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From Caring to Employment: a toolkit for carers

Care2Work Project

Proudly funded by

This is a project of Carers NSW



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1. Introduction

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Looking for work that fits in with your needs as a carer can be challenging, particularly if your days are busy and unpredictable. You may feel like your situation and priorities have changed since you became a carer and your work preferences may be different now as a result.

If work is something you feel ready to explore, but you are not sure what is out there or what options will suit your current situation, here are some tips to get you on the right track.

Adding work to your schedule could be the break you need to help build your skills and connections, achieve personal goals and start a plan for your future.



Take the [Carer Work Readiness Self-Assessment](#) to get an idea of how work ready you are right now and what else you might need to consider to get the job you want.



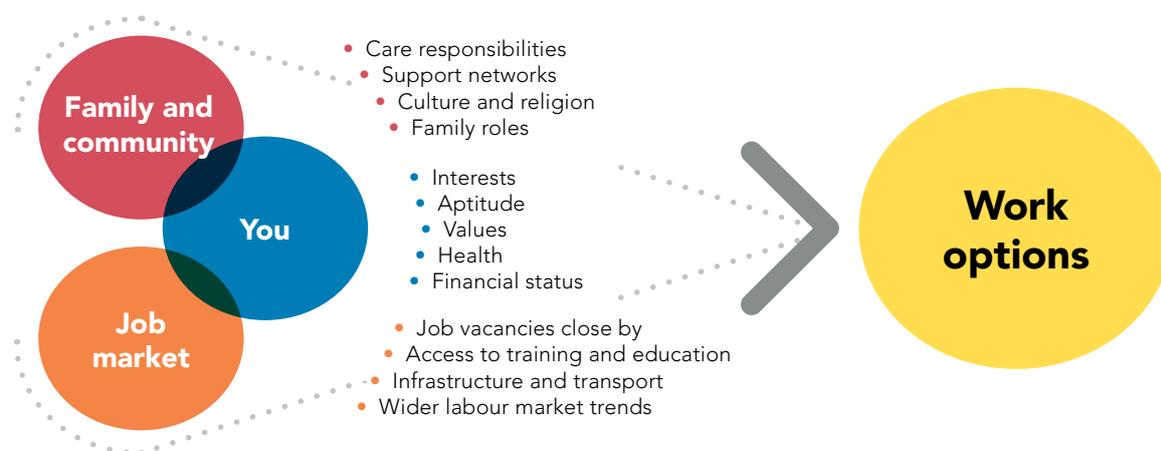
2. Explore your options

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There are many factors in play that influence what work options are available and realistic for you at a particular stage in your life.

As a carer you are likely to be aware of how your daily care responsibilities and the support network around you will influence what kind of work you can do.

Other factors include your personal interests, your skills and values and what jobs and training options are available to you where you live.



2.1 Know your skills

It is likely your experience caring has provided you with many opportunities to develop skills that are highly valued by employers. This may include being able to bounce back from difficult situations, interacting well with people from diverse backgrounds and adapting to a constantly changing environment.

A recent survey conducted by the National Skills Commission found that three quarters of employers consider personal qualities as equal to, if not more important than, technical skills.¹

Have a think about the personal qualities you utilise in your caring role, like the patience and interpersonal skills you draw upon to help you negotiate complex situations. Knowing how to communicate these 'soft' skills or 'life' skills will help set you apart from other candidates in job applications and in interviews.

Have a look at these activities and links below to get you started:

[Know your skills](#) - a resource to help you identify key personal traits to highlight in job applications.

[Employability skills for carers](#) - a resource to help you come up with examples from your caring role to demonstrate employability or work-readiness skills.



www.skillslink2work.com.au - a resource designed for carers to assist translating the activities you do in your everyday caring role into core skills for work.



www.yourcareer.gov.au/get-career-ideas/ - has a range of career tools to help you explore jobs for now and the future based on skills and interests.



www.jobjumpstart.gov.au/article/job-search-basics-workbook - an interactive digital resource providing a step by step approach to help you identify and apply for work that aligns with your personal preferences.

¹ www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/finding-job



2.2 Know the job market

Before you set your sights on a particular job or career path, it is important to get an idea of what jobs are in demand in your local area now and in the future and what employers are looking for.

Talking directly with people in your industry of choice can help you find out information on training options, advertising platforms, networking groups and key employers to approach.

There are many online resources available to help improve your knowledge of realistic job options and steps to take to secure the job you want. You might start by searching your job of choice using one of the many online recruitment websites – see links below. Have a look at the selection criteria listed in advertised roles to see if you satisfy the requirements or need to look at gaining additional qualifications.

Once you have an idea of key employers of interest you can try researching employer websites directly to learn more about how they advertise and recruit new employees and what values underpin their organisation.

As a carer, you might be interested in identifying employers who acknowledge and support carers in the workplace. Have a look at the [Carers + Employers network](#) for a list of carer friendly accredited employers.

Job market resources



www.joboutlook.gov.au has current information on jobs in demand, skill levels required, average salaries across different industries and future projections.



www.whatsnext.dese.gov.au/get-your-next-job has Information and links to assist individuals with strategies to locate and secure new work and plan for the future.



<https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmployersRecruitmentInsights> - includes information from the National Skills Commission employer surveys and other up to date official sources to help you better connect with what employers want.

Job search websites



www.seek.com.au A market leader advertising roles and career advice for job seekers across all major industries



www.jora.com.au A job board finder or 'Aggregate' that gathers jobs directly from job search engines including Seek, industry associations and company websites.



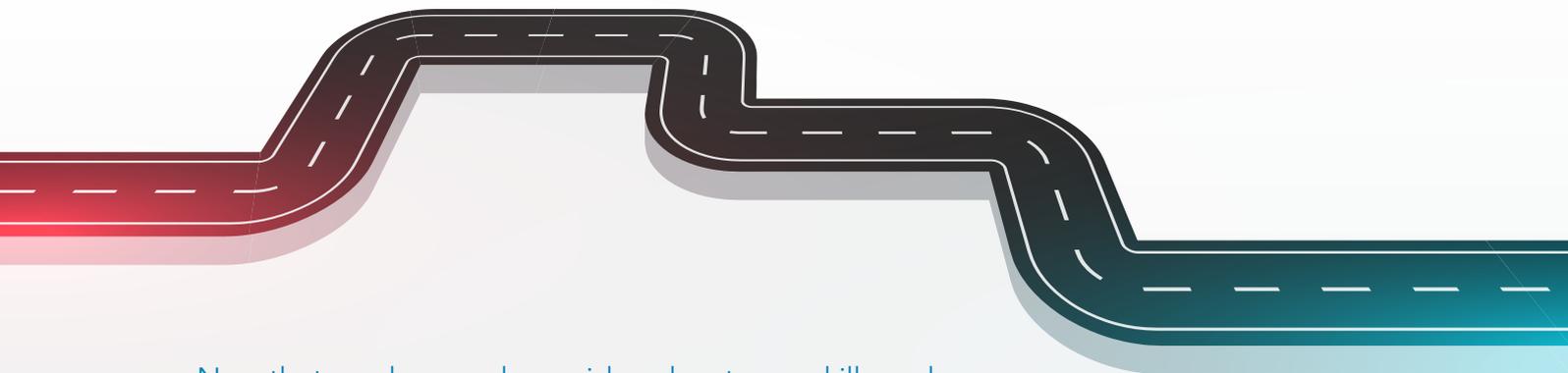
<https://iworkfor.nsw.gov.au/> - has advertised roles and guidance to secure a job within an NSW government department.



www.dese.gov.au/jobs-hub is an Australian Government initiative supporting job seekers and employers to connect in a rapidly changing jobs market.

3. Choose your pathway

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Now that you have a clearer idea about your skills and how they match the job market, the next step is to identify the most effective pathway to achieving your goal.

It is likely you will engage in more than one of the pathways listed below as you navigate your way into meaningful work.



3.1 Direct re-entry

Returning to an industry or job you held previously can be an efficient pathway back to work for carers, particularly if you have managed to keep industry networks and memberships up to date. The more recent and the more extensive your previous work history, the greater your chances are of securing new work using this pathway.

Make sure to update your resume and online profile, let relevant networks know you are looking for new opportunities and use the vast array of online resources available.

It might be worth exploring how your skills could transfer across industries or into other suitable roles. Have a look at [Skillsroad](#) advice regarding changing careers or use the [skills match](#) feature on the Job Outlook website to help you identify new jobs where your existing skills are likely to be valued.

If you are actively caring, you may require flexible work arrangements to maintain your commitments to the person you care for. Have a look at [Flex careers](#), [Beam](#) and [Gemini 3](#) platforms focused on connecting job seekers with suitable part-time, flexible and job share opportunities.

Depending on your situation, you may be able to secure a return to work opportunity with a private employer, which is common in Finance, Banking and IT industries. You may also be eligible for a range of government support initiatives including [career transition assistance](#), and a [wage subsidy](#) incentive if you are receiving income support assistance.



3.2 Education and training

If your work preferences have shifted away from a previous career path or you are in the early stages of considering a new career, enrolling in a course and gaining a qualification is an excellent option.

There are many different pathways to tertiary education available. Make sure to do your research and consult a range of different Registered Training Organisations (RTO) to ensure you choose the best course to match your work goals.



Have a look at the [My Skills](#) website for information on TAFE NSW VET courses, and your eligibility for [subsidised courses](#). If you are looking at options to complete university studies have a look at the [course seeker](#) and the [compared](#) websites to gain insights from current and past students about course suitability.

You may also be eligible for [carer-specific financial assistance](#) to assist with your education and training goals, the [Skills and Training Incentive](#) or other [government subsidies](#) for course fees or living costs based on your financial status.



3.3 Lived Experience

The experience, skills and knowledge you have gained in your caring role can open up new work opportunities.

How your lived experience transfers into paid work options will depend on the nature and intensity of your caring role and how you are able to communicate your skills to a prospective employer. See the [Know your skills](#) and [Employability skills for carers](#) in Section 2 of this resource to assist with identifying and communicating your lived experience to a prospective employer.

If you are looking to enter or return to a role within the Health and Social Care sector, adding lived experience to prior work experience can be an effective way to demonstrate continuity of skills and up to date industry knowledge. Make sure to use professional language, include details of key responsibilities and level of expertise when you apply for advertised roles. Have a look at the examples provided in the [Resume](#) and [Cover Letter](#) templates to assist.

Depending on the kind of evidence you can provide, you may also be able to have your lived experience formally recognised and count towards a qualification. Examples of evidence you could put forward include certificates from workshops or training you have attended or reports you have contributed to as part of your caring role. Have a look at the TAFE NSW website for information about how to get assessed for [Recognition of Prior Learning](#).



3.4 Volunteering

At some stage in your caring role, you are likely to find yourself advocating on behalf of a cause (i.e. a disability group) or contributing to a community group of some kind in a voluntary capacity.

Offering your services free of charge provides a clear message to employers that you are a proactive, trustworthy and dependable employee. Make sure to include this volunteer experience in job applications to highlight your personal qualities and set you apart from other candidates.

Volunteering builds skills and confidence, as well as opportunities to connect socially with likeminded people. There is a good chance you will learn about other opportunities through this social networking too.

Have a think about connections you may already have with a community group for example or industries where you have interests and skills as a start. For new opportunities you can search the NSW government [volunteering](#) website or approach an employer of choice directly.



3.5 Self-employment

Starting your own business, be it as a sole trader or in partnership with another individual or group, can appeal to carers for many reasons. You may find advertised roles do not offer the kind of hours or flexibility that you need at this time in your life, or maybe your skills and expertise no longer match mainstream roles?

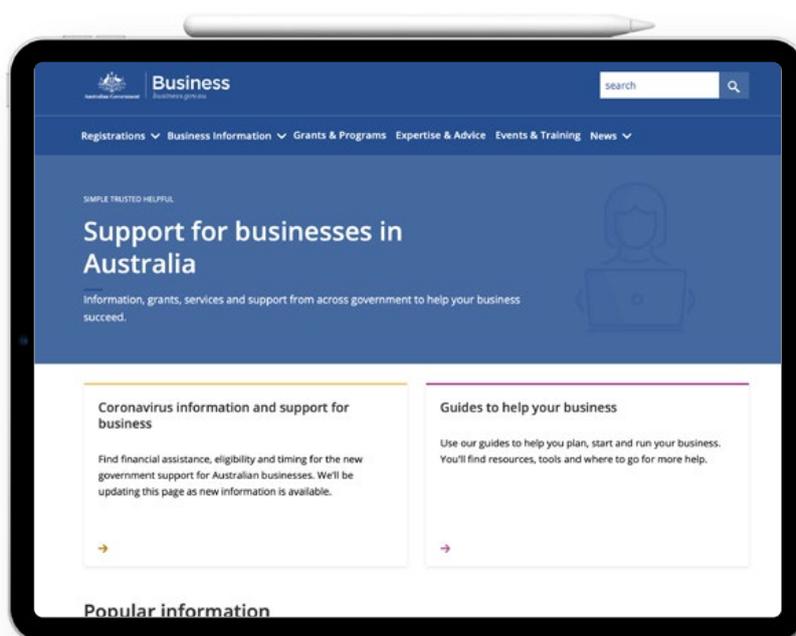
Starting a business and having the flexibility to choose how, when and what type of work you do may be the pathway for you. It may be that your business idea is in the early stages of development in which case you can choose the pace it grows according to your situation and the amount of time you have available.

Starting your own business comes with a considerable amount of responsibility. Not only do you need to consider how to maintain a client base and grow your business, you are also responsible for fulfilling tax and superannuation requirements, purchasing appropriate insurances and planning for your immediate and future security needs.

There are many government resources, grants and tailored support programs available to assist if self-employment appeals to you. Job Active's [Self Start](#) website is a great resource to help guide you through some initial considerations.

[Networking](#) with other business owners and like-minded professionals can be very beneficial. Visit your local council website or search the internet more broadly to see what local or industry specific business networks you can join.

For a comprehensive resource covering all aspects of starting a business from start to end have a look at the Australian Government's [Business.gov website](#).



4. Secure a job

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Securing the job you want can take some time. Even for candidates who meet all the criteria, the recruitment process can be lengthy and competitive.

It is a good idea to review your approach and your work options regularly, utilise helpful support networks and keep a check on your mental wellbeing also during this time.



4.1 Resume

Whether applying for a job using an online recruitment website, through a direct referral or an alternative method, you will need to provide written evidence of your skills, education and prior work-related achievements. This is referred to as a resume or curriculum vitae (CV).

There are many online resources to assist you to develop and refine a resume. Most importantly your resume needs to be up to date, easy to read and highlight skills and experience that are relevant to the role you are seeking. See links in [Section 2](#) of this resource and have a look at the articles and resources available on [Seek](#) and other recruitment websites to get started.

If work or study has been on hold for a period of time since you have been caring, you may feel unsure what to include in a resume. Here is a [resume template](#) with examples of ways to use your lived experience caring to demonstrate relevant experience and skills for work.



4.2 Cover letter

Most advertised roles will require you to submit a cover letter in addition to a resume. As a minimum a cover letter should include your contact details, the date and job reference number (if there is one) and a brief outline of why you are a good fit for the role.

The cover letter can also be a good place to include information about your lived experience of caring, particularly if you can identify how the skills you have gained caring align with the requirements of the role.

For information and guidance on how to write an effective cover letter check out the articles, tools and tips on the [Job Jumpstart](#) website.



4.3 Selection criteria

Selection criteria refer to a list of essential skills, knowledge, experience and/or qualifications you must fulfil to be eligible for a job. There is a lot of variation in what employers' request when hiring new employees. Make sure to follow the instructions carefully for each application you submit.

Some employers have very strict policies and will not progress an application that fails to address all selection criteria. If you feel you don't have a clear match in your experience however, you can still provide a response that explains how you are working towards gaining specific skills or have similar experience and qualifications to those requested for example.

The [Selection Criteria examples](#) website provides a wide range of examples to selection criteria questions across different industries and job titles.

Have a look at this [cover letter](#) template as an example of how to answer key selection criteria in advertised roles using your lived experience caring.





4.4 Referees

When you submit a job application you will need to include the contact details of at least two referees who can vouch for your competence to perform in the role you are seeking.

If you have been out of the workforce for some time or if you have primarily used examples from your caring experience to apply for a job, you may be unsure who you could ask to act as your referee.

Have a think about health or educational professionals you engage with on a regular basis regarding the person you care for or other volunteer responsibilities you hold? It's likely a treating doctor, a Care Manager or treating Allied Health Professional, will be able to speak on your behalf and confirm your skills and suitability.



4.5 The interview

The final stage of the recruitment process is likely to bring mixed feelings. Anxiety and self-doubt are common, particularly if it has been some time since you were in the workforce. The good news is, you can make use of all the research, personal enquiry and skills analysis you have done to get this far.

All that is left now is to review the role to the best of your ability and practice how to communicate in person your suitability for the role.

The majority of employers structure their interviews using behavioural style questioning. Make sure to practice examples from your role caring and from previous work and volunteer experience following the [STAR \(Situation, Task, Action, Result\) method](#) – recommended for answering behavioural interview questions. Practice on your partner or a trusted friend until you feel comfortable with your responses.

Have a look at [Job Jumpstart](#) articles and the [video examples](#) on the Job Active Australian Government website to assist you to prepare and perform well in an interview.



5. Appendix

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<p>6. How important is your work goal to you right now?</p> <p>Rate on a scale from 1-10</p>	
<p>7. How confident are you that you will achieve your goal?</p> <p>Rate on a scale from 1-10</p> <p>In what timeframe?</p>	<p>_____ months/ years</p>
<p>8. Do you require new or updated qualifications to achieve your work goal?</p> <p>If so, list what courses you have identified including timeframes and start dates</p>	
<p>9. List approx. how many jobs are advertising right now that you would be qualified to apply for?</p> <p>(Use a job search engine most suited to your work goal)</p>	
<p>10. Who are the key employers hiring people in the role/ roles that you are looking for?</p> <p>Have you researched their websites to find out different methods they may use to recruit (i.e. expressions of interest)?</p> <p>Have you approached employers directly to enquire about opportunities to volunteer or apply for up and coming roles?</p>	<p>[include notes]</p>

NB: This self-assessment tool should help orientate you towards the things you need to know to secure new employment. If you are unsure about some of the questions in this self-assessment tool, consider talking with a job coach or engaging in further research using the guidance and links provided in the 'From Caring to Employment – A toolkit for carers ' resource.

5.3 Employability skills for carers

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Employability Skills are 'general' and 'transferable' across industries and can be acquired through everyday life experience (and your caring role). You might also see employability skills referred to as employment, workplace, work-readiness skills or foundational skills.

Employers regard these skills as key to how effectively you will be able to perform across a range of work performance indicators.

Here are 8 commonly referred to employability skills.

1. Communication
2. Teamwork
3. Problem Solving
4. Initiative and Enterprise
5. Planning and Organising
6. Self-management
7. Learning
8. Understanding and using technology

The examples below look at the first workplace skill – Communication. There are various types of communication skills including verbal, listening, written and interpersonal. Employers may list one or many of these types of communication skills as a requirement for an advertised role.

Have a look at these examples to give you an idea of how you could use your experience caring as evidence to demonstrate good communication skills.

"I utilise my well-developed **verbal communication skills** on a regular basis to organise the supports and services for a family member with disability, including liaising in person and over the phone with various treating providers, care staff, plan management and support co-ordinators..." [Provide an example]

"My well-developed **listening skills** enable me to follow instructions and complete requests to assist the effective support of a family member with disability"

"My **proficient written communication skills** can be evidenced by my ability to complete detailed service request forms and produce written support statements to secure services and supports for a family member with disability. [Provide an example]

"I have **well-developed interpersonal communication skills** gained through managing the complex needs of a family member with a chronic illness. I am skilled at reading situations and adapting accordingly to maintain a safe environment...I collaborate with a team of treating providers to coordinate the care and support needs and achieve effective outcomes for a family member with disability." [Provide an example]



With these examples in mind, answer the following questions using specific examples from your caring role.

1. Provide evidence (i.e. a specific example from your caring role) to demonstrate that you are a good team player

2. Provide evidence of your self-management, organisation and planning skills

3. Provide an example of how you are a creative problem-solver and adaptable to a changing situation



4. Provide evidence to demonstrate you are proficient in using computer applications including Microsoft Office

5. Provide an example of your capacity and keenness to learn new things



5.4 Resume template

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Full Name

0000 000 000

xxxxxxx@xxxxxx.xxx

Career Objective/ About Me [Choose the most suitable title]

[Outline your key skills and attributes and why you would be a good fit for the advertised role. It's important to tailor this section for each job you apply for, and try to match your values and goals with the employer values]

Example: Compassionate individual, seeking a meaningful role in the [Industry] where I can combine my professional skills with my lived experience assisting individuals with complex needs build their capacity and achieve their goals.

Key Skills

[List key skills in line with the requirements of the role.]

[Try to match with key words listed in job advertisement]

Examples:

Adaptability, Organisation and management skills, Conflict resolution

Education

[List qualifications and certificates that are relevant to this job in order with the most recent listed first. It's not necessary to include school certificates or courses completed more than 10 years ago]

[Course name - Institution, location] [Year]

Example:

Cert IV Community Services (Case Management) - TAFE NSW, Meadowbank 2020

Work Experience

[Include both paid and unpaid workplace experience that is relevant to this job. Include your most recent experience first and work backwards]

[Job Title] - [Company Name] [job dates]

[Overview of role in 1-2 lines]

Key Responsibilities

[Insert text]

[Insert text]

Example:

Disability Support Worker – Private 1999 – Current

Provide care and support for a family member with physical and intellectual disability



Key Responsibilities

- Collaborate with a team of health and disability professionals to execute support plan
- Advocate on behalf of family member regarding health and lifestyle issues and concerns
- Contribute to raising awareness of disability and carer rights through informal advocacy and participation in lobbying activities
- Monitor participation and progress for individual with disability in line with support plan goals and provide feedback as required.
- Monitor support plan budget and liaise with agency provider to ensure standards and goals are achieved
- Solve problems and managed crisis situations as they arise

Volunteer/ Community Work

[List additional volunteering, participation or membership with community groups, committees, support groups etc. List in order from most recent/ current roles]

[Volunteer role] - [Company Name] [job dates]

[Overview of role and responsibilities in 1-2 lines]

Examples:

Guardian and Advocate – Private 2020 - Current

Provision of health and lifestyle support and advocacy for a family member with dementia living in residential care.

Support Group Facilitator – Connecting dots 2017 – 2019

Organise and facilitate monthly support groups for parents of children with disability

Referees

[Include contact details for at least two referees who can support your application for this job. Make sure to let them know they are aware you are including them in your application]

[Name]

Example:

[Current title]

Ms Messy Kassis

[Business]

Program Coordinator

[Work relationship]

Carer Alliance NSW

[Dates you worked together]

Co-facilitated Connecting Dots support group
start-up - 2015-2017

[Contact phone and email]

0400 000 000

messykassis@careralliance.org.au

5.5 Cover letter template

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Full Name

Phone number

Email

[DATE: 00/00/0000]

[Job Reference number – if known]:

To [whom it may concern. Address to hiring manager if known]

I wish to apply for the [Job Title] role with [Company name].

[Outline your key skills and attributes. Try to match as closely as possible with key skills listed in the job description and link your values and intentions with the values of the organisation]

Example: I am a passionate and committed individual, skilled in communicating and managing multiple tasks while maintaining patience and composure. I would thrive in a role with a company, such as yours, that shares the values of inclusion and upholding dignity and respect for all people.

[Address all selection criteria in order, providing examples (evidence) from work experience (paid and unpaid) and your lived experience caring]

Selection criteria examples:

1. Experience establishing networks, leading and facilitate group activities

Example: I am highly skilled in establishing networks, leading and facilitating group activities as demonstrated by my long-standing position as Group Facilitator for Connecting Dots Carer Support Group, where I curate monthly topics, organise guest speakers and lead discussions.

2. Knowledge of community care and disability sectors

Example: My lived experience caring for a family member with disability has greatly developed my knowledge and awareness of the needs of people living with disability and illness in the community. This role involves research, inquiry and regular liaison with services and supports across health, disability and community care sectors to achieve effective outcomes for the person I care for.

I feel my range of personal and professional skills will flourish in [Industry e.g. community support work] and would greatly appreciate an opportunity to discuss my suitability in person.

Yours sincerely

Full Name



5.6 STAR method interview resource

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The STAR method is an acronym to help you prepare clear and concise responses to selection criteria and interview questions. The method is usually used to outline a specific example however you can also follow the structure to explain or a broader situation involving multiple tasks, actions and responses.

S – **Situation:** **Set the scene.**

Where and what are you doing? Try to do this in approximately three lines

T – **Task:** **State role/ responsibilities.**

What were you trying to achieve?

A – **Action:** **What did you specifically do?**

What skills did you use? How did you handle the situation? Was it complex? This should make up the main body of your response.

R – **Result:** **What was the result of your actions?**

Try to make this as positive as possible. Even if the outcome was not the desired one, what did you learn or how would you handle it differently next time.

NB: The examples must be able to be supported by your referees. A simple everyday task does not demonstrate skills. Try to think of an example that challenged you and where you used your very best skills to bring about a positive result. Try to explain how the situation was challenging, i.e.: you were carrying out a complex task, dealing with a difficult person, working in a politically sensitive environment or bringing about a major change.

Remember that the most important part is how you acted to get the result. The result of your action must be positive, short and concise. Where possible, indicate how successful you were at achieving your tasks. You could do this by referring to outcomes, measurements, feedback you've received from others, suggestions you have made that have been adopted, and/or changes you have implemented that are still being used. Try to make it as tangible as possible.



Activity

Follow the STAR method to prepare answers to typical interview questions using examples from your caring experience.

Example Interview Question:

Describe an important project you have worked on? How did you go about it? What did you do well and what could you have done better?

Answer:

Situation: I have worked on many different projects throughout my career and personal life. The most important project I have worked on most recently is taking on the role of self-managing an NDIS package (over 60 K annual) for a family member with disability. The role relies on high level of organisation and time management to coordinate with key stakeholders and treating providers and establish an effective plan.

One of the most important stages is preparing for the annual planning meeting with the NDIA. Having a clear idea of project objectives (in this case my brother's goals), key milestones and being well prepared from the outset is critical to effectively managing any project. I make sure to schedule reviews with all treating professionals well in advance of the planning meeting and have hard copies available of all key reports describing the NDIS participant goals, milestones and the supports and services required to progress and achieve identified goals.

Task: Implementation of the plan has involved quite a few challenges and setbacks relating to difficulties accessing recommended therapies and delays in purchasing equipment and in approvals for payments for example. It became clear that coordination and scheduling was key to effectively managing the NDIS package.

Action: In order to better coordinate care staff and manage multiple appointments, I initiated the implementation of a person-centred care management system for the NDIS participant in collaboration with an independent NDIS provider.

Result: The scheduling system I initiated two years ago is working effectively improving coordination of services and care staff, processing of payments to service providers and enabled better forecasting and allocation of funding for the participant now. As a consequence, I also have more time to spend with my family and engage in other activities.

For more guidance and examples of how to use the STAR method to prepare for interviews, have a look at the [Indeed website](#).





