

# Accessing Hidden Talent: Practical Disability Employment

**Presented by:**

**Joshua Bamford**

**Human Resources Director**

**M&H Ward Group – McDonald's Toowoomba  
Region**

**Chair – Disability Employment Taskforce –  
Darling Downs**



**TOOWOOMBA  
REGION**

# Who is Joshua Bamford

- ▶ Current HR Director for the M&H Ward Group – McDonald's Toowoomba Region.
- ▶ Current Chair – Disability Employment Taskforce – The First of its kind in Australia
- ▶ Member – Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce
- ▶ Member – Indigenous Workforce Action Group
- ▶ I have been running alternative recruitment pathways for 5 years with genuine results. Joshua has a firm focus on Disability Employment based on lived experience.
- ▶ Currently running a multi award-winning Disability Employment Pathway, with a genuine passion to see each individual define themselves not by a barrier in the workplace but by their genuine worth to the workforce overall.



# Session Overview

Reframing disability employment as a business strategy

Real-world example: McDonald's Toowoomba Region's Disability Employment Program (DEP)

Addressing labour shortages while building inclusive teams

Actionable insights and key lessons learned

3



**Serve**

We put our customers and people first.



**Inclusion**

We open our doors to everyone.



**Integrity**

We do the right thing.



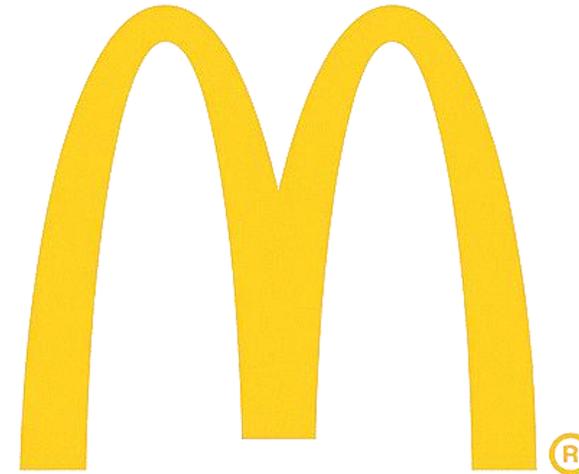
**Community**

We are good neighbours.



**Family**

We get better together.



**M&H  
WARD  
GROUP**

**TOOWOOMBA  
REGION**

# What is Practical Disability Employment?

- ▶ Partnering with multiple IEA and Government stakeholders to find the right person for current labour shortages with a firm focus on recruiting an individual that is right for the role irrespective of barriers.
- ▶ Assessing and reviewing current vacancies which a position description can be adjusted to meet both the individual and organizational objectives
- ▶ It is an organizational cultural change in how we understand and manage employees with barriers.
- ▶ Its matching words with actions.



# The M&H Ward Group Journey

- ▶ Disability Employment Program - Launched in late 2020 – early 2021 at the height of COVID
- ▶ Developed in consultation with atWork Australia and APM
- ▶ Over 65 + successful placements and growing
- ▶ 4-time award-winning initiative



**The M&H Ward Group  
McDonald's Toowoomba**



**Serve**

We put our customers and people first.



**Inclusion**

We open our doors to everyone.



**Integrity**

We do the right thing.



**Community**

We are good neighbours.



**Family**

We get better together.

# Program Challenges

- ▶ Senior Leadership buy-in for a program that did not exist, with no real world data to provide in the case of QSR's
- ▶ WHS concerns – Resolved through individual assessments.
- ▶ Buy in from Junior Leadership – Achieved through the process of genuine applicants for genuine labour shortages
- ▶ Professional self doubt – Can I achieve this? Am I the right person?
- ▶ Position description adjustments tailored to meet organisational and operational needs while striking a balance with privacy and dignity.



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



# Program Outcomes: Direct Business Impacts

- ▶ Immediate labour shortage resolved
- ▶ Dedicated Employees with 95% attending each shift scheduled on a weekly basis, with an average attendance from the remaining staffing levels at 80% each week
- ▶ Reduction in turnover – Individuals employed under the DEP are 4 times more likely to remain within their role longer than applicants not employed through the program

7



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



### Community

We are good neighbours.



### Family

We get better together.

# Program Outcomes: Indirect Business Impacts

- ▶ Strong community support
- ▶ Recognition of the organisation being an employer of choice within the Darling Downs Southwest Region due to firm social credibility through actions not just words.
- ▶ Multiple Awards which were highlighted and used to further the advocacy of the programs
- ▶ Expanded Customer Base



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



### Community

We are good neighbours.



### Family

We get better together.

# Brand Recognition

- ▶ The M&H Ward Group has been received multiple awards for our programs:
- ▶ 2022 – Outstanding Employer of the Year – Business Disability Awards Australia
- ▶ 2022 – Innovation in Disability Employment – atWork Australia QLD Awards
- ▶ 2023 – Outstanding Employee of the Year – Business Disability Awards Australia
- ▶ 2023 – Business Engagement – Business Disability Awards Australia
- ▶ 2024 – Regional Finalists – Queensland Training Awards
- ▶ 2025 – Finalists – DE&I Category – TIARA Awards – Talent Acquisition Awards ANZ
- ▶ 2025 – Finalist (x 2) Outstanding Employer of the Year – Business Disability Awards Australia
- ▶ 2025 – Finalist – Social Inclusion Employment Year – Business Disability Awards Australia

# What's Next?

- ▶ The M&H Ward Group now runs a multitude of employment Pathways
- ▶ Disability Employment Pathway
- ▶ First Nations Employment Pathway
- ▶ Mature Aged Employment Pathway
- ▶ Refugee and Migrant Employment Pathway
- ▶ At Risk Youth Employment Pathway (In Pilot Stage)

# The Business Case for Disability Employment



- ▶ Low unemployment in Darling Downs & Maranoa - 3.10% (Adults) 5.0% (Youth) – 4.10% & 8.90% Nationally.
- ▶ Shrinking long-term unemployment pool
- ▶ Between 18-20% of the active workforce have an undisclosed barrier
- ▶ Disability employment is not a "nice to have" — it's a workforce necessity in a very competitive market



## Serve

We put our customers and people first.



## Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



## Integrity

We do the right thing.



## Community

We are good neighbours.



## Family

We get better together.

# Foundation of Success: Data-Driven Decision-Making

- ▶ Executive buy-in achieved through hard data and ROI
- ▶ Used regional labour market insights to frame the need
- ▶ Positioned as a strategic workforce solution, not just a DE&I initiative

12



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



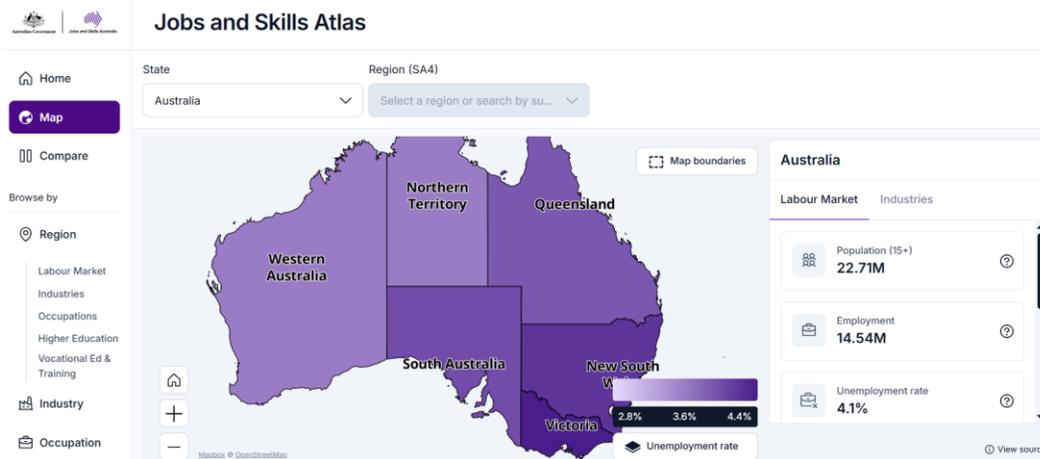
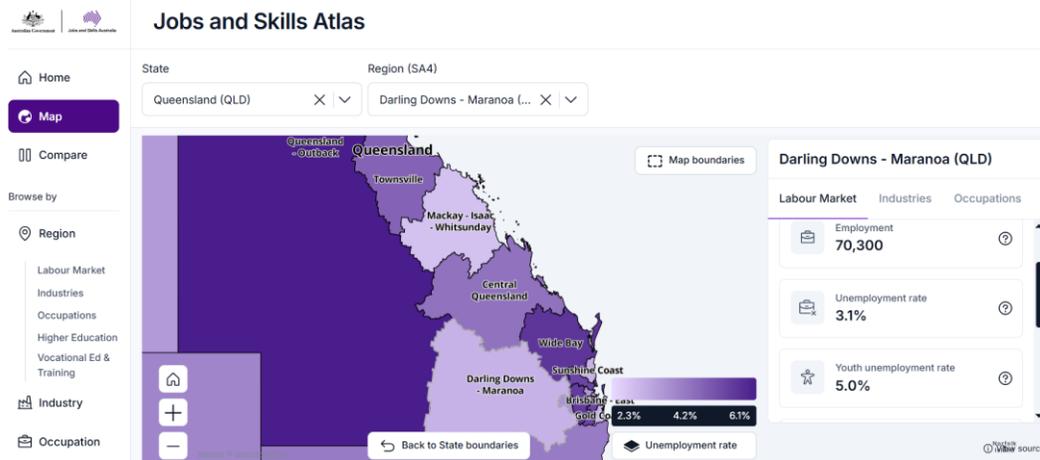
### Community

We are good neighbours.



### Family

We get better together.



# Jobs and Skills Atlas – The facts

# Assessing Suitability First

- Align roles to skills and capabilities
- Safety and productivity are non-negotiables
- Adjustments only made after suitability is confirmed

14



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



### Community

We are good neighbours.



### Family

We get better together.

# Addressing Common Leadership Concerns

- ▶ **Myth:** All disability employment requires major adjustments
- ▶ **Fact:** Most do not require any physical modifications
- ▶ Clear communication and tailored task design are often sufficient
- ▶ Safety concerns addressed with rigorous assessment

15



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



### Community

We are good neighbours.



### Family

We get better together.

# Gaining Leadership Buy-In

- ▶ Pitching to operations & finance: focus on **stability & profit**
- ▶ Pitching to HR: provide tools, data, and operational benefits
- ▶ Avoid DEI buzzwords; lead with **business value**

16



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



### Community

We are good neighbours.



### Family

We get better together.

# Place-Based Success through Collaboration

- Industry engagement is key
- Stakeholders include:
  - Darling Downs Health
  - Toowoomba Regional Council
  - Boeing, TAFE, Universities
- These organisations represent 50-60% of local job vacancies
- Understanding business differences ensures greater program impact

17



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



### Community

We are good neighbours.



### Family

We get better together.

# Realising the Benefits

- Reliable, untapped talent pool
- Enhanced team morale and culture
- Improved retention rates
- Greater alignment with community expectations

18



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



### Community

We are good neighbours.



### Family

We get better together.

# Final Takeaways

- Disability employment is a **strategic workforce solution – Approach businesses as such.**
- Use data to drive change and gain executive support – Facts matter for businesses, the decision makers want to know why they should invest.
- Focus on suitability and shared benefit
- Collaboration drives place-based success
- Unlock hidden potential in your community

19



## TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



### Community

We are good neighbours.



### Family

We get better together.

## Q&A / Discussion



# TOOWOOMBA REGION



### Serve

We put our customers and people first.



### Inclusion

We open our doors to everyone.



### Integrity

We do the right thing.



### Community

We are good neighbours.



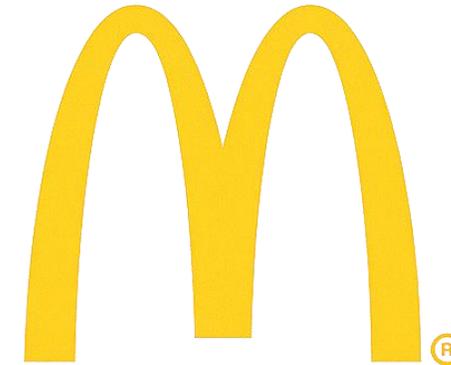
### Family

We get better together.

Thank you!



21



**M&H  
WARD  
GROUP**

**TOOWOOMBA**

**Joshua Bamford**

[Joshua.Bamford@mcdtwmba.com.au](mailto:Joshua.Bamford@mcdtwmba.com.au)

**0458 381 115**



**Serve**

We put our customers and people first.



**Inclusion**

We open our doors to everyone.



**Integrity**

We do the right thing.



**Community**

We are good neighbours.



**Family**

We get better together.