

Task force outlines plans to help more people with disabilities find jobs

Another 4,500 set to benefit by 2030, with efforts to raise employment rate to 40%

Chin Soo Fang
Senior Correspondent

An estimated 4,500 more people with disabilities (PWDs) in Singapore are expected to have jobs by 2030, as part of efforts to increase the employment rate of this group to 40 per cent.

A task force looking at ways to reach this goal announced its recommendations in a report on Sept 16, laying out plans to grow the pool of inclusive employers, expand employment opportunities for PWDs and better equip job coaches.

The Government aims to increase the number of inclusive em-

ployers from more than 7,000 today to 10,000 by 2030, of which 30 per cent, or 3,000, will hire more than one PWD each.

Currently, close to four in five inclusive employers hire only one PWD, and can scale up efforts to hire more of them, said the task force.

As of now, the pool of 7,000 employers hire around 16,000 PWDs.

The recommendations by the Taskforce on Promoting Inclusive Employment Practices also include tapping gig work as a stepping stone for PWDs to join the workforce, and better equipping job coaches.

Mr Eric Chua, Senior Parliamen-

tary Secretary for Social and Family Development, shared the recommendations at the Enabling Academy Learning Festival at the Lifelong Learning Institute in Eunos.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) supports all the recommendations of the task force, formed in 2022 as part of the Enabling Masterplan 2030, which is Singapore's road map for supporting PWDs and enabling them to contribute to society.

The average resident employment rate of PWDs aged 15 to 64 has risen from 28.2 per cent in 2018/2019 to 32.7 per cent in 2022/2023.

The task force comprised 17 members from the people, private and public sectors.

It is led by Ms Ku Geok Boon, chief executive of disability agency SG Enable, and Ms Susan Chong,



Mr Zack Ling, who has autism, applauds the idea of offering gig jobs to people with disabilities as it brings in income and work experience. ST PHOTO: LUTHER LAU

CEO and founder of agri-tech firm Greenphyto, who is also a board member of the Singapore Business Federation Foundation.

The task force proposed to identify and develop companies to be inclusive, hiring "champions" in key sectors so that they can engage and inspire others to do the same.

The focus will be on six sectors that have hired PWDs or have growing potential of job opportunities for them.

These sectors are: food and beverage services, retail trade, information and communications, health and social services, transport and storage, as well as financial and insurance services.

Employers need more support, said the task force, in covering the cost to hire and equip an inclusive workplace champion who will lead the implementation of such practices and policies within the organisation, or an in-house job coach.

MSF is studying the recommendation to provide funding support to employers to build up in-house capabilities in inclusive hiring practices, and will provide an update in the coming months.

Another recommendation is to expand employment opportunities by tapping short-term assignments or gig jobs as avenues for PWDs to return to the workforce, and possibly progress to formal employ-

ment.

Among resident PWDs aged 15 to 64 who were unemployed, about 20 per cent were previously employed within the last five years. They may face barriers returning to the workforce, such as the need for more flexible work, said the task force in its report.

MSF and SG Enable aim to place 200 PWDs into gig jobs annually by 2026. They also hope to support 70 per cent of them to continue engaging in gig work, or move on to secure formal employment within six months after being placed into their gig job.

A pilot by Workforce Singapore and SG Enable since May 2023 to match PWDs with gig jobs has seen early success, said the report. Over 100 PWDs found jobs through the scheme, and more than 40 per cent transited into more stable employment.

Close to 60 per cent of those placed in gig jobs through this pilot had not been employed for at least six months. These include about 35 per cent who did not have employment history since 2018.

Mr Zack Ling, who has autism, said it is a good idea to offer gig jobs to PWDs as this brings in income and work experience.

The 19-year-old product design student at the Institute of Technical Education is an artist-in-training with non-profit organisation ART:DIS, which commissioned him to make his own line of ceramic sake cups for sale. He even concocted a special "Zack blue" glaze for his ceramics.

"I learnt to take criticisms to improve, and build up my resilience,"

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