved **productivity levels**.



Increased **innovation**.

Improved **workplace cohesion**  
and respect for difference.



A business more  
**reflective of the community**.

Access to a **broader pool of talent**.



Projections from the National Skills Commission indicate that almost **a million new jobs** will be created over the five years to November 2025, as the labour market recovers from the impacts of COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>



Jobs exist. A pool of  
talented people exists.  
Let's remove the barriers  
and start working together.

# Employer commitment

Many employers are already demonstrating a commitment to diversity within their own organisations.

A number of employers have chosen to publically demonstrate their commitment to employing people with disability by endorsing this Strategy.

Endorsing employers are listed at [dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/disability-employment-strategy](https://dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/disability-employment-strategy).





**‘Our differences help us spark ideas, create connections and build communities.’**

Leading Australian retailer

---

**‘We don’t expect our people to be or think the same – indeed, diversity and inclusion drive our success and the innovative solutions we deliver with our clients.’**

International law firm

---

**‘We firmly believe that the more inclusive an organisation is, the more successful it becomes.’**

Multinational professional services company

---

# Priority areas for change

**1. Lifting employer engagement, capability and demand:** Providing employers with the tools and abilities to confidently hire, support, develop and retain more people with disability.

## Why is this a priority area?

Many employers are already focussed on creating disability inclusive workplaces, but others may need help to get started.

Each employer has a unique journey to become genuinely inclusive and needs different things to help them along the way.

Not all workplaces are alike. They vary in many ways, including size, industry and location.

There are also different types of employment. This could include working for a company, a small business or being self-employed.

Building employer confidence and demand will mean:

- More people with disability can get a job, and have the opportunity to build a sustainable and fulfilling career of choice.
- Employees are effectively supported to return to work should they acquire a disability.
- Employers realise benefits such as increased revenue, productivity and innovation.<sup>6</sup>
- Workplaces better reflect our diverse community.



•••

'Employers just assume that people with a disability are a liability or we need extra help to do the job.'<sup>7</sup>

Employers can:

- Actively work to **build their disability confidence** by engaging with resources such as:
  - » **JobAccess** – free, expert support from disability employment specialists.
  - » **IncludeAbility** – online resources and information for employers.
  - » **Australian Network on Disability** – builds disability confident employers through education, networks and support, to improve accessibility and inclusion of people with disability across all areas of business.
  - » **Diversity Council of Australia** – expert advice, resources and programs to build diversity and inclusion in the workplace.
  - » **Get Skilled Access** – sector professionals, with lived experience, focussed on inclusion of people with disability.
- **Develop a Disability Action Plan** to outline how their goods, services, premises and facilities are accessible for people with disability. Find more information through **JobAccess** or the **Australian Human Rights Commission**.
- **Reconsider recruitment processes** to ensure they are inclusive.
- Discover the talent available in their area by:
  - » Contacting local **Disability Employment Service** or **jobactive** providers.
  - » Getting in touch with recruitment organisations.
- **Reach out to similar organisations** to find out how they are working to boost disability inclusion.

The Australian Government will:



### Develop, improve and promote

information, tools and resources to support employers.

...

Reform government programs to ensure they are effectively **supporting employers**

as well as people with disability.



Test new approaches to **increase inclusive employment practices** – from recruitment to ongoing, on-the-job support.



**Increase** the number of people with disability **employed** in the **Australian Public Service**.

More information is available in the APS Disability Employment Strategy 2020–25.



**States and territories are also taking action. Details are provided in the Employment Targeted Action Plan under Australia's Disability Strategy.**

...

'It would be good for managers to have a real understanding of what the disability involved. There needs to be more education for managers. Especially for invisible disabilities.'<sup>8</sup>

...

'We just want someone to give our son a go at what he wants to do, not what others perceive he needs to do or can't do.'<sup>9</sup>



## 2. Building employment skills, experience and confidence of young people with disability:

Ensuring young people with disability are supported to obtain work and careers of their choice.

### Why is this a priority area?

A recent survey of young people with disability, aged 15 to 24, found this cohort are generally positive about their future in employment, and over 90 per cent want to work.<sup>10</sup> However, feedback also indicated the journey to employment can be complex.

There is clear evidence that people with disability are less likely to successfully transition from school to work or further study than people without disability.

Contributing factors include:

- A lack of appropriate career development and transition to work activities while at school, such as participation in work experience.
- A need for more confident and informed support networks – including teachers and career advisors.

**This lower rate of transition appears to have long-term impacts on employment participation. For example, 18 per cent of school leavers with disability do not enter the labour force for up to seven years after leaving school (compared to five per cent for people without disability).<sup>11</sup>**

This Strategy acknowledges that education is critical in preparing young people for work, and notes that Australia's Disability Strategy includes Education and Learning as a key Outcome Area.

Building employment skills, experience and confidence will mean that young people with disability:

- Understand the nature of work and can choose a post-school pathway to employment that suits them.
- Are more likely to successfully transition from school to work.
- Can benefit from the financial, social and community inclusion aspects of work.

The Australian Government will:



**Develop new approaches**  
to support young people  
in their transition from  
**school to work.**



**Develop and promote information, tools and resources** relating to employment pathways to **build the capacity and confidence of young people with disability,** and their support networks.



Employers can:

- Hire a young person with disability.
- Provide work experience or internship opportunities.
- Ensure that mainstream recruitment pathways such as graduate or cadetship programs are inclusive for young people with disability.



#### Families and carers can:

- Begin building expectations and aspirations for their child's future employment at an early age.
- Engage with resources such as:
  - » **JobAccess** – free, expert support from disability employment specialists.
  - » **Raising Children Network** – includes information and advice about preparing young people with disability for work.
  - » **Everyone Can Work** – employment information for people with intellectual disability, their families and supporters.
  - » **Your Career** – clear and simple career information for people of all ages.
  - » **The Disability Gateway** – information to help people with disability, their family, friends and carers find the supports and services they need.

#### Schools and Career Practitioners can:

- Learn more about employment supports and services by engaging with the resources listed above.
- Talk to young people with disability to better understand the challenges they face transitioning out of school.

### **3. Improving systems and services for job seekers and employers:** Making it simpler for job seekers with disability and employers to navigate and utilise services, and driving better performance from service providers.

#### **Why is this a priority area?**

Feedback indicates both people with disability and employers can struggle to navigate the disability employment and income support system.

Key issues include:

- A lack of clear, accessible information for people with disability, their support networks and employers.
- A lack of clarity around how systems work together including Centrelink, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Disability Employment Services and jobactive.
- A range of concerns with the current design of the Disability Employment Services program – with both employers and job seekers indicating it often does not meet their needs.



## Improving systems and services for job seekers and employers will mean:

- People with disability can more easily navigate systems to access the support they need to find and keep a job.
- People facing multiple barriers due to issues such as race, sex or age are better supported throughout their employment journey.
- Services are well connected to each other, and to the broader community, providing a seamless user experience.
- Employers can easily access systems and services to assist them to support people with disability in the workplace.

## The Australian Government will:

### Seek to ensure disability and mainstream employment services and supports have a focus on:



Working effectively with other government programs.



Creating more genuine choice and control for people with disability.



Providing tailored supports that meet the needs of people with disability and employers.

### IMPROVE

**information, tools and resources** for people with disability and employers.



**Help people connect with information and supports.**



#### **4. Changing community attitudes:** Changing people's perception and expectation about the capability of people with disability in the workplace.

##### **Why is this a priority area?**

Discrimination, prejudice and negative stereotypes continue to present significant barriers for people with disability. These barriers can impact a person's ability to participate in society, including finding employment.

While attitudes need to change across the whole community, employers have a particularly powerful role to play. Employers that focus on inclusion are critical in breaking down discrimination, prejudice and negative stereotypes. By becoming disability confident and employing more people with disability, employers can send a clear message that people with disability have skills and talents that are valued in the workplace.

**Changing community attitudes is central to achieving a more inclusive society.**



# Implementation and reporting



This document is an Associated Plan under Australia's Disability Strategy.

Associated Plans are strategies, plans, roadmaps and frameworks that focus on improving particular aspects of Australian life for people with disability.

Australia's Disability Strategy includes a focus on employment and financial security for people with disability. Implementation and reporting arrangements for Australia's Disability Strategy will include actions and measures relating to disability employment.

## Targeted Action Plans

---

- Targeted Action Plans sit under Australia’s Disability Strategy, and apply an intensive focus over one to three years to achieve specific deliverables.
- Government actions taken under this Strategy will be outlined in the:
  - » Employment Targeted Action Plan, or the
  - » Community Attitudes Targeted Action Plan.
- Actions will be based on available evidence and people with disability will be involved in implementation.
- An annual progress report for the Employment Targeted Action Plan will be published on the Australia’s Disability Strategy webpage.

## Reporting

---

- **Targeted Action Plan Report** – produced annually on a financial year basis. This high-level report will cover actions and successes, other key steps taken or planned, and overall status.
- **Outcome Framework Report and Dashboard** – updated annually, the Outcomes Framework Report and Dashboard will publish data against the outcomes of Australia’s Disability Strategy. This will include data relating to employment of people with disability.
- **Implementation Report** – produced every two years, this report will include the voice of people with disability and the broader community. It will include progress against disability initiatives at all levels of government.
- **Evaluation reports** – two Major Evaluation Reports (2025 and 2029) will provide analysis and findings from independent evaluations of Australia’s Disability Strategy, including recommendations for improvement.

All reports will be published on the Australia’s Disability Strategy webpage.

**Further details on implementation and reporting are available in Australia’s Disability Strategy.**

**‘The people I work with make me feel good, and I enjoy spending time with them.’**

Gayana

---

**‘The warmth and joy a person with a disability brings to the work place is not comparable. It is a privilege to support Gayana achieve her goals and aspirations.’**

Employer

---



**‘Having a job helps me feel good about myself and gives me satisfaction in my life. It allows me to provide for my family and live an independent life.’**

Jesper

---





**The people I work with are legends and awesome.**

Keiran

---

**‘The most valuable thing about Keiran is he’s very willing to help people.’**

Employer

---



**‘Having a job gives me independence, freedom, and helps me make new friends.’**

Suzi

---

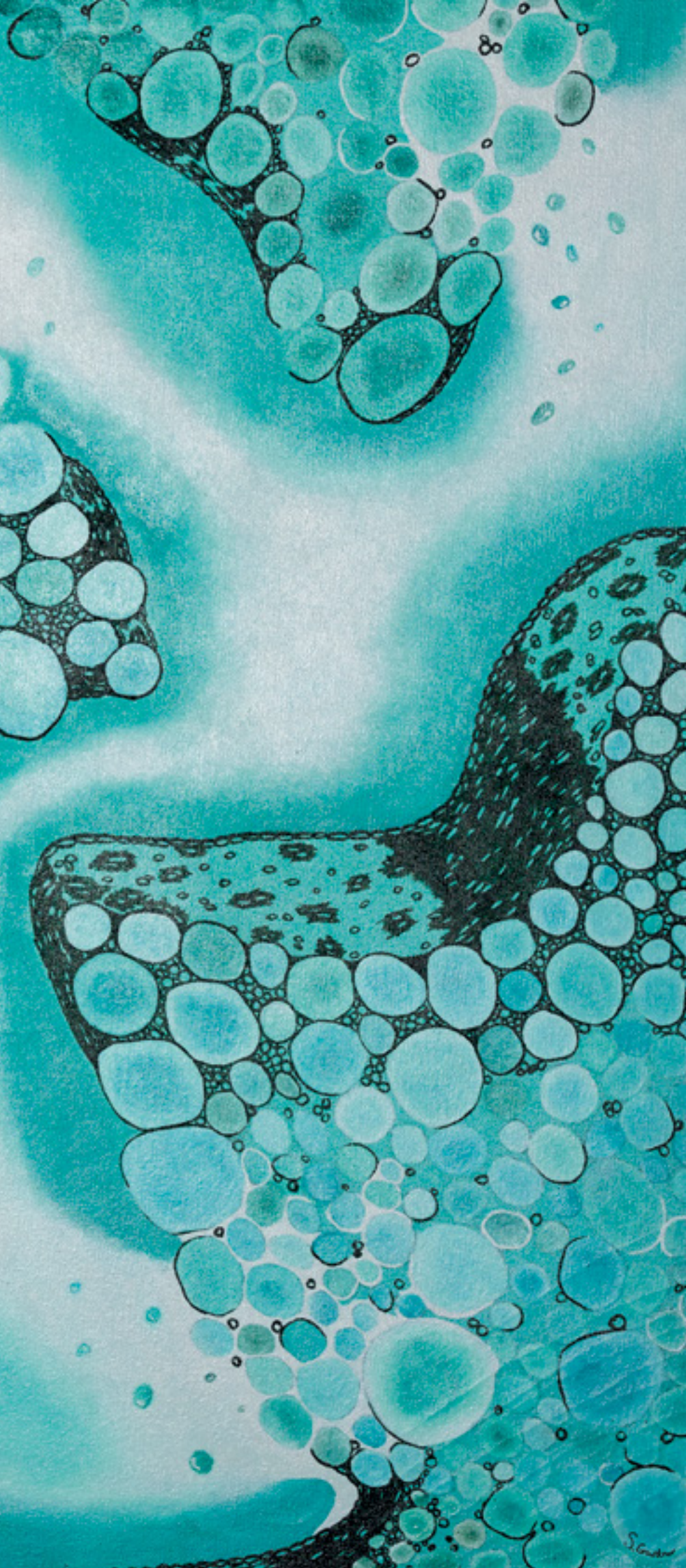
**‘Suzi is bright and bubbly, and she is always happy to give anything a go. Suzi has built her confidence and brings fun and positivity to the team.’**

Employer

---

# Endnotes

1. Person with disability (2021) *Submission to the Disability Employment Strategy public consultation process.*
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020) *People with disability in Australia.*
3. Person with disability (2021) *Submission to the Disability Employment Strategy public consultation process.*
4. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020) *People with disability in Australia.*
5. Labour Market Information Portal (2021) *Industry Employment Outlook: Five years to November 2025, available at: <https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmploymentProjections>.*
6. Accenture (2018) *Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage.*
7. Services Australia (2021) *Customer Research Experience – Person with disability.*
8. Services Australia (2021) *Customer Research Experience – Person with disability.*
9. Family or carer of a person with disability (2021) *Submission to the Disability Employment Strategy public consultation process.*
10. Year13 (2021) *Disability and Career Advice Survey – Research Results & Findings.*
11. The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies (2021) *Disability Employment Landscape Research Report.*



# QArt Gallery

QArt Gallery provides employment, mentoring and training for professional artists with intellectual and physical disabilities. The employment and recognition afforded to the artists gives them a sense of pride in who they are and what they do and an identity in the community.

