

Greater Dandenong Libraries Self Employment Training Program

Pierre Gorman Award Report



Greater Dandenong Libraries Self-Employment Training Program

Summary

The pilot of the Self Employment Training Program was a co-designed program for young people with intellectual disability delivered by Greater Dandenong Libraries in 2024.

The program aimed to support participants to gain the knowledge needed to start a business and empower people with employment options.

The program was held weekly for 10 weeks at Springvale Library.

Participants were involved in co-designing the program, helping to develop and shape the program, according to their interests and current knowledge level.

The program was facilitated by Natasha Siryj from Practice Inclusion and supported by Greater Dandenong Library staff members Meenah Harrison, Information Librarian and Lily Protter, Programs and Partnerships Innovation Officer.

Background

Greater Dandenong has a high proportion of people with disability and a low proportion of people in that cohort employed, compared to the Victorian average. Whilst working at Greater Dandenong Libraries and facilitating access forums in the library, we received feedback that there were limited opportunities for people with a disability to access mainstream employment. People were also unsure how to access information about their options.

Local services The Bridge and Burke & Beyond have programs preparing young people with intellectual disability for work and finding work opportunities. We approached these services and were able to confirm that they had a cohort that was interested in learning about small business and had expressed the desire for more work options. Combined, there were eleven people who were interested in participating in the program over the ten weeks.



Project Objectives

- To increase knowledge and understanding of small business processes
- To increase knowledge and understanding of local supports
- To empower people to consider self-employment as an option for them
- To increase participant confidence

Project Overview

Self-Employment Training Program

- Facilitator candidates responded to an EOI submitted via Start Space and disability networking organisations like Women with Disabilities Victoria. The facilitator was chosen due to her lived/living experience, co-design expertise, experience as a teacher, background working within councils and willingness to allow Greater Dandenong Libraries to hold intellectual property of any project output.
- The program ran for 10 weeks from 17 July until 18 September 2024 with eleven participants completing the program.
- In addition to this, participants were invited to attend an introductory and first co-design session in June.
- Participants engaged in four co-design sessions that were embedded throughout the project.
- A steering committee guided the project.
- Sessions took place at Springvale Library and one session took place at The Drum Theatre.
- Participant's business ideas included - artistic endeavours such as photography, music, acting, performance, establishing a coffee cart business, baking and selling biscuits online and/or at local markets, working in the hair and beauty industry, YouTube content creator, creating designs to produce merchandise and selling hoodies and t-shirts online, movie reviews and market stalls selling clothing.
- Sessions included information on business plans and business planning, networks, mission and values, business idea development, brainstorming and mind mapping, branding, marketing, record keeping, tracking finances, creating a business plan and task setting and checklists going forward.

- A key part of the program included guest speakers who were invited to share their expertise and experiences with the group. The guest speakers were sourced while the program was running, in response to the group's interests and needs. Guest speakers included Greater Dandenong Council (Council) Economic Development Team, Council Festival and Events Team, Council Community Grants Team, Enabled VIP, Virtual Assistant, a marketing expert, a disability artist and advocate, Australian Taxation Office, Fusion Theatre, Go Joe Art and Designs, Small Business Victoria and Minus 18.



- The program was facilitated by Natasha Siryj from Practice Inclusion. Natasha is a Lived and Living Experience consultant and trainer who is passionate about inclusive practices, the power of individual voice and the use of Lived Experience to drive change.

Project Partners:

This program was delivered in partnership with local disability service providers The Bridge and Burke & Beyond. The program partners coordinated the participants for the project based on those who had expressed interest in being part of the program. The project partners also provided staff who attended each session to support participants. Kylie, the Manager for Youth Jobs Now at The Bridge came to each session with the four participants from The Bridge and two workers and the occasional work placement student from Burke & Beyond came to each session with their seven participants.

Co design:

The program was developed to fit the needs of the participants, rather than asking people to fit into a ready-made program.

To inform the development of the Self Employment Training Program, co-design principles were utilised. Participants engaged in four paid co-design sessions to contribute to the program's development. Participants also had the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions at every session over the 10 weeks.

The preference of the participants was to be paid in gift cards. The participants were paid \$50 an hour for the co-design component of the program.

The aim of the co-design process was to find out what people already knew about running a small business and what they wanted to know. These sessions were also an opportunity to discuss the groups experiences and understanding regarding self-employment, to learn from participants about barriers to participation, and to find out about access requirements.



Self Employment Training Program

Delivered by Greater Dandenong Libraries in partnership with The Bridge and Burke & Beyond



What is the program?

This program is about:

This 10-week self-employment program aims to support participants knowledge they need to start their own business. During the program participants will:

- Take part in self-employment training
- Co-design the training program
- Work with the facilitator to create a resource to be used in the future.

The program will run for 10 weeks, every Wednesday during term 3.



Who is the facilitator?



Natasha Sinyi

Natasha Sinyi (she/her) will be facilitating the self-employment training and co-design workshops. Natasha is a Lived and Living Experience consultant and trainer. She founded her own business, Practice Inclusion, in 2023.

Natasha has a Lived Experience of Disability, Neurodiversity, Mental Ill-Health and lives with a chronic health condition. She is passionate about inclusive practices, the power of individual voice and the use of Lived Experience to drive change. You can find out more about Natasha and what she does by visiting her website: www.practiceinclusion.com.au

What is co-design?

Co-design is a process where people with different experience and skills come together to create agreed outcomes. In this instance, the facilitator will work with the participants to design a training program about self-employment.

The co-design model sees all people as capable and values professional and lived experience equally. Decision making and power is shared with all participants. There is no one size fits all approach.

How will co-design work in this program?

We will partner together to develop a program about self-employment.

Prior to the program development beginning, participants will meet with the facilitator to discuss:

- **The program in general**
 - What participants think the self-employment program should be.
- **Outcomes**
 - What participants want from the training and what they achieve from participating.
- **Potential program content, structure, resources, etc.**

The facilitator will use the provided information to develop the program.

Participants in the 10-week program will engage in approximately sessions to contribute to the program's development. Participants will be invited to contribute to the program's development. Participants will be invited to contribute to the program's development.

Some things have already been decided including venue, time and parts of the program are co-designed.

When are the sessions taking place?

JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
Wednesdays 26 June 10am-11:30am	Wednesdays 17 July 10am-2pm 24 July 10am-3pm 31 July 10am-2pm	Wednesdays 7 August 10am-2pm 14 August 10am-3pm 21 August 10am-2pm 28 August 10am-2pm	Wednesdays 4 September 10am-2pm 11 September 10am-2pm 18 September 10am-3pm

Springvale Library

What you need to bring



- Snacks and lunch (alternatively you can purchase lunch if preferred from nearby shops).
- A phone, laptop, or tablet if you would like to use one in the sessions. This is not essential.

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The opinions expressed in this work are the author's opinions and not the opinions of the Library Board of Victoria.

Do you have a question about the program?

Please contact: • meenah.harrison@egd.vic.gov.au
• lily.proctor@egd.vic.gov.au





Originally the co-design was going to happen at the beginning to inform the shape of the program before it began. The facilitator decided that it would be better to have the sessions dispersed throughout the ten weeks to allow for a truer co-design process. The sessions were going to run for an hour after the content for each week, but this proved to be tiring for the participants. We embedded the subsequent co-design sessions into the training day, so people had the energy to participate.

Steering Committee:

A steering committee were engaged with the purpose of discussing and providing feedback on the co-design, development and delivery phases of the program. Six meetings were scheduled for the duration of the program. Membership included relevant council staff, program facilitator and staff from relevant local organisations.

Membership:

- Meenah Harrison – Information Librarian, Greater Dandenong Libraries, **Project Lead**
- Lily Protter – Library Programs and Innovation Officer, Greater Dandenong Libraries, **Project Support**
- Natasha Siryj - Practice Inclusion, **Program Facilitator**
- Chris Stewart – Disability Planner, City of Greater Dandenong
- Kate Harris – Senior Economic Development Officer, City of Greater Dandenong
- Michele Semmens - Manager Community Development, VALID
- Olga Florenini - Senior Equitable Learning and Disability Support Advisor, Chisholm

The steering committee provided valuable feedback in relation to effectively supporting young people in their learning journeys, how to incorporate and support self-advocacy, and how to conceptualise success.

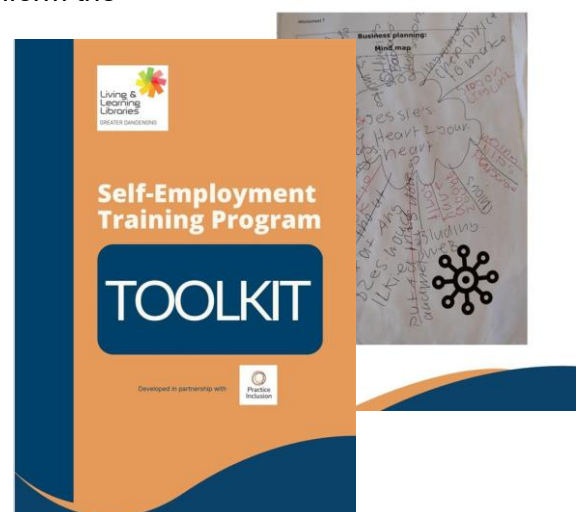
Toolkit:

The Toolkit was created by the facilitator after the conclusion of the program. The Toolkit was created to provide a resource to Greater Dandenong Libraries and other organisations/libraries that wish to run a similar self-employment program.

The toolkit includes:

- How emergent co-design was used to inform the development of the program
- Program development
- Objectives and outcomes
- Considerations
- Session planning guideline
- Example slides
- Guest speaker guideline
- Worksheet examples
- Examples of completed worksheets
- Resources for participants
- FAQs

Examples of completed worksheets



Evaluation

Evaluation included a weekly survey; mid-program survey; end of program survey; a mid and end of program survey of support staff; and the collection of general ad hoc feedback.

Feedback gathered consistently reflected high levels of participant engagement and satisfaction. The program maintained high levels of participant engagement throughout its duration. Weekly surveys consistently showed that 100% of participants enjoyed each session and learned something new, indicating strong satisfaction and relevance of the content. Participants frequently highlighted aspects such as the facilitator's engaging and inclusive teaching style, the opportunity to learn about business concepts, and the interactive activities like creating business cards, brainstorming, and mind mapping.

Participants also expressed enthusiasm for learning practical skills and concepts related to self-employment. Highlights included sessions on business planning, mission statements, financial tracking, and guests with creative backgrounds. Guest speakers and community involvement were particularly appreciated, with many participants citing them as the best part of the sessions.

At the mid program survey:

- 100% of participants felt inspired to start a business
- 100% reported gaining more contacts within the small business community
- 88% felt heard and involved through the co-design process
- 63% felt more confident in starting their business



Participants described their experience using words like *excited*, *grateful*, *supportive*, and *knowledgeable*, reflecting a positive emotional and educational impact.

Participants provided thoughtful feedback throughout the program. While most comments were highly positive—such as “amazing teacher,” “very fun,” and “great course”—some constructive suggestions were offered, including requests for more variety, shorter speaking segments, and additional breaks. These insights are valuable for refining future iterations of the program.

At the conclusion of the program, participants provided feedback via surveys from Greater Dandenong Libraries and weekly facilitator-led questionnaires. Key findings include:

Overall Satisfaction

- **100%** of participants enjoyed the course.
- **100%** reported learning new things.
- **100%** felt more connected to the small business community.
- **100%** felt heard and involved through the co-design process.
- **72%** felt more confident about starting a business.

Participant Sentiments

Participants described their experience using words such as:

- “Amazing,” “Fantastic,” “Happy,” “Excited,” “Heard,” “Connected,” “Fun,” “Interesting.”

Highlights of the Program

Most valued aspects included:

- Guest speakers
- Learning about small business fundamentals
- Practical tools (e.g., Canva)
- Networking and sharing ideas

Support Needed to Start a Business

Participants identified areas where further support is needed:

- Business planning and content creation
- ABN registration
- Overcoming personal barriers (e.g., fear)
- Selling products online

Suggestions for Improvement

Common recommendations:

- More frequent and longer breaks
- Increased hands-on activities
- Less time sitting, more movement
- More time to absorb content



Support staff from disability support organisations who attended sessions alongside participants provided feedback at both the midpoint and conclusion of the program.

Key Outcomes

- 100% felt participants had opportunities to share ideas and engage in the co-design process.
- 100% believed participants gained more contacts within the small business community.
- Confidence in Starting a Business:
 - Mid-program: 100% agreed participants were more confident.
 - End-program: 67% agreed, 33% were unsure.

Support staff described their experience with words such as:

- *Inspired, Empowered, Excited, Engaged, Happy, Supportive, Proud, Motivated, Accountable, Overwhelmed, Interested.*

Program Successes

Highlighted successes included:

- Inclusive and clear delivery
- Exposure to guest speakers and real-world business insights
- Helping participants shape and refine their business ideas
- Providing practical tools and resources

Best Aspects of the Program

- Guest speakers
- Facilitator's clear communication
- Watching participants' ideas develop

Support staff identified areas where participants still need support:

- Understanding permits, tax, and business setup steps
- Ongoing mentorship and encouragement
- Time and support outside of sessions to work on goals

Suggestions for Improvement

Common recommendations included:

- More hands-on activities and less talking
- Use of computers and interactive tools (e.g., Canva)
- Shorter sessions or more frequent breaks to maintain focus
- Consistent support staff across sessions for continuity



Outcomes

- Individuals increased their confidence
- Peer connections
- Connections to services and supports
- Development of business ideas
- Increased knowledge about self-employment
- Some individuals have taken steps to begin their business
- Increased participant independence
- Participant empowerment to choose self-employment as an option
- Creation of a toolkit that can be used by other councils or City of Greater Dandenong into the future.
- All participants were retained throughout the 10 week program. One participant dropped out after the first session due to other commitments, but all other participants remained
- Development of strong partnerships with the two partner disability support organisations

What were the challenges?

- Mentors – a mentorship program was attempted but ultimately abandoned for the pilot program. In future we would start the process with council six months before the start date of the program to allow for the development of a position description and the induction of mentors into Council's volunteer program.
- Providing all the information that people needed in the ten weeks in a digestible way. In future we would run the program over 20 weeks.

If we were to do it all again

It is recommended that the program run for 2 terms/20 weeks. This would allow for:


- More hands-on activities
- Extra breaks during each session
- Slower paced sessions
- Site visits and excursions
- Embedding learning and supported follow up (e.g. Canva session, ABN session, Logo/business card development session)
- Addition of mentors to support during program and ongoing
- Working towards showing wares at a market or similar

A longer program would also allow more time for:

- Exploration of Acknowledgement of Country
- Further introducing the ideas of disability pride and Lived and Living Experience
- Themes around identity to be further introduced and explored (e.g. pronouns and minus 18 session)



Where to from here?


- We are currently applying for conferences and hope to launch the Toolkit on the State Library Victoria website shortly
 - We will be looking for funding to run the program again
 - We will be available to consult with any other library service or organisation that would like to run the program
 - We are supporting the participants that want to work with a mentor to apply to the Dylan Alcott foundation mentorship program
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The Pierre Gorman award is a biennial grant, offered by the Library Board of Victoria to support public library services to enhance their services for people with disabilities. Our thanks also goes to: The Bridge and Burke & Beyond, for partnering with us on this program, to Practice Inclusion for developing and facilitating the Self Employment Training Program and creating the toolkit, and most importantly, to our program co-designers and participants.



Appendix A

Survey responses (participant's own words)

Weekly Survey:

The facilitator conducted a weekly participant survey, to seek continual feedback and adapt the program as it went along. On a weekly basis participants were asked if they enjoyed the session and if they learned something new. Each week 100% of participants responded that they enjoyed the session and that they learned something new.

At the completion of each session, at each of the 10 weekly sessions, participants were asked *What was the best part of today's session?*

Responses included:

- Learning about business
- Facilitator teaching style – really engaging and inclusive
- Watching participants grow their business ideas
- Learning
- I learned about mission statements
- Library tour and learning business planning
- Learning how to make a business card
- Learning about keep track money
- Learning more about art and music and band and all different stuff
- The fusion theatre
- Joe Art and Fusion Theatre
- Go jo
- Meeting jo
- Guest speakers
- Greater Dandenong speakers
- Talking about brainstorming
- The speaker
- Learning what to do
- The best part was learning about the mind map
- Brainstorm activity and mind map

Each week, participants were given opportunity to provide general feedback.

Comments included:

- I really enjoyed it
- Amazing teacher
- Good trying to feel confident with others
- It's been going good
- Very fun
- Too much talking makes it hard to stay focused

- I feel grateful today
- Not enough variety
- I really enjoyed it
- The course is good and very educational
- Great course for the participants, really informative!
- I'll say it's very good to learn new business skills
- Today's session was good
- It was amazing
- Learning about Canva
- I love about today session it's a bit everything
- Meeting Sam
- The best is learning

Mid Program Survey – Participants

Mid way through the program participants were given a survey to complete by Greater Dandenong Libraries, as well as being asked some additional questions in the weekly survey created by the facilitator.

A summary of responses below:

- 100% of participants felt inspired to start a business
- 100% of participants felt they have more contacts within the small business community through participating in the program
- 88% of participants felt like they have had the opportunity to have their ideas heard and participate through the co-design process
- 63% of participants felt more confident in starting their business through participating in the program
- Participants were asked to provide three words about how they are feeling about the program:
 - Learn new skills, interesting
 - It is so good learning a lot/guest speakers
 - Share and learn, to know what I am doing, how to get ready to launch
 - Happy supportive knowledgeable
 - Good, great, overwhelmed
 - Tired, excited, good
 - Feel excited, felt alright, grateful
 - Good, excited, tired
- Participants were asked what the best part of the program has been so far:
 - Learning business card merch
 - Talks and business
 - The best is bringing in some biscuits and I can get some customers
 - Guest speakers
 - Guest speakers
 - Guest speakers
 - Completing worksheets
 - Love learning more about my favourite business

- Participants were asked what they still need to achieve their goal of starting a business:
 - Still thinking
 - Need more ideas about business
 - There is more for me to do like register kitchen
 - Permits, business name
 - Register business name, more research, where to sell, tax info
 - Being on time, studying hard as my musician dream and business, like to join the band to travel
 - Business name
- Participants were asked if they have any suggestions for the program in the future:
 - Build-up - more business and different programs
 - More breaks in between guest speakers

End of Program Survey – Participants

At the conclusion of the program participants were given a survey to complete by Greater Dandenong Libraries, as well as being asked some additional questions in the weekly survey created by the facilitator.

A summary of responses below

- 100% of participants said they enjoyed the course
- 100% of participants said they learnt new things throughout the course
- 100% of participants felt they have more contacts within the small business community through participating in the program
- 100% of participants felt like they have had the opportunity to have their ideas heard and participate through the co-design process
- 72% of participants felt more confident in starting their business through participating in the program
- Participants were asked to provide three words about how they are feeling about the program:
 - Very very good
 - Good, tired, heard
 - Amazing, fantastic, and I hope other people have the same experience
 - I am happy about that came it my you amazing
 - Okay
 - Fun/ learnt a lot/ best staff
 - Good, happy, enjoy it
 - I enjoy, I learnt something new, I connected
 - Fun, funny, excited
 - I had the best day in program, I like feel in program a lot
 - Very interesting, great, happy, sometimes sad

- We asked participants what the best part of the program had been so far:
 - The guest speakers
 - Completing worksheets
 - Sam - talking about Canva
 - Meeting the great speakers, taking photos etc
 - Speakers
 - Guest speakers/ coffee/ learning / meeting new people
 - The speakers
 - Learnt about different about Joe Art
 - Meeting the guest speakers
 - To bring my biscuits in class
 - I say the Drum Theatre and music industry, stages, artist
 - Photos interview video
 - Getting the interview
 - Learning all the new things about small business
 - The best part that learnt new things
 - Learning how to start my own business
 - Guest speakers
 - Talking about different types of small business
- Participants were asked what they still need to achieve their goal of starting a business:
 - Making progress
 - The finer details
 - I need to figure out what content I want to put on twitch and/or YouTube
 - Writing my ...?
 - Many things
 - Sell my merch on website
 - Starting hair and beauty
 - Overcome by fear
 - Get a ABN number
 - ABN - Kate registration
 - To create ABN for my business they needed
- Participants were asked if they have any suggestions for the program in the future:
 - More breaks
 - Hands on stuff and more breaks
 - Hands on, more moving, also not sitting all the time, something different
 - Hands on stuff and more time to adjust after breaks
 - More hands-on activities
 - More short break
 - More time. It felt quite rushed
 - More breaks in between

Mid Program Survey – Support Staff

Mid way through the program staff who had been attending the sessions and supporting the participants were given a survey to complete by Greater Dandenong Libraries. These staff were employed by the disability support organisations.

A summary of responses below

- 100% of support staff felt that participants have had an opportunity to have their ideas heard and participate in the co-design process
- 100% of support staff felt that participants are more confident in starting their own business through participating in the program
- 100% of support staff felt the participants have more contacts within the small business community through participating in the program
- Support staff were asked to provide three words about how they are feeling about the experience of being part of the program alongside the participants:
 - Inspired, excited, empowered
 - Excited, engaged, happy
 - Interested, educated, over stimulated
- Support staff were asked what they thought were the key successes of the program so far:
 - Inclusion, repetition, clear/simple
 - Introduction to having an idea to create a business, helping the participants think about what they actually want for a small business, guest speakers/experiences, what you need have/do that will help you have a successful business
 - Having a variety
- Support staff were asked what the best part of the program has been so far:
 - Guest speakers and facilitator's ability to deliver clearly
- Support staff were asked what the participants still need to achieve their goals of starting their business:
 - The program has given the participants a good overview on the steps to start their own business, in a simplistic, practical manner.
 - Working on their goals outside work hours
 - Business name, permits, tax
- Support staff were asked if they have any suggestions for the program in the future:
 - Using the computers, more hands on things to achieve their goals, sitting down for a long time, participants tend to lose focus, fall asleep etc.
 - More hands on tasks and less talking. Participants find it challenging to focus, especially being in a space for long periods of time. Giving them activities can help them in staying focussed and engaged.

End of Program Survey – Support Staff

At the conclusion of the program, staff who had been attending the sessions and supporting the participants were given a survey to complete by Greater Dandenong Libraries. These staff were employed by the disability support organisations.

A summary of responses below

- 100% of support staff felt that participants have had an opportunity to have their ideas heard and participate in the co-design process
- 67% of support staff felt that participants are more confident in starting their own business through participating in the program and 33% were unsure
- 100% of support staff felt the participants have more contacts within the small business community through participating in the program
- Support staff were asked to provide three words about how they are feeling about the experience of being part of the program alongside the participants:
 - Engaging, overwhelming, interested
 - Supportive, empowering, proud
 - Motivated, excited, accountable
- Support staff were asked what they thought were the key successes of the program so far:
 - Listening to guest speakers provide information
 - Participants know that having their own business is achievable, regardless of what their idea is and they now have the resources to support them.
 - Great information/tools resources about how to start a business. Great guest speakers
- Support staff were asked what the best part of the program has been so far:
 - Meeting the different guest speakers
 - Watching participants and their ideas grow
- Support staff were asked what the participants still need to achieve their goals of starting their business:
 - Understanding what permits are needed, understanding the steps needed to start up, what the business needs, how to promote
 - Ongoing encouragement and support from their supports
 - Understanding their business, having meetings with their mentors after program
- Support staff were asked if they have any suggestions for the program in the future:
 - Less talking during the program, more hands on/doing activities
 - Definitely the same supports for each session for continuity
 - More hands-on activities in relation to the topic, keeping participants more engaged throughout the program, participants sitting down for a while is a bit much, e.g. using the computers to use and learn how to use Canva.