All In
Accessibility & Inclusion @ Telstra

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'Supported workers' inspire a quiet revolution at Telstra

Next time you're passing a Telstra network site or visiting one of our regional offices, take a moment to smell the roses. If you find yourself admiring the gleaming, flower-scented floors or the neatly trimmed lawns outside, chances are you're enjoying the handiwork of one of our 520 proud 'supported workers'.

For many Telstra staff, particularly in our regional offices, it's a well-known fact that cleaners, gardeners and repair workers who live with a disability tend to do a better job than their commercial counterparts. Some put it down to supervision, others to rigorous standards of assessment. But for most of those in the know, it comes down to something far more elemental: conscientious effort and hard-won pride.

"It shouldn't surprise anyone that our supported workers are changing people's attitudes about disability," says Steve Ryan, who oversees Telstra's property maintenance program in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and South

Australia. "These employees all have a deep commitment to their work. They really want to work – and it's something that shows its value at our properties every day."

Across Australia, people living with a disability are at least 50% more likely to be unemployed or under-employed. We believe it's important for companies like Telstra to support Australian Disability Enterprises to provide meaningful jobs, with liveable wages. Combined with our targets to increase graduate recruitment and employ more staff with a disability, we aim to support the broad needs of people entering or returning to work.

Changing the landscape

Few people understand the significance of this more than Jim Dinuccio who, for nearly 20 years, has been one of Australia's most passionate advocates for supported employment. Today, Clean Force Property Services – the award-winning company he co-founded in 2001, now part of WISE Employment – has 46 employees working at 400 Telstra sites across Victoria and Tasmania – making Telstra their largest customer by far.

"Telstra has changed the landscape for us," says Jim. "Having a partner that has such a large volume of work and gets involved and cares how individual employees are going – that makes such a difference."

So much so, that when a prominent organisation that was cleaning 100 Telstra sites in central Victoria went into administration in 2016, Clean Force was able to pick up the contracts within a matter of weeks – saving the jobs of five long-term employees [See story on the following page].

Michael Hodgkinson, National Contract Manager at House with No Steps, one of Telstra's longest-running enterprise partners, says their 43 employees are carrying out an ever wider range of tasks for Telstra – including many "reactive jobs" in response to unexpected situations.

"If a light blows out in an exchange, or a gutter needs clearing, or some graffiti has to be removed, our people can get straight onto it," says Michael. "Because most of them have been with us for 20 years or more, they rarely need much supervision."

Steve Ryan points out that – while it remains a key commitment of Telstra's Accessibility & Inclusion Plan – allocating our cleaning and grounds maintenance to people with a disability makes great business sense.

"Some people still talk about this as charity work," says Steve. "But I can tell you that since we started employing these teams in 2011, complaints have dropped significantly – and the standard of cleaning has kept going up."

From our enterprise partner:

"Telstra is by far my favourite customer. Steve Ryan and [program manager] Jude Flynn are great supporters of ours, and the fact that we know each other so well means we can jump onto reactive jobs with minimum fuss."

– Michael Hodgkinson, National Contract Manager, House with No Steps, Sydney

And then there are the natural benefits of having a more diverse workforce – and of playing a real part in transforming people's lives. It's something that still puts a lump in Jim Dinuccio's throat.

"When people come to you and say, this is the first time I've been able to take my wife on holiday, or to buy my first car, or to buy proper Christmas presents for the kids – I defy you not to go weak at the knees. You just can't put a value on that."

Australian Disability Enterprises currently cover 69% of Telstra's scheduled cleaning and grounds maintenance program – a level we aim to raise to 75% by the end of 2019. There are approximately 520 supported workers cleaning 700 sites and maintaining the grounds of 3,950 Telstra sites across six states.

Rory cleans up in his quest for job security

For Rory Trewhella, coming in to clean Telstra's Bendigo offices twice a week is like coming home – to a place "where people are always nice to talk to, always super-friendly".

Sheri Roberts and Rory Trewhella cleaning one of Telstra's offices in Bendigo

"I love working for Telstra," says Rory.
"I love the people. I love working with Sheri.
It's the kind of work I like doing, and I'm good at doing."

Sheri Roberts and Rory Trewhella at work

For Rory, who has Williams syndrome (a genetic condition that impacts cardiovascular health and can cause developmental or learning disabilities), being surrounded by friendly, non-judgmental people is almost as important as having a regular job.

But 18 months ago, he almost lost both.

In October 2016, four years after he began cleaning our three Bendigo buildings, Rory, 36, was told his disability support agency was shutting its doors – and he and his team would be out of work.

"It happened very quickly and I felt very bad about it," says Rory. "Especially about what would happen to my workmates."

Fortunately, Telstra's property maintenance manager Steve Ryan was able to arrange for the administrators to transfer the contracts directly to Clean Force – returning Rory, his three teammates, and team leader Richard Morgan to work with immediate effect.

"Steve's in charge of hundreds of buildings across Australia and for him to step in like that

and recommend me [to Clean Force] was a really kind and empowering thing to do," says Richard. "What could have been a disaster for us ended up being a chance to improve our whole operation."

For Rory – a regular fixture at his beloved Eaglehawk Football Club, as well as Bendigo's famous Chinese Spring Festival – his work at Telstra remains "a very big thing".

"I love working for Telstra," he says. "I love the people. I love working with Sheri [his teammate]. It's the kind of work I like doing, and I'm good at doing.

"Some people at Telstra call me 'The Boss' because I've been there longer than most of the other staff. I'm not really the boss – but I feel like one some days!"

More on Telstra and Clean Force:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0cTKM9UyQA,

Digital developers dive head-first into a world of new challenges

No one wants to imagine they're blind or have chronic arthritis or a learning disability, but that's exactly what the Accessibility & Inclusion team asked 130 Telstra employees to do last month, as it set about evicting them from their digital comfort zones.

Participants at Telstra's first Digital Accessibility training

The confronting exercises were part of Telstra's first Digital Accessibility Immersion training, held by the newly christened Telstra Empathy Lab – an incubator set up to drive awareness of the needs of people with disabilities, as a first step towards more inclusive product design.

In a little over an hour, employees were plunged into a world of new challenges: trying to send a text with goggles simulating a debilitating eye disease, completing a complex Wi-Fi log-on as a person with short-term memory loss, or playing a mobile game with the indistinct 'grey' vision of the colour-blind.

The tasks were a wake-up call for the four groups of digital product owners, managers, developers and visual designers from across our digital business.

"These exercises really helped me realise that testing of audiences with different needs must be front and centre in all our design decisions," said Nicole Hein, who leads conversation design at Codi, Telstra's Virtual Assistant program.

"Although there are guidelines for some accessibility functions, not everything is black and white – and this kind of education should be mandatory for all staff involved in product development and design. I certainly plan to collaborate with our partners to see what they're doing in this space, and what we can replicate across Telstra.com and Codi."

The session was the first 'immersion training' hosted by the new lab, and coincided with **Global Accessibility Awareness Day**, which aims to get the digital community talking and thinking about making technology more usable for people with disabilities.

A collaboration between Telstra Digital and Senior Accessibility & Inclusion Advisor, Kelly Schulz, Telstra Empathy Lab runs the training in conjunction with Amir Ansari at the app development company, Transpire – a leader in the fast-growing field of accessible tech.

The exercises have since been delivered to another 80 team members, with further sessions planned across Telstra – including teams developing products for international markets – and new cultural activities covering different customer situations.

What our participants had to say about the training

"Accessibility affects a huge number of Australians, and trying to do simple tasks on their mobile devices can be a very frustrating experience. I will do my best to apply an accessibility lens on all future product enhancements, and ensure that moving forward it stays top of mind."

– Kenny Gonzalez, Product Manager, Telstra
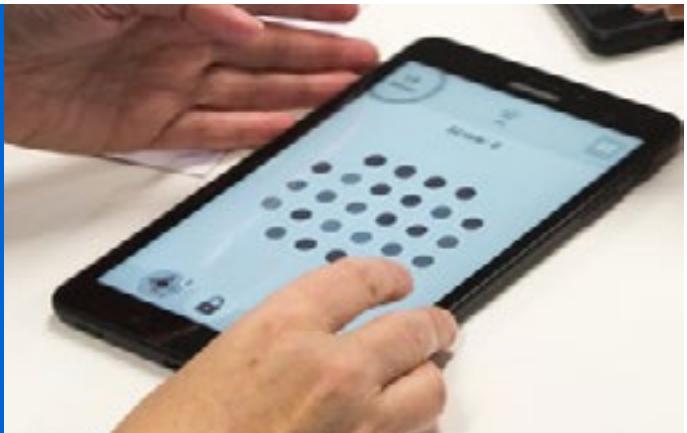
A mobile game with the indistinct 'grey' vision of the colour-blind

"A lot of fundamental change occurs from the bottom up," explains Amir, "so it's important that we begin to build an attitude shift and an awareness for diversity and inclusion, which will spread through the entire organisation."

Sally Haydon, the Head of Service and Transformation at Telstra Digital, was one of several executives who visited the training to commend the participants' involvement – and underscore Telstra's commitment to more inclusive product design.

"This is absolutely critical to us if we want to be genuinely accessible to all our customers," Sally told the participants. "We have set these standards now, and to hit the expectations of our customers we really have to make sure we achieve them."

The immersion training aims to ensure that all new products and services developed at Telstra prioritise the needs of different users – not just with bigger buttons and contrasting colours, but features and elements specifically designed for people with different abilities and challenges.

Trying to send a text whilst vision impaired

Participants were introduced to our checklist of non-negotiable accessibility requirements, as well as a number of tools for accessibility testing – including Vision Australia's **Colour Contrast Analyser**, the **Siteimprove Accessibility Checker**, and the **Funkify Simulator**, which provides a feeling of how the web can be experienced by people with different challenges.

Innovations to make Melbourne as accessible as it is 'liveable'

As part of Melbourne Knowledge Week, we partnered with the world's most liveable city in its quest to become a model of inclusivity, bringing an array of ground-breaking accessibility solutions to our Melbourne Customer Insights Centre on May 8th.

The Open Innovation Competition, held by the City of Melbourne with support from its Disability Advisory Committee, asked for submissions from innovators, entrepreneurs, businesses and the community.

Participants were encouraged to incorporate data-driven and technology-enabled approaches into their submissions, which addressed issues such as accessible parking, footpath navigation and wayfinding.

Five finalists were selected and launched a host of new tech ideas to make the city more accessible – from apps reporting up-to-the-minute building and footpath works, to hearing-augmented venue maps, to a novel accessibility rating system for restaurants and bars.

"Being involved in this event has broadened my understanding of what a liveable city means. I am proud that Telstra has been able to support these creative teams in coming up with ways to tackle accessibility challenges across Melbourne."

– Andrew Scott, Head of Technology, Telstra

The winner and recipient of the $20,000 top prize was Melba – a 'smart assistant' that delivers real-time information on parking, building access, congestion, and other vital accessibility information from the City of Melbourne, Amazon, Google and other sources.

As well as providing the venue, the Telstra Labs team hosted the finalists to help perfect their pitches to the competition judges.

Telstra Labs is home to Australia's first publicly accessible Internet of Things (IoT) Lab, a safe space where product developers can test and prototype IoT solutions in controlled radio conditions. This means we can simulate devices moving in and out of coverage, transferring between cell connections, and transmitting in noisy environments.

Telstra also provided the winning team with data-loaded tablets, and offered all five finalists free space in our IoT Lab to continue refining their prototypes.

The IoT Lab is the first of its kind in Australia and provides an open invitation for anyone from anywhere to build and test their ideas in a controlled lab setting.

For more information visit:

https://labs.telstra.com/

Open Innovation Competition prize winners

1st prize – Melba:

Created by Kyle Mantesso and Hong Yew – A pairing of the City of Melbourne's Open Data with Siri, Google Assistant, Amazon's Alexa and other smart assistants, providing up-to-date information via voice, text and screen readers. **See Melba being taken for a test drive here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IquE1SQ-k4c**

2nd prize – ClearPath:

Created by Samantha Wong and Luannie Dang – A turn-by-turn navigation system to assist the blind or vision impaired to navigate unfamiliar places including permit events, construction sites, rough ground and heavy pedestrian traffic.

3rd prize – Eatability:

Created by Michelle Khuu and her team – A rating system which provides guidelines for the food and beverage industry, showcasing a business's accessibility rating for four disability groups: mobility, auditory, visual and cognitive.

Four of the finalists also received prizes and pledges of support to develop their ideas from the Impact Co, CQ University, and Accenture.

See more on the Open Innovation Competition here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4pqfcP4nzs

Auslan Connections launches booking platform at Telstra

On April 23rd, we were proud to host Auslan Connections, Vicdeaf's language access service, at the launch of their new online booking platform, AC+. The event at our Customer Insights Centre in Melbourne welcomed more than 100 visitors – ranging from Auslan interpreters and Deaf community members to organisation partners and stakeholders.

AC+ is an innovative and intuitive online system that allocates Auslan interpreters to assignments based on their skills, experiences and client preferences – and will play a significant role in ensuring Vicdeaf

meets the ever-growing demand for Auslan interpreters.

For more information visit:
http://auslanconnections.com.au/how-to-book/

Live Chat improvements make it easier to chat 24/7

In May, we updated our Live Chat service at Telstra.com to improve accessibility. The contrast of text and buttons has been improved for low-vision users, and some of the previously unlabelled elements have been made accessible to screen readers. Our Live Chat customer service team are available 24/7 – so please let us know if you have any feedback on your experience.

Chat to us:
www.telstra.com.au/chat