

## Work training program for people with brain injury: Information for employers

By offering a work training placement you are making a positive contribution to rehabilitation, gaining a new employment candidate familiar with your business and fostering a supportive workplace culture for all employees.

### What is brain injury?

A brain injury refers to any damage to the brain that is acquired through accident/trauma (eg car accident, assault) or illness (such as a stroke, brain infection, lack of oxygen etc)

**The effects of brain injury are different for each person**, depending on how severe the injury was and which parts of the brain were affected. The brain controls everything in our body: our thinking, memory, movement, strength, co-ordination, speech, vision, mood and behaviour. An injury to the brain can affect all or just some of these aspects. The brain has some capacity to recover over time; most of the recovery occurring gradually for up to 2 years following the injury.

Some changes will be obvious (e.g. walking with a limp, paralysis of one arm), but many are not visible (e.g. memory, mental fatigue, changes to vision, difficulty tolerating loud noise). Sometimes people experience changes to their personality, which may be subtle (like being more talkative), or more noticeable (like difficulty controlling emotions).

How well a person manages in a job also depends on the demands of the job role. One position may require physical strength, co-ordination and balance; where as another position has higher demands for cognitive skills like planning, problem solving and communication.

*Brain injury is complex: the injury impacts on each person differently and changes over time as recovery occurs.*

*Working with a brain injury is even more complex with the interplay of injury and job demands.*

### What is a work training placement?

A work training placement is an unpaid work experience placement. The 'host' employer provides work tasks, supervision and training but does not pay a wage. Insurance coverage is arranged by the Vocational Provider. It is best if the person is an additional member of the team (not filling a vacant position) during the placement.

### Benefits of the work training placement for the person:

- Improves confidence
- Provides opportunity to trial a new job and gain feedback about work abilities
- Builds work fitness and skills
- Provides the chance to socialise
- Updates work references and a chance to secure paid work

### What support may the person require on the job?

Supports will be tailored to the individual and the job. General strategies may include:

- Start on part-time hours and increase gradually over time
- Allocate a 'buddy' to provide training and act as key support person.
- To assist learning, focus on 1 work area/task before progressing onto the next
- Use a diary, checklists and written notes to aid learning
- Schedule regular feedback that is timely, sensitive and specific
- Reduce distractions in the work environment
- Avoid time pressured work, initially

### How is the host employer supported?

The vocational provider will guide you through the process of setting up a work training placement and assist your staff in providing training to the person. Regular contact will be maintained to monitor progress.

***The host employer is responsible to provide a safe and healthy workplace. During the work training placement, the person is not covered by the host employer's workers compensation policy but by an additional policy insuring personal injury and public liability that is arranged by the Vocational Provider.***

## Examples of work training experiences

**Instructions for this section (please delete before you print):** Please choose the most relevant example(s) and delete those not relevant

**Name:** Kerry

**Details of injury:** Kerry was injured in a car accident when she was a school student. She went back to school, requiring extra supports and modified curriculum and completed year 12. Kerry has partial weakness in her left arm and leg. She is slower at walking and unsteady on uneven surfaces. Kerry has no difficulty understanding but her speech is slowed. She requires demonstration and repetition to learn new tasks.

**Goal:** Kerry has experience with her own pets, has completed a dog grooming course and would like to trial work as a dog groomer part-time.

**Work training placement:** Kerry completed a work training placement for 12 weeks at the local vets, working alongside the dog groomer. She enjoyed the work; had some difficulty lifting and handling large dogs but could manage small dogs.

**Outcome:** The Vet offered Kerry 8 hours per week paid work assisting the dog groomer during busy times.

**Name:** George

**Details of injury:** George sustained a brain injury as a result of an assault. He previously worked as a truck driver. He now has problems with his vision, memory, slower speed of thinking, and weakness to one leg. Following 2 years of rehabilitation it was determined that his reduced peripheral vision is permanent and he can no longer drive.

**Interests:** George enjoys being outdoors and gardening.

**Work training placement:** George completed a 12 week placement attending a large garden centre twice per week, watering plants, unloading new plants and generally setting up the outdoor garden area. He buddied up with another staff member and worked under his instruction.

**Outcome:** George enjoyed the placement though was only completing a few tasks from the job role. He negotiated that he continue on as a volunteer at the garden centre.

**Name:** Angela

**Details of injury:** Angela sustained a brain injury and fractures to her leg when she was hit by a car. She previously worked in hospitality (bar work). As a result of the injury she had mild in-coordination, walked with a limp and her speed of moving and thinking were mildly reduced. She had not worked in the 18 months since her injury and was worried about managing the pace and precision of bar work.

**Goal:** Angela to trial work in a hospitality role suited to her strengths.

**Work training placement:** Angela completed a 12-week placement in the catering company situated in the head office of a large bank. She prepared and delivered food and drinks (using a trolley) and set up conference rooms, in a small team.

**Outcome:** Angela was offered paid casual work with the catering company at the end of the work trial.

**Name:** Mustafa

**Details of injury:** Mustafa fell at work sustaining a brain injury. He was unsteady on uneven surfaces, experienced headaches and became irritable more easily. He also fractured his shoulder and was unable to lift overhead. Mustafa was a third year carpentry apprentice when the injury occurred but was unable to return to carpentry work.

**Goal:** Trial work in another role within the timber industry

**Work training placement:** Mustafa completed a 12-week work trial in a pallet making factory. He was able to do the work but found that the noisy environment worsened his headaches. He then completed a second placement at a large hardware store though had difficulty recalling where things were stored and did not enjoy customer service.

**Outcome:** Mustafa decided to change career areas and started studying a computer course in network engineering at TAFE. The work training placements helped him work out what type of work he can now manage and would enjoy.