- ... I’m the manager of our undergraduate recruitment here at the University of Wollongong, which is a role I've just taken on very recently. But I have been here at the university for coming up to 21 years now, and in the same role where I advise high school students and their parents about the courses here at the University of Wollongong. I absolutely love what I do because, like you guys, I enjoy getting to see a student find their dream course and helping them get there. So I really do enjoy it and hence I've been doing it for so long, and I like working with all of you guys. We do really appreciate all the support that you give us in talking about the University of Wollongong to your students as well. So we value that support and we're very grateful that you've all made time to come along today.

I know many of you have your students here enjoying this couple of days, so I think they will get a lot out of the experience and they'll walk away knowing exactly which courses are for them and, potentially, which ones aren’t for them, which is also beneficial. So hopefully they'll have a good day.

If any of them need you throughout the day, the team over here will let me know and I'll call out to you so that you can go and assist them if they need you.

Before we get into the official presentations of the day, I'd just like to do the acknowledgement. We acknowledge that country for Aboriginal peoples is an interconnected set of ancient and sophisticated relationships. The University of Wollongong spreads across many interrelated Aboriginal countries that are bound by this sacred landscape and intimate relationship with that landscape since creation. From Sydney, to the Southern Highlands, to the south coast, from freshwater to bitter water, to salt, from city to urban to rural, the University of Wollongong acknowledges the custodianship of the Aboriginal peoples of this place and space that has kept alive the relationships between all living things.

The university acknowledges the devastating impact of colonisation on our campus’s footprint and commit ourselves to truth telling, healing and education.

Just a little bit of housekeeping before we'll go into our first presentation. In the event that there is an emergency evacuation, we will direct you out to the meeting point which will be outside the Hope Theatre just up there. Bathrooms are just out these doors and turn right. There's also an ironing board for some reason, if anyone needs to iron anything, you never know. Just outside the doors here there is a bubbler where you can refill water if you need to. Hopefully everyone's got their caffeine here. We will be having lunch brought down to the room as well and there's bins all around the room.

So if you do need Wi-Fi throughout the day, we've got an event Wi-Fi running for you. If you don't remember what it is, the maps up the front here do have the Wi-Fi password down the bottom as well if you need them. But otherwise, I'm going to get started with our first presenter. So I'm going to ask Professor Sarah O'Shea, who is an honorary professor with us here at the University of Wollongong, to come up and introduce the Career Development Learning Hub Symposium that she's been involved with, along with a lot of other professors from other universities who we have here with us today.

SARAH: Thank you. Thanks, everyone. Thank you for joining us today. Today we have an online audience and an audience in the room as well. So what today is really about is a National Careers Institute funded project that we were lucky to get back in 2020. And the project was looking at best practice career support for students with disability, with the aim of establishing the first career development learning hub that would support students with disability.

So what we're doing this week is every day we have a different presentation from a project under the auspices of the grant. So the grant was a large, overarching grant. And then underneath that we had four different projects running in different universities. And today's project is going to be presented by Molly Dollinger. Molly ran the project in terms of her affiliation with Deakin. And briefly, I asked Molly how she wanted me to introduce her and she said just as briefly as possible. So I'll just say that Molly is a senior lecturer in the Learning Futures team at Deakin, and she's going to talk today about Co-designing diverse career identities for people with disabilities.

Now, before I welcome Molly up, I do want to let everyone know online that closed captions are available for this session. So if you just want to press the CC button down in the corner of your screen, you'll see those closed captions. And also to let you know that this session is being recorded. Every session this week has been recorded and we've had some really positive feedback. So on Monday I presented on the overarching project and what we found yesterday, we had a really interesting panel with students who talked about their own journey into university and how they navigated that in terms of with their disability and also showcase the resource that was developed as a result of that, which was a professional development module for careers advisers. And then today Molly is going to talk about her co-design workshop, so I hope you'll join me in welcoming Molly up on the little platform.

MOLLY: Before we begin, for those of us in the room, can I just get a show of hands of who's already been to a few of the sessions this week, so I understand a little bit about – no-one. Okay. Well, that was very good information to know. All right. So welcome.

As Sarah mentioned, this is part of a - this is a pilot that's part of a much larger grant. And I'm presenting today on behalf of Professor Rola Awaji and Dr. Rachel Finnernan, who also worked with me on this project. Before I get started. We've already had a wonderful acknowledgement of country for the lands we're on today, but I'd also like to acknowledge the lands upon which this work was done, the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

So as Sarah mentioned, all of this work is done as part of the CDL hub that's specific for students with disabilities. The resources are going to launch very shortly on the ADCET website. Some of you might be familiar with that, and I'll get to, at the end of the presentation, some of the resources that will be available as well.

Okay. Can everyone - hopefully everyone online can also see the slides now. Sorry that wasn't happening. So a quick overview of the session. I'd like today to be quite interactive. So as briefly as possible I'm going to introduce the project and talk about some of the main findings that we had from it. But also I really want to move the discussion to what we can do about it now. So discussing the importance of developing diverse career identities for people with disabilities, and there will be an activity to reflect and challenge perhaps your ableist bias or perhaps that you have encountered in your workspace so you can get ready to look around you, and you're going to be talking to the people at your table. For those of you that are joining us online, you're going to be put into breakout rooms.

So a bit of context into this space. So currently students with a disability continue to face barriers in the graduate employment market. So even with a university degree, they are less likely to receive full-time or part-time employment and they are also more likely to have jobs that do not match their skills and capabilities with many of those students reporting that they are not being utilised to the full qualifications of which they have achieved.

So this is quite troubling, and I think where we came from for this project was really thinking about what universities can do to address this gap. As many of you would already know, and what we'll discuss later, a lot of this also sits with the responsibility of employers and our larger society as a whole around how we discriminate based on disability. But I think, trying to rein it back in, we wanted to understand what universities can be doing to support these students. And in particular, we wanted to look at placements. So some of you might have done a placement when you were at university. I didn't do one. I was in an arts degree and back then arts degrees didn't have placements - I'm not sure if you did - but what we know from students is that this is often a transformational experience in their university. It's often the thing that they most look forward to, to getting out there, to seeing what the job is like. Unfortunately, placements tend to happen far too late in the degree as a starting point, so they're already one, two years in. It's not easy to change out of teaching or nursing, or whatever degree they might be in, but also the placement itself is not particularly well supported.

So this goes to all kinds of issues. It goes to our professional staff who are under-resourced and under-trained about how they can set students up with the correct placement that is appropriate for them. It goes to how we train and really recruit our industry partners. Oftentimes it's more that the university is coming from a position of almost begging the industry to take on our students and, therefore, we don't really set the criteria that we probably should be. We don't review those partnerships and those relationships particularly well. And then the students themselves don't necessarily receive the training and support that they need to make the most of their placement as well.

So essentially the question being are WIL placements an untapped opportunity for students with a disability as opposed to yet another barrier? So our research questions guiding the study were what are the perceptions and experiences of students with disability regarding their WIL placements? What benefits and challenges, anticipated or lived, do students with disability face in WIL placements, and the “anticipated” or “lived” was something we added to the project because unfortunately many of the students we spoke to had chosen not to do placement because of their disability and concerns that it would not be accommodated or supported. And then how could WIL placements be more inclusive, accessible and equitable to students with a disability?

So we started with an online survey. We had 132 responses. We distributed through our Disability Resource Centre, that's the DRC there. So as a lot of you I'm sure would know that when a student enrols they can tick the box of whether they have a disability and whether they would like to be included in the Disability Resource Centre, or whatever the name of it is in that university. I'll just preface now around 8% of students tick that box currently. We know it's much, much higher than that. In reality, a lot of students don't feel comfortable disclosing or they just miss the question altogether because enrolment is a stressful process.

The survey logic was dependent on whether they had had a placement experience or not, and then we also held online focus groups to further unpack. So this data was collected in March and May 2022, and it was an online study at that time, COVID was still going through Victoria.

Okay. So to begin, we wanted to first unpack the motivations for students who had done placements about why they wanted to. And sure enough, our hypothesis that this was an opportunity for them to test out how they adapted to a work environment and what was suitable and right for them definitely came clear. So I'm going to read the quotes just in case it's inclusive to all people who are listening today. So “I want to gain real work experience and training, gain an idea of how said work and career area might work around my disability.” And another student said, “I endeavour to figure out a successful and healthy working relationship with an employer to be able to manage part-time studies along with working as a team, independently, part time or casually.”

So again, really going back to that idea of this being an opportunity to test some things out, to trial some things, because again, once they graduate into the workplace, you know, they don't get another trial run. So placements are quite an important part of being able to test that out.

But what also came through in our motivation was students also felt this - whether you want to call it a burden or not around advocacy. So this student said “to prove that with simple adjustments, people with disabilities can do the same thing as everyone else.” Now, I actually find this quote actually quite upsetting rather than perhaps positive because it's not about doing the same thing as everyone else. And that goes to show you how our society has essentially incorrectly educated this student. It's about being able to contribute to the workplace in a way that takes advantage of their strengths, which might be different than someone else's strengths. So one of the things that came out quite clearly in our study is that there is still this pervasive narrative that one size fits all is fair and it's not fair or equitable setting a standard criteria and saying everyone has to meet this and therefore we are not discriminating to anyone because we've set this criteria and made it really clear. That's not equity, right? That's not inclusion. So it's about challenging that.

We also found many, many challenges. And I don't have time to go into all of them, but they spanned almost every aspect of the placement itself from the built environment. Students saying that there weren't elevators or access lighting in the workspace. The sit/stand desk is always one. The tasks themselves, having students report to us that they were asked to read aloud when they said that that was not something they were comfortable with. Communication, the style of communication, the frequency, and so on. Again, understanding their strengths and where the student felt like they were best situated to contribute to the team, feedback and as well as flexibility. So a student quote here is “I worry workplaces may not know how to accommodate me or even understand the ways I may function or look at things in contrast to a non-autistic person.”

And that's why really one of the findings of this project is it's not enough for us to support students with a disability. We need to educate all students and all employers to understand disability as well, because it is all of our responsibility. So unfortunately - and I know these are a bit sad, but hopefully they're powerful as well - we found a lot of things around stigma as well. So a student said to us, “I look and sound like I am very smart and capable. However, I need longer to grasp things or need things worded in a different way that sometimes catches people by surprise and makes them confused, like I'm incompetent.” And then another student, “My brain works differently, which is an asset. As long as people allow me to operate in this way without judgment. “

So again, I think there's just - and you know, I watched the ABC, some of these shows they have about dating for people who are neurodiverse. Say what you will about these shows. There's positives and negatives to them, but at least it's putting people with disabilities out in society, showing - building that empathy with people. I think there's still not enough. It still feels hidden, in a lot of ways, and that has to do with also acknowledging visible versus invisible disability as well. But really, we need to, as a society, celebrate disability more and and acknowledge that quite a lot of us have a disability.

So discrimination. Another student was talking about a nursing placement. And this is one of the sadder stories that we had come through where they were saying, “On orientation day, the professional staff member who was handling the placement said if a student has a medical appointment that's been booked so far in advance that it can't be changed, you probably shouldn't be on placement.” And what this student later told us is that, essentially, they had to cancel their medical appointment because it was seen that they were putting their health before the responsibility of the placement. And this was a nursing student. So, I mean, just really quite upsetting. And I don't mean to pick on the placement advisers or supervisors who are often under-resourced, like I said, and understaffed. We also heard negative stories about the industry supervisors, about the academic staff members, about the student's peers. I mean, it's everyone, right, so it's all of our responsibilities.

And you won't find this surprising, after the things I just said, but only 25% of students who completed a placement said they fully shared their disability and accommodations with their supervisors because, yeah, a lot of students mentioned masking in order to make sure that not only they were able to conduct the placement, but also that they would get a recommendation from the supervisor at the end of the placement and ideally even a job, because for a lot of students this is how they then find employment.

So what this really comes down to is an unfair burden on the student. So again, “It was like they assumed that I had everything. Even when I asked for more assistance, it seemed like they didn't take it seriously. Communication was at times difficult because I was encouraged to mask in order to make myself more appealing. I did not bring this up with my supervisors as I did not want to risk my placement.”

So that second quote relates to a student who was doing an education placement where the parents were coming to the school one day, and the student was told to make sure that they didn't didn't show their disability and so that the parents would feel comfortable having them around their children. So, yeah, it's a bit upsetting.

And what we also see here and what's really important to mention is that there is that power imbalance with placements. So a lot of students talked about the fact that if something went wrong in their placement a week in or two weeks in, they would have to drop the unit and that unit might not be offered again for another year, which means they have more student fees, they have to wait longer to graduate, and so on. So really, once that placement has started, the student feels really stuck to make it work regardless of the consequences.

So the reflections on the data was that obviously it's all of our responsibilities to support inclusive environments and diverse workers. You know, we're talking today about students with a disability, but there's been similar work around international students, and mature age students, and all the different kinds of discrimination that happens in our society, but that the roots of the issue go far deeper than our processes or systems, which can definitely be improved - don't get me wrong, a lot of these placement coordination, it's not very flexible. It doesn't really allow for any nuancing. But I think it really, at the end of the day, if we're going to tackle this head on, it's about how we as a society define, conceptualise and interact with disability and it speaks to the prevalent ableist biases and perspectives. So there's a lot in the disability community. Some of you might know, you know, we haven't done a great job necessarily as sexism and racism, but we need to start including ableism in that conversation as well.

So where to from here? So with some colleagues, we're working on a new project that's talking around the importance of co-designing, alternate career identities that are non-ableist and challenge the notions of ideal workers. So from this, it's really, you know, insinuated that identities are socially constructed, that our identity is not - you know, doesn't develop in a vacuum. It's how people have interacted with us from a very young age. And, in fact, a lot of the work probably needs to start much sooner than, you know, high school or even middle years. It needs to start from the very beginning and think about what we mean when we say someone is good at leadership or that they're hardworking and things like that. And this is, of course, ever more important as the notion of disability comes more and more to the forefront of our conversation. So recently, 1 in 6 Australians identify as disabled, and that's really worldwide. World Health Organisation says 1 in 5. So really high levels when we think about it.

So as a bit of an icebreaker with your table now, I want you to think about some of the ableism you might face in your job as a career adviser. So some of the things I just sort of came up with on the fly, thinking about it, is questions around what traits are necessary for leadership. And often that has to do with public speaking, right, which not everyone is good at public speaking. That doesn't mean you're not a good leader. Also, traits around what makes a good teacher, a doctor, a nurse. These notions that hardworking people never call in sick, that this is something that we should be applauding. And I hear this one a lot, and I hear it a lot in my own job as well, but I prefer flexible employees, people who go with the flow, people who can work late or on a weekend if I ask them to, who can switch to this task, who can do that, right? Like, that's just not inclusive.

So just as an icebreaker now and hopefully breakout rooms online, if you can just discuss some other questions, maybe you hear them in interview examples, maybe you hear them in your training, that you think have that underlying current of ableism in them. I'll give you a couple of minutes.

(Breakout rooms)

MOLLY: I might bring everyone back together again. I don't have a bell or a whistle or anything, but I take it as a good sign that people are chatting, that they hopefully had some interesting conversations. If I can ask, to make this a bit more engaging - I know we have a few people online who can perhaps add things in the chat - but what were some of the the things you discussed? What do you see as exemplifying ableism in your daily work? Or stories as well. Yep.

KIM: We at our school, we ran the ISP program last year and through that program, which is a tutoring, we worked on the literacy, we identified a lot of students with learning differences that had been missed in the classroom because those kids were masking. They didn't want to be identified as not having the same as everybody else in the classroom. And of course, the teachers have got such a big class, it's hard to focus down on the individuals. That's something that I feel like commonly occurs in a classroom, unintentionally. And we were talking about the fact that, you know, it's expected as a teacher you're supposed to identify it. But equally, unless the individuals highlight it, you know, bring it to our attention, there's that 50/50 kind of situation.

MOLLY: So for those of you joining us back in the room, we just heard an example - sorry, what was your name?

KIM: Kim.

MOLLY: from Kim talking about how many students in the class continue to mask, which makes it really difficult for teachers to be able to support their needs and their unique perhaps strengths and things like that because they don't - they simply don't know that the student has a disability. And I think really what we want to get to, I mean, in an ideal world, is perhaps people not having to mask that. Everyone feeling having like they have the freedom and the openness to be able to disclose. But one of the things we'll talk about in a second here is what people should have to and should not have to disclose, but any other comments about why, essentially we're at this point? Yeah.

- I'm just thinking for organising a day like today, we're sharing, we've got 12 students here. We've got a large cohort of up to 180-odd students and we're trying to encourage them to register to come. We're talking at year assemblies and then we might be backing it up, and our internal meetings at school for us, it's Google Classroom. We're assuming that that message is getting through to those students. And sometimes the assumption, if a permission note hasn't come back, or the student doesn't want to come or, you know, rather than - we know there's a core group of students in our year group who perhaps still need an individual - - -

MOLLY: Yeah.

- ...to everyone. But there's a core group that perhaps need that extra reminder that this is a day for them as well.

MOLLY: Yeah, we heard a really powerful story on Monday. For those of you that – well, I guess all of you that weren't there, which is a student had worked really hard to be able to get accepted into University of Sydney. They were in a wheelchair. They went for a campus visit only to find that the campus was not at all accessible for them. And it's sort of a happy ending, in a way. They ended up in Macquarie and apparently I think they were pretty happy there. But I think to myself, this is a student who had worked hard to get into a Go8 and they got there, they did all the things right, and then we didn't serve them right. And that's really quite upsetting, I think.

But okay, I do want to - we have other activities as well, and I want to also discuss this evolution of disability as how we define it. So it's changed a lot in my lifetime. I can imagine it's probably changed a lot in those of you that are here lifetime as well. It really used to be seen as something that was a deficiency in the person. So they can't do this or they, you know, require this. But it's increasingly defined in a biosocial model. And what we mean by that is it's the limitations of material and social environments which determine inclusion and success. So this is a really important shift that we go to. And from this shift, we need to stop fixating on the specific disability itself. You know, we have, for example, a large number of students who identify as neurodiverse. There is no one type of ADHD that all ADHD students have or autism, or so on, right? Everyone is unique. They're individuals. And it's not about linking, “Okay, you have autism, so blank.” It's about thinking about how we, as a society, design our educational and work environments to make sure that they're inclusive of people.

And I think from that, we learned in the study - we started off by asking students what disability they had, and we got told off pretty quickly by the students that that was not appropriate and that they weren't going to answer that question. And so we learned that through our project. And I think increasingly we all need to accept that and fixate less on disclosure to a point where it's just - it's almost obsolete whether someone chooses to disclose or not. If they say that they need a sit/stand desk, they don't need to give a reason for that. They can just say, “I need a sit/stand desk.”

So now in our activity, I want you to discuss a series of student personas who identify with a disability. These personas are based off the data from our study. Of course, anonymised. But I just - I use student personas a lot in my work around co-research and co-design. In an ideal world, we would have authentic student personas, even students creating their own personas together, or you having personas that arise from your specific context. So these are just sort of dummy personas, if you will.

And again, I'll provide some information about the disability, just as a bit of a talking point, but moving beyond the fixation of the type of disability and, instead, thinking about the social or physical barriers.

So for those of you online to take a screenshot of this and maybe even a few of you here in the room if you're worried you might forget these questions because I'm going to put the personas up on the screen. But the first question is what study or career options may this student have typically received through a traditional ableist lens? So thinking about, you know, potentially in the past, or if it wasn't you as their career adviser, what might have they been told would be good for them? And then what are alternate or inclusive study career options that position the student better through a strength-based lens. And again, moving away from the responsibility just being on the student, also thinking about what is needed here to educate employers to ensure this person is included in the workforce as well as a secondary.

So does that make sense, those two questions? Essentially, what might have happened but what should happen is essentially it. So I'll start you off in each of these we’ll give five minutes and then we'll come back together. So someone might be called on from your group to speak, so I'm warning you now. Okay. So the first person we're talking about is Stephanie. So Stephanie has a chronic medical condition that flares up periodically and is different from day to day. She is naturally creative, makes hilarious TikTok videos, great at public speaking, and has wonderful people skills.

So as career advisers, hopefully have a conversation about what might have been advised to her and what could be advised to her. Okay.

(Breakout rooms)

MOLLY: Okay, we might come back together again. So we have about 18 people online, who I realise cannot hear you when you are at your table, they can only hear me. So not only am I going to ask a few of you to share what your group discussed, but I'm actually going to ask you to come up and discuss so that the microphone can pick you up. So do I have anyone who would volunteer for this? Now you know how your students feel. No? I'll give it a second. Somebody gives in eventually. always. And Deb, I don't know if the online participants have joined as well, but they can also put in the chat.

DEB: They've got 14 seconds and they'll drop back in.

MOLLY: Okay.

DEB: Yeah, I'll let you know if there's anything in there.

MOLLY: And when you're discussing Stephanie, this might have also triggered a story or something as well that you can also share that might not be specifically about Stephanie, but about something you've experienced. Don't make me randomly call on people. I'll do it. Oh, there we go. Come on up.

- It's my last day? It's not about Stephanie, though.

MOLLY: That's okay. It doesn't have to be about Stephanie.

- So we had a student many years ago who was in year 11 and got chronic fatigue, a very academically able student, but had to drop out. Thankfully, the uni system did help her. She went to Western Sydney College and started a diploma in science. It took her a long time to do that and she's ended up at Sydney Uni doing a degree in animal science and I think it's taken her seven years because of her chronic fatigue, and I know that from knowing her parents, she gets a lot of people saying to her all the time, “What are you doing with your life? Why are you only working one day a week? Or you should forget your uni degree, go and work for Coles”, you know, but she's academically incredibly capable. So I suppose people have put her into a box just because of her chronic fatigue.

So she did a big assignment at the end of last year, a group assignment. One of her lecturers really acknowledged that she, you know, carried the weight of the whole group, really. And she's had a professor have a research grant, and that professor has offered her a part-time job while she's studying uni doing research. And it was interesting that even the professor said to her, “I can't understand why you don't think you're bright.” And I think because of her chronic fatigue, people have just assumed she's lazy, she doesn't have any academic ability, she just can't contribute to society.

So I, you know, know her well and I've so happy for her and pleased that this professor has recognised, and she's been very upfront about her chronic fatigue. So, you know, that she's going in with that. So thankfully, they've been very supportive of her.

MOLLY: Great. Thank you. Yeah. So we had quite a few students participate who had chronic medical conditions. And as we just heard, a lot of that came down to the industry supervisor or the university staff thinking that they were lazy, and often that they were making it up, that the pain wasn't as bad as they were saying it was, or things like that as well. Is anyone else online?

DEB: Did you want to ask them to unmute? We've got a comment from Sasha.

MOLLY: If they can unmute, even better.

DEB: Otherwise I can read it out.

MOLLY: What is their preference? Hi Sasha.

SASHA: So we were breakout room 2, and both Sharon and I are from the universities and understand bits about the UCEP program. I run the UCEP program out of South Australia. So looking at this, we'd sort of thought about it from the uni perspective and that, you know, traditionally Stephanie may have been steered towards roles maybe in like a retail or even being told that her lack of reliability makes her not suitable for work and really limiting options in that way. But we talked about things like exploring advertising and design, journalism. I thought afterwards about even like radio, stuff like that sort of thing. And we also talked about, you know, that disability confidence for her to understand how her condition impacts her. You know, I've supported students in the past with similar sounding conditions and they may need to lay down or things like that during the day. So the working from home options is very good. So freelancing, consultancy, that sort of stuff, and really sort of seeing where she's interested in in taking it.

And the other thing that we spoke about was, yeah, the flexibility of hours. So some employers that I've got students with will actually go, “As long as you get the work done, you know, you could work from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. at night, if that's when it's suitable for you.” So that educating of employers and encouraging their flexibility as well would be suitable for her, we thought.

MOLLY: Yeah, Sasha, I completely agree with everything you said. And, you know, one of the things that came out in our study around the medical condition is that freelancing work is increasingly seen as a viable option for a lot of younger generations. So I think I saw a statistic the other day that 63% of young people would consider doing freelance work or working in the gig economy as well. So that is potentially a great route there as well.

I will caution that a few of our students who were given the flexibility to work from home or to work different hours, sometimes that backlash is in a way where they then don't get invited to team events or to other socialising activities.

- There's also the issues with super and that kind of thing, that if they're in the gig economy and freelancing, they're not actually building up that same back, you know, contributing to their super and being part of a larger organisation. So I'm not sure - - -

MOLLY: I'm just going to repeat that as well. So one of the issues as well that came up from the participants is around the gig economy not contributing to super. So not having that stability financially, potentially long term. So again, that goes back to thinking about how our systems are created and how - this is both a social issue and a systems issue as well. All right. We have another one. So hopefully.

DEB: Molly, you had one more - a couple more online.

MOLLY: Keep going.

DEB: Denise, you wanted to unmute and share?

DENISE: Yeah. Hi there. We spoke about encouraging Stephanie to look at the foundation for young Australian clusters, where their focus - you know, there are some that are focused on people's skills and creativity, and really aligning with that strengths-based approach and what they're good at. And within there, there might be some suggested roles in that cluster that might work well for her, and perhaps some that offer flexible working where they can work from home around their own time schedule and needs as well might be helpful. Yeah.

MOLLY: Thanks, Denise, for joining in.

DEB: And one last from breakout room 3. CS Cooper.

MOLLY: CS Cooper. That's a cool name.

CARMEL: I just made it up, actually, it's Carmel here. I work in Education in Queensland, so immediately, whenever I think of - when I was thinking of Stephanie, I was thinking of a high school student. And sometimes - and the description doesn't describe any kind of impact on Stephanie's cognitive capacity. So sometimes when people in schools present with these kind of chronic medical conditions that do flare up, even though she's got this amazing skill set, they can sometimes be strongly encouraged to go on a less intellectually rigorous pathway through senior secondary schooling, that they're provided with opportunities which, you know, are valid and reasonable to go and do a Cert III in TAFE or something around art while they're still at school, but don't have access to that highly vigorous program of learning. If Stephanie's aspirational for university, then Stephanie needs to be supported in any way we can. So that's kind of the traditional approach.

And an approach that's more inclusive would take into account the systemic barriers for her to access that rigorous program of learning. And that would be things like a variable progression rate or a VPR, which is senior secondary over three years, to enable her to access the time necessary to engage in that intellectually rigorous program of learning as much as she possibly can so that her aspirations are met post-school.

One of our team members also talked about the masking that she might experience while, you know, she's trying to cover up or manage those conditions and and pretending that they're not impacting just to try and fit in as well. So that was pretty much - and because I'm in education, I kind of thought of her as a school student, but my two colleagues in the breakout room were career advisers in universities, and I think one of them is in the employment sector for people with autism, I understand. I hope I've got that right. So that's pretty much what we thought.

MOLLY: Yeah, absolutely. And I'm really glad you brought up the point around aspiration. So not my own research, but linking to other. There's been lots of research in that area and people with disabilities do not have lower aspirations than anybody else. So that's a stereotype. And again, it goes back to that idea that our identities are socially constructed. And so if you ask them when they're 10, 11, “What do you want to be?” They want to be doctors, they want to be CEOs, they want to be entrepreneurs. And then, unfortunately, you know, as they get older and they've had these negative experiences, it becomes “I just want to get by. I want to be independent.” And, you know, that's really quite sad to to hear that that has happened.

DEB: So one last one.

MOLLY: One last one. Here we go.

DEB: So it was Theresa.

MOLLY: Theresa, are you with us?

THERESA: Yes, I'm here. I'm just having trouble with my buttons. So there was only a sweet little group, two of us, in our little breakout room. And we talked about traditional options that probably would have been discussed with Stephanie. Bright, bubbly young women were usually channelled towards retail, hospitality or working with children, without sort of considering if that's what they're interested in. It didn't matter whether you like children or not. And to some of the more current options, we need a lot more information about what Stephanie's actual interests are. So it's a great little summary of, you know, what people have observed, but what are her goals, what are her interests? And then use that information to help her find something that would have study options that would suit her, that are flexible, information about what the supports are available, and if she's considered the self-employment or the entrepreneurial coaching options, a lot more of those available now so that people have a better chance of succeeding running their own business, and making sure that she has information about disability awareness and the discrimination resources that she can share to help her educate employers that she might come in contact with.

MOLLY: Yeah, absolutely. And ideally mentoring as well. So again, a story that was said on Monday was the importance of people having that mentoring experience, of seeing people in the next step and making that achievable for them as well.

I did have to balance how much information I put on the persona slide to make it readable while still giving you enough to go on. So I apologise. They are a bit short and snappy.

We'll move to the next one though. So this one's a slightly different situation. Trent was born with a condition that causes him severe back pain and limited mobility, so it's hard for Trent perhaps to drive. It's hard for him to be out all day, things like that. But he wants to study engineering at university. He's concerned that for him to be happy, if he could be happy in a face-to-face mandatory placement - so the engineering degree would require a mandatory face-to-face placement - and also what that means for his future requirements for the daily office environment. So similar to the last activity, discuss amongst yourselves, and we'll open up those breakout rooms as well.

(Breakout room)

MOLLY: Well, we had one brave participant last time who broke the ice, so there's really no excuse not to have another participant again. Would anyone like to talk about Trent? And again, it doesn't have to necessarily be about Trent. It could have just brought some other story or experience or issue with the system up in your mind as well.

I see. They always say, “I want an interactive session”, and then you give them an interactive session and no-one interacts. You can't win. Anyone? Yeah, come on up. Come on up. Back in. Okay.

- Hi, everyone. So I've got a very similar student to Trent. My student is in year 12, and he suffers from a condition muscular dystrophy. He was actually enrolled in the HSC engineering course and he has recently dropped out of that at the end of year 11. And I guess that was him feeling the academic rigours were just too much to study that subject due to his constant absenteeism out of school because he's in and out of school interstate for specialist appointments at times and lots of medical appointments.

So it was a shame. He did have an interest in engineering. He's not really sure exactly what he wants to do after school, but we talked about that the communication issues there in in helping keeping Mason on track. I mean, there's a lot of outside factors to consider with his appointments and things. But yeah, those academic rigours and then the communication amongst staff as well in careers advisers knowing what's going on, communicating with support staff, and things like that. So there's - I don't think there's any real answers other than strengthening the communication systems that we have, but certainly that's an issue. Thanks.

DEB: Sasha online.

MOLLY: And Sasha Online.

SASHA: Hello. So we were in breakout room 2. So we talked about depending on the type of engineering that he wanted to do, it may actually impact that type. So whether it's lab work or field work involved, and actually looking at sort of where the industry is that he wants to be in, so helping him to explore that. And also whether, even though it's mandatory, it could still be part time. So he just does it over a longer period.

Also talked about working with Trent to actually talk about how his condition impacts him to get a better understanding of what might be ways that he can be supported on placement. So does he have a sit/stand time restriction? You know, all those little specific things, and maybe even involving his support network in that so that he has a bit of his own disability confidence to know where his challenges might come. And also talking about supports for his employer might be just around general understanding, like he needs to take regular breaks, he needs to go for a walk every hour, or something like that, and maybe adjustments in highlighting - and adjustments available to them, but also highlighting his strengths and what he's going to bring to placement. So where he's actually got real skills and what might be suitable for him and what benefits and value add he's going to bring. So yeah.

MOLLY: Yeah. Sasha, I'm glad you brought that up because in the work that colleague Sarah O’Shea, Denise Jackson, who's online, and a few of us are working on, we're really positioning this actually as an economic issue for Australia. So when you think about the wasted talent, you know, that Trent might invent a new sustainable bridge design, or something to do with our recycling systems or, you know, who knows? I'm just giving an example here. Not only do those people not get to be included in the conversations that they should be, but then actually they often require government support. So we all have heard stories about the NDIS, and so on.

And really, when you look at the NDIS and the amount of support that it gives out, I have a feeling that if people were properly supported and given the opportunity to contribute, that many more would be able to do so than currently are able to. So that's really great that you brought that up. Did we have any others?

DEB: Yes. Peter and then Alicia.

MOLLY: Peter.

PETER: Hi, everyone. Yeah, we talked about that perhaps, you know, being in engineering that he could bring that lived experience and perhaps contribute to some universal design in engineering that would benefit, you know, people, and also that perhaps he might just need some support in understanding what his needs are, being able to feel a bit more confident to advocate for himself or with support, both at uni or an educational institution, and then later in the workplace to, you know, focus on what he needs to to do well at work.

MOLLY: Yes, absolutely. I agree. And we have Alicia.

ALICIA: Hi, everyone. Thank you. Great presentation, Molly. I guess we also felt that there was limited information and understand why, but based on what we saw, we weren't really thinking that there were too many challenges that were insurmountable. We really just felt it was having a conversation with Trent to understand, you know, his own expertise in managing his condition. It says that it's a condition that he was born with. So presumably there's been some supports that have worked for him previously. So really wanting to work with him to understand what it is that he finds beneficial and supportive, perhaps an OT assessment to help understand how those those supports might translate into different workplace and study environments.

But we were really just talking about, you know, ergonomic workplaces and assistive tech that he might also not yet have had exposure to and be familiar with that could alleviate some of his concerns. You know, if he's thinking that he has to sit or stand for prolonged periods, you know, perhaps he actually doesn't. And there's assistive technology that actually he could use and, yeah, benefit from both his study and his work environment.

MOLLY: Yeah, absolutely. There's so much potential in the assistive technology space. In many ways, we don't live in a very good time period, but in one way that we do, it's around the improvements around assistive technology. And that links to Peter's comment as well about how Trent could perhaps transferably move his skills into thinking about how we could engineer universal design perhaps online as well. So we don't have time to do the last one, but I'm still going to just show it because I think it's an interesting case.

So Ying is neurodivergent and has received lifelong discrimination as a result. They are passionate. This is a typo. They're passionate about horses, but their parents worry about Ying doing this as a career. Their strengths include honesty, loyalty and attention to detail.

And this came out a little bit in our study and I just want to talk about it. I don't know how I feel about it yet still, I'm still processing it, but a lot of neurodivergent students shared how they were supported through hobbies, whether that's horses, or puzzles, or other types of things. And they said that that was really important for them to think about what they were good at and it gave them a way to also create friends and to have social interaction and so on.

But I do think it's important that we consider how those can be transitioned into a workforce job, and maybe thinking about how those hobbies are also positioned as well. It just seemed a little bit of a tricky balance there as well. So I just wanted to flag that with you. I'm sure it's something you interact with as career advisers fairly frequently as well.

So we do have a few reflection questions moving here. So hopefully you found this activity challenging and not too easy, but you might have found it quite easy. If you found it easy, that's great. Please tell us everything you know and we can all learn from it. But I think it's important to think about your role in this, thinking about how you can support others to recognise diverse career identities. You obviously work a lot with parents, with carers, with teachers, you know, these cohorts come with their own biases and discrimination. Unfortunately, kind of linking back to what I just said about Ying, sometimes it's the parents or the carers themselves. And it comes from a place of love, it comes from a place where I want to make sure this person doesn't experience more discrimination and more challenges. But ultimately what it does is it does dampen their aspirations and what they think they’re possible of. So those are really difficult conversations to have. And I don't envy your job in doing that. And then also remembering that this isn't just about the student or the person themselves, but what can we do to change employers or carers’ biases? How can we create policies and systems that reward and recognise people who are doing good work, and probably limit or punish people who aren't. So in our study, a lot of the students felt that if they had experienced discrimination on their placement, they should have a way of reporting that and that that supervisor shouldn't be allowed to have students anymore.

- I have a question. Are there countries where it's more progressive? Fiji, Finland or somewhere where they seem to be able to do things very well?

MOLLY: The place that we identified the best is Canada. So Canada does have a lot more policies and workplace guidelines, laws, and so on, that really cracked down quite hard on discrimination. I think Australia is doing pretty well. I mean, compared to a lot of other countries, you know, we have students who come from - come to us from Asia and in Asia it's just - I mean, there's absolutely no support. And those students are often the ones who are most afraid of disclosure and of looking - they think - they've been told that it would make them look weak.

So I don't mean to demean. I'm obviously - you probably hear from my accent I'm American, so I'm by no means - I'm actually an Australian citizen as well, but I'm by no means bashing on Australia, but I'm just, yeah, making sure that we can do better as well.

And so I'll end with these questions and we might have time just to do this last one as well, but to continue to question yourself and your colleagues’ biases, to empathise and consider how students might have already been impacted by their experience. So as they walk into the room, whether they're, you know, 14 or whatever years old, thinking about all the things that must have been told to them at that point and how they've probably themselves absorbed a lot of that discrimination and stigma. And considering how career advising, career paths, teachers, and so on, may discriminate against diverse workers and what more can we do?

Does anyone have any questions to end on? Otherwise, it's never bad to have a couple of minutes back in your day, and I will just plug once more that we will have resources available on ADCET. So this includes a podcast with some students about the topic of disclosure. We created some resources to educate and support industry supervisors to support students with disabilities, all of which are student-led ideas of what they think their supervisors should know. And there's, you know, more research, as I mentioned, underway with myself and colleagues thinking about what more we can do to tackle this societal issue.