

Anne Cazar - Host (00:17):

Today we're speaking about rethinking your ideas of the human services sector. We're joined by Jodi Schmidt, who is the CEO of human services skills organisation. So, welcome Jodi and I thought we'd start by asking you the question. Can you explain what we mean by and define what the human services industry is? Or did it used to be called something different?

Jodi Schmidt (00:55):

Well Anne, the human services sector, I guess we'd call it, is an aggregation of a number of different sectors that operate in what we might call person centered services. There includes a range of services, including age care, disability services, veterans' affairs, allied health and early childhood education and care. In many instances, I guess we talk about it in a broader sense as health and social assistance, or health and community services. But as these services progress in terms of the technology they use and the way in people, the way in which people want to consume these services, they're increasingly human centered services and so human services seems like a great collective term and one that's growing popularity when we refer to these types of sectors.

Anne Cazar - Host (01:50):

Right? So, I think what we're talking about is the fact that about 5 or 10 years ago, we never used to refer to them as human services sector. They were all probably a conglomeration of all these different industry areas that have now been brought under one global umbrella as well. So, I think that probably is an indication as well about the importance that this area and this sector is now forming in Australia, but around the world. So, before we go in and start to maybe talk about some of the career paths and everything like that, I was wondering if you could tell me about the human services skill's organisation. Why was it formed and what was it in response to?

Jodi Schmidt (02:28):

So, we were formed as an initiative of the Australian government, but we were formed to represent employers. So, we are an employer owned body. My board of directors are CEOs of human services organisations. And our charter is to work collaboratively with the human services sectors to make that there's a shared understanding of the workforce requirements they have in terms of workers, but also the skills that are needed to make sure that we're delivering great services to Australians through the variety of sectors that we just talked about. And there is so many skills and occupations and pathways and jobs that you can have in these sectors, it is really, really broad, and so it's an important piece of work for us to make sure that we're communicating clearly to prospective job seekers, to those who are skilling towards and looking for rewarding careers and ensuring that it's a well understood sector for all that it can offer workers.

Anne Cazar - Host (03:29):

If we could just maybe talk about some of the jobs and the careers perceptions versus reality at the moment. Can we, first of all, talk about how this sector has actually now changed. If we go back 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, maybe how it's term in terms of the actual skills needed, the people employed and the career path. I know this is a huge question. So, if we break it down into maybe how it has actually changed and where are the changing skills needs, could we have a bit of a talk about that?

Jodi Schmidt (04:00):

Sure, so if we think about 5, 10 years for ourselves, our lives are changing significantly and the way in which we undertake our lives and the services that we might use change as well. And so, in terms of health and social assistance, which is, you know, known as one of the biggest growth areas of employment in this country, and we see huge numbers required in these sectors in the coming years and the next five years alone, the growth in these sectors are expected to be double any other sector. And when we talk about human services 5, 10 years ago, age care was represented by residential age care and increasingly what we're finding is that, for people who are ageing, it is better for them in most instances to age in their home and so therefore they're consuming services in homes, so we talk about home care services. We will know that the national disability insurance scheme started to come into being about five years ago, and that gave control to people with a disability to creating their own care plans and care plans in most instances are about enablement of people to participate and to make the best of their lives with their disability and so there's a, a huge array of services that available to people with a disability, for their enablement, for instance. Similarly with return soldiers or veterans who have served our country, there's a range of services that they use in order to make sure that they're getting the best out of their lives. In health settings, allied health assistance are helping physiotherapists and speech therapists and occupational therapists in a range of different ways for people who might be injured and doing rehabilitation or recuperation. There are examples of all human services type arrangements.

Anne Cazar - Host (05:56):

One of the main things is the idea that the scope of work in a sector and where it actually is all going, and a lot more of the priorities that are coming into it have just exploded in terms of career paths and new ideas about where people can go and where they can start. So, it's a really interesting thing, through the research and through the reports and the work that you've done in trying to generate the interest in the career path and make this an area that people want to enter into, what have been some of the perceptions about people, about some of the jobs or what jobs were like in the, in the past, in terms terms of, you know, where they led to, or what they did. Could you give us any information on that at all?

Jodi Schmidt (06:43):

I guess focus often goes when you think of these roles and these particular sectors to providing quite personal services to individuals and of course that is part of the role, but larger of the role and different roles that are needed in the sectors are as broad as you can possibly think of. From security, to cleaners, to domestic services, to chefs that are required in order to feed participants in clients, to maintenance contractors, to landscaping and a range of other services that are consumed here. And then of course there is individual support, assistance with shopping and undertaking tasks that may be difficult for some of the participants, to learning about technology and how to use technology in an effective way, their, their services that individuals use to participate in the community and in life in a way that perhaps they're not able to do so without assistance. And then of course, as you move through a range of careers and gain skills in these areas, there are health assistance roles and nursing roles that you can grow into, into other allied health roles that I started to talk about before.

Anne Cazar - Host (08:04):

So, what amazes me is the scope of jobs that I don't think a lot of people, young people coming out of school people who are looking for, what do I do next? I don't think they've even thought about the scope of what is actually possible in this area. So, I was probably thinking in terms of that, what are, what are the industries, or what are the sectors looking for? And I don't mean let's not look at a

stereotype of, you know, what does the person look like, who works there. What are some of the skills, or what sort of people would be really attracted to coming into these roles? Could we talk about that?

Jodi Schmidt (08:41):

Yeah, so these are people centered roles. So, people who enjoy being around people, enjoy helping people or providing support to people, other things that people talk about. But in addition to that, it's a range of soft skills, problem solving, entertaining, providing hospitality, social skills, a range of skills that we all use every day in our lives with the people that we love or in our family or friends, are inevitably the role that you play when you are providing support or services in a person-centered way. It is about respect and integrity, and also from learning from each other, while you're undertaking a particular service delivery. So, it is human interaction, I guess, and therefore it really reinforces while we're calling them human services. In addition to that, obviously there's a set of skills that need to be developed by individuals in that regard and they relate to understanding the regulation that sits around these sectors, to some extent and compliance, respectful people of all types, diversity, cultural understanding, and a range of other skills that would be contextualised to a particular event or service that's being delivered at any given point in time. So, it's both a social interaction, a developmental and support role and one where you are also undertaking tasks at a critical to assisting the client or participant.

Anne Cazar - Host (10:19):

Yeah. One of the things I think that just in our conversations and conversations are having in the world, that your client base or the client base in the human services sector is incredibly varied, it's incredibly diversified. And my understanding is one of the key things is that we actually need people working in the industry that actually reflects that diverse, that diverse clientele. So, traditionally it might have been seen, if you talk about childcare or some of the nursing or some of the aged care, that it was predominantly possibly, a female position, would that be right in saying that the complete needs have changed or there has been a complete movement away from that area?

Jodi Schmidt (11:07):

I think we've all experienced that there were occupations that have been historically biased to one gender or another and I think it's true in human services that you're talking about a majority of women working in these sectors. Having said that it's an extremely attractive and more and more men are coming to the sectors and I think really, we need balance in our, in our organisations we should really reflect the community in which we live and work in. And so, I don't think that gender is particularly important here, in the same way that you said that this isn't a particularly age based occupation. You are right. young people with a disability often say that they prefer to have support workers who are also young people, they have more in common, they'll get on better, they'll be able to understand each other in a greater way and I think that that's a good choice that a participant has and a great way to make sure that the services are meeting the client's needs. I think also when we think about age care, we think about people who are perhaps getting towards the palliative or clinical part of care. When in fact all of us will start to prepare for our ageing by over 55, we talk over 55 as the start of that journey. And as we own that, how we choose to age as our ageing population is the case, we can then start to choose the services that we need as we choose not to or perhaps have difficulty undertaking certain things. And so, I think that it's as important for young people to enter age care or home care service as it is for perhaps more mature age reskillers or those who wish to remain in the workforce past perhaps retirement from their original occupations can gain employment in these areas.

Anne Cazar - Host (13:09):

So thanks for that, Jodi, I think that whole idea about this career path and the fact that the roles that we are talking about now, also may require a specialist training or that the qualifications or the skills training that is needed for it, be it within a vocational setting, an industry setting, a university setting, has actually also then done wonders for the industry, because it's now being recognised as a really clear area that you can have a career and grow into it and stay within it, you know. It doesn't mean you have to train initially, I'm assuming in community services, you could come from a finance background, you could come from a sports background, you can come from a health background or whatever. And that transitioning into the industry is just as important as developing all your training or your skills within that human services, maybe qualifications and that. There's a lot of, a lot of opportunities. I actually wanted to talk about Jodi, maybe some of those new interesting career paths, or where can people go. If we've got a young person who's coming to us and saying, or somebody in their twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, we'll just keep going, saying where they want to go. How do we inspire them to say that look, it's, you know, this is, this is some of the path, this is where you can actually go? Do you have any examples of maybe career paths that hadn't been thought of, or haven't really been explored a lot? Would you be to help us with that?

Jodi Schmidt (14:45):

I think that pathways is a theme that we're talking about now, as we understand that once upon a time, we were all encouraged to find a job and then largely stay in those jobs for a long period of time. The world of work these days, I think last time I heard demographers talking, we will have somewhere between seven and 11 jobs in the same way that we'll have, or seven 11 careers, in the same way that we probably move house more than we used to. And so, in the training and skilling world, we start to talk about what are the underpinning skills that are applicable across sectors and what is the time and the cadence of when individuals are interested in different roles. So, if you take the impact of COVID on the economy, we saw unfortunately, a lot of people displaced from their jobs, but those people, whether they were in frontline service in retail, or whether they were in, you know, hospitality or perhaps travel and tourism, there are underpinning skills that are required in customer service, in solving problems, in providing support to people that are transferable. There's also those skills that are absolutely critical to these sectors as well, in terms of regulation and compliance, workplace health and safety. They're all skills that with contextualisation to a new sector, this being human services where we're talking, people can transition into the jobs and you'll be surprised how many similar competencies are transferable to other sectors. But of course, there's a range of entry points. You can enter at an entry level coming out of school, you could have your skills recognised and you could have credit given against qualifications in perhaps community services, individual support, or allied health, and then undertake gap training or skill sets in the workplace while you're working in order to support the development of those skills and boost another career path, for instance.

Anne Cazar - Host (16:53):

Jodi, we were talking about some of the stats coming through what is going to be needed by the human services sector in the next, say 10, 20 or 30 years. What are some of the stats that are now coming to light?

Jodi Schmidt (17:10):

So, I think in the next five years, it's anticipated that personal care workers will be in high demand. We expect that we need up to 250,000 additional employees in the next five years across the human services sectors. I think in addition to that, we always hear about shortages in terms of nurses and allied health professionals and of course, assistants that work to that, whether it be enrolled nurses, assistants

in nursing or allied health assistants. In the family and community services, similar type roles that might be called community support workers or client care advisors are required and they have different pathways in terms of the underpinning skills. And, but they have a range of shared skills that means that people can move between these roles with a little bit of upskilling.

Anne Cazar - Host (18:07):

It sounds like where you are, and the industry is actually looking for people with life skills, people who can, can come in, take those things that they've learned in other industries, and then apply it to their clientele base here gives them a greater understanding of where it's going. I love that title, that client care advisor, because to me that is, it actually epitomises how the industries are actually changing isn't it? Where they're being recognised as for the profession that they're actually, that they're actually in. I wanted to then, maybe then, so taking on that, if you are looking for doing some work in the human services sector, have you got any recommendations for people maybe who are career advisors or parents listening to here, what would be some of your suggestions to get started in here or to move into it? How do you, how does it all come about? What would your recommendations be in that space?

Jodi Schmidt (19:05):

Well, there's a lot of activity right now around attracting people to these sectors. So, you'll see a fair amount of social campaigning, both from government and from employers looking to share more details around what a career in these sectors might look like. In addition, there are a range of school programs where skilling programs in schools are being undertaken to lead people on that journey. The human services skills organisation are going to be working with organisations like year 13 to attract young people to the sector and to educate them about what's possible as an example. But similarly, employers are often undertaking expose or job fairs, and a range of mechanisms are being put in place to raise people's awareness around the opportunities and to bring them and to have them see inside these organisations. The other thing is that there's referral programs for people who work in these sectors that are increasingly becoming popular, because the best people to recruit people are people who are already doing it.

Anne Cazar - Host (20:14):

Absolutely.

Jodi Schmidt (20:15):

Similarly, you see community-based organisations like the YMCA really investing in attracting people to sport and recreation jobs that might move to children, early childhood education and care, that also might enable a kind of portfolio career for people at different points in their lives, where they might undertake some age care, some disability care, some sport and rec, some early childhood development and care. It is really up to you what sort of career you want to; you want to take in these sectors and what you can build out of it

Anne Cazar - Host (20:54):

In the last few years. But if we talk about some of the things that are coming up in the industry, is there anything there that maybe in terms of some of the programs that we're, they're now putting in place, or some of the ideas that you are speaking with industry, that you could share with us in regard to, you know, getting us ready for the future? And I'm assuming that things will be different. I mean, I think it's welcome to life, isn't it? You know what we were doing five years ago we're not doing. Could you talk to

us maybe about some of those programs or some of the initiatives or stuff that industry's looking at doing now?

Jodi Schmidt (21:26):

Well, I think research is telling us what works best for people in terms of making the best outta their lives. And so, the obvious one, and I talked about it earlier, is that the longer that you can stay in your community, engaging in community and in your house, the more healthier and the greater wellbeing you have as an individual. And so that's leading the way in which service deliveries happening. If you add, in addition to that, and, you know, technology is affecting every part of our lives, it's inevitable to some extent, there's a range of assistance technologies that are coming and being experimented with in different service delivery, whether it be the use of smart devices in terms of collecting information, storing information, or creating connectivity between humans. There's also a range of other services that help to predict requirements, to have senses that identify when individuals might need particular help, a range of companion robots and, or other emotional supports that might be aided by technology, that I think will be used to assist in the delivery of services. Having said that I don't think we'll ever replace and I think the research is bearing this out, the importance of human contact in communities that help us remain healthier and happier throughout our lives and so this workforce is absolutely critical to the ongoing happiness factor, if you would say for Australians.

Anne Cazar - Host (23:05):

And that human element is so critical and it's never gonna be lost, even if it's having somebody who's just using that automation or the robotics or whatever, just to improve that care, that the scope is or the capability or capacity of where you go in this sector is huge. So, Jodi, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to talk with you. is there anything that you'd like to say before we finish off?

Jodi Schmidt (23:37):

If you're interested in a career in the human services, please pursue it. I'm sure that it will be rewarding, it will be challenging at times, but it'll build your skills and your understanding of yourself and how you participate in the broader community. We'll continue to be here to support individuals who want to pursue that and to ensure that we can provide you with the skills that you need to be successful in those jobs.

Anne Cazar - Host (24:03):

Great. So, thank you very much. thank you for being with us, for this webinar. We do appreciate all your insights, and I think it's critically important that we have these discussions in regards to rethinking and challenging people's perceptions about jobs and career paths. So, we'll leave it there at the moment. We thank everybody for listening in and for watching, if you do have any questions that you'd like to ask, you're more than welcome, I won't say ring Jodi, because you'll probably get inundated, but the human services skills organisation has a fantastic website and they're talking about their projects and their news and some of the initiatives that are going. So, farewell for now and we look forward to seeing you again. Goodbye.

Jodi Schmidt (24:51):

Thanks, Anne. All the best.