

# JOYFUL WORK JOYFUL LEARNING

## HOTEL ETICO: TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH WORK AND INDEPENDENCE

### PRELIMINARY RESEARCH INSIGHTS REPORT



HOTEL ETICO  
A U S T R A L I A

PREPARED BY  
Dr Madalyn Scerri  
Dr Anita Manfreda

Centre for Organisational Change and Agility  
| Torrens University Australia

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## THE PROJECT

Hospitality and tourism researchers at BMIHMS @ TUA in the Centre for Organisational Change and Agility have partnered with Hotel Etico to provide an evidence-based foundation for expanding and sustaining inclusive employment. This research highlights the real and transformative impact of Hotel Etico's model, reinforcing the need for continued investment in programs that create meaningful opportunities for people with disability.

### Research Partnership

Hotel Etico is a multi-awarded leader in supporting people with disability (PwD) to achieve independence through meaningful work. BMIHMS @ TUA, a globally recognised leader in innovative hospitality education, is uniquely positioned to research and support inclusive employment through its expertise in industry training, hands-on learning, and commitment to social impact. The partnership was initiated in 2021.

### Research Focus: Meaningful Training and Employment for PwD

This exploratory, scoping study examined Hotel Etico's Independence Program, a social enterprise initiative providing employment and training for PwD in hospitality. Using a participatory research approach, the study included multiple stakeholders of the program to examine how inclusive employment fosters skill development, workplace integration, and career pathways.

Our research provides key insights into how Hotel Etico's model fosters skill development, facilitates long-term employment transitions, and contributes to a shift in industry perceptions about the capabilities of PwD. The impact of this approach is evident in the personal growth of trainees and positive feedback from trainees, families and industry partners.

### FINDINGS HIGHLIGHT HOW THE PROGRAM:

- Equips trainees with essential hospitality skills.
- Enhances confidence and workplace readiness.
- Facilitates transition into mainstream employment.
- Demonstrates the need for industry-wide collaboration to support inclusive hiring practices.

### METHODOLOGY

Interviews with 33 participants



Field observations over 6 months



35 participant-generated images



Participants: Trainees, Trainees' Families, Trainers, Hotel Etico Leaders, Industry Leaders/Employers

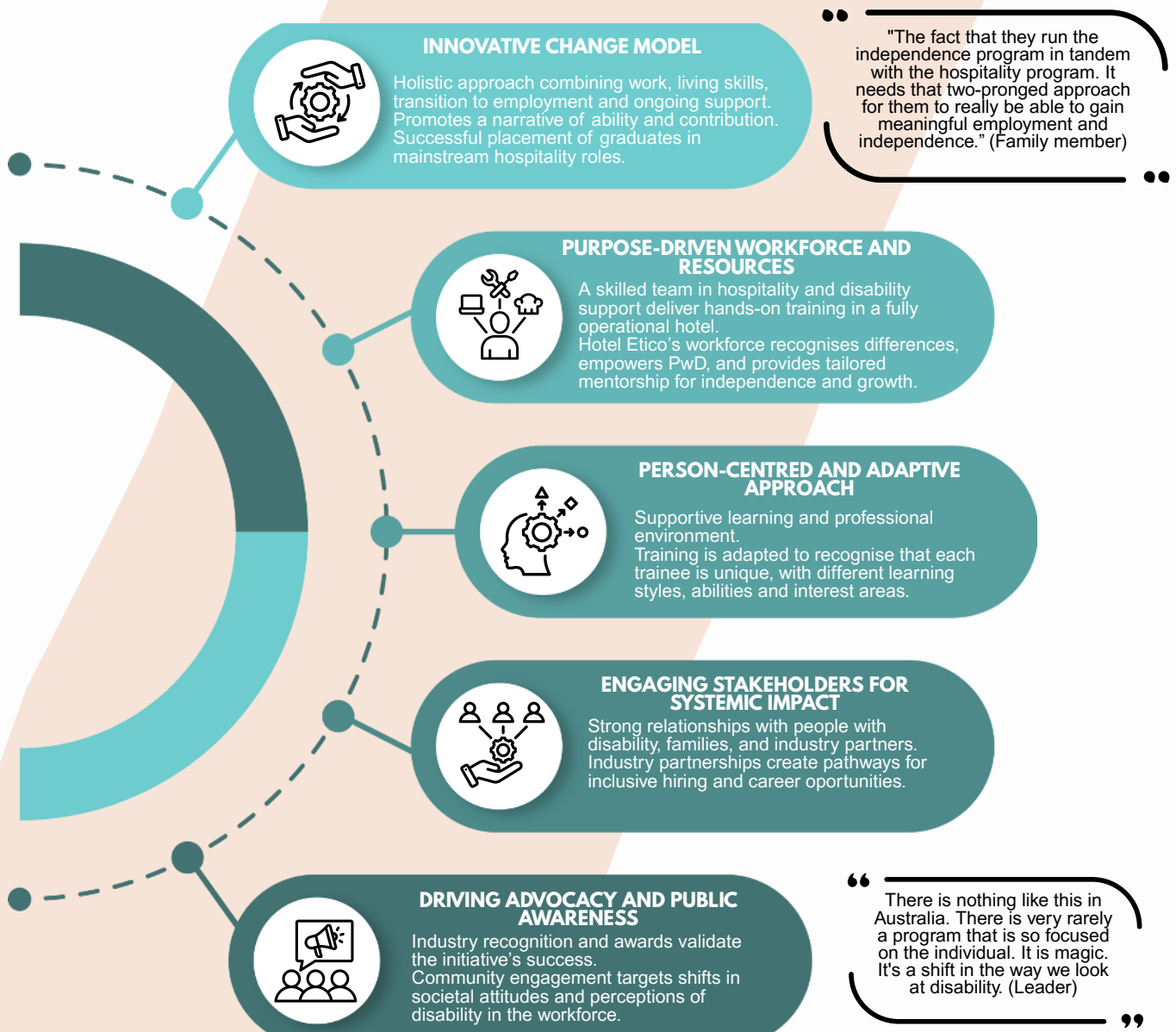


# REDEFINING INCLUSION – THE SOCIAL INNOVATION BEHIND HOTEL ETICO’S SUCCESS

Hotel Etico is redefining employment for people with disability by providing an innovative pathways to meaningful and sustainable careers. Unlike traditional programs, its model integrates real employment experience with long-term skill development, blending hospitality training with independence-building support.

Through hands-on training, transition assistance, and industry collaboration, trainees gain the confidence, skills, and workplace readiness needed to thrive. At the same time, Hotel Etico challenges systemic barriers, shifts industry perceptions, and promotes more inclusive hiring practices, demonstrating the value of a diverse workforce while fostering long-term change in the hospitality sector and beyond.

The following key success factors highlight what makes this approach effective and sustainable. Together they make the Hotel Etico model scalable and replicable.





# TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

Hotel Etico's impact extends beyond employment, transforming the lives of people with disabilities by building confidence, fostering independence, and empowering full workforce participation. Through structured training and hands-on experience, trainees not only develop technical skills but also gain the independence and self-assurance needed to navigate professional and social environments.

By providing an inclusive and supportive workplace, Hotel Etico empowers individuals to take ownership of their careers, challenge limitations, and establish a true sense of belonging in their workplaces and communities. Many trainees experience true workplace belonging for the first time.

“ She's learned so much while she's been up there, both from an independent point of view and the skills of just being able to do more for herself around the house and the skills that she's gained as far as being able to get a job in the hospitality industry and her confidence has shopped through the roof. (Family member) ”

“ To see her now, it is a complete turnaround. She's taking orders now, she's actually going up to tables and ordering well and doing a bill by herself, which if you saw her when she first started, she would not even talk to anyone. (Leader) ”

## ECONOMIC

- Engagement in meaningful work.
- Opportunity to earn an equal income through open employment.
- Development of transferrable employment and independence skills.
- Stronger sense of future aspirations and career goals

“ I like everything. Working with... people and with all the others in this program and all the support workers here...And it's good money...When I graduate from Hotel Etico I'd like to work in a cafe. (Trainee) ”

## SOCIAL

- Increased confidence in expressing themselves and interacting with others.
- Strengthened social connections with others.
- Enjoyment interacting with customers.
- Increased communication and interpersonal skills.

“ I've been happy here. Learn new things, new tricks...and make new friends here. (Trainee) ”

## IMPACT ON TRAINEE WELL-BEING

“ I like learning...I like the casual, real way...I like going [to] do something for myself. (Trainee) ”

## PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Sense of belonging.
- Formation of professional identity.
- Sense of agency and purpose.
- Support with reducing anxiety by building trainee knowledge and competencies, and offering a supporting and caring environment.

“ It makes me happy...more independent. (Trainee) ”

## EMOTIONAL

- Happiness, joy, and pride in their achievements.
- Enjoying work experiences and learning.



# LEARNING FROM HOTEL ETICO

## INSIGHTS FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION

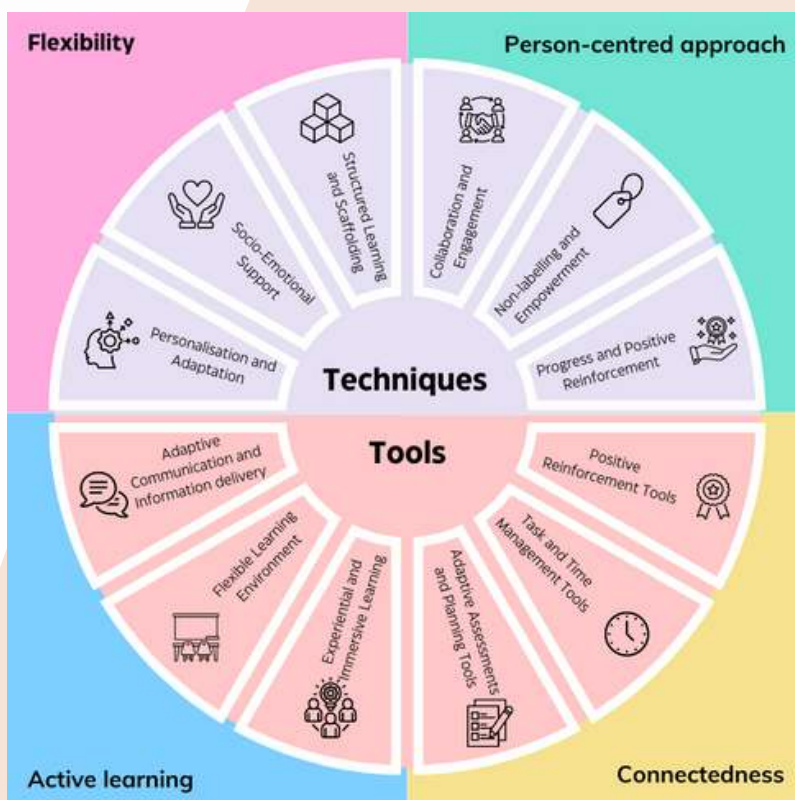
Hotel Etico's success provides valuable insights for improving inclusive education and vocational training. Translating these best practices can guide educators and industry leaders in:

- Implementing individualised learning tailored to diverse abilities.
- Embedding work-integrated learning opportunities.
- Adopting a strengths-based approach that shifts focus from disability to capability.
- Providing mentorship and adaptive support to ensure long-term employment success.

## INSIGHTS FOR THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

The hospitality industry is progressing toward inclusive employment, but challenges remain. Insights from Hotel Etico's model demonstrate the importance of:

- Systemic change – Acknowledging and tackling employment barriers at their root to create equitable opportunities.
- Supportive work environments – Strengthening work, learning and development frameworks to foster long-term success.
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration – Engaging stakeholders to co-create social value and drive inclusive practices in the industry, workplace and community.
- Learning from Hotel Etico's model – Leveraging evidence-based insights to inform inclusive employment strategies and practices.



### Inclusive Training and Education Toolkit

This toolkit consolidates key insights, recommendations, and actionable strategies derived from the study's findings, offering practical guidance and resources for educators, administrators, and industry partners to effectively support the training, education, and transition to employment of PwD in Hospitality, Tourism, and Events.

Toolkit and associated guidelines are currently in drafting.



## CONCLUSION

“ We are wholeheartedly here...We help them with the transition, we help them with the training, we help them with employment, and then we don't disappear when we employ them either. (Leader) ”

Hotel Etico provides a working model of inclusive employment in hospitality, showing that person-centred training, work integration and transition support, and industry collaboration can create long-term career pathways for people with disabilities.

This research provides an evidence-based support for the effectiveness of Hotel Etico's approach in fostering skills, independence, and industry-wide change.

Scaling and adapting this model can further drive inclusive workforce development, ensuring that people with disability have equitable access to sustainable employment opportunities.

## NEXT STEPS

- Expanding research on long-term employment outcomes for PwD.
- Scaling inclusive employment models in the hospitality industry.
- Co-developing a practical toolkit for hospitality educators and trainers to optimise education and training practices.
- Strengthening industry partnerships to advance disability inclusion.

### Contact Information

For more information, please contact:

Dr. Madalyn Scerri

Centre for Organisational Change and Agility, Torrens University Australia

Email: [madalyn.scerri@torrens.edu.au](mailto:madalyn.scerri@torrens.edu.au)

Website: <https://www.torrens.edu.au/research/research-institutes/coca>