

WDN June Community Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 30th June 2026

Fountain View Room, Civic Centre, 10.00am – 12:30pm

Chair/ Facilitator	Jafar
Minute Taker	Kieran
Event management support	Jafar and Kieran

Item	Time/ Duration	Notes
Welcome to our June 2026 meeting • Acknowledgement of Country • Housekeeping • Overview of Agenda	10:00 am – 10:10 am	<i>The meeting commenced with an Acknowledgement of Country, recognising the rich Aboriginal heritage of this country. The Wurundjeri Willum Clan and Taungurung People were acknowledged as the Traditional Owners of the lands within the City of Whittlesea, and respect was paid to their Elders past and present.</i>
Presentation 1: City of Work Readiness Program Rosie Beaumont	10:10 am - 10:25 am	Agenda Item: Partnership Project with Northern School for Autism Presenter: Rosie Beaumont, Community Strengthening Officer Employment Context

		Rosie highlighted that employment outcomes for people with disability are gradually improving through initiatives such as: • Workplace adjustment policies • Disability employment programs • Recreation and leisure sector opportunities • Employment within supermarkets Rosie noted that supporting inclusion and reducing barriers aligns with Council's core business, including: • Reducing barriers for people with disability to access Council services and facilities. • Reducing barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment. • Promoting positive attitudes and reducing discrimination. Current Challenges Discussion highlighted a number of ongoing employment barriers, including: • Limited local employment opportunities for young people with disability. • Graduates with disability often remaining in repeated training programs without progressing into employment. • A growing cohort of neurodivergent young people who are motivated to work but continue to face barriers to securing employment. Previous Council Initiatives Council has previously partnered with the Northern School for Autism on work readiness initiatives, including a long-term horticulture program aimed at developing practical employment skills in the open spaces and horticulture sector. • A previous project (2014) supported eight young people through placements in open spaces and nurseries.
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		• In 2025, the program was paused following evaluation, which found that work readiness activities were not consistently translating into sustainable employment outcomes. Current Partnership Project The current project aims to better understand, and address barriers faced by employers when engaging young people with disability. Key observations included: • Employers often have legitimate practical concerns regarding participant support needs, costs, workplace adjustments and program expectations. • The project seeks to improve employer confidence and understanding through clearer information and practical experience. Gembrook Community Garden Project The Gembrook Community Garden Project involved eight Year 10 and 11 students participating in a work readiness program focused on the role of a garden maintenance worker. The project included: • Development of practical skills, including mowing, line trimming and interpreting workplace instructions. • Building understanding of workplace expectations, including wearing the required uniform and following workplace procedures. • A range of accessibility supports, including: ○ Visual aids (e.g. photographs of facilitators and required PPE). ○ Timers and familiar prompting tools to support task completion. ○ Low-sensory environmental adjustments where appropriate. • Opportunities to engage with genuine employers and community stakeholders through practical, workplace-based learning experiences.
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		Support to develop an understanding of workplace health and safety requirements and employer expectations.
Feedback from Community Catch ups in March and April	10:25 am – 10:35 am	Presenter: Jafar, Community Strengthening Officer Overview Jafar presented a summary of feedback gathered through four community catch-up sessions held across the municipality: - Wollert - Thomastown - Whittlesea - South Morang A total of 34 community members attended the sessions. Community Catch-ups Discussion Summary Community members discussed recent changes to the NDIS and the impact on participants, carers and service providers. Key concerns included reduced plan funding, increased administrative requirements, changes to plan management, workforce shortages, and inconsistent communication from the NDIA. These changes have resulted in increased stress, confusion, service delays and reduced confidence in navigating the NDIS. Members identified a need for clear, consistent information, accessible education sessions, practical guidance on plan management and assessments, stronger local support, and greater advocacy to help participants understand their rights and access services confidently.

Council Update DAC update	10:35am – 10:50am	Agenda Item: Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) Update Presenter: Stephen McKay, Manager Community Strengthening Stephen provided an update on Council's review of disability engagement and advisory arrangements. Council advised that its approach aims to ensure community engagement is: - Meaningful. - Provides genuine opportunities for influence on Council decision-making. To support this work, Council will undertake a series of workshops with stakeholders to help shape the future engagement model. Potential approaches to be explored include: - A Disability Advisory Committee. - The Whittlesea Disability Network. - Alternative engagement models identified through consultation. Questions Q: When is the new approach expected to be implemented? A: Council advised the intention is to implement the new approach during the upcoming financial year.
Morning tea 10:50 am – 11:20 am All		

Presentation 2: Megan Walther – Cape Group – employment programs Explaining what they do and their experience in this space.	11:20 am – 11:35 am	Agenda Item: Presentation – Cape Group Presenter: Megan Walther Organisation Overview Megan shared her lived experience of growing up with a father who used a wheelchair and spoke about her passion for improving employment outcomes for people with disability. She highlighted that the next major focus in the disability sector is creating meaningful employment opportunities, with the goal of supporting people to participate in the workforce and take pride in their work. Cape Group: • Provides supported employment opportunities for people with disability. • Employs approximately 189 people, primarily people with intellectual disability. • Operates pick and pack, warehouse and nursery services. • Offers flexible shift times to meet individual needs and preferences. • Supports school leavers and provides school-based work experience opportunities. Current Approach Megan outlined Cape Group's commitment to: • Expanding supported employment opportunities for people with a range of disabilities and employment experience. • Moving away from segregated employment models, informed by the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission. • Building partnerships with mainstream employers, including organisations such as Woolworths and Hume City Council, to create more inclusive employment pathways. • Increasing acceptance and understanding of disability within open employment settings.
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		- Developing sustainable labour hire partnerships with established employers, including opportunities to work with Council. - Investing in leadership development through a recently established Group Leader Program, a 12-week course that develops leadership and communication skills, enabling participants to support facilitators and mentor peers. Questions and Discussion Q: Have employer goodwill and award wage arrangements presented challenges when creating employment opportunities? A: Megan acknowledged that wage rates can present challenges and that productivity-based pay is often a complex issue. However, many families prioritise meaningful participation, independence and social inclusion over financial outcomes alone, recognising the broader benefits of employment. Q: With increasing use of technology and AI, are there opportunities beyond traditional supported employment roles such as horticulture and pick-and-pack? A: Cape Group advised that technology-focused roles are available within the organisation. Examples include computer-based positions in its printing department and administration and reception roles at its Broadmeadows site. Another attendee suggested CRANK, an organisation incorporating gaming, role-playing games and skill-based learning to build participant capabilities. Q: How is workplace safety managed within warehouse environments? A: Cape Group delivers workplace safety training using Easy Read resources, which are reviewed and updated annually. Training is designed to ensure participant understanding, and employees with strong knowledge and experience are encouraged to support and mentor their peers in following workplace safety requirements.
Presentation 3: Connecting 2 Ability, employment opportunities for people with disabilities	11:35 am – 11:50 am	Agenda Item: Presentation – Connecting2Ability Presenter: Owen Hewlett

		Owen provided an overview of Connecting2Ability and its supported employment services. Organisation Overview • Connecting2Ability has been operating for approximately 75 years. • Delivers day services and supported employment programs. • Operates 10 sites across Victoria, including Thomastown and Heidelberg. • Currently employs 47 supported employees, assisted by Disability Support Professionals (DSPs) and facilitators. Supported employment activities include: • Waste recycling. • Screen printing. • Cleaning of Victoria Police vehicles. • Horticulture and grounds maintenance. Questions and Discussion Q: Are there any opportunities to partner with metropolitan op shops? A: There are currently no partnerships in place; however, Connecting2Ability is interested in exploring opportunities with service providers. Q: Who makes up your workforce and what types of disability do they have? A: Employees have a diverse range of disabilities, with many having an intellectual disability and others having physical disabilities or multiple disabilities. It was noted that some roles, such as horticulture, have physical requirements that can limit accessibility, although alternative employment opportunities are available. Q: There is a perception that supported employment providers receive significant NDIS funding. A: Owen acknowledged this misconception, noting that organisations often face significant operating costs, including specialised vehicles and equipment, which are not funded through the NDIS. Partnerships with other organisations are valuable in supporting service delivery.
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		Q: Are there plans to expand employment opportunities? A: Connecting2Ability is actively seeking to attract younger employees as its workforce ages. Recruitment activities include school presentations and attendance at career expos to promote supported employment opportunities. Q: What is the current waitlist for services? A: The current waitlist is approximately five people, with capacity available to support additional participants.
Round Table Discussions	11:50 am – 12:25 pm	1. How can employers make their workplace more accessible for employees with disability? 2. What practical barriers do employers face when seeking to employ people with disability, and how might they be overcome? (e.g. limited understanding and fear of getting it wrong, supervision, productivity, recruitment processes, funding and ongoing support and workplace adjustments).
Report back on roundtable discussions Facilitator to talk through what has been suggested by members. Reporting round table discussions back to wider group	12:15 pm – 12:25 pm Time allocated: 10 mins	Question One: How can employers make their workplace more accessible for employees living with disability? Workplace is safe – physical (flat area) – environmental (noise) – attitude (acceptance) Understanding of disability Be flexible ie: – job design to suit

(can also do open floor discussion instead of above questions if needed).		– work different areas – different work hours Focus on - Strengths and weakness. Asking people with a disability what they want? To make workplace accessible Employees undertaking training in disability matters. Goodwill and understanding client/work group (making time to support) Positive workplace culture focus Training open approach to people with disability – other supporting organisations providing training for people with disability before employment to be ready for workforce. Flexible workplace/plan/individuality Hybrid model Consultative with employees Peer/Mentoring Involvement by employees with recruitment Onboarding process: – Job is – Provision for inclusion Employees trained as HSR's Feedback model for employees Accessible information in HR space Supervision/feedback session individualised. Celebrate the wins – employee of the month Recognising people are people Technology – Feedback/follow up meetings/changes. Can be accessible but not inclusive. Physically accessible – adjustments – Doorways – Screens – Stand desk
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		– Calm rooms – Sensory spaces Job access – department of social services Other staff training/awareness Easy rad resources/visuals Understand your team/individuals. Consistent standards – creates routine. Peer roles/buddy system/mentor roles. Training and reassessments. Remove assumptions. Ensuring workplaces accessible for all. Removing pre-conceived limitations Focus on what people are able to do, rather than what they can't – ability rather than disability. Being less naïve about what disability actually means – understanding different abilities eg: neurodiversity. Being open minded and seeing the value – for instance people with autism might be much more committed than other employees. Staff education Question 2 What practical barriers do employers face when seeking to employ people living with disability, and how might they be overcome? Income vs wage subsidy (Biggest problem to sell) Staff resourcing Lack of awareness regarding person capability to work Employees need to respect and encourage people to work Applying for job and interviews not disability friendly. It's hard enough Not being flexible ie: – Reduce work hours
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		– Take disability Employees education – Understanding inclusion Psychosocial barriers: – Times of work – Medication – Invisible disability Families: – Communication – Consultation – Education Workplace flexibility Transport in rural and region – Petrol prices – Length of shift Financial sustainability – NDIS funding Fear of how many hours they can work for, fear of losing disability pension Funding, government support (local, state, federal) Action plans implemented from research, then re-researching research – (Hitting iron when its hot) Good well and understanding client/worker (Making time to support Action plan put in Government agendas (local, state, federal) Use wage subsidies incentives to support employee's/employers Cost Liability risk False information/ lack of Everybody's the same Fear Misinformation Language barriers/communication Cultural
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		Not having someone in the space already to talk to Access to disability awareness training Understanding and awareness about the disability for potential employees Disability awareness for workplaces: – Education modules (visual, simple) – Disability advocates in workplace – outsources? Post placement support/ongoing support – Weekly contact on the job with the employee – financial can be onsite: – Getting to work – Onsite support Training time = employer, time – poor – External resources – employment services can support people on the job (Building awareness of these services) – Support workers on site like supported employment model to get started – initial training and settling in Paid work trail and wage subsidies – brokered by employment services Money – Award wages needed, potential employees not seen as delivering this value, eg: – Greater commitment, greater skill levels – Understanding the value, often much greater than assumed
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All-abilities Program Announcement	12:25 pm – 12:27 pm	Arthur from Belgravia announced the group all-abilities programs being launched in Whittlesea Council's leisure centres.
Wrap up - Thank participants - Next WDN Meeting	12:27pm – 12:30pm	Next WDN Community Meeting Tuesday 22 September 2026 Community Meeting Fountain View Room, Civic Centre, 10 am – 12:30 pm
Meeting closed 12:30 pm		