

Upskilling and work/life balance for Australian workers with disability

Australian not-for-profit, Afford, scores Kimberly Clark project for more jobs for Australians with disability. More than a job – Aussies with disability earn income and make friends. Afford ensures continuity of employment for supported employees during COVID-19. Product labelling requires precision and patience, and for the next 10 weeks, this arduous task will be in the hands of hundreds of workers with disability across Western Sydney employed by Australian not-for-profit disability provider, Afford (the Australian Foundation for Disability).

Workers across Afford's Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) in Minchinbury, Prestons and Ingleburn will be relabelling and repackaging thousands of Huggies Baby Wipes for delivery to supermarkets for customer purchase right across the country.

"Many of the products that we buy every week at the supermarket are relabelled and distributed by Australian workers living with disability. The unique abilities and talents of our supported employees enhance our operations and positively contribute to the Australian economy," said Afford's Executive Manager, Commercial Services, Gordon Griff.

The Kimberley Clark project is significant for Afford and will provide meaningful employment for over 200 supported employees. The strict timeframe and the 16 container and 600 pallet quantity of product to be managed, will also present opportunities for employees to undergo training to upskill and advance in their roles.

"On-site training gives our supported employees the chance to develop their skills and move into leadership positions. We have employees who have worked with us for years and know the processes and procedures inside and out. After participating in training, they are now Team Leaders and role models for their peers," said Mr Griff.

Watch: Lourdes becomes Team Leader

Case Study: Steve is just one supported employee who has undergone further training to meet increased demand for forklift drivers to load and unload vehicles as they arrive at the factory. He has been supported by a speech pathologist to develop his written and communication skills to now have the confidence to independently manage stock as it comes in and validate it against paperwork.

In the years following Australia's Polio epidemic of the 1950s, Afford led the country in providing work opportunities for individuals affected by Polio to reintegrate into society.

Seventy years on, Afford supports more than 400 supported employees with physical and intellectual disability each year to enjoy meaningful work, earn income for independence and develop social and community connections.

With the Coronavirus affecting the viability and operations of many disability providers in 2020, Afford responded quickly to adjust routines for COVID-19 safe work practices. Afford's actions ensured continuity of employment for all its supported employees.

"While some other disability enterprises stopped operations, Afford updated the ways we work on the factory floor. We increased our health checks and educated our supported employees about COVID safe work practices so that we could continue to provide employment through the pandemic," said Mr Griff.

Watch: Afford ADEs – COVID-safe workplaces.

"This meant that our supported employees could continue working, earn money and also have safe social interaction with their friends and workmates."

"We're always looking to employ more supported employees for all of our ADEs. We also reach out to other disability organisations to provide

additional work opportunities for their workers when we have surplus work.”

The Kimberley Clark project will involve activities across administration, production and manufacturing. In a first for the not-for-profit, Afford production staff have developed a new Serial Shipping Container Code (SSCC) to meet the shipping and tracking requirements for the project.

“The Kimberley Clark project will see our teams deal with importers, manage stock reconciliations, book stock into the system, and deliver to meet the customer’s deadline.”

“Our supported employees will develop their skills to suit a specific production process. They will adjust their pallet loading to meet the load requirements of the project. They will ensure the precision and uniform front and back labelling for every product. They do all this and more to deliver for all of our customers.”

“We are immensely proud to say that our supported employees have contributed to the production and delivery of many products that are found in retail stores, and purchased by many Australians, across the country.”

In a whole-of-life approach to disability supports, Afford organises and hosts social events for supported employees which are held during work hours to foster work/life balance.

“Our employees are not just work mates, they are friends. At Afford we aim to provide supportive and encouraging workplaces where our supported employees can feel safe to be themselves and extend their friendships for fullness of life.”

For more information about Afford visit www.afford.com.au.

ENDS

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About Afford - www.afford.com.au

The Australian Foundation for Disability is a registered charity providing disability services to thousands of people across Australia. The supports provided by Afford include Shared Living; Overnight Respite; Social and Community Programs; Transition to Work Programs; Transition to Retirement Programs; Carer Support; Disability Employment Services; Supported Employment; Allied Health Support, Support Coordination and Supported Holidays.

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