

Above and Beyond

STORIES FROM DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT SERVICES





Introducing Disability Employment Services

Disability Employment Services (DES) is an Australian Government program assisting people with disability, injury or health condition to search for, find and keep a job. Administered by the Department of Social Services, there are two parts to DES:

Disability Management Service (DMS) is for job seekers with disability, injury or health condition who need assistance to find a job and occasional support in the workplace to keep a job.

Employment Support Service (ESS) is for job seekers with permanent disability who need help to find a job and who need regular, ongoing support in the workplace to keep a job.

OCTEC delivers both DMS and ESS. We are the largest not-for-profit provider of Disability Employment Services in Australia.

OCTEC acknowledges and pays our respect to the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of Australia, and all Aboriginal Elders, past, present and emerging.





Introducing OCTEC Limited

OCTEC Limited is a not-for-profit community organisation providing high quality employment, training, advocacy and youth services from more than 270 service locations.

We provide services to all clients regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious belief, marital status or disability.

We seek to work productively with all our clients and understand their specific needs. Our clients include jobseekers, single

parents, training participants, disadvantaged or isolated community members, community organisations, government agencies and local businesses.

We are flexible in the delivery of our services, allowing us to meet the changing needs of all we serve.



Above and Beyond

OCTEC delivers Disability Employment Services in 54 Employment Service Areas (ESAs) across eastern Australia – covering much of NSW, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT. We have a participant caseload of more than 15,400 participants, each with barriers to employment relating to a disability, injury or illness. We work alongside them, assisting them to overcome their barriers, to develop new skills and to build new careers.

In this booklet you will read the stories of a number of these inspiring people. You will read how, in partnership with their OCTEC DES Career Consultants, they were able to go above and beyond their barriers, showcase their abilities, and create new opportunities for themselves.

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OCTEC Limited CEO

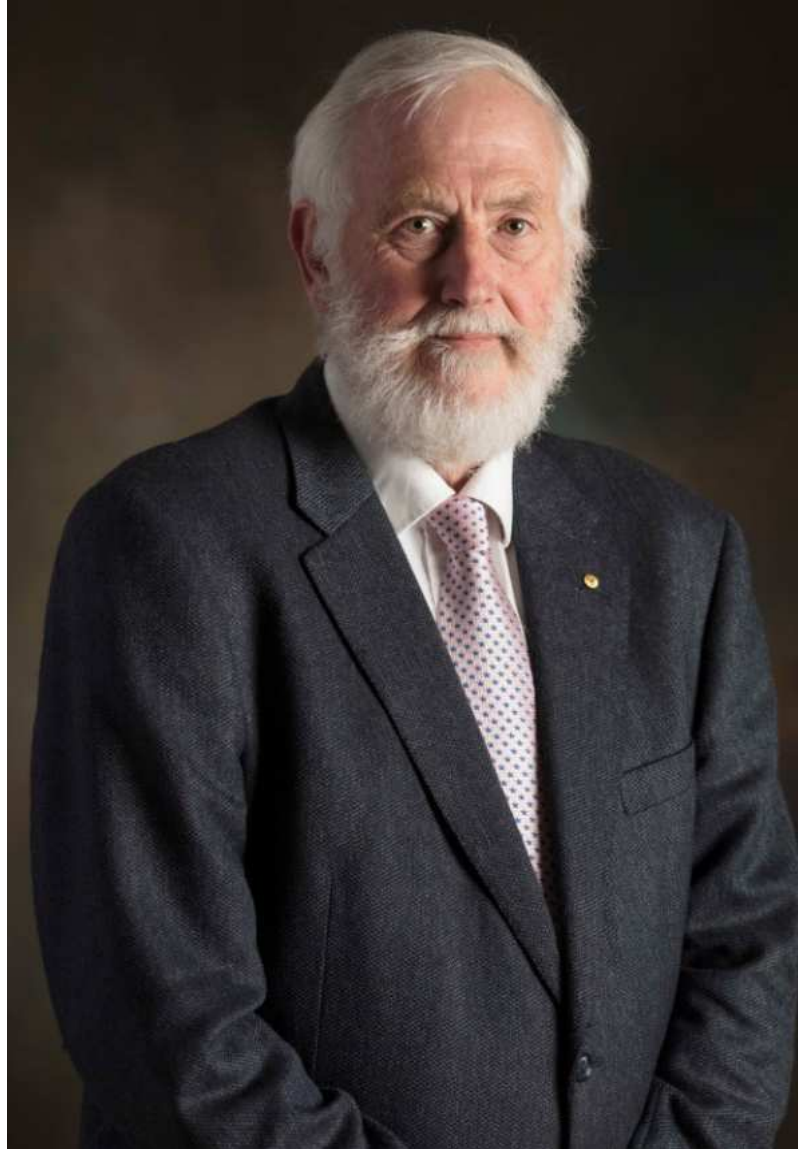
**It is my pleasure to present to you, *Above and Beyond*
– Stories from Disability Employment Services.**

OCTEC has always been about possibilities, investing in communities and their people to be everything they can be, no matter the barriers they have to overcome. That's why partnering with the Australian Government to deliver the Disability Employment Services (DES) program has been so important to our organisation.

Since 1989, OCTEC has been providing government-funded employment programs and services for people with disability. And today, we are Australia's largest not-for-profit provider of the DES program. Operating up and down the eastern seaboard, we currently assist more than 15,400 people with disability, injury or health condition to overcome their barriers, start careers and, in many cases, turn their lives around. In this booklet, we wanted to provide the opportunity to read and share in some of those wonderful stories.

I would like to thank our Employment Service National Managers, Chris Clark and Adam Swist, our Area and Regional Managers, and our wonderful team of consultants for their hard work and achievement – going above and beyond to assist people with disability, illness or injury during these difficult years of flood, fire and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is their hard work that made possible the stories you are about to read. I trust you will be inspired by them as much as I have been.

Andrew McDougall OAM
CEO, OCTEC Limited



Disability Employment Services Manager

“It really was a long road, but my life has been completely transformed, thanks to OCTEC and DES.”

“The compassion coming my way has been overwhelming. It’s the beautiful side of this apocalypse.”

It’s easy to be inspired and enthused after reading quotes like these from OCTEC participants! And there are thousands more like them. They are why our organisation has long been involved with the delivery of Disability Employment Services (DES). DES is part of our organisational DNA. For more than three decades, OCTEC has delivered services to assist people with disability secure a brighter vocational future, and DES has been an important part of that journey.

Today, we assist a caseload of more than 15,400 participants, in sites from central and south east Queensland, down the Australian east coast across much of NSW, ACT and Victoria, through to the border with South Australia. We deliver services to participants from all backgrounds and in all circumstances, including specialist services for mature age and First Nations participants. We are the largest not-for-profit provider of DES and external audits confirm we invest more in our participants, and their employers through our unique Biz Support packages, than any other DES provider. ^[1]

OCTEC truly believes in DES. The stories you will read in this booklet are a sample of the experiences our incredible consultants and amazing participants share every day. Because of DES,



we are able to partner with people living with disability, illness or injury, helping them realise their goals, to feel empowered, to develop skills, and to join, or re-join the workforce. These are the stories of how, in partnership with these inspiring participants, our people go above and beyond, creating new opportunities and changing lives.

Please read and enjoy!

Adam Swist
Manager Disability Employment Services

^[1] National Standards for Disability Services Audit, BSI Group.

A woman is lying on her back on a massage table, covered with a white towel. A person in a dark green shirt is performing a massage on her back and shoulders. The woman has her eyes closed and a peaceful expression. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window showing a building outside.

Light in my future

- PRANG

I remember when I first came to OCTEC DES in Gladstone, back in December 2021. I was in my fifties, my English was not so good, and I was suffering from PTSD and anxiety.

“There was so much violence and trauma in my life.”

Sometimes, I even considered harming myself. And, because of these things, I had not worked for more than ten years.

At OCTEC, I met with Maria, who would become my DES Career Consultant. Although I felt shy and very anxious, Maria put me at ease. We spent time talking and I told Maria I had experience as a massage therapist and that I was passionate about helping people overcome their anxiety and stress through massage.

Maria helped me in so many ways. She showed me how to use the computer and programs in Microsoft. She helped me to write a résumé and explained how job search works. To help me manage my anxiety, Maria referred me to the local PCYC and their Ruby Program. This program helps women to feel more confident, healthy and happy through exercise in a supportive and safe place. It helped me to deal with the violence in my life through connection with other women in similar situations. I had no driver's licence, so OCTEC and PCYC helped me get my learner's permit and OCTEC paid for driving lessons.

When we both thought I was ready, Maria and I began looking for a job where I could use my skills. Maria found a local beauty salon that was looking to expand their services to include massage therapy. When we spoke with them, they were very interested in me. I can't tell you how good that made me feel. And my confidence grew even more when a second business was also interested in me. This second beauty salon was close enough to my house to walk to work, so I chose this one.



“When I got the job, it was my first paid employment in more than 525 weeks.”

OCTEC offered my employer a wage subsidy to help cover the cost of my training. And OCTEC is still by my side, keeping in contact and helping me with the dream of starting my own massage therapy business. Maria referred me to Business Australia for help with a business plan, and she helped me apply for an ABN. Maria arranged for me to have access to a private study room with Internet, and OCTEC even paid for a laptop. Maria helped me to enrol in the Australian Government's New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, providing me with small business training and support.

“Today, there is light in my future, thanks to Maria and OCTEC DES.”

A lot of people are lucky to have them in their lives ... and I am one of those people!

Above and beyond

- PETER

It was May 2021 when I first came to OCTEC DES in Mt Druitt. A friend told me about OCTEC.

“I wondered if they could help me get a job. I had plenty of things going against me.”

I'm a First Nations man. I'd been in gaol. I'd been addicted to drugs. I had serious mental health issues, and my accommodation situation was unstable. I hadn't worked in years. I thought I had too much going against me.

At OCTEC, I met with Career Consultant Norma-Marie. Norma took the time to listen to my stories. I told her I wanted to change my life. I wanted to break the ties with my past and I wanted to start again. Norma was amazing. We worked together on some measurable employment goals, which I knew I could achieve. She helped me write a great résumé, helped me prepare for job search, and she even began a marketing campaign on my behalf.

Heading towards Christmas 2021, I had another crisis – I was about to become homeless. Once again, Norma stepped in to help me. She contacted the Housing Department at Mt Druitt, and I was connected to a community housing provider. They arranged for temporary accommodation for me over the Christmas and New Year period.

With the start of 2022, Norma and I began concentrating on finding me a job. Norma contacted a labour hire company, but



I was worried about what they would think if they knew about my criminal convictions. Norma reassured me the right thing to do was to be honest. And the employer really appreciated my honesty. They were willing to give me a chance, thanks to my positive attitude and the Biz Support they received from OCTEC. In January 2022, I started in a process worker role in Minchinbury. This was my second chance, and I'm determined to make it work!

“The help from OCTEC has been unbelievable. I never got anything like this from other services, and Norma has gone above and beyond.”

I'm working again. I've been off drugs for three years. I'm building a new life. All the OCTEC staff at Mt Druitt have been friendly and professional and I feel like they genuinely cared about me. That made the biggest difference!

A focus on my strengths

- DYLAN

I was 19 when I was referred to OCTEC DES on the New South Wales Central Coast. I had a speech disorder and no previous work experience.

“I guess what I needed was someone to give me confidence, and a little guidance.”

When I started at OCTEC, I met with consultant Shaun. Shaun spent time with me, speaking about career goals. Shaun focused on my strengths, not my barriers. His positivity made a big difference. We both agreed I might suit a career in hospitality, where there were a lot of good jobs available.

Because I didn't have any experience, I wanted to get some skills and a qualification. So, Shaun helped me to enrol in a Certificate III in Hospitality. I went really well, passing all the theory parts of the course. I then had to complete a practical work placement and Shaun helped me secure a work placement with a local RSL club.

My placement went so well, the RSL offered me a paid position. Once again, OCTEC were there to assist. They paid for work clothing as well as the costs of my travel expenses. And Shaun was always there, offering support and assistance if I needed it.

Today, things are going great. I'm learning more and more about hospitality work, gaining new skills and experience, and the RSL has increased my hours. By focusing on my strengths, Shaun, OCTEC and DES have set me up for a bright future.





A productive partnership - The Davis Farm

The Davis Farm is a community-based farm located mid-way between Port Macquarie and Wauchope on the NSW Mid North Coast. Originally a hobby farm, created by Steve Davis and his wife to help manage their own mental health challenges, their mission today is:

“To create a place where everyone is accepted and welcomed. To help the community and people who are disadvantaged or have mental health challenges by offering education and employment in a self-sustainable, ethical, inclusive and non-alcoholic environment.”

OCTEC's DES team in the Hastings region has developed a productive partnership with The Davis Farm, assisting participants



with mental health barriers to gain work experience and paid employment in a safe and nurturing environment.

OCTEC provides the farm with Biz Support packages, including wage subsidies, to help offset costs. We also assist participants with uniforms and fuel, as well as regular post placement contact regarding their performance and any further assistance required to continue employment.

OCTEC and The Davis Farm are working together to make a tangible difference in the lives of disadvantaged jobseekers.

OCTEC DES participants who have benefited from this partnership with Davis Farm include Maya, a quiet shy young woman who had been unemployed for more than two years.



Maya's natural ability with animals led to a paid animal assistant position at the farm and she is currently completing a Certificate II in Animal Studies.

Simone was a participant with an acquired brain injury, requiring support and assistance with social interactions and to cope with work-related stress and pressure. With the support and patience of her OCTEC consultants, and the team at the farm, Simone now comfortably interacts with her co-workers and completes duties at her own pace.

Bree was a participant with an intellectual disability and found it difficult to work in a stressful environment. When she was expecting a baby, OCTEC worked with farm management to create a new role for Bree, ensuring she could continue working during her pregnancy. According to Bree, the team at OCTEC and The Davis Farm have helped to turn her life around. And, thanks to this productive partnership, Bree says,

“I can say I definitely feel more confident and comfortable with what the world has to throw at me. Nothing will hold me down.”



Moving forward

- ABBEY

I was one of Career Consultant Videshna's (Vee) participants when she first began working at OCTEC's South Morang DES site, back in January 2020.

“It’s fair to say our relationship was pretty rocky at the start. I was angry. I didn’t want to be there.”

Vee and I met face-to-face. We spoke about things like plans and goals. Vee was interested in what I wanted to achieve. She shared her own background, to help me understand what was possible. We created a ‘to do’ list together.

Although I had some serious mental health issues, including anxiety and PTSD, I had goals, like getting my licence, buying a car, and making an independent life for myself. Vee understood this and set about helping me realise these goals.

When I told Vee I was ready, we began the job search process together. We found a vacancy at a local call centre, which was work I thought I could do, and Vee helped me with the process and the paperwork. And I got the job!

“After I started work, I began to experience self-doubt.”



Vee was great, providing me with encouragement and support. My confidence grew. When I bought myself the car I'd always wanted, OCTEC paid for mechanical repairs so it was roadworthy. I was employed at the call centre for more than a year.

Unfortunately, the impact of the COVID lockdowns meant my employer started cutting positions. I felt it was time to move on. I now had so much confidence I began looking for my own employment. When I found the perfect job, I applied, was offered an interview, and was successful!

I can say that without Vee and OCTEC DES, I would never have had the confidence to move forward and do these things for myself.

No longer alone

- WENDY



It's not easy finding a job as you get older. When I came to OCTEC DES in Laurieton, in July 2021, I'd been unemployed for more than three years. Things were tight.

“I was worried about my financial future, and even where I was going to live.”

I'd worked in hospitality and tourism in the past. I liked working with people. And the Mid North Coast is an area where there are plenty of tourism jobs available. However, many of these jobs require you to complete administration as well as manual tasks – like housekeeping or cleaning – and with severe arthritis in my hands, I couldn't do this type of work anymore. I was worried that this barrier would prevent me from finding a job. I'd also been bullied in previous workplaces, and needed to find a positive working environment.

At OCTEC, I was introduced to Career Consultant, Dave. We worked together to improve my résumé, highlighting my administration experience and my personality profile as assets for employers seeking staff for customer service roles.

Dave knew of a customer service position at a local holiday park, which could have been perfect for me. However, the role included admin as well as housekeeping and cleaning duties. Because Dave had a great working relationship with the manager of the park, they came up with a solution and the role was split, meaning there was a vacancy for someone to perform only admin-related tasks. The employer offered me an interview, and I won this new position!

OCTEC provided my employer with access to a Restart Wage Subsidy, which is a government scheme encouraging business to employ mature age job seekers. OCTEC also paid for corporate

clothing and shoes. Dave was in regular contact with me to make sure things were going well. It's been such a happy and fulfilling place to work. My financial future is much brighter and my housing issues have now been sorted, as I have stable accommodation at the holiday park.

I am so grateful to OCTEC, DES and Dave for their support.

“Having worked in an employment agency in the past, I was overwhelmed by the support I received from OCTEC.”

Not only did they negotiate a new position which met my needs, Dave matched my personality perfectly with that of my employer. Thank you OCTEC for all your support. Because of you, I no longer feel alone.



Realising goals

- BEN

wanted to get a job, but how could I ... with serious mental health issues, no driver's licence and no real work history?

“I hadn't worked at all for more than a decade.”

I volunteered to go to DES, and started with OCTEC in Laurieton in mid-2021. I met with consultant Dave, and he knew just what to do. OCTEC funded driving lessons for me. And, even when I failed my first driving test, Dave was there, helping me to stay positive. When I passed on the second attempt, and got my Ps, I'd realised my first goal.

Dave then assisted me to look for work. He found a vacancy for a kitchen worker at a local caterer. He helped me prepare for the interview and I was offered a job. Helen, my new boss, was really happy with me. She said she saw me as part of her long-term plans for the business. Another goal had been achieved.

OCTEC provided a wage subsidy to offset the costs of my employment. They paid for work clothing and footwear. Dave kept in regular contact with me, to make sure everything was going along OK. He also made sure I was in regular contact with my GP, who is managing my mental health plan.

“Dave and OCTEC have been extremely helpful, giving me a great opportunity to achieve my goals.”



More than I expected

- KAREN

It was December 2021, when I first came to OCTEC DES in Pialba, which is in Hervey Bay. I was a single mum to five kids and twelve grandkids. I had hip and leg problems, as well as anxiety and depression.

When I started at OCTEC, I worked with consultant Annie, and even though I hadn't worked in many months, I told Annie about my work history.

“I used to own my own cleaning business, but with my mobility issues, I couldn't do that anymore.”

I also told Annie I had completed a Certificate III in Disability Support Aged Care. Annie suggested I needed some practical experience and arranged a work placement for me with a local Indigenous respite care provider, where Annie had developed a great working relationship.

Once I finished my placement, Annie contacted the employer and they were so pleased with my work, and the support OCTEC provide, they offered me paid employment. OCTEC provided a Biz Support package which included a wage subsidy, work clothing, safety gear and covering the costs of relevant licences and checks. OCTEC also assisted me with mobility issues, including the purchase of an electric scooter. My experience with OCTEC DES has been far more than I expected.



“I've been with other DES providers, but I've never received the level of support and guidance that OCTEC delivers.”

A close-up, low-angle shot of a hand holding a metal bowl, pouring a golden liquid into a dark dish on a table. The scene is dimly lit with warm, golden light, creating a cozy and intimate atmosphere. In the background, other dishes and a small white bowl are visible on the table.

Connections for careers

- YOUSEF AND CYRIS

“Local connections can make a major difference to the successful delivery of Disability Employment Services.”

My name is Joan, and I work as a Career Consultant for OCTEC at our Wetherill Park DES site, in Sydney's Fairfield area. Working with Vali (our Career Consultant at the neighbouring Fairfield site) we use our connections to engage local people with disability, many of whom come from culturally-diverse backgrounds, and to connect these participants to great jobs with local employers.

Yousef and Cyris were two such participants. Early school leavers, they were referred directly into OCTEC DES by their high school at the end of 2020. This referral was made possible because of the strong connections Vali has established with local Catholic schools.

Both young men had significant barriers associated with mental health, including Schizophrenia and Bipolar Affective Disorder. They also had diagnosed learning disabilities. Plus, they had challenging family circumstances – Yousef came from a very low-income household and Cyris' mum had been diagnosed with cancer.

Because they were both straight from school, neither had any job search experience, so I spent time with each of them, providing tutoring on job search, preparing résumés and completing other job application paperwork. We discussed goals and aspirations, seeking to understand what each of them wanted to do with their lives. And I spent time with Yousef and Cyris' families, making sure they understood the process, along with improving my understanding of their situations, and connecting with their support



networks – including specialist mental health support. When we agreed they were ready, I arranged work trials for both Yousef and Cyris, giving them experience in the world of work. I assisted with travel to and from various appointments, as both also had travel barriers.

I contacted a number of employers, seeking suitable roles in the local area. I was able to secure an interview for Yousef with a local RSL and sporting club, and he was offered a role as an apprentice chef. I worked with a local VERTO Apprenticeship Support Service to complete the relevant paperwork, and Yousef commenced in



When they felt doubts about their future, I spent time with them (particularly Cyris) to evaluate progress and encourage them to continue.

Today, more than a year after they first began with OCTEC DES, both Yousef and Cyris have exited the program as independent workers. Both continue to thrive in their apprenticeships, and both now have the skills and experience to create a bright future for themselves in a growing employment sector.

“Both young men were able to achieve these outcomes thanks to positive, goal-focused support, and the strong connections OCTEC DES staff make in their local communities.”

his role at the end of 2020. Two months later, thanks largely to the successful integration of Yousef into his new role, Cyris also commenced as an apprentice chef with the same employer, in February 2021.

I provided post-placement support for both Yousef and Cyris and their employer, monitoring their progress, ensuring they received vocational instruction suitable for their learning challenges and monitoring for any barriers associated with their mental health.

Escaping the too hard basket

- JOSS

No other DES provider invests as much in their participants as OCTEC. In addition to our unique Biz Support packages – assisting employers and placed participants to begin the work relationship as productively as possible – we also provide in-house training, work experience and career development opportunities.

Joss came to OCTEC DES in Melbourne's northern suburbs, having unsuccessfully worked with “countless” other employment services. She experienced significant anxiety, family issues and a lack of confidence.

She felt as if she'd been placed in the “too hard basket”.

OCTEC staff set about changing that perception.

Our DES team felt Joss would benefit, both professionally and personally, from a paid employment opportunity with a suitable organisation. All parties agreed the best organisation to fill that role was OCTEC.

Joss was employed as a cleaner at our Boronia site. She didn't take the opportunity for granted. Joss displayed an outstanding work ethic during her time with us. She gained independence, self-confidence, and transferrable work skills. At the same time, our consultants were on hand to provide Joss with guidance, feedback and support. It was a genuine win-win.



After 12 months working with OCTEC, Joss was a different person. Feeling worthwhile and confident, she wasted no time and secured a housekeeping role with a local hotel.

Working with OCTEC was an important stepping stone for Joss on her path to a new career and a promising future.

A long road

- TONY



Back in 2018, my life really wasn't too good. My family life was a mess and I had major mental health problems. I was depressed. Suicidal. I didn't trust anyone. And, even though I was a qualified boilermaker, I couldn't get around well because my knees were shot.

“With all this going on, I hadn't worked in years.”

I was referred to OCTEC DES in Richmond, in Sydney's Hawkesbury region, and met with Career Consultant Michael. He met with me each fortnight, just to talk, and to listen. Michael referred me to a psychologist to assist with my mental health issues, and encouraged me to join the local men's shed to connect with people again.

“Getting my life back ... it was going to be a long road, but OCTEC would be there for me.”

Then, in 2019, I had a double knee reconstruction. Slowly, over the next six months, my mobility improved and I started speaking with Michael about getting back to work. Michael and I started looking for suitable job opportunities.

It was around this time, when I was travelling with my new partner in Central West NSW, that I discovered an engineering company in Gilgandra. I spoke with Joshua, the manager, and he was interested in my skills and experience. He asked me to come back for an interview as a boilermaker. Michael gave me interview training and coaching, and I went for an interview with Joshua. I was offered the job, but only if I would relocate to Gilgandra.

I told Michael that my partner and I would be happy to relocate to the country and one day buy a house for ourselves, but that I didn't have funds to make the move. Michael told me I would likely be eligible for government relocation assistance, and that OCTEC could help me with this and other financial support.

In April 2021, with the relocation money, I paid for the move to Gilgandra and started my new job. Because I was still regaining my full mobility, and would have to slowly build up my work rate, OCTEC offered Joshua a wage subsidy so that he was not out of pocket while I got back to full capacity. OCTEC also paid over \$1,000 for tools to help me get started.



“I've been employed now for more than a year. My partner and I have bought a house in town.”

It really was a long road, but my life has been completely transformed, thanks to Michael and OCTEC DES.

No barrier too big

- GINA

I started with OCTEC in Miller in 2019. I had not been employed for more than five years. There was so much trauma in my life. I was older now, and I was a widow. My family were back in the Philippines. I did not speak English very well. I was very depressed. I had lost my motivation.

“There seemed to be too many barriers in my path.”

Rosie was the name of my DES consultant at OCTEC. Slowly, she helped me to understand that no barriers were too big to overcome. To help with my mental health, Rosie connected me with a local psychologist. To help me improve my English, Rosie enrolled me into the SEE Program.^[1] OCTEC even paid for a laptop and Rosie helped teach me how to use it. I knew nothing about using computers before Rosie showed me.

Because I had worked in a warehouse before, Rosie was able to help me to get a job as a process worker. She negotiated with my employer to give me shifts that I could get to on time, because I had to catch public transport to work. She helped me manage my transport, showing me the fastest and cheapest way to get to my job.

“My new employer did not think I would last very long, but with Rosie’s help, I have been employed now for more than a year.”



OCTEC helped me to buy work clothes. When COVID hit, to keep my job I had to go to a testing centre each week to get tested. OCTEC paid for taxis to take me there. Sometimes I felt like giving up during this hard time, but Rosie was there to encourage me to keep going. And I did!

OCTEC helped me to see that no barrier is too big! I feel like I have purpose in my life again. I have showed everyone that I am a hard worker and a loyal employee.

^[1] The Skills for Education and Employment program.

Moral support

- BRIAN

When I started with OCTEC DES, Melbourne was in the middle of COVID lockdown. The company I'd worked for shut down and I lost my job.

“I was really depressed and my anxiety was getting worse and worse.”

I was connected with Aaron, an OCTEC DES consultant. Aaron kept in touch with me right through the lockdown. He would phone me and assure me he was there and that there was hope. He told me he would definitely find a company which would hire me.

“The moral support Aaron provided during this time was very important to me.”

When the lockdown finally ended, I went into the Melton office and met with Aaron. He showed me how to use MyGov as part of my job searching. He helped me with my résumé and we began sending it out to various companies. He even took me to local shopping centres to look for vacancies that weren't advertised. And he helped me find a job as a delivery driver.

OCTEC support didn't end there. They paid for work clothes and fuel vouchers. Aaron and I still speak on the phone a lot and I love telling him how things are going.



“I'm still employed and recently began acting in a team leader role.”

I'm relaxed and happy. I feel energised. I have OCTEC DES and Aaron to thank for their amazing moral support.



Proud to serve

- OCTEC

For more than 47 years, OCTEC has provided vocational assistance for disadvantaged Australians, helping them to overcome barriers and secure a future through skills development and employment services. Since 1989, we have been proud to serve people with disability through government-funded employment services and programs.

Our assistance to people with disability goes well beyond the delivery of funded programs. OCTEC is an approved provider of NDIS services, helping our participants to secure employment, create connections within local communities and develop their skills to become more independent.

Located near Orange, in the NSW Central West, Huntley Berry Farm is an OCTEC-owned and operated Australian Disability Enterprise, providing supported employment for people with disability. The farm is also an important tourist attraction in the region, offering a range of truly spectacular produce to visitors from around NSW and Australia.



OCTEC's Mental Health Employment Strategy (MHES) is an important element of our employment service approach. OCTEC staff work to maximise employment outcomes for people with mental health barriers, using strategies such as developing partnerships with specialist service providers including headspace youth mental health services in our footprint.

OCTEC is also a member of WayAhead, the Mental Health Association of NSW, educating people of mental health and well-being and linking them to services and resources to improve their mental health.

We are long-term members of the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW, a peak body for people with disability and their families and carers, with a particular focus on those from culturally-diverse backgrounds.

Across the regions in which we operate, our teams participate in local events such as those associated with the International Day for People with Disability, and we participate in and sponsor expos such as the Melbourne, Sydney and Gold Coast Disability Expos.



Belief in myself

- ANGELA

Being long-term unemployed can make life tough, especially in a country town. When I first came to OCTEC DES in Leeton, in south west NSW, I had been unemployed for more than six years.

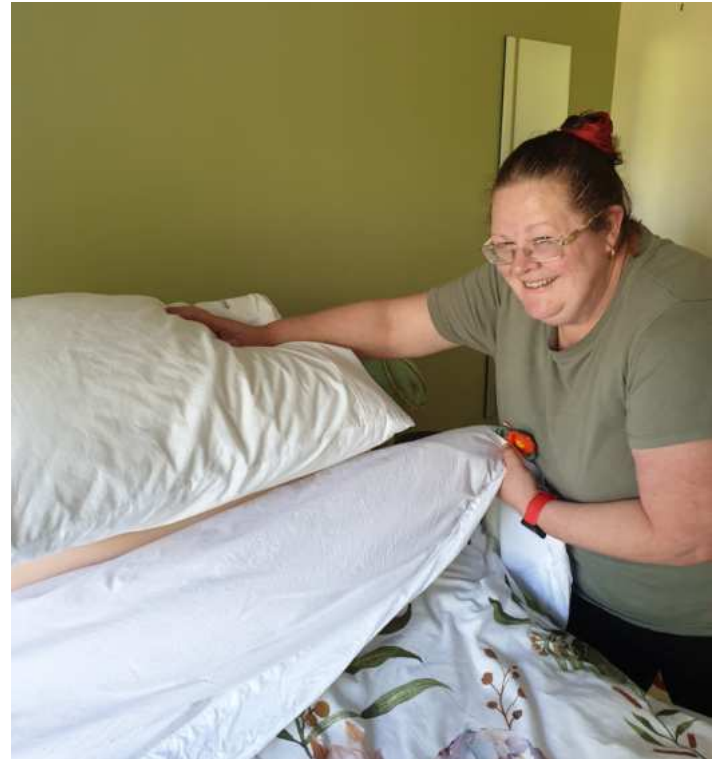
At OCTEC, I worked with DES consultants Belinda and Sharon. They have both been amazing.

“They gave me so much confidence and support, helping me to believe in myself... and to believe that I would get another job.”

The assistance OCTEC provided me was so much more than I expected. They gave me financial support to complete a Certificate III in Aged Care. They helped me obtain relevant licences and checks and certificates. They paid for work clothing and shoes.

“There is no way I would have been able to afford the things I needed without OCTEC’s support.”

Today, I’m a domestic support worker for a 91 year old lady who still lives in her own home. I spend three days a week with my client, assisting her with cooking and cleaning and housework. I take her shopping and to medical appointments. Because I’m now qualified, I’m even able to help with her personal care and basic medical needs.



The son of my client said, “Mum was in an aged care facility and she hated it. Now we have Angela to take care of her in her own home. This means I can have a few days respite to myself and take care of my things, knowing mum will be okay as she has someone who will look after her.” Hearing that feedback made me feel really good.

A happy future

- SABRI

I was born during the terrible civil war in South Sudan. My father had been killed. My mother and my sisters fled with me to Uganda when I was still a baby. We then went to a refugee camp in Kenya. While we were at this camp, I contracted meningitis which had a big impact on my health.

In 2004, my family and I came to Australia as refugees. We came to Melbourne. Things were hard for me. I had cerebral palsy, because of the meningitis I had in Kenya when I was little. My speaking and movements were very slow.

“At the end of my time in school, I gave a graduation speech about my fears for the future.”

One of the people at that graduation was Juma from OCTEC.

Juma told me that my speech made him feel sad. He encouraged me to sign up for DES at OCTEC's office in Dandenong. He spent time with me, speaking with me and encouraging me and, because of Juma, I began to see that I had a future.

Juma connected me with an NDIS provider which offered services to African people with disability, just like me. And then, with help from OCTEC and their Biz Support packages, Juma was able to get me a job as an admin assistant with a great employer called Infinity Support Services.



“Thanks to Australia and thanks to Juma from OCTEC DES, I have a job and I am earning money.”

My mum, she is very happy too, because now her son has a future. She said, “Thanks to OCTEC for helping my son when he left school, and to get a job. I am very glad now because he is happy.”

Unmatched support

- KRISTAL



It was a few years ago, when I started with OCTEC DES in Forbes, Central West NSW. Along with chronic back pain, I was battling with severe mental health issues, including PTSD. I was on medication to help me manage my health issues.

At OCTEC, I worked with Amy, a Career Consultant. Amy took the time to make sure my mental health barriers were being properly addressed and then, once I felt ready to get out there, Amy and I sat down to think about my career.

“This wasn’t just about finding any job. Amy got me to think about what my career goals were.”

I wanted financial security, but also a job that I liked. We agreed something in hospitality, working back of house, would suit me.

Amy and I worked on my résumé and we began contacting local businesses. I secured an interview in hospitality and Amy came along to support me. OCTEC even paid for clothes for me to wear at the interview! When I got the job, Amy was there to give advice and support me if things went wrong.

I worked at the club for six months. When a new male chef took over, his behaviour began triggering my PTSD. I spoke with Amy and we decided it was best if I resigned.

“Amy was so supportive. She didn’t put me down for resigning, rather she praised me.”

I had realised one of my PTSD triggers and took appropriate action before things went too far. I began to attend psychologist appointments. My medication was altered.

Throughout this six-week period, Amy was there for me, offering encouragement and helping me stay motivated. When I was ready, Amy and I began sending out my résumé again. Amy sourced a position at the Forbes Golf and Sportsman’s Hotel – where the head chef was a female – and they offered me an interview. Once again, I won the job.

That was almost a year ago. Today, I’m still employed at the hotel, working in a field I love. My manager and the hotel owner say they couldn’t be happier with the quality of my work. And working has made a huge difference in my life. I have financial security. I can travel to see my children in Sydney without any financial restrictions.

I have OCTEC DES to thank for helping to turn around my life. The support from OCTEC is unmatched and Amy has been nothing short of exceptional.





Finding paradise

- APRIL AND KATIE

APRIL

When people first met me, I'm sure they thought how happy and confident I seemed. But underneath, things were not that simple. When I came to OCTEC DES in Kempsey in November 2021, I was really low. I suffered severe anxiety and panic attacks. I had Insomnia. I really didn't like big crowds. I'd been out of work for years.

I started working with my consultant, Alexandra, and we spoke about more than just my barriers. She asked about my employment goals. I told her how much I loved nature. My dream job would be something simple, and something to do with the outdoors.

“Alex told me about a job vacancy hiring equipment to guests on Lord Howe Island. The remoteness, the smaller number of visitors ... it sounded perfect.”

Alex arranged for a video interview and I got the job! OCTEC provided me with information on island restrictions and requirements, they assisted me with access to transport and accommodation, they made sure my prescriptions were pre-filled and that I would have access to ongoing support over the phone. OCTEC even arranged my flights to Lord Howe to begin work.

Once I was settled into my new job, OCTEC's support continued. They provided a laptop to allow me to start a Certificate III in Guiding.



“Having this qualification would allow me to expand my role and conduct nature tours with guests.”

OCTEC paid for the cost of shipping items not available on the island and paid for flights so I could return to the mainland when I needed medical support.

I have come so far since beginning with OCTEC DES. I wouldn't be where I am without their support. Alex is someone who believes in me, even when I don't believe in myself.



KATIE

I first came to OCTEC DES in Port Macquarie back in August 2021. I had severe anxiety, which led to panic attacks, and worse. I also had Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome, a blood circulation condition which causes dizziness, heart palpitations and problems when suddenly changing posture.

At OCTEC, I met with consultant, Dion. While we spoke about my barriers, we also discussed the kinds of things I loved, such as the outdoors. Dion then spoke with me about a job opportunity on Lord Howe Island, and it sounded amazing!

Dion arranged a video interview with the employer, and I was offered a job in a customer service role – hiring water sports equipment to visitors.

“I would be living on the island, in a small house by the beach. It sounded like paradise.”

Dion then spent time with me, making sure my barriers would be manageable. He reassured me that the employer was supportive, that I would be part of a small team, and that I would have mentoring support to assist with my anxiety. To minimise the impact of my circulation condition, OCTEC arranged for me to have access to an electric bike for transport around the island. OCTEC paid for my flights to Lord Howe, for the shipping of my stuff, and for support with my accommodation.

Once I began working, Dion and I spoke weekly, discussing any issues and finding solutions. I am building amazing friendships, earning an income and exploring this amazing wild place.

“This opportunity has absolutely changed my life for the positive. I actually feel at peace in the world which I have never felt before.”

Although they'd not met in the past, and came from different parts of the Mid North Coast, April and Katie met on Lord Howe Island. Through shared experience, they formed a friendship.

Together, thanks to OCTEC DES, Katie and April are developing new skills and building exciting careers, in one of the most beautiful places on earth.





Community partnerships

- BEYOND MY LABEL

Partnerships are essential for the successful delivery of DES. In Brisbane, one of our most important DES partners is Beyond My Label.

A registered NDIS provider, Beyond My Label (BML) was founded by Paul Inglis. Having overcome his own battles with mental health and substance abuse, Paul was determined to share his experiences and assist others to overcome their barriers.

Working with our DES participants, BML provides community connection, life skills, personal coaching and more.

Our consultants work with BML staff to cooperatively address barriers faced by participants. We provide regular three-way consultation sessions with our participants, which have resulted in significant changes in the lives of many.

In addition to their support services, BML are also an important OCTEC employment partner, placing a number of our DES participants into employment, setting them up for careers in an important job growth sector.

Examples of this successful partnership include our work with Susan, an OCTEC DES participant placed with BML in 2020.

After two months placement, severe shoulder pain forced Susan to resign.

Following nine months of treatment, BML were once again willing to employ Susan and, in partnership with OCTEC, devised a



plan which would allow Susan to continue work without further aggravating her shoulder.

Anil was a 66 year old migrant who was assisted by OCTEC DES to complete a Certificate III in Individual Support when vision difficulties prevented his continued work in the sugar industry. We then contacted BML, who were seeking male support workers at the request of their clients, and Anil was offered work. Today, he is a popular member of the BML team, and his support services are frequently requested by their clients.

OCTEC and BML will continue this partnership, working to help our DES participants overcome their barriers, secure real jobs, and build meaningful long-term careers.

A true partnership

- PETROS

I had been in the system for a very long time. Most of the past 24 years I'd spent out of work. I was overweight. My legs were impacted by lymphedema. It was hard for me to get around. Even sitting for long periods of time created problems. I also had a major battle with anxiety. My confidence was very low.

At DES in Thomastown, I worked with Blaga, my OCTEC consultant. Blaga was different. She took the time to get to know me. And when someone listens to you, well, you start to feel important and that helps your confidence grow. Blaga and I started working on a plan for my future.


“This wasn’t just another consultant telling me what I should do, it was a true partnership.”

As part of our plan, Blaga and OCTEC helped me to continue with a cyber security course I was undertaking. When the time came to start looking for work, Blaga helped me to identify potential jobs that would cater to my needs and interests, while minimising the impact of my barriers. At every appointment with OCTEC, Blaga and I spent time looking for suitable jobs, and applying for them.

Now, I didn't get the first job we applied for, and that rejection was hard, but Blaga was there for me. And then, in July 2022, I was offered a job as an online invigilator (a supervisor for online medical exams). This is awesome, because I'm now working for a professional organisation, in a role that is similar to what I've studied, and in a situation that suits my personal needs.



The partnership I developed with Blaga and OCTEC DES made all the difference, and those long and difficult years of unemployment are now behind me.



The beautiful apocalypse

- A TRIBUTE TO NEILL

In 2012, Neill Duncan was earning a living as a musician in the Blue Mountains of NSW. He had a partner and four kids. Life was beautiful.

When he found a lump on his left forearm, Neill thought he should have his doctor check it out. He remembered a day of heavy snow, and how there were no cars out on the street. The scene was almost post-apocalyptic, but it was beautiful at the same time. On that day, Neill was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer, known as sarcoma, which attacks the limbs. It was devastating news.

Six months of chemotherapy could not stop Neill's cancer. To save his life, and stop the cancer spreading, Neill's left arm had to be amputated. This, truly, was Neill's apocalypse.

He'd suffered the harshness of chemotherapy, six months without work, and now faced a future without being able to play music.

It was then a friend told Neill about someone in The Netherlands who produced instruments for one arm players. However, Neill played saxophone, and a modified sax would cost close to \$20,000, an amount which was, in Neill's words, "out of my league."

Enter OCTEC and DES. Neill was referred to OCTEC's Katoomba site where our consultants spoke with him about Australian Government assistance, covering the costs of workplace modifications for people with disability. OCTEC agreed to pay for the purchase of a saxophone from The Netherlands. We also assisted with modifications to Neill's music studio, to facilitate making music, as well as moving instruments to other locations. The beauty of music came back into Neill's life.



Neill became the world's first single arm tenor saxophonist. He formed a band called the Three Handed Beat Bandits and began touring with his music. His story featured in global media. When his sax required refurbishment, OCTEC helped to pay for his travels back to Europe. And, Neill was so appreciative for the assistance he received from OCTEC and DES, he was determined to give back.



He began working with local schools, assisting young people with challenging behaviours. He raised money to assist people with disability to access music, and he provided support to others experiencing the challenge of limb loss and cancer.



Neill once said,

“The compassion coming my way has been overwhelming. It’s the beautiful side of this apocalypse.”

Neill Duncan lost his battle with cancer on 28 December 2021. OCTEC would like to dedicate this book to the memory of Neill, his music, his generosity, and his fighting spirit.

May he rest in peace.

For more information regarding OCTEC Limited's

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