



Down Syndrome
Australia



In the workplace
for employers



This two-part guide is designed to set the potential employee with Down syndrome on the right path towards employment, and the employer on the right path to creating an inclusive and meaningful work place for people with Down syndrome.

Section 1 is a guide to assist the adult with Down syndrome, to help him/her discover what may be the right work for them. It is also designed to show employers what a potential employee has considered before applying for a job.

Section 2 is designed to help the employer set the employee with Down syndrome up for success in their workplace.



Contents

Section 1

This section is a guide for the employer to see what questions the individual with Down syndrome has thought about before applying for a new job. It could be used as a reference by the employer to identify strengths, interests and weaknesses of the employee.

A separate guide for people with Down syndrome, *Preparing for Employment*, can be found on www.downsyndrome.org.au

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Section 1

Finding the right job

About you, what you are good at and what you like.

There are lots of jobs out there, it is just about working out what you like to do and finding a workplace that can help you do that.

These are some good questions to think about and maybe talk about with someone who knows you well, this could be a parent, a sibling, a teacher or an employer.

Before you start looking for work, here are some things to think about and maybe write down:

1

What do you like to do?



2

What are your interests?



3

What would you like to achieve when you get a job?



4

What don't you like to do?



5

Do you like to work with other people?



6

Do you want to work in an office?



7

Do you like to work outside?



8

How many days do you want to work?



9

What are you good at?

For example:

- Are you good at computers?
- Are you good at talking to people?
- Are you good at cleaning?
- Are you good at cooking?



10

What was your favourite subject at school?



About you, what skills and working experience do you have?

The next thing to think about is what work you have done in the past and what qualifications you have. Some people work without being paid, they are called volunteers. Volunteers do many different types of jobs and can get experience and skills.

1. Have you had any work experience?
2. Do you want to do work experience to learn more skills?
3. Do you want to do an apprenticeship to learn more skills?
4. Have you had a volunteer job?
5. Will you be a volunteer to learn more skills?
6. Have you had a paid job in the past? What did you do there?
7. Have you been to TAFE? What did you learn?
8. How will you get to work? Do you need to do some travel training?
9. What was your favourite subject at school?

After thinking about what you like to do, what you are good at and what skills you have, the next step is to think about what job would be good for you and what job you would be good at.

It is a good idea to speak to people who know you and can support you in narrowing down what jobs would be best for you. Try to think about a few jobs that can be related to your interests and skills.

Here is an example:



I like sport



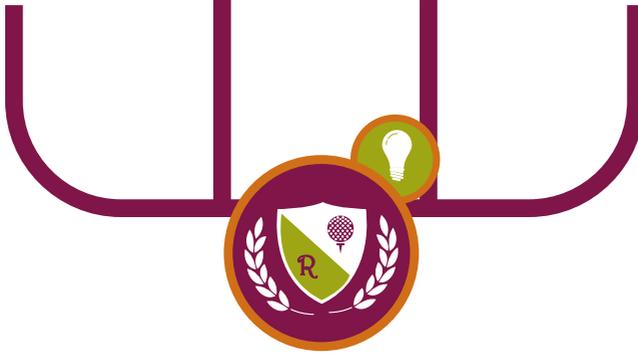
I liked studying
sport at school



I am good
at talking to
people



I like to work
outside



I could work at a sporting club.
Sporting clubs need...



coaches

trainers

cleaners

grounds
people

cafe
staff

merchandise
staff

etc.



I could work as a gardener
at a sporting club.

Your next step is to create what is called a resume, this tells an employer about you and what you are good at. Examples of resumes can be found on the internet also. A resume should include:

Resume

Your Full name

Your contact details

- Contact telephone number
- Mobile telephone number
- Email address
- Postal address

Career objective

(this is what you want to do in a job)

Skills

(what skills you have that you could do at a job)

Employment history (this includes paid, voluntary or work experience)

1

2

3

Education (Special achievements or things you have done) –
Give the title and date for any work or skills related awards you may have achieved

Hobbies and interests

Referees

(people who know how you work and know your personality)

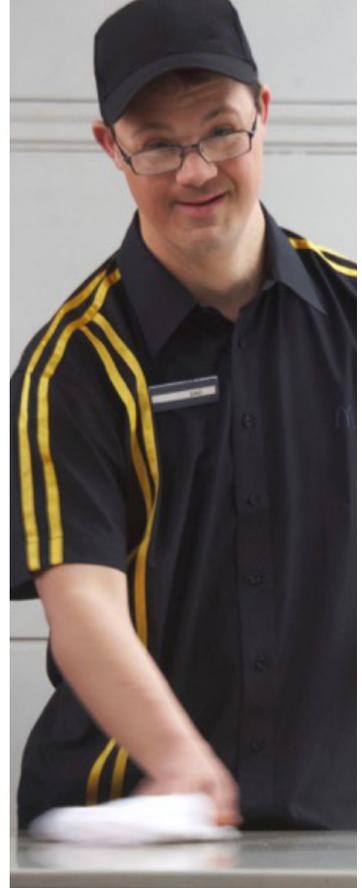
Now you know what sort of jobs you might like to do, and you have thought about your resume, you can start to look for a job. It may help to talk to people who can assist you to find the right job. Jobs can be found in many different ways, this can include:

- telling people you know that you want a job and what sort of job you are interested in
- looking at job boards, or 'worker wanted' advertisements at your local shops
- looking in the jobs pages of newspapers and local papers
- on the internet
- contacting your local groups and letting them know you want a job
- contacting local Disability Employment Service (DES)
www.jobaccess.gov.au
- contacting your local Down Syndrome Association
www.downsyndrome.org.au

If you are still at school your careers teacher may help or your local Ticket to Work Network
www.tickettowork.org.au

These organisations can then assist you to set your own Career Action Plan to get the job that is just right for you. They will be able to help you apply for a job and prepare for an interview. Your local DES will also be able to support you and your employer in your new workplace when you get a job.

NB: Information on Career Action Plans can be found on **www.education.vic.gov.au**



**Good luck
and happy
job-hunting!**



Section 2

Employing someone with Down syndrome

Congratulations, you have made the decision to employ someone with Down syndrome to do a 'real job with real wages'. This resource will attempt to assist you in the employment process and with workplace strategies to gain the most from your employee with Down syndrome. The benefits to your 'organisational health' by employing someone with Down syndrome will go far beyond the actual job they have been employed to perform. At the end of this resource is a list of relevant organisations and references that may also be able to assist you to gain the most from your employee with Down syndrome and answer some common questions. The Disability Discrimination Act of 1992 talks about 'reasonable adjustments' when employing someone with a disability, this resource will assist you, the employer, to make those adjustments for the employee with Down syndrome.

Although all people with Down syndrome have an intellectual disability, which have some common learning characteristics, all people with Down syndrome are **not** alike and each person has his/her own individual personality, strengths and weaknesses. Some common learning characteristics of people with Down syndrome are: they are most always visual learners, most have some verbal short-term memory impairment and verbal skills are not reflective of cognitive ability.

Because of these common learning styles, visual cues such as photos/pictures or video could be used along with clear written text.

Recruitment and interview process

It is important to ensure that the candidate with Down syndrome can understand what the job is and apply appropriately.

Recruitment

- use easy to read English for the job advertisement and application form
- use large print and give an appropriate area for the applicant to write answers (if applicable)
- use visual cues if appropriate
- make the job advertisement available to your local Disability Employment Service (DES) www.jobaccess.gov.au and your local Down Syndrome Association www.downsyndrome.org.au
- use clear, easy to understand language when writing the position description for the job. Your local DES may be able to assist with this process.
- when writing the criteria, qualifications and skills required for the job, ensure that only the essential experience or qualifications are written down, not ones that are desired. Remember that skills can be gained through volunteer work, work experience and training courses.

Interview

- speak clearly
- use short sentences
- if the interviewee is unsure about the question, ask the question in a different way
- avoid metaphors, acronyms and jargon
- allow longer for the interview than you would typically
- use a tick box questionnaire to assess skill base – use easy to read English
- allow the interviewee to bring a support person with them who may assist with rewording some questions
- if a support person is present, address questions to the person with Down syndrome NOT the support person.



Orientation and training

It is important to provide the employee with Down syndrome adequate time for training and allow them to orientate themselves to the work environment and their co-employees. The usual orientation process for all new employees can be carried out but with some adaptations to learning styles, as previously discussed. Below are some tips that can help with this:

- Allocate a mentor to the employee so he/she knows who to go to to ask questions. Let that mentor orientate the employee so a relationship can be established.
- Provide the employee with an orientation folder so that he/she can keep all the information together.
- Provide a photo of each co-employee with his/her name underneath, and what they do, and where to find them as a reference.
- Explain the 'unwritten rules' of the workplace, if any e.g. what coffee/tea mugs to use.
- Provide a schedule of the day, including break time and lunch. Use a visual as well as a written schedule so the employee can keep it as a reference, include length of time if relevant e.g. 30 mins for lunch
- Break down the jobs on the daily schedule into individual tasks and then show the employee how to do each task. You may also want to use photos or pictures in a 'First - Next - Then' sequence so they can refer to it later.
- After each task is explained, check they understand before moving onto the next. The 'See one, Do one, Teach one' technique can often assist the mentor to understand if the employee understands the task.
- You may need to use simple language, e.g. no abbreviations or complex words, explain a task a different way, similar to that used in the interview process.
- You may need to extend the orientation period from the usual practice.
- Be mindful of confidentiality.

Doing the Job

Anyone doing a job for the first time needs support. People with Down syndrome are no different and the support needed will also depend on the individual. Support for the employee with Down syndrome should be assessed and discussed in the presence of the employee, the employer or a manager and a DES employee. This will ensure that all areas of the workplace and the employee's job are being assessed. Here are some suggestions to facilitate a supported work environment.

Aides and Equipment

- Give the employee a map of the work space, with photos of who works where, where items are stored, and where things can be found.
- Visual aides to assist in tasks (like those explained in the orientation section).
- Ask someone who knows the employee to find out what aides or equipment they use at home to complete tasks, use what already works.
- Assistive devices, which may include items such as an electronic stapler, and non-skid material, may help.



Making information understandable and accessible

- Use visual aides.
- Break jobs down to manageable tasks or components to work through sequentially.
- Explain tasks in other ways if the employee doesn't seem to understand initially.
- Show the employee how to do the task whilst explaining.
- Use appropriate language and common synonyms for words and concepts i.e. 'put together' instead of 'compiled', 'pay' instead of 'remuneration'.
- Use larger text and an easy to read font for written instructions.
- Ensure that the DES employee is involved.
- Allow a reasonable timeframe to complete a job or task.
- Routine or regular jobs are often achieved successfully and independently.



Support *from* all co-employees and managers:

- Ensure that co-employees and managers lead by example.
- Reward the employee appropriately (which can be verbal), for good work and effort.
- Set up an environment where the employee feels comfortable asking for assistance.
- Social inclusion is important for an employee and co-employees. This could be as simple as asking the employee with Down syndrome to join other staff at lunch time or a social outing that all staff are partaking in. If an employee feels happy and included in an environment he/she will work more efficiently.
- Alteration to procedures when needed and appropriate – if a procedure is not essential and the employee is finding it challenging then it could be agreed to modify or alter it, for example, if using the current system to clock on and off is difficult to use, then the employee could report to a supervisor instead.
- Alteration to work hours may be necessary for a variety of reasons and this should be discussed with the employer, employee and DES employee.
- Job restructuring, such as a change in work schedule or a decrease in the number of job duties, may be necessary.

Support *for* all co-employees and managers:

- It is a good idea to educate co-employees and all employees about Down syndrome and how they can assist their colleague with Down syndrome – your local Down syndrome association will be able to assist with providing resources for this.
- Ensure that all new employees receive education about Down syndrome.
- Ensure that all employees understand that the employee with Down syndrome is there to do their job also and, like all other employees, will want to feel and be part of the team and included.
- Have a system for feedback that is constructive and productive so that all employees know that they are being heard.
- Involve the DES to assist with team building activities, for all employees.
- Have a clear policy on bullying and harassment and ensure that all staff are familiar with the policy.

Performance appraisal and monitoring

Like all employees, employees with Down syndrome should have work targets or goals. Commonly in a workplace, performance monitoring and employee appraisals are carried out by filling in self-appraisal forms. It may be that the self-appraisal form for the employee with Down syndrome has easy to read questions or their mentor assists the employee to fill in the form. The DES employee may assist with an appropriate method to assess performance.

- Monitoring at frequent, regular intervals will also highlight areas that require more support or re-training early on. Involve a DES support employee or mentor.
- Performance appraisals also show the employee and employer when and in what area an employee is not performing at their job and allows them to work together to give the employee a chance to improve.
- Explain to the employee with Down syndrome that all employees have a performance appraisal.
- Highlight positive, as well as negative, areas of the employee's overall performance. Have the same expectations for the person with Down syndrome as for other employees.
- Allow more time for the employee to complete the form and interview, and follow the communication tips given in the recruitment area of this resource.
- Remember all people learn when they are given feedback on their performance in a considerate and constructive manner.
- Reward the employee, just as you would any other staff member. This may include further responsibility, further training and development, financial reward or a certificate of appreciation.



Highlight positive, as well as negative, areas of the worker's overall performance

Answers to common questions

What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome is the most common cause of intellectual disability. Everyone who has Down syndrome will have some level of intellectual disability. Most people with Down syndrome have 47 chromosomes in their cells instead of 46. They have an extra chromosome 21, which is why Down syndrome is also sometimes known as trisomy 21.

Although we know how Down syndrome occurs, we do not yet know why it happens. Down syndrome occurs at conception, across all ethnic and social groups and to parents of all ages. There is no cure and it does not go away.

Can someone with Down syndrome learn?

Yes. There will be some intellectual disability in development and some level of learning difficulty for all people with Down syndrome. Because everyone is unique, the level of difficulty will be different for each person and a person's level of understanding and learning is not equal to their level of speech. As discussed in the resource, learning can be facilitated by using aides and equipment and different teaching techniques.

What are my responsibilities as an employer?

'Prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment, including conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006*

Resources and useful websites

I can get a job. A step-by-step guide to getting a job. A guide to getting a job for you and the people who support you.

GREAT BRITAIN. Department of Health. Valuing People Support Team (2005)

Employing people with learning disabilities: A handbook for employers

S. Hemmings and J. Morris

Down Syndrome Australia

www.downsyndrome.org.au

Down Syndrome Victoria

Down Syndrome - An Employer's Guide

www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au

Disability Employment Australia – to locate your local DES

www.disabilityemployment.org.au

Australian Network on Disability

www.and.org.au

Job Access

www.jobaccess.gov.au

www.yournextstar.com

www.creativespirit.org.au

McKinsey & Company

The value that people with Down syndrome can add to organizations

(March 2014)

www.mckinsey.com

Australian Government: Department of Employment

www.employment.gov.au

Supported by Australia Post
Our Neighbourhood Community Grants





**Down Syndrome
Australia**

Down Syndrome Australia is made up of eight State and Territory associations providing support, information and resources to people with Down syndrome and their families across the country. Please contact your local association on the details below for any enquiries, or to contact Down Syndrome Australia directly, email info@downsyndrome.org.au

Down Syndrome Victoria

www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au

(03) 9486 9600 or 1300 658 873

Down Syndrome Western Australia

www.dsawa.asn.au

(08) 9368 4002 or 1800 623 544

Down Syndrome New South Wales

www.downsyndromensw.org.au

(02) 9841 4444

Down Syndrome Northern Territory

www.downsyndroment.com.au

(08) 8985 6222

**Down Syndrome Association of
Queensland**

www.dsaq.org.au

(07) 3356 6655

ACT Down Syndrome Association

www.actdsa.org.au

(02) 6290 0656

Down Syndrome South Australia

www.downssa.asn.au

(08) 8245 4600

Down Syndrome Tasmania

www.downsyndrometasmania.org.au

1300 592 050

