

# Successful Dandelion Program partnership continues to expand.



After the success of the Adelaide implementation in January 2015, the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE) have continued working together with Danish organisation Specialist People Foundation (SPF) to deliver further job opportunities for people with autism.

## Partnership History

This innovative partnership first began in 2014 when former Minister for Human Services Senator the Hon. Marise Payne announced the Dandelion Program. “The department is proud to be working with such progressive organisations to provide people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) an opportunity to work in a field that allows them to harness their unique skills and abilities,” Minister Payne said.

The program initially provided 11 candidates with employment, following HPE’s unique training schedule. The Dandelion Program partnership has pioneered a successful and innovative delivery model to provide a team of software testers working with HPE’s market leading testing methods and tools. HPE looks forward to continuing the partnership, with continued support from Minister for Human Services Stuart Robert, who is committed to identifying further opportunities to provide meaningful employment to people with ASD.

“The Australian Department of Human Services is the perfect client for continuing the development of this partnership” says Michael Fieldhouse, HPE’s Account Executive. “The benefits for Australians as well as DHS’ investment in service delivery improvement means a win for everyone”.

Continuation of the initiative has meant HPE and Specialist People Foundation working with state peak bodies for autism as well as others in the wider autism community to identify potential candidates in their state. The partnership has its sights firmly set on continuing the success of the Adelaide and Brisbane delivery model in other areas of Australia, including Canberra commencing in January.

## Hewlett Packard Enterprise

Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE) is a recognised market leader in IT testing tools and services and this has made an ideal partnership for the innovative thinking from Department of Human Services and the Specialist People Foundation. HPE brought Specialist People Foundation’s unique employment concept to Australia by leveraging HPE’s existing Testing Centre of Excellence in Adelaide.

The partnership’s early successes with the program (the first project of its kind in Australia) has directly led to expanding and extending the first Specialist People Foundation engagement in the country beyond the original trained team in Adelaide.

“The Dandelion program aligns strongly with HPE’s global Living Progress program, the company’s commitment to bringing people and technology together to benefit the wider society” HPE Managing Director Nick Wilson explained. “At HPE we believe diversity and inclusion create a competitive advantage, helping drive growth, productivity and innovation”.



**Australian Government**  
Department of Human Services

**SPECIALIST  
PEOPLE  
FOUNDATION**   
Enabling one million jobs

## Project progress

Specific milestones

### Jan 2015

Testing services commencement with DHS in Adelaide

### Sept 2015

Testing services commencement with DHS in Brisbane

### Jan 2016

A new Dandelion Team to commence services with DHS in Canberra

## Specialist People Foundation business model

The Specialist People Foundation's key tenet is to shift the focus from 'disability' and instead focus on an individual's 'special abilities'. Their vision is to enable one million jobs for people with autism and similar intellectual challenges by harnessing social entrepreneurship, corporate sector engagement and a global change in mind-set. This employment concept has been successfully implemented around the world in Denmark, USA, Canada, Ireland, U.K., Austria, Poland, Switzerland, Spain, Norway, Iceland and Germany and now Australia.

[www.specialistpeople.com](http://www.specialistpeople.com)

The Specialist People Foundation niche is 'new development' testing, or situations where the cost of setting up automated testing is too high or too complex. Customers using the Specialist People Foundation model prefer working with this over automated testing as they can discuss test findings and documentation; dialogue and feedback can be critical for business. Before the people selected through the program can become "billable" at client sites, individuals with appropriate combinations of skills need to be identified. Specialist People Foundation has developed a sophisticated model and intellectual property for the hiring methodology that HPE is implementing with Specialist People Foundation. The people with autism who are selected to work do not work full time and have special supervisory oversight based on their unique personal circumstances.

Specialist People Foundation founder Thorkil Sonne said the foundation received "countless requests from families affected by autism to bring the employment model here (Australia)" so this success and upcoming expansion left a positive impact on the Danish founder. "This collaboration has been outstanding and sets the example for the public, private and non-profit sector to make a difference in how society regards autistic people and similar challenges". The Foundation's continued success around the world with employment for the disabled workforce ultimately led to the inception of the Dandelion Program with DHS and HPE in Australia. The program's floral logo, the inspiration for the name 'Dandelion Program' itself being a tribute to the Specialist People Foundation and their business model as the partnership continues to utilise global expertise in Australia.

## Project Challenges and Value

One of the project challenges involves expectations. Stereotyping is an inherently negative practice and the new stereotype of autistic people as 'brainiacs' endowed with quirky super minds is as misguided as the old assumption that autistic people are mentally disabled.

This is of primary concern to the program and as a result the project's hiring methodology incorporates a four week assessment to positively identify individuals who have the right mix of skills, aptitude and qualities. This typically results in one in six individuals being offered a position. With such a high degree of unemployment amongst people with autism, the value of this approach is creating an environment and business model that not only seeks to integrate people with autism into the work force, but actually seeks out and leverages their special abilities. This enables people with autism to regain their independence, reduces their reliance on carers and family and dependency on government payments.

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