

## Bedford Group

For a large disability service provider in South Australia, selecting the strongest workers as team leaders to supervise students has proven successful in providing opportunities in both residential and in-home work settings.

The Bedford Group is the second largest employer of people with disability in Australia, providing a range of services for more than 1300 clients across 18 sites in South Australia.

Wherever it has capacity, Bedford is committed to supporting the disability services sector by facilitating work placements and offering potential workers good experiences and learning opportunities.

Bedford provides both student placement and traineeship models, seeing a need for both in generating high quality workers.

*“It’s a good opportunity here because Bedford has people living in houses and we have community centres, so it gives them some quite varied roles and experiences to explore before they go out to full-time employment.”*

### Placement settings

The main settings for student work placements and traineeships are Bedford’s centre-based and community-based services that provide clients with independent living skills.

Student placements for supportive and independent living services, which are more challenging to manage, have not been operating for the past six months due to COVID-19 and a shortage of staff. Nevertheless, Bedford’s past experiences with student placements in supported independent living services were successful.

Students started their work placements in Bedford’s residential care centre before moving to the environment of independent living houses. Clients were supportive of students in their homes.

The need to have a good balance was very important so that each student felt they were a valued member of the team where they were encouraged and able to learn and develop.

*“valuable opportunity for them to be having their placement on site rather than them feeling that they are a hinderance.”*



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*It’s beneficial both for the residents and for our team to see what is happening and the changes and value students can bring into the team as well. There are benefits from both sides, but it is labour intensive and challenging financially.*

The main challenges Bedford identified were gaps in student training and the cost of supervising students where margins in supported independent living services were reducing. Training in manual handling and personal care are two areas that students needed to be well prepared for when undertaking work placements in supported independent living. Despite the challenges, Bedford is looking to taking on students for in-home settings again in the future.

## Partner selection

Bedford has relationships with a select few RTOs for student work placements, and a single RTO for traineeships.

Setting clear expectations about student readiness and RTO support during the placement is very important for Bedford. This includes communication with the RTOs about the electives Bedford considers to be the right fit for their work environment and discussions about key elements for work placement booklets and the practical support supervisors need to provide.

*“We tend to have a bit more influence around what we think will be beneficial to the support worker from a workplace point of view and service provider point of view that at the end of this placement these are the things we would prefer you had knowledge of to come on board with Bedford.”*

## Engagement points

Bedford is invited by RTOs to speak to trainees about the services it offers and has been involved in workshops so students can identify what settings they would prefer, and Bedford can determine who is a better fit for their services/organisation.

Before a traineeship or work placement starts the RTO attends a meeting with the manager and student in the first instance and complete any of the paperwork. The RTO also returns for onsite visits during the placement.

## Induction

Induction for students and trainees is like new staff induction. They meet with their manager/supervisor on the first morning and do a tour of the site, undertake a workplace health and safety induction, discuss the program, how it operates and Bedford’s expectations of them. They are then introduced to clients and buddy up with the staff member they will work alongside for their placement.

Bedford makes sure everyone is clear about what students can and can’t do on placements. Students are reminded that as a placement rather than a traineeship they are always under supervision and told who to speak to if at any point they feel unsafe or not being supervised appropriately.

## Supervisor selection and support

Bedford ensures line managers have teaching and assessment qualifications so that they can support workplace supervisors to feel confident with the students in a variety of settings and situations. Bedford likes to have the student’s work placement book in advance so the supervisor can work through it during the placement while encouraging the student to adopt a practice of self-directed learning.

## Continuous improvement

Bedford’s experiences from student work placements have been positive and a key learning has been to not take on too many students at one time so they can receive a quality experience.

With demand for quality workers continuing to increase, trainees and students are a good recruitment pipeline.

*“Student placements can offer a lot of positives in an industry that does have its retention challenges.”*

