

Parents need individualised employment support to thrive, says atWork Australia

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It can be incredibly challenging for parents to return to work after having a child, and these challenges are further amplified when trying to secure employment as a single parent. For parents living with disability or caring for a child with disability, these barriers can be even greater, highlighting the need for tailored employment support.

Recent research from the Australian Bureau of Statistics highlights some motivating factors that encourage parents with children to enter the workforce. The findings show that over half (56.4%) of Australians believe that having the ability to work during school hours is a crucial incentive, while a similar proportion (55.9%) said having access to part-time work would support their return.

Additionally, 53.5% of parents indicated that financial assistance with childcare costs would enhance their ability to participate in the workforce¹.

Employment services provider, atWork Australia works to connect their clients with suitable employers and job pathways, often suggesting training opportunities to ensure they are as 'job ready' as possible. For single parents, particularly those with disability or caring responsibilities, access to flexible work arrangements, inclusive workplaces, and ongoing individualised support is essential in breaking down barriers to employment and ensuring long-term sustainability.

atWork Australia is currently supporting more than 8,500 parents on their employment journey across a number of programs. Often, parents are required to take time out of the workforce to care for children and may also require greater flexibility in their employment. Whilst this is beneficial as a parent or caregiver, it can also create additional barriers to enter the workplace. Upskilling can help parents remove these barriers.

Over the past 12 months, atWork Australia has supported over 1800 parents to gain new qualifications. This has been part of the employment support journey allowing them to secure employment. The types of roles where employment for parents was most popular includes roles such as aged and disability carers, sales assistants and kitchen hands. Often these roles are typically casual or part time positions, providing parents flexibility to work around their parenting responsibilities.

For fathers Jack and Kong, atWork Australia's support has been life changing.

For **Disability Employment Services (DES) client, Kong (aged 53), a single father from Eschol Park, New South Wales**, returning to work seemed impossible. Kong had conflicting priorities, he needed to return

to work to financially support his young daughter, while also requiring flexibility for school pick up and drop off. Additionally, Kong experienced serious health issues, including a heart condition and chronic back pain. Kong had previous experience as a production worker, however heavy physical labour was no longer an option for him, and the uncertainty of finding suitable work left him feeling discouraged.

After connecting with atWork Australia nearly a year ago, Kong found the tailored support he needed to get back into the workforce. With ongoing assistance, atWork Australia helped secure a position in architecture with hours that accommodated his health and personal situation.

"atWork Australia has been incredible," said Kong. "They didn't just help me find a job – they found a role that truly fits my needs and supports my health. Their ongoing check-ins and genuine care have made all the difference. I feel valued, supported, and finally in a job that works for me. Overcoming these challenges wouldn't have been possible without atWork Australia."

Previously, Kong had struggled in a job that didn't offer the flexibility he needed, eventually making the difficult decision to leave. With atWork Australia's help, he secured a new role that better suited his capabilities and allowed him to work within his limits.

"I have been able to overcome my health challenges and find suitable and meaningful work because of atWork Australia," said Kong.

Similarly, for **Jack (aged 41) from Kogarah, New South Wales**, who is also a single father, finding stable employment was essential, so he could care, provide and be a good role model for his young daughter. However, this became particularly challenging during COVID-19.

After moving to Australia from China in 2006, Jack pursued a career in teaching, inspired by his mother's challenges as a migrant to Australia 10 years ago. Jack has completed qualifications in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Applied Linguistics at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and built a career teaching adult migrants English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN).

When COVID-19 hit, the demand for overseas student programs declined, making it difficult for Jack to secure ongoing work. As a single parent, the financial strain was immense.

Seeking support, Jack connected with atWork Australia in 2022, where his dedicated job coach, Viviana, provided critical assistance during times of financial hardship, guiding Jack's career planning, and helping him secure a teaching role he is passionate about.

"Viviana helped me so much – not just with finding work, but with teaching tools, planning and ongoing support. She frequently checks in, making sure I have what I need to succeed," said Jack. "With atWork Australia's help, everything became easier, and now I'm doing what I love – teaching and supporting my students."

atWork Australia has helped place over 2,600 parents into new jobs over the last 12 months which equates to close to 15% of all clients they have assisted. This has resulted in these families having more stable income and financial security. By connecting parents to suitable employment options, they are able to work around school schedules and remain employed while juggling family responsibilities.

To learn more about atWork Australia's DES support, visit:
<https://www.atworkaustralia.com.au/disability-employment-services/>.

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About atWork Australia

atWork Australia has been delivering employment services on behalf of the Australian Government since 2003. From more than 300 locations around the nation, atWork Australia delivers Disability Employment Services (DES) and Workforce Australia connecting people and business so both can thrive. Collaborating with more than 3,500 employers across the country, atWork Australia has connected more than **20,000** Australians with meaningful and sustainable employment across six states over the last 12 months, across a diverse range of industries and occupations. Find out more at www.atworkaustralia.com.au.

References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Health and caring for kids most common barriers to work. November 2023. <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/health-and-caring-kids-most-common-barriers-work>. Accessed March 2025.