

OAK Tasmania is building employee foundation skills and expanding opportunities for personal empowerment and active participation in work and society.

Enriching the lives of people with a disability is central to the work of OAK Tasmania. The organisation has its own registered training organisation to provide robust and inclusive models of learning. OAK Training and Development Services helps employees and external clients overcome barriers to participation in training by using innovative universal design and specialised knowledge of assistive technology, both software and hardware.

OAK Training and Development Services has provided foundation skills development opportunities for:

- **OAK employees working in supported workplaces** – ensuring that these individuals are adequately trained and prepared for future transitions.
- **Disability support workers** – building digital literacy and communication skills to help workers with their role in developing individual plans for clients.



Julian Edwards, Oakdale Industries
Proudly part of OAK Tasmania

OAK Tasmania is an independent, not-for-profit provider of services and support to people with a disability and their carers. OAK has provided a range of services in southern Tasmania since 1953. In 2013-14 OAK directly employed 229 people across four business divisions. A significant number of these employees are people with a disability working in supported employment at one of the Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) operated by OAK.

With support from the Tasmanian Government’s 26TEN Literacy Program, OAK Tasmania has provided literacy skill development to supported employees working in the organisation’s Australian Disability Enterprises:

- **Oakdale Industries** – making premium range timber products, from floorboards to chopping blocks
- **Walkabout Industries** – paper recycling, security shredding and potting media production
- **Tahune Fields Nursery** – growing young apple, pear and stone fruit trees
- **Mailhouse Tasmania** – providing bulk mailing services for government and business
- **Oak Sewing Services** – sewing and over-locking services, from hospitals to hospitality
- **Grove Heritage Nursery** – preserving Australia’s largest collection of ‘heritage’ apples

Supported employees and trainees of OAK Tasmania are people living with physical, sensory, neurological, intellectual, cognitive and psychiatric disability. They also include people living with autism, ADHD, cerebral palsy, acquired brain injury, people with vision impairment and people experiencing mental illness.

For people with disabilities, the acquisition and use of literacy and numeracy skills can be a source of active participation in society, personal empowerment and self-advocacy. People with disabilities who are literate and numerate have more opportunities to integrate with their communities and have greater access to further education and employment. Through the literacy program, OAK Tasmania aims to support future work opportunities for individuals who are ready to find independent or open employment, therefore opening up places for other individuals to access supported employment.

OAK Literacy Program

OAK provided a structured learning program and time release for employees to attend the literacy program during work hours. Small group sessions and one-on-one literacy support were tailored to the learning needs of individuals and to their work environment. The program focused on digital literacy, basic adult literacy and workplace communication to support safety and productivity. OAK employees have been highly enthusiastic about their involvement in the program.

The program was very enjoyable, Peter made the sessions interesting and he was a fun teacher. He made up a Word search that was all about Walkabout and it made the class real because it was about work.

OAK Youth Pathways Participant



Brodie Hyland, Oakdale Industries
Proudly part of OAK Tasmania

Outcomes from the program include improved confidence, self-esteem and job satisfaction, as well as increased levels of literacy and numeracy. Positive feedback from support workers, supervisors and division managers has highlighted the improvement in employee comprehension, research and communication skills – especially an increased understanding of work documents and complex work procedures.

Supervisors have reported that program participants improved their understanding of work health and safety and their productivity. The participants themselves increased both their ability to meet the complex demands of life and their desire to pursue further education and training.

OAK Tasmania has used formal and informal training to build the literacy and numeracy skills of disability services workers.

Now, and in the future, disability support workers at OAK will be undertaking new and more complex roles. With the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIA), new work processes have resulted in increasing skills requirements including the use of new technologies and increased compliance and quality measures. Progressively higher levels of language, literacy and numeracy, and digital literacy, are required to support these changes. OAK has been working to bridge skills gaps to ensure that the organisation will meet future needs and demands.

Through formal and informal approaches, OAK has provided skill building opportunities to disability support workers. These have focused on the digital literacy skills needed for increasing workplace documentation requirements, and the writing skills needed for program planning and profile writing.

An annual 'training week' is set aside at OAK to enable a mini internal conference on site. The week is used to explore different approaches to skill development and has been used by OAK Training and Development Services as the trigger for embedding skill development support into ongoing activities.

OAK training weeks have included:

- Implementation of a communication and language awareness program between staff and participants
- Opportunity to provide mentoring support to colleagues
- The theory and implementation of active support
- Quizzes used to re-inforce organisational policies and procedures
- An iPad and digital literacy extension programs
- Team building activities with an oral communication focus
- Bullying and harassment training
- Personality types and effective communication

Valuable outcomes for the organisation have been identified by OAK management:

- Generating greater collaboration between employees
- Building organisational capacity
- Significant culture shift toward communication and lifelong learning
- More confident and productive workforce



As a result of these workforce development initiatives, there is no doubt that the service will be better equipped to meet the demands of the industry in the future.

Graeme Finlayson, Manager OAK Training and Development

Seven Workplace Champions have been appointed as public ambassadors for foundation skills

The Foundation Skills Workplace Champions aim to raise employer awareness of the benefits of addressing foundation skills in the workplace by sharing positive outcomes from their own organisations.

Foundation Skills Workplace Champions

- Anthony Kittel, Redarc Electronics Pty Ltd
- Victoria Jacques, Villa Maria Aged Care
- Yvonne Webb, CHARTTES Industry Training Advisory Council, NT
- Vince Ball, ACT Regional Building and Construction Industry Training Council
- Graeme Finlayson, Oak Training and Development, Tasmania
- Ro Coroneos, Lend Lease
- Kim Moore, Unitywater

Further information on individual champions is available on the website of the National Foundation Skills Strategy Project: <http://www.statedevelopment.sa.gov.au/nfss>

Support for the Workplace Champions is being provided by Michael Taylor from the Australian Industry Group, and the National Foundation Skills Strategy Project Team.

The National Foundation Skills Strategy Project (NFSS) 2014-2015 is a joint initiative by Australian governments to support priority action areas from the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults.

For further information contact:

- Michael Taylor, Ai Group: michael.taylor@aigroup.com.au
- Wing-Yin Chan Lee, NFSS Project Manager: wing-yin.chan-lee@tafesa.edu.au
- Anita Roberts, NFSS Project Co-ordinator: anita.roberts@outlook.com

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