CREATING WAVES FOR CHARITY

australia’s national disability magazine

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In this issue: Our 20-page employment feature | News | NDIS | Opinion | Travel | Music

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I’m delighted to be the new editor of Link magazine, taking over from Rebecca Somerfield who has done a fabulous job editing the magazine over the past three years.

Link has been serving the disability sector for more than 34 years and it’s a privilege to take the reins at a time when the magazine continues to grow, both in print and online, and through its weekly email newsletter and Facebook presence.

With one in five Australians reporting living with disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015), disability touches nearly everyone’s lives in some way.

Maybe you work in the sector, maybe you care for someone who does, or maybe, like me, you have a family member with disability. Whether you’re impacted directly by disability, work in the sector, or just want to be informed, Link shines a light on the latest issues impacting all of us.

In this edition of Link, we look at, if one in five people have a disability, why isn’t the medical profession better represented by doctors with disabilities? We catch up with Dr Dinesh Palipana from campaign group Doctors with Disabilities on breaking down the barriers.

We also meet Brisbane man Michael Powell, who has completed one of the world’s most gruelling challenges by swimming the English Channel, and meet Victorian mum Mandy McCracken who is back on the bike thanks to a Tikkun Olam Makers (TOM) makeathon.

Our feature this month delves into Employment. We talk to disability enterprises involved in the My Job Counts campaign, as the Fair Work Commission is set to decide how wages for workers with disability are determined in February 2018.

Our Contribution comes from Melbourne woman Donna Tsironis, titled ‘My husband is my carer’, which I’m sure many will identify with and enjoy reading. Our Travel Contributor Craig Sheather tells us the best places to see in Hong Kong, while in other travel news, a world-first resort for people with spinal cord injury has opened in New South Wales.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition. The Link team wishes all readers, advertisers and supporters a happy festive season and a safe and prosperous new year.
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Imagine a world where everyone has a disability, and those that don’t are called ‘without speciality’.

Jeremy the Dud is a short film partnership between genU (formerly Karingal St Laurence) and Robot Army Productions.

The 30-minute comedy – which can be viewed online via Facebook – was launched in Geelong, Victoria, last month. It is intended to lift the lid on disability and create substantial awareness in a fun and meaningful way.

Marketing and Public Relations Manager for genU, Ben Flynn, said the film “flips the world on its head” to create awareness, showcasing people with disability and touching on issues of discrimination and disadvantage – while having a lot of fun along the way.

“Jeremy the Dud is a comedy set in a world where everyone has a disability, and those that don’t are treated with the same prejudice, stigma and condescending attitudes that people with disabilities face in our own society,” Ben said.

“We hope it breaks through some of the discrimination and sensitivities that exist in a fun way and we hope people from all angles can enjoy the film for what it is, and that’s a comedy. Comedy breaks down barriers in such a great way.”

Ben said the film arose from genU wanting to do something big and create awareness about disability in a whole new manner.

“We teamed up with Ryan Chamley from Robot Army to come up with this concept where the world discriminates those ‘without speciality’,” he said.

The concept is one that has really hit the mark, striking a chord with people all around the world.

A Jeremy the Dud trailer, just one minute and 45 seconds long, was posted on Facebook on August 17 – and within 48 hours had gone viral.

The trailer has had more than 4.5 million views, and a massive 46,000 shares. This response is purely organic, with no paid advertising.

“We were blown away by the response to the trailer on Facebook … it was shared by the National Disability Insurance Agency, Olympic Committees all around the world, and organisations and individuals who just loved the concept,” Ben said.

“An important part of our concept was creating an opportunity for our communities, our friends to be part of it. We’re really proud of the film and proud of the opportunities it gave to people to be involved, with about 50 genU clients involved in the filming.

“Most of all we’re proud because we’re creating awareness in a way that’s so different to the historical narrative. Jeremy the Dud is a modern celebration of people’s ability.”

facebook.com/jeremythedud

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An interactive workshop program is inspiring high school students to consider a career in the disability sector.

projectABLE is led by people with disability, visiting students from Years 10, 11 and 12 in schools all around Australia, and it’s achieving some great results – including 80 per cent of students saying they feel inspired to think about a career in disability after completing a workshop.

More than 7,500 students have completed the workshops held in schools around the country from Whyalla, South Australia, to Gosford, New South Wales.

Surveys of the program have shown:

- 18 per cent of teachers know of one or more students now working in the disability sector.
- 45 per cent of teachers have had one or more students go on to do something related to disability advocacy, such as volunteering, community work or related study.
- 79 per cent of teachers believe their students were inspired to consider a career after attending a workshop.

projectABLE was developed by National Disability Service (NDS). NDS Student Programs Manager Jillian Black said the program had received outstanding feedback and acknowledged social impact.

“projectABLE is a response to the workforce shortage in the disability sector. There’s an anticipated 70,000 new jobs that will be created in the disability care sector by 2019 as a result of the full rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme,” Mrs Black said.

“The program inspires students to apply their passions, skills and abilities to enrich their lives and the lives of others by pursuing a rewarding career in the disability and community service sectors.

“The half-day workshops are free for schools and are led by people with disability. Our presenters talk honestly and openly about their disability and are chosen for their ability to connect with students. It is this connection, coupled with honesty and humour, that enables students to learn about living with disability, the importance of social inclusion and what they can do to make a difference.”

Mrs Black said there is a huge variety of career options in the disability and community care sector for young people about to embark on their working lives – from support workers and nurses, to social workers and advocates, marketing professionals to business managers, and so much more.

“Our aim is to build awareness of the disability and community care sector and the potential career paths available,” Mrs Black said.
“Before we do that however, we focus on disability awareness. We steer students away from the cliché notion of disability being brave or inspirational, or even disability as a tragedy. We hope students come to realise from our workshops that people with disability are just as diverse as they are, with a range of hopes and dreams, and a range of things going on in their lives beside their disability.”

Students participate in hands-on activities, group exercises, and down-to-earth discussion with people with disability, as well as questions and answers with workers in the sector. They also learn ways to promote positive perceptions of people with disability and the importance of inclusion and participation for people with disability in the community.

“We challenge students to move away from the idea that people working in the sector are angels or saints,” Mrs Black said.

“Working in the sector is not about that. It’s about being an ambassador for the rights and dignity of others. If you have a strong sense of social justice, then the disability sector is a great place to work.”
Dragon voice solutions

Dragon is a voice recognition software that converts spoken words into text to help users write.

Dragon is hands-free and allows people with disability, mobility or dexterity impediments to command a computer and turn thoughts into written words.

The software enables users to create and send emails, surf the internet, and control desktop and web applications simply by speaking. Dragon also enables the creation of reports, correspondence and spreadsheets through voice command.

Derek Austin, Dragon Business Manager, Asia Pacific, said Nuance had long been committed to helping people with disability to improve their quality of life through assistive technology.

“The NDIS approval of Dragon reaffirms our continued commitment to providing assistive technology and allows us to increase awareness of the benefits of this solution,” Mr Austin said.

As part of its continued commitment to the sector, Nuance has released a dedicated Dragon solution for the PC and Mac called Dragon Accessibility.

“We are really pleased to be able to offer a tailored and high quality communication solution such as Dragon Accessibility because we know that Dragon can make a difference to the lives of people with disability,” Mr Austin said.

Dragon Accessibility is available through Nuance’s Dragon partners and accessibility specialists.

australia.nuance.com

Parallel Parks is Australia’s first Virtual Reality (VR) project that will enable people with disability to access previously inaccessible parts of Australia’s national parks and feel immersed in nature.

Social enterprise New Horizons has set its sights on unlocking the potential of VR to foster greater connection, inclusivity, and access to the outdoors.

Parallel Parks is already 12 months in development, with a campaign launched on non-profit crowdfunding platform Enablr to raise the funds required to shoot additional VR footage and co-design the delivery of the product with people with disability.

To showcase the potential of VR, Sydney’s Martin Place was recently transformed into a virtual park event. Members of the public could explore four of Australia’s finest park areas – Uluru-Kata Tjuta, the Great Barrier Reef, Kangaroo Island and the River Murray – through a VR demo.

NSW Government Parliamentary Secretary, Scott Farlow said Parallel Parks showcased the power of technology to remove barriers and improve access for people with disability.

“Community connection, inclusivity, and access to the outdoors are all key elements in creating a sense of wellbeing, and are fundamental to happiness and positive mental health,” Mr Farlow said.

Professor Rafael Calvo from the University of Sydney said VR holds great potential to improve wellbeing.

“VR allows anyone to be transported and experience worlds that would otherwise be out of reach,” Professor Calvo said.

www.parallelparks.com.au

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AT Chat launched

A team of people with disability are changing the way information is created and shared around Assistive Technology (AT) in a new initiative called AT Chat.

The development team of Danielle Loizou-Lake, Jocelyn Franciscus, Nick Passanisi and Zel Iscel, all people with disability, officially launched the online multimedia information service in October.

The peer developed project out of Western Australia aims to improve how people access information about AT using practical and engaging real life examples. AT is the term given to aids, equipment, a device or system under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The AT Chat Facebook page (@atchatwithus) releases ‘user led’ video content each week encouraging people with disability to see what is available for them to consider. This is supported by ‘Chatterbox’ a Facebook group to share knowledge and experience about AT.

Project lead Danielle Loizou-Lake said the content AT Chat creates demonstrates people with disability using their AT in everyday situations.

“We show people living their lives; at university, a local sporting club or trendy bar. It’s important to take the time to create content that shows people using a wide range of AT to support their interests … we know how important that is and the difference it can make,” Danielle said.

Danielle and Jocelyn both acquired spinal cord injuries in their 20s. They said the difficulties they faced sifting through the vast amount of information there is about AT inspired the initiative.

www.facebook.com/atchatwithus

Screen diversity

Western Australian screen funding and development organisation, Screenwest, has launched an action plan to help address a lack of diversity within the state’s screen industry, both on screen and behind the camera.

Screenwest Chair Janelle Marr said diversity was part of the contemporary community, yet the screen industry didn’t reflect this.

“To resonate with audiences, we need to reflect a diversity of experiences and perspectives,” Janelle said.

“Through the Screenwest Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan, Screenwest will implement a range of processes and activities to widen the talent pool and offer fairer access to the screen industry. We want to inspire greater creativity and authenticity, to introduce new voices and untold stories from across Western Australia, and to grow the audiences watching the content we support.”

A key action is the introduction of the new Screenwest Diversity Fund.

The Diversity Fund provides funding to producers, organisations and individuals to help overcome barriers that prevent community members from underrepresented groups from participating in professional screen industry activities.

www.screenwest.com.au
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STUDY ONLINE
DON’T GET MAD, GET MOVING

Gold Coast fitness guru Ashy Bines recently made headlines when she parked her car in a disability parking spot, later defending the move as acceptable because, ‘her gym has no members with disability.’

After a moment of disappointment, I considered Ms Bines’ statement and realised she is by no means alone in her assumptions around disability. The reality is, many people still believe if a disability isn’t visible and obvious to the passer-by in the street, it doesn’t exist. And that’s a problem.

I don’t believe there was any ill-intent behind Ms Bines’ comments, but there is certainly an opportunity for her words to act as a catalyst for conversation, so we may all become more educated and informed.

The truth is, disabilities can be both visible and invisible. Disabilities are not black and white; even people with the same disability can have vastly different experiences.

A disability can be something that a person lives with all day every day, or something that can affect them in different ways at different times.

Saying ‘no one here has a disability’ is particularly problematic, especially as many people with invisible disabilities choose not to disclose for fear of becoming the object of damaging stereotypes.

Ms Bines has a significant public platform for disseminating her messages, as do many other individuals in the media spotlight. And the issue is, when influential people make uninformed assumptions and comments, people listen.

We live in a time when words and phrases like ‘wheelchair-bound’, ‘suffering from’ and ‘victim of’ are still commonplace in the media. That needs to stop, now. These words serve to perpetuate the narrative that people with disability should be pitied. It says people with disability are always going to be at a disadvantage, never able to achieve as highly as others. And that’s just not true.

It’s up to everyone to educate themselves, and make sure they are part of moving society forward and levelling the playing field for people with disability. There is no shortage of resources and voices out there that will happily help you on this quest.

I’ve seen a lot of blame and shame in this whole ‘Ashy Bines’ saga, and I do understand where people are coming from. But rather than getting mad, let’s get moving. Let’s get moving on an educational journey to demonstrate that disability comes in many forms. And most importantly, demonstrating that disability does not mean ‘less’, it just means different. And different is good.

Bill Gamack has been CEO of disability employment not-for-profit EPIC Assist for four years. Bill has family experience with disability, and understands the challenges faced by people and families in seeking the services needed to achieve success.

By Bill Gamack, CEO, EPIC Assist
On display will be the latest in assistive technology, aids and equipment, as well as options for mobility, communication, travel services and lifestyle options. The Independent Living Expo is an event that welcomes all those involved in ensuring better outcomes for people with disability of all ages.

For more information phone 1300 789 845 or visit www.atsaindependentlivingexpo.com.au
The Invictus Games harness the power of sport to inspire recovery, support rehabilitation and generate respect and understanding for those who serve their country. Link meets Invictus Games competitor Jeff Wright.

Competing against the United States for the bronze medal in wheelchair rugby was a huge highlight for Jeff Wright in his first Invictus Games competition in Toronto, Canada, in September.

"It was a great match and we came close to knocking them over, but in the end we went down by five points and finished fourth," said Jeff, who lives in Townsville, Queensland.

"We missed out on the medal, but we earned a lot of respect from the top three teams, and coming that close to the US was a big improvement for the Aussies.

"There's this great photograph (on this page) of a US player rocketing through some Aussie defence, and guys like him inspire me to get stronger. I certainly feel that I've got unfinished business … to get even more competitive."

The word Invictus means ‘unconquered’. It embodies the fighting spirit of the wounded, injured and sick service personnel and what these tenacious men and women can achieve, post injury.

An initiative of HRH Prince Harry, the fourth Invictus Games in Toronto brought together over 550 serving
and former serving military personnel from 17 nations.

Australia’s Invictus Games team comprised 43 competitors in 11 disciplines, and the team returned home from Canada with 51 medals.

But to competitors like Jeff, the Invictus Games is more than medals, more than just sport – it’s about capturing hearts, challenging minds and changing lives.

Jeff joined the army in 1986 as a driver. He served in East Timor as an Operations Sergeant in 1999, and reached the rank of Warrant Officer before discharging in 2003. He said sport had played a big role in his rehabilitation following a training accident and a motorcycle accident.

“I sustained a knee injury in a training accident in 1998, and subsequent to that had a motorcycle accident in 2015 that I shouldn’t have survived,” he said.

“I became a paraplegic, had my face reconstructed, suffered vision loss and vocal cord damage. It’s certainly been an epic rehab journey for me.

“People at rehab in hospital suggested I try wheelchair sport. I didn’t think I’d be ready physically or mentally. But the first come and try night that I went to in Townsville, I fell in love straight away, I felt great and I guess I felt like I wasn’t disabled.

“We spend our life trying not to feel disabled – whether it’s how you dress, how you interact with people. With sport, you are just an athlete playing rugby or any other sport as a team, encouraging each other, and competing in a team environment – because that team environment can

Jeff Wright competed in wheelchair basketball (above) and wheelchair rugby (opposite page) at the Games.

be in short supply when you’re in a wheelchair.”

As well as wheelchair rugby, Jeff competed in wheelchair basketball at the Invictus Games, with the Aussies finishing fifth – to which Jeff said: “We beat the Kiwis which was good!”

Other highlights of the Games experience for Jeff included the training in the lead-up, particularly training camps held in New South Wales with international players; as well as “being treated like a rock star” with police escorts to competition venues in Toronto.

Jeff said he would recommend the Invictus Games to anyone who wants to use sport as a vehicle to support their rehabilitation.

Sydney will host the 2018 Invictus Games.

www.invictusgames2018.org
My carer

Why is it so hard for me to accept my husband becoming my ‘carer’? At times, I honestly feel like I’m a patient in a hospital or clinic of some sort being tended to. But I’m actually in the environment of my own home with my caring husband and wonderful son.

These thoughts swiftly pass through my mind every single day of my life. I still find it hard to absorb the fact that my adoring husband, the father of our child and my best friend, has taken on the selfless role of being my life-long carer. It can be so frustrating for me, yet so comforting at the same time.

I’ve had counselling over the years to work through my struggles of accepting my condition of Multiple Sclerosis (MS) but I still become emotional when I need his help with something. There are times I feel like it’s a patient / caretaker relationship instead of a wife / husband. When we got married, we both loved to go on holidays together, going out for a bite to eat and not really planning our days together by being carefree and spontaneous. Not once, did we both suspect anything like this would happen. But that’s life, isn’t it?

My life-changing moment

Ahhh, the day that changed my life. It was two to three days before Christmas, on a warm summer’s morning. My husband had already left for work and I was home alone. The house was so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. There were colourful decorations inside our home and a beautiful, glistening tree in our living room, in preparation for Christmas. I was looking forward to the festivities, the sumptuous, delicious food that our mums cooked and relaxing over the holiday season.

I leaped out of bed, put my robe on and begun walking down our hallway to get to the kitchen. But my body felt weird.... my legs were heavy and numb. I was numb from my chest down to my feet and pins and needles wrapped it all up. I’d never felt this way before. I looked all over my body to check whether anything had bitten me, for any rashes. I was trying to find something, answers as to why I was feeling this way. But no clues at all. Fast forward a few hours with a visit to a GP and my husband then ushered me to hospital.

I was completely stunned and frightened. How could I feel this way just a few days before one of my favourite times of the year? Instead
It’s one thing to show your love for someone when everything is going fine and life is smooth. But when the ‘in sickness and in health’ part kicks in and sickness does enter your lives, you’re tested. Your resilience is tested.

-Patti Davis

We have both become people that are more grateful for the simple and the mundane even though we sometimes have our absurd and chaotic moments. Our sense of humour allows us to override unjoyful moments and lift both our spirits. My husband and I may not be able to hold hands walking down the street together any longer, but we still manage to nurture each other by being warmly affectionate both emotionally and physically and leaving the lines of communication open. This has brought us closer together. I adore my carer, oops, my husband, as that’s what I prefer to think of him as!

Donna Tsironis, 44, lives in Melbourne with her husband George and son Nash, 12.

Got something to say? Email editor@linkonline.com.au or post on our Facebook page.
Q&A with the NDIA

Need help navigating the National Disability Insurance Scheme? Link asked the National Disability Insurance Agency to share the most common questions asked about the NDIS by people with disability, their carers and families, over the past two months. Here are the questions and answers.

I’m not sure how to start my plan? Who can help me?
Depending on your situation there are a range of people who can help you get started with your plan. It is expected that a majority of people will work with an Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) partner or Local Area Coordinator (LAC) throughout their journey with the NDIS. This includes accessing the NDIS, developing, starting and reviewing their individualised plan. For children aged zero to six years, ECEI Partners will tailor supports to a child’s individual needs and work directly with the family. LAC partners will work with those aged over seven to develop their NDIS plan, and support them to implement their plan including how to use the portal, connect with funded supports and begin to access services. LACs will also support people throughout their journey with the NDIS to monitor and review the participant’s progress regularly.

Is there any funding for NDIS participants to start a business?
No. But the NDIS does provide funding for participants to build their capacity that may enable them to create and run their own business. The NDIS funds reasonable and necessary supports that help a participant to reach their goals, objectives and aspirations. If you are considering growing your skills to start your own business, have a chat with your Planner or Local Area Coordinator (LAC) to work out ways to align your goals so that you plan can support you to do the things you want to do.

How long will my plan last and what is the process to have it reviewed?
Towards the end of your first year as an NDIS participant, you will be contacted to prepare for a review of your NDIS plan. Your plan review will be conducted by a NDIS representative such as an ECEI partner, LAC or NDIA planner, and you are welcome to bring a family member or support person with you. During your plan review, you will be able to provide feedback on what supports are working for you and how you are progressing in achieving your personal goals. You will also have the opportunity to explore and set new personal goals, building on your previous achievements. Plan reviews can be scheduled up to two years apart, depending on your personal circumstances and goals. If you know that your situation may change in the near future, such as your living arrangements or a planned move from school to work, your next plan review could be scheduled for up to 12 months’ time to make sure your supports best support your needs and goals.

Why do you post stories on social media that aren’t about the NDIS?
Talking about disability and the disability sector is part of the National Disability Insurance Agency's job. When the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Act was passed in 2013, the Federal Parliament gave the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) the job of delivering the NDIS, as well as (among other things) growing the disability sector in Australia, and building community awareness of disabilities and the everyday things
in our society that contribute to disability. That means a big part of the NDIA’s job is to contribute to and lead conversations about disability in Australia. This was written into the NDIS Act because by having these conversations, all Australians can help raise the level of awareness of disability in our communities.

If you want more information about the Scheme itself, we recommend signing up to the NDIS fortnightly eNewsletter at www.ndis.gov.au/news/subscribe

I’ve heard some people have received letters about advanced payments. What is it all about?

In June and July 2016 some self-managed participants experienced difficulties paying for supports when the new myplace portal was launched. These participants received an advance payment to help them pay for their supports. The NDIA now needs to acquit these advance payments. If you are affected by this you will be contacted by phone and mail to explain how the offsetting process will work. If your current plan has sufficient funds, we will offset the advanced payment within your current plan. If there is insufficient funds in your current plan to cover the offset amount, we will work with you on a solution to ensure you aren’t disadvantaged, such as offsetting the advance payment from future plan payments.

www.ndis.gov.au

Psychosocial disability: guide for mental health providers

A new guide developed jointly by the Australian Government and Flinders University will support mental health providers in making it easier for people with a psychosocial disability to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services, Jane Prentice, said community based mental health providers are at the front line of helping their clients’ access the scheme.

“For people with significant disability, the NDIS can be life changing – giving people the power to choose the support they need, when and where they need it,” Mrs Prentice said.

“Consultation with mental health providers has revealed a strong need to assist people with a psychosocial disability through the NDIS process.

“The guide, Accessing the NDIS, provides practical advice based on providers’ own experiences.

“The information helps simplify the NDIS requirements, such as explaining how clients can test their eligibility and meet NDIS criteria.

“The guide was field tested with the mental health sector, consumers, and carers to ensure it is helpful and easy to use.”

The Guide builds on work occurring in the National Disability Insurance Agency to improve pathways for people with psychosocial disability and work underway by the Productivity Commission and the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS.

To view Accessing the NDIS go to www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/mental-health/publications-articles
If one in five people in Australia have a disability, then why isn’t the medical profession better represented by doctors with disabilities? Link spoke to Dr Dinesh Palipana from campaign group Doctors with Disabilities on breaking down the barriers.
Dr Dinesh Palipana was halfway through his medical degree in 2010 when he had a car accident driving home. He was left fighting for his life in intensive care, with a fracture to his cervical vertebrae (C6/7) which made him a quadriplegic.

“Even in the ambulance on the way to hospital after the accident, I kept saying I wanted to go back to medical school no matter what,” he said.

Dr Palipana returned to Griffith University in 2015 and finished his degree, driven by his own determination and with encouragement from the University’s medical school.

This month Dr Palipana will finish his internship at Gold Coast University Hospital, having worked in the emergency department, obstetrics and gynaecology, and psychiatry, as well as working on research into spinal cord injury.

In his year as an intern, Dr Palipana said the reaction from patients to his disability has been mostly positive.

“I have to say that all the patients I’ve had the pleasure of working with, have been uniformly nonplussed by the spinal cord injury. They have been amazing,” he said.

His own experience working as a doctor with disability and the reaction from his patients prompted Dr Palipana to join forces with Dr Harry Eman from Melbourne, to set up the campaign group Doctors with Disabilities Australia. Together, they aim to become a support network for both aspiring and established doctors wanting to break down the barriers.

“I think our group opens up the dialogue for allowing doctors with disabilities to give their fullest to our communities,” Dr Palipana said.

“We want to provide input to bodies dealing with this issue, while sharing our experience with those following our path.”

Dr Palipana said in Australia, doctors and medical students with physical impairments face an uphill challenge with regards to being admitted to medical school and then seeking employment in the health system.

“Speaking from my experience as a medical student at Griffith University, I can say that the medical school there did everything to make my journey a success,” he said.

“There are several other medical schools in Australia that also take a positive approach to those with physical impairment.”

He said the Australian Health Practitioner Regulatory Authority and the Australian Medical Association have been “safe and reasonable with physical impairment”.

Photographs of Dr Dinesh Palipana are courtesy Griffith University.
On its website, Doctors with Disabilities states that “pervasive paternalism about what people with disabilities can and can’t do, should and shouldn’t do, poses a major barrier to entry to medical schools and subsequent employment. This is often based on false presumptions about what people with disabilities can actually achieve – there are many successful, safe doctors with various types of impairments. With some goodwill and imagination, a person’s physical limitations can often be overcome, with reasonable adjustments to the environment or use of technological aids”.

The group maintains that the field of medicine encompasses a wide range of specialties, each requiring different skill sets and physical requirements. Dr Palipana said like every other doctor wishing to specialise, a doctor with disability will seek a specialty that best suits their capabilities.

“In 2017, it is hard to argue against training someone who has the merits to enter medical training. If one has the merit, then discriminating against their physical impairment alone is a travesty,” Dr Palipana said.

“With one in five Australians identifying themselves as having some sort of physical impairment, we argue that society is better served by having doctors with real-life experience of being patients themselves. This experience can produce doctors with greater compassion for their patients.”

For Dr Palipana personally, day-to-day life often presents more challenges than his daily work as a doctor.

“For me, it’s mainly the day-to-day things surrounding work. For example, it takes me much longer to get ready for work and settle in after work. Normal life matters take a bit more time and planning,” he said.

“I have been fortunate to have people and a workplace in my life that make me feel like a normal junior doctor living a pretty good life. The people, intellectual challenge and variety of work are all things that make this job great. However, I think the heart of being a doctor is really a love of people and helping them.”

www.dwda.org.au
At Unisson Disability we are passionate about enabling people with disability to live their best life.

As one of NSW’s leading NDIS service providers, Unisson Disability has been at the forefront of providing support to those with disability and their families since 1924. Our services cover Sydney and the Central Coast, Hunter and the Nepean Blue Mountains regions.

Read Corey and Harry’s experience below.

**No Barriers for Corey**
Like most 22-year-olds, Corey loves his independence and heading out to explore the city. So, Corey and his Direct Support Professional Harry from Unisson Disability have been undertaking travel training.

Together they’ve built up Corey’s skills and confidence when it comes to using public transport,

“...I love doing travel training with Harry, I feel more confident,” says Corey. “We go out to all types of places, he’s a really kind and helpful person.”

Corey’s independence has grown immensely, and he’s looking brightly toward his future. “I’m excited to be able to go out on my own.” says Corey. “I love being independent.”

Contact us to plan your NDIS support with Unisson Disability.

📞1300 266 222  📧info@unisson.org.au  🌐unissondisability.org.au
Michael, 55, lost part of his left leg in a tractor accident when he was four, but two years ago made the decision to take on the 32-kilometre swim between England and France.

Michael has become the sixth amputee to swim the English Channel, completing the swim in 15 hours and 25 minutes.

He took on the challenge to raise money for charity Foodbank Queensland and collected more than $28,000.

He said the swim was initially smooth in water temperatures around 18 degrees, but conditions became more difficult midway through.

"The French inshore just went really choppy, the wind got up, the currents turned around, and it went from being pleasant to quite challenging," he said.

Michael initially went into the swim expecting to complete it in around 18 hours, but said he stopped thinking about the clock midway through.

"At the start, the crew was telling me how long I’d been going for, but after four or five hours, I told them to shut up," he said.

"I wanted to be in the zone and swimming, and that was it.

"My prime focus was getting there, I wasn’t focussed on how long it took. Towards the end, I could see the shore for what seemed a very long time.

"When I finally touched a bit of sand with my arm I thought, ‘now I can feel like I’ve made it’.”

Michael said as a kid he was inspired by Australian Des Renford — dubbed the King of the Channel in the 1970s — and thought: “I want to do that.”

Years later, that thought started to become reality when, in December 2015, he received an email from Grimsey Adult Swimfit promoting an information night about swimming the English Channel.

“I was so excited I couldn’t sleep for two weeks,” he said.

“Most nights I was going through the ‘will I or won’t I’ phase. My wife Amanda finally said just swim the Channel or I will always regret it if I don’t.

“So on January 1, 2016, I paid a one thousand pound deposit for a pilot boat called Masterpiece.”

Michael was coached in Brisbane by Trent Grimsey, the world record holder for the English Channel swim, and received nutrition advice from Tara Diversi. Trent worked with Red Top Swim based in London to offer a full program for swimming the Channel.
Red Top Swim coach Tim Denyer says the single word that best sums up an English Channel swim is ‘relentless’.

“It just seemingly never stops – even when you are 400 metres away from the coast, it still seems like France isn’t getting any closer,” says Tim, who has swum the Channel himself and coached 21 athletes on Channel crossings this year.

“Michael trained the house down for this swim and deserves every accolade going – his pace was consistent, he had no issues with the water temperature, all of his feeds went down and were pretty fast, he held excellent position next to the boat and most importantly, he never asked how much longer. A model athlete!”

Michael dedicated his marathon swim to his late sister Katrina Powell, a former softball star who died of cancer at just 18 years of age, as well as his uncle Henry Powell, who died during WWII in the Channel itself.

Michael said his wife Amanda and children Georgia, 25, Darcy, 21, Jaime, 12, and Oliver, 8, were all extremely supportive of his swim.

“My two youngest ones were in Dover to see me off at 1am and welcome me back at 8pm that night,” he said.

Michael enjoys living a full life, maintaining his passion for swimming and not letting his prosthetic slow him down in any aspect of his life.

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Getting back on your bike

When Mandy McCracken suffered a blood infection in 2013, staff at the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne were forced to amputate her arms and legs to save her life.

The mother of three from Kilmore East, north of Melbourne, learned to live with prosthetic arms and legs, but missed riding her bicycle with her husband and children.

The dream to get back on the bike brought Mandy to the Tikkun Olam Makers (TOM) makeathon in Melbourne in 2016.

TOM is an international not-for-profit organisation that brings together a community of makers, using technology to address real-life needs of people with disabilities.

Director of TOM Global, Daniel Weil, said the TOM movement started in Jerusalem and ‘Tikkun Olam’ is a Hebrew phrase that translates to ‘acts of kindness that repair the world’.

“The TOM Makers movement addresses the fact that, when it comes to providing solutions for people living with disabilities, one size does not fit all,” Mr Weil said.
The TOM:Melbourne event is a 72-hour makeathon, where 10 teams of designers, engineers and developers gather to help a person with disability. Over the frantic three days, each team is tasked with conceiving, creating and manufacturing a prototype device that overcomes a specific challenge.

Using state-of-the-art manufacturing technology, such as 3D printers, laser cutters, fabrication tools and electronics, teams work to create an innovative technological solution that solves a real-world challenge.

Mandy’s team came together to get her back on the bike, and that meant remaking a bicycle that was tailor made to her needs. The bicycle frame was altered to accommodate her prosthetic legs, which could only bend to a 90-degree angle, and the handlebars were lifted. The team also added an electric motor from a cordless drill to aid pedalling.

The work was a success, creating a bike Mandy could ride there and then, and take home to ride with her family.

“To get on the bike and have a pedal was just fantastic,” Mandy said.

“I’ve got primary school aged kids, so to go on a family bike ride was absolutely magic. I’ve been able to get back to an active life as a mum with young kids because of what they did.”

Mandy said her story is proof that the TOM movement is creating a more inclusive world.

“I think the biggest thing I took away from the TOM makeathon was the value of an able-bodied world understanding what life is like for somebody with a disability,” she said.

“I still am astonished that these strangers would all work so hard to help me.

“It was a great chance for the community with disability to have an impact on the able-bodied world of design and manufacturing. Hopefully now, these people will take into their careers an understanding of the impact that both good and bad design can have. We can have a world that is fully inclusive.”

Mr Weil said that following the event, the plans for Mandy’s bike were uploaded to the tomglobal.org website, where they remain available alongside plans for devices created at every TOM Makeathon held around the globe.

Mr Weil said that this way, TOM is not only providing real, tangible solutions for participants, but is creating a library of free assistive technologies for everyone’s use.

“TOM:Melbourne is a global pioneer mobilising local talent and resources in Australia to help local people that experience neglected challenges that have no market solution and no government solution,” Mr Weil said.

“By creating a specific and extremely affordable open-source solutions to a specific problem, and then making it globally available, every team can help tens of thousands of other users worldwide, supporting a global network of communities collectively working together to improve the lives of millions of people living with disabilities.”

TOM:Melbourne is on again in December 2017 at Swinburne University of Technology and Mandy is back, taking part with a new team of makers to build another bespoke solution.

And the movement continues to grow, with TOM: Queensland held in November in Brisbane.

To learn more about TOM: Melbourne, including opportunities to take part or donate, visit the TOM website, www.aus.tomglobal.org.
The 11th National Disability Awards were held at the National Museum of Australia on 3 December 2017.

Employer of the Year Award
Compass Group, QLD

“We are proud to welcome people with disability to Compass Group, offering a flexible workplace where individual potential can flourish.” Rosie McArdle, Executive Director Human Resources & Risk, Compass Group Australia

Compass Group is Australia’s leading food services company, employing over 10,000 people at over 480 locations across Australia.

Compass Group Australia is committed to giving people living with disability the opportunity to compete equitably for employment and enjoy satisfying careers. Through consultation with disability support agencies, Compass Group has developed a comprehensive program to support the successful transition of new employees with disability into employment.

Community Excellence Award
Catia Malaquias, WA

“The Awards are a great opportunity to bring attention to the need for a fundamental shift in attitudes to disability. I believe that inclusive advertising and media have real potential to accelerate the inclusion of people with disability.”

Catia Malaquias

Catia is an advocate working to ensure people with disability have equal access to educational opportunities, as well as representation in the media. She is a leading voice in Australia and internationally advocating for the inclusion of people with disability in mainstream advertising and media and has been involved in the inclusive advertising efforts of Kmart and Target in the last 18 months. Catia has also co-founded the Global Alliance for Disability in Media, which she helped launch in 2016 at the United Nations in Geneva.
Excellence in Innovation Award
AbilityMate, NSW

“We’re living in an era of design where human invention, empowered by technology could reshape the lives of people with disabilities for the better.”
Melissa Fuller, co-founder AbilityMate
AbilityMate is a social enterprise that combines the power of 3D printing with human-centred design to co-create assistive technology with Australians with disability. In recent years, AbilityMate has undertaken a number of initiatives that focus on improving accessibility and innovating new assistive products. AbilityMate collaborates with people with disability, their families, healthcare providers and mission-driven organisations to ensure its products are human-centred, clinically-safe and fulfil the needs of the community. AbilityMate is focused on ensuring that custom-made assistive products can be accessed affordably by all.

Lesley Hall Leadership Award
Sue Salthouse, ACT

“Celebrating International Day of People with Disability is an important annual milestone. It gives us all a chance to reflect on the place of people with disabilities as citizens in our communities.”
Sue Salthouse
Sue is a leading advocate for change. The realisation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people with disabilities are on her agenda. She has extensive experience in advocacy and leadership roles in promoting equality for women and the full inclusion of people with disabilities in society. Sue has had many opportunities through her various positions including Chair of Women with Disabilities ACT, ACT Official Visitor for Disability and Co-chair of the ACT Disability Expert Panel advising the ACT Government on the implementation of the National Disability Strategy and the National Disability Insurance Scheme to partner with like-minded colleagues in furthering this work.
I’m not going to sugar coat it: living with a disability is at times really tough. Growing up, I remember feeling anxious at the thought of not fitting in; having to sit on the sidelines watching my friends do whatever they wanted, run wherever they wanted, whilst I had to sit there wishing I could keep up but knowing I couldn’t. I experienced that feeling when people used to call me names, like ‘cripple’ or ‘spastic’, and starting to believe them it would make me embarrassed that I was different.

But as I grew older, I slowly started to love the fact I had a disability. I started being PROUD of the fact I had a disability. And why wouldn’t I be proud? Everyone in life wants to be different. They wear different clothes, different hairstyles, drive different cars and have different jobs. People make decisions all the time that separate them from the crowd so what better way to be different than to have a disability, as long as I could harness the positives to be the best version of me!

But as I progressed through life, I learnt that for the vast majority of people with disability this wasn’t the case for them. I started being PROUD of the fact I had a disability. And why wouldn’t I be proud? Everyone in life wants to be different. They wear different clothes, different hairstyles, drive different cars and have different jobs. People make decisions all the time that separate them from the crowd so what better way to be different than to have a disability, as long as I could harness the positives to be the best version of me!

But as I progressed through life, I learnt that for the vast majority of people with disability this wasn’t the case for them. I would get really surprised when people didn’t admit they had a disability, even though they clearly did. I often, to this day, still see people sharing their stories and saying that “my whole life, my family and friends taught me that I didn’t have a disability, and that I should tell people I’m not disabled”. Why? Because being disabled means you’re broken,

Excellence in Education and Training Award
University of Sydney – Centre Of Disability Studies, NSW

“Gaining recognition on the International Day of People with Disability for those students with intellectual disability who are attending undergraduate classes at the University of Sydney through the uni 2 beyond initiative is a milestone for inclusion within university settings.”
Professor Patricia O’Brien, Director, Centre of Disability Studies

uni 2 beyond is a two-year initiative that supports people with intellectual disability to experience university life at the University of Sydney. Students attend lectures and tutorials of their choice as audit students, and participate in university social life through engagement with mentors and other peers. In recent years, the uni 2 beyond initiative has expanded to offer service-learning projects and employment internships to students. It is one of only two inclusive education initiatives that operate within Australian universities and is the only one to offer internship opportunities.
less capable, unemployable and un-dateable. I hate it when people say this because it means they’re embarrassed to say they’re disabled. I still get confused when countless Paralympians call themselves ‘Olympians’. They didn’t go to the Olympics they went to the Paralympics, and what’s wrong with that? That is nothing to be embarrassed about.

And why are they embarrassed? Why don’t people want to admit to themselves that they have disabilities? Why are they afraid?

The answer is simple. Unfortunately, when you do speak up, society immediately places limitations on what they believe you can achieve. Immediately they say you can’t do the work of an able-bodied person. Immediately they believe you are less productive or skilful. Immediately they think you minimise the chance of getting meaningful work. And for many, they believe that rules you out of the dating world as well.

To me, that sucks and makes me sad. And the worst part, these misconceptions are completely and utterly untrue.

Having a disability is a natural, normal part of society. It can happen to anyone, at any stage, even to you reading this. No one is immune. Disability does not discriminate! But contrary to what many in the able-bodied world may think, having a disability isn’t a death sentence either. I have spent my life, and the work I do through my new disability and accessibility training start up Get Skilled Access, changing the way people with disability are perceived in our community, normalising disability, and altering the existing negative stigmas and prejudice into positives.

I want people all around this country to feel comfortable to be able to say they’re disabled. I want them to be proud of their abilities and differences, and be able to get out and live the happy and successful lives they deserve to live. I want them to be able to shop, travel, work, laugh, live and love just like everybody else. But in order to do so, we as a society need to continue to further our expectations of what people with disability can actually do. We need to stop overcomplicating disability. We need society to employ us, treat us like customers, and not be afraid to start a conversation.

It is an incredible honour for me to be named the 2017 Patron of International Day of People with Disability. I hope I can give the position the justice it deserves.

Dylan Alcott – 2017 Patron International Day of People with Disability
The Supported Employment Services Award is undergoing a review, and Australian Disability Enterprises and workers around the country are awaiting a decision when the issue comes before the Fair Work Commission in February.
Christen Dittmer has enjoyed working as a supported employee for Greenacres in Wollongong for five years.

The 25-year-old, who has mild cerebral palsy and mild intellectual disability, said her job has given her new skills in administration, industrial sewing and training others, while providing a supportive work environment. She has also made many new friends.

“If I didn’t have my job, I would be lost. I think I would really struggle to get work in open employment so I would probably spend my days sitting at home, bored and alone,” Christen said.

Christen is one of hundreds of supported employees from the Illawarra region of New South Wales who attended a My Job Counts campaign rally in Wollongong recently, to voice their concern for their jobs and their futures.

More than 20,000 people around the country are employed by an Australian Disability Enterprise.
Christen’s employer, Greenacres, is one of 13 Disability Enterprises which say they could be forced to cut jobs – or even close down – if a new productivity-based wage tool is introduced.

In February 2018, the Fair Work Commission will decide how wages for workers with disability are determined.

Greenacres Chief Executive Officer Chris Christodoulou said the outcome could potentially destroy the financial viability of many Disability Enterprises, forcing them out of business and many Australians with disability out of a supportive workplace.

Mr Christodoulou said the key problem is that certain advocates and the Government want skill based assessments removed from the wage assessment tool.

“Instead they are seeking a change to a productivity based wage tool, which will only consider how fast an employee works and not their skill level,” he said.

“For example, someone doing simple packaging at a fast rate would be paid more than someone doing more complex work, like industrial sewing, at a slower rate.

“Paying higher wages for a very simple task or a small part of a job is not sustainable – no operation can stay in business if wage costs are too high.

“This will destroy the economic viability of the Disability Enterprise system due to the tool’s inequality of determining what a person with disability gets paid which could lead to an unsustainable outcome for Disability Enterprises resulting in job losses.

“This makes no sense for anyone.”

Greenacres, Flagstaff and The Disability Trust were three Disability Enterprises which protested the proposed changes with their workers and supporters at the My Job Counts rally in Wollongong.

Flagstaff Chief Executive Officer Roy Rogers said the public and
In 2017, it is hard to argue against training someone who has the merits to enter medical training.

politicians need to do more to protect the jobs of workers with disability.

“The right to choose between working in open or supported employment must not be taken away from those people with disability who want to work,” Mr Rogers said.

“If the Fair Work Commission makes the wrong decision, many thousands of workers with disability could be denied that right.”

Organisations supporting the My Job Counts campaign are Flagstaff, Greenacres, The Disability Trust, Endeavour Foundation, The Mai-Wel Group, Yumaro, Wangarang, Access, Valley Industries, The Intellectual Disability Foundation of St George, Afford, Our Voice Australia and Sunnyfield Enterprises.

There are more than 180 ADEs in Australia. Each Disability Enterprise receives Federal Government funding to provide support for people with disabilities. The level of funding received depends on how much support the employee needs at work. As for pay, these employees receive a percentage of the full rate – known as a ‘pro rata’ wage rate. This is worked out by using a wage assessment tool which determines what proportion of the wage is paid to the employee.

The wage assessment tool currently combines an assessment of productive output with a competency assessment, which measures the employee’s skills, qualifications and job knowledge.
The Federal Government told Link it is committed to supporting high quality and stable job outcomes for people with disability and to ensure that any new wage settings for supported employees allows for the ongoing viability of Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) for employees, their families and the business.

A spokesperson from the Department of Social Services said that the Department has been an observer, and not a party, in the Fair Work Commission conciliation process since December 2013. The parties, through conciliation, have accessed the support provided by the Government to develop a productivity-based wage assessment tool.

“The Government is committed to ensuring ADEs are supported to become strong and viable businesses, and continue to provide effective employment for Australia’s 20,000 workers in supported employment,” the spokesperson said.

“This commitment includes almost $200 million in funding for the sector to adjust to new wage arrangements for supported employees in readiness for expected higher wage outcomes and transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

“Wage supplementation commitments and business transformation support, are focused on encouraging ADEs to develop a clear timeline for reform and implement changes to their businesses to enable them to take advantage of opportunities that the NDIS presents.

“This funding complements ongoing investment made by the Government in ADEs, which includes access to funding support for business improvement advice and future business planning.”

The spokesperson said supported employment is part of an employment continuum that includes more open employment options, giving participants a greater sense of belonging and independence.

“The rollout of the NDIS to full scheme, presents opportunities to expand and diversify the supported employment sector in this regard,” the spokesperson said.

“Under the NDIS people will have greater choice and control over the support options they access. Supported employment is one option that will offer individualised and tailored support to an NDIS participant to achieve their employment goals.

“We expect the number of NDIS participants with employment included in their NDIS plan will grow into the future.”

But a court ruling in 2012 found that tool was discriminatory for two workers with intellectual disability. The findings went to the Human Rights Commission which decided that a new wage model should be put in place. All parties have since been working to come up with a new tool through the Fair Work Commission process, with a decision expected in February.

For many supported employees, the pay is second to what they actually do. For Christen Dittmer, it’s as much about the job as it is about life.

“I really like working at Greenacres and I don’t want to work anywhere else,” Christen said.

“I love the atmosphere and the people in general. I have been helped by Greenacres so many times over the years, not just in my job but in my life.

“If I lost my job, I would probably be depressed. There would be no social outlet for me and I would feel useless. At Greenacres, I feel respected and I feel like my job is important.”

Christen Dittmer has worked for Greenacres in Wollongong for five years.
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You are at a barbecue and keen to meet new people, and introduce yourself to a possible new friend. You exchange names and either right now or pretty soon comes the question, ‘what do you do for a dollar?’

In Australian society what we do, or don’t do, for work is important as a social marker. It helps people see where we fit and that’s bad news if you are unemployed, particularly if that lack of occupation is coupled with a disability.

If that’s your situation you may have found yourself at risk as either being seen as an ‘object of pity’ or cast as a ‘burden of charity’.

Fortunately, in Australia, it doesn’t have to be that way – we have a national network of disability employment services that can help you achieve meaningful employment for either the same wages as your peers without disability or maybe even better!

How to find such a provider?
A good start is go online at disabilityemployment.org.au and click on the provider search tab, where you can search by postcode.

Likely you’ll get a choice of services, so how do you pick the best or right service for you?

Again, there are places that will help. Disability Employment Services get rated on a ‘Star’ system from one (maybe not so great) to five (performing in the top percentage of services).

You can check out the ratings at employment.gov.au/disability-employment-services-star-ratings

That said, nothing beats interrogating the provider!

You know what you are looking for – full time or part time work, what sort of job appeals and the amount of work (full time or part time) you are looking for, so ask questions.

It’s perfectly legitimate to ask how long the staff have been working for the provider, about the last five jobs obtained, whether full time or casual, how many hours, what sort of wages?

Time is precious and sitting on a service provider’s backburner, or being asked to take unsuitable work hurts. Not only is such treatment stressful, it wastes irreplaceable opportunities.

This is the best time in my memory for disability employment – more opportunities, better wages, more hours, greater acceptance and more chances for any necessary adjustments or accommodations.

Ask questions and aim high – happy job seeking!
employmentfirst.com/index.php/job-seekers-guide

One of Raumund Cotton’s biggest challenges has been overcoming the stigma around his disability.

Growing up with autism, Raumund was told multiple times by various people that he would not complete Year 12 or get anywhere in life, and he changed schools four times during high school to try to escape this.

Now 24, Raumund sees autism as a strength, as it gives him great focus on things he is passionate about.

Raumund was successful in gaining employment with a tyre dealer earlier this year through South Australian disability services and support organisation Community Bridging Services.

CBS Senior Employment Officer Jess Irving said Raumund works as a tyre fitter anywhere from eight to 24 hours per week and has proved himself to be a reliable and efficient member of the team.

“Raumund advised us he enjoys his role at the workshop as it is a good place to work, the staff are easy to get along with and are always happy to help each other. Raumund is grateful for the opportunity and hopes to continue to progress in the role,” Ms Irving said.

After everything Raumund went through in his earlier years, he feels...
he has overcome so many obstacles and proved a lot of
people wrong, successfully completing year 12, gaining
a Certificate III in Disability Care and maintaining
employment.

“Raumund reported one of his biggest achievements
was gaining employment, as it has provided him with
many opportunities he would not have otherwise had,”
Ms Irving said.

“This includes achieving his goal of living
independently. Employment has also allowed Raumund
to improve his social skills; building self-esteem and
confidence in all areas of his life and developing new
friendships.”

Community Bridging Services continues to encourage
and support Raumund.

www.communitybridgingservices.org.au

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Helping People Achieve is advancing the exploration of pathways to open employment for people with disability in the Northern Territory.

HPA Chief Executive Officer Tony Burns said there is a common misconception that a person in the workforce with disability or mental illness will require much more attention and resources from their employer.

“Misunderstanding and lack of awareness has contributed to the stigma that people with disability or mental illness are more of a liability to their employer, rather than a valuable team player,” Mr Burns said.

“But research states that these perceptions do not match reality.”

Mr Burns said an Australian study in 2012 found that employees with disability have a lower number of occupational health and safety incidents, lower workers’ compensation incidence, higher retention rates than people without disability and comparable levels of productivity.

As an Australian Disability Enterprise, HPA currently employs 68 people with a moderate disability.

The aim of HPA’s employment service is to benefit the community through the creation and development of employment opportunities for people with disabilities in integrated settings and provide the training and ongoing support necessary to enable their success in open employment.

“HPA has a strong record of achieving success in this role resulting in ongoing opportunity to the individuals and benefit to the community through sustained employment,” Mr Burns said.

“Two HPA Ausdesign employees, Raymond Roach and Nathan Carrol (pictured above), clearly demonstrate and exemplify this belief.”

Ray and Nathan were nominated to apply for entry level administration positions in the Defence Administration Assistance Program (DAAP) at Robertson Barracks which began in April 2017. They are now members of a team who have assisted with basic administration duties on the Barracks, and had the opportunity to participate in some hospitality training at the Barracks Café.

HPA Ausdesign Manager, Jodie Doyle said: “All candidates attended interviews and were successful in gaining a three-year contract to work part-time with the DAAP Program. This work is combined with their roster at HPA and they work in a team of seven at the Robertson Barracks.

“There have already been beneficial outcomes for both the employer and the employee.”

Mr Burns said HPA looks forward to the opportunity to work with NT Government, corporates and partners to explore the design, implementation and funding of this valuable pathway.

“The benefits for those with a disability and the Northern Territory community will be both impactful and quantifiable,” he said.

www.hpa.net.au
Supporting people living with disability to live a life of their choice

We have a simple philosophy at Orana... our aim is to provide people with disability the chance to live and work as part of their community, as independently as possible.

As a registered provider of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Orana provides a range of services including:

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- Housing Support
- Assistance with Transport
- Personal Care
- Skills Development
- Positive Behaviour Support Plans
- Health and Wellbeing
- Respite (Short Term Accommodation)
- Access to Community Activities
- Accessing Employment Opportunities
- Advocacy

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When it comes to smart hiring, employers need to start looking for diversity, according to University Specialist Employment Partnerships (USEP) and Mylestones Employment.

People with a disability aged between 15 and 64 years are almost twice as likely to be unemployed compared to the general population. And in a study by Graduate Careers Australia, researchers found graduates take up to three months to find a job, but for graduates with disability, it can take 56 per cent longer to gain full time employment.

Joanne Holt (pictured above) graduated in 2015 with a Bachelor of Criminology and Criminal Justice degree, and was searching for a job for over two years, until she reached out to Mylestones Employment and USEP this year.

“Not all employers are understanding nor have any notion of what it is like for me as a deaf person,” Joanne said.

“Using the phone is out of the question for me, and I can’t have a meeting with a large group of staff members. Plus, many jobs require excellent communication skills with stakeholders, which is also a barrier because I am not always able to communicate effectively as every individual is different when it comes to lip reading. English is my second language.

“When it comes to employment, it was difficult to find and apply for jobs relating to my degree because they may discard my application on the basis of my disability or they have no knowledge of how to work with me.”

Mylestones Employment, a Disability Employment Service, and USEP have been working towards change.

Mylestones Employment has partnered with USEP for a pilot program preparing and connecting university students with disability to graduate jobs.

Removing barriers to work remains the focus for both USEP and Mylestones Employment, who provide a range of services including work preparation and training, on-the-job support and post placement in supporting each individual’s ongoing needs.

“USEP worked with me to develop my suitability for the selection criteria and with writing my cover letter,” Joanne said.

“Then Mylestones Employment supported me to enter the workforce and not let my degree go to waste!”

“USEP listened to me and supported me to become job ready while Mylestones Employment kept me up to date with progress on my applications and supported me with sign language interpreters during my interview.”

Joanne has since started work with Maurice Blackburn Lawyers and she’s never been happier.

“I believe students with disabilities should have the opportunity to work in the real world; the USEP case managers can advocate on their behalf and find them work,” she said.

“This job means I can apply the skills I gained during my degree.”

Tony Cameron, State Manager for Mylestones Employment, said: “People with disabilities or barriers can achieve anything with the right support – Joanne is a perfect example of this.

“At Mylestones, we’re passionate about increasing the employment participation rate of people with disabilities and its programs like USEP that will support us to achieve this.”

www.myemployment.org.au
www.usep.com.au

Diversity key to smart hiring

When it comes to smart hiring, employers need to start looking for diversity, according to University Specialist Employment Partnerships (USEP) and Mylestones Employment.
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disability.choices@minda.asn.au
Sadly Australia does not have a proud history in terms of inclusive employment practices and opportunities. PricewaterhouseCoopers tells us that in 2011 Australia was ranked 21 out of 29 OECD countries in employment participation rates for people with a disability, and around 45 per cent of Australians with a disability were living either near or below the poverty line.

And according to Deloitte Access Economics, in 2009, only half of the 2.2 million working-age Australians with a disability were employed, compared to nearly 80 per cent of working age Australians without a disability.

In this context, it is deeply concerning that, currently, just two per cent of participants over the age of 24 have an employment component included in their NDIS plans.

This is concerning on a number of levels because, while there are quantifiable fiscal reasons for having a job, the capacity building and social engagement outcomes that result from meaningful employment are inestimable.

The opportunity to work ensures people have an income but also leads to increased social engagement and all the benefits that flow from it – the same benefits which many of us take for granted.

When talking with people working in supported employment, it soon becomes clear that they have chosen to do so because they are unable to work in open employment. Many have tried but have faced bullying and other issues which, in turn, have proven harmful to mental health. While they are keen to work, they have found supported employment to be the only sustainable employment option for them; its significance must not be undervalued.

Having a job is an important factor in helping people to stay active, fit, and mentally engaged. It boosts confidence and self-esteem, and supports people to strive for potential-fulfilling goals.

Employment offers an avenue for skills to be recognised and valued, and brings a sense of purpose to each day, alongside friends and colleagues in the community.

We believe Australia must maintain a broad continuum of employment options, so that everyone who wants to work can find the supports needed to make it happen. Inclusion does not mean dismissing the aspirations of people with profound intellectual disability who also want to enjoy the many benefits of employment.

By Andrew Donne, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Foundation

Supported employment matters

Advocates for the introduction of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) made a strong case for the significant value that would be delivered to people with a disability and society more broadly, if people had the right supports to enable them to participate in employment.
Going to work is important to Katie. And that’s why we believe there should be a job for everyone who wants to work – because employment is not only about having an income.

Disability Enterprises offer tailored employment opportunities which meet the skillset of the individual. The emphasis is on the abilities of each person so that they work in a positive and supportive environment.

Katie’s story is typical.

“I’m the only child in the family with a disability,” Katie says.

“I always wanted to be like my brother and sister, who don’t have a disability. I try to fit into the real world and do what they do but I have limitations.

“There are a lot of people out there who experience depression and feel like they can’t achieve things. I’ve been through that myself.

“That’s completely changed since I’ve been at Endeavour Foundation. I realise that it’s a good thing to love yourself.”

Katie says she has learned to love herself since she’s been at the Endeavour Foundation.

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Bedford Group employee Michael Todd has a number of qualifications under his belt after working with Bedford’s landscaping and horticulture business, Adelaide Property Gardens (APG), for four years.

“I’ve learnt how to drive a manual vehicle, got my truck licence and my Workzone Traffic Management Licence as well. I’m now working towards getting my excavator licence which is something I’ve wanted to do for a while,” Michael said.

“I like planting trees, installing irrigation, and working with heavy machinery. I love being able to work outdoors in a hands-on role.

“I come into work 30 minutes early every day because I love my job.”

Michael’s Supervisor, Hamish Small, experiences the positive effect employment has on Bedford employees every day.

“A handful of our employees would barely say a word when they started, but now they come in early to work and are constantly improving on a personal level. The work we do gets employees outside and gets them moving,” Hamish said.

As the second largest Disability Enterprise in the country, Bedford Group provides employment, training and community access services to over 1,400 people with disability across South Australia and New South Wales.

Bedford’s employment options create work experiences and career progressions across a range of industries. The work produced across their packaging, landscaping, hospitality and manufacturing businesses continues to broaden the perception of what it means to live with disability.

While Bedford is well-known for its employment opportunities, Chief Customer Experience Officer Tristan Dunn said Bedford offers so much more than just a job.

“Our teams work on large contracts for many well-known brands and develop skills to last a lifetime,” Mr Dunn said.

“Having a job at Bedford not only means you can earn a wage, but also get out of the house, see your friends and meet new people.

“In addition to our vast employment offering, we provide a variety of other supports such as community participation programs, support coordination and lifestyle training, which continue to evolve to meet people’s needs and goals under the NDIS.”

Bedford is also proud to be part of the Buyability network – a National Disability Services initiative, chaired by Bedford CEO Sally Powell, that aims to raise awareness about the importance and value of supported employment.

“Being part of the Buyability network allows us to see how our work contributes to the wider community,” Mr Dunn said.

“In 2015-16, Bedford’s business partnerships generated over $39m of direct economic benefit to Australia, which is an amazing figure.”

www.bedfordgroup.com.au

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“When it comes to employment, it was difficult to find and apply for jobs relating to my degree because they may discard my application on the basis of my disability. USEP worked with me to develop my suitability then Mylestones Employment supported me to enter the workforce and not let my degree go to waste!”

Joanne Holt, Bachelor of Criminology & Criminal Justice
Chief Executive Officer Geoff Blackwood said Barkuma helps people find work in two ways – through supported employment in its own Commercial Enterprise and through open employment in the mainstream workforce.

“Having a job brings a range of benefits including the ability to afford things, making new friends and improving self-esteem,” Mr Blackwood said.

“We focus on people’s goals, needs and wishes to ensure they get the job that is right for them.”

In open employment, Barkuma is recognised in SA as the highest performing specialist service for people with a developmental disability through Disability Employment Services Star Ratings.

Mr Blackwood said Barkuma clients work in a variety of roles and industries with over 300 South Australian employers, including aged care, business and administration, fast food, hospitality, maintenance and cleaning.

In supported employment, Barkuma’s Commercial Enterprise has two locations in Adelaide’s northern and north-eastern suburbs, at Elizabeth and Holden Hill.

Mr Blackwood said working in this supported environment was a great way for people to develop their skills, confidence and experience, all while earning a wage.

“At Barkuma, you receive wages, set hours of work, leave entitlements, superannuation and other benefits,” Mr Blackwood said.

“To qualify for supported employment, you must be 16 or older, have an intellectual disability, eligible to receive a Disability Support Pension from Centrelink and currently have an NDIS plan with the goal of employment.”

www.barkuma.com.au

South Australian disability organisation Barkuma has helped hundreds of people with disability find work throughout its 50-year history.

Amrita has been working at the Adelaide Convention Centre for 10 years, she is pictured here with Caterina Goglia, Uniforms Manager at ACC. ACC and Barkuma began working together in 2004.
Merry Christmas FROM OCTOBER 1 2017 TO JANUARY 31 2018. WHILE STOCKS LAST. SAVINGS ARE FROM RRP. EXTRA CHARGES MAY APPLY TO SOME ASSEMBLED CABINETS. PRICES VARY IN COUNTRY AREAS DUE TO FREIGHT. EXCLUDES CHAIRS AND FLAT BED INSERTS. ACCESSORIES NOT INCLUDED, IMAGES ARE FOR FULLY ASSEMBLED. RTA MAY VARY SLIGHTLY FOR EVERY ASSEMBLY. NOT TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH OTHER OFFERS.

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Chief Executive Rebecca Fletcher said the decision to change followed extensive consultation with clients, families, employees and other key stakeholders.

“The new name reinforces Unisson Disability’s commitment to best serving clients by providing a visible and accessible brand, reflective of the wide range of services offered and our mature leadership in the sector,” Ms Fletcher said.

For almost a century the organisation, founded by Dr Lorna Hodgkinson, has been committed to working collaboratively with families, individuals and local community service providers.

Unisson Disability’s comprehensive range of services includes individually tailored in-home support, community access and participation, short-term accommodation, shared living, supported employment, transition to work, and after school and vacation care.

Ms Fletcher said Unisson Disability’s commitment to its clients remains the same, with “collaboration underpinning all that we do”.

“We are committed to evolving our organisation to adapt to changes in the disability sector, and to best represent the people we support. We are focused on filling the gap in tailored and individualised support services which are lacking in the wider community, and providing these for our clients and families,” she said.

Timothy Strachan, a Unisson Disability client who previously lived in his family home with parents William and Lin, moved into his own shared living house in Wahroonga and is testament to the positive outcomes that can be achieved.

“All at Unisson Disability have provided our family with support, advice and most importantly flexibility and understanding of Tim’s needs,” said Tim’s father William.

“The application of (their) extraordinary expertise and experience has realised such a positive difference to Tim’s and our lifestyle.”

Ms Fletcher said Unisson Disability is committed to providing support to more people with disability and their families.

“Our number one priority is focused on supporting our clients to achieve their goals and we believe our new name will allow us the privilege of supporting more individuals and families, as we grow our services within the wider community and continue to work collaboratively,” she said.

unissondisability.org.au

Unisson Disability brings positive change

New South Wales disability support organisation Unisson Disability (previously Sunshine) launched its new name and brand this month.

Rebecca Fletcher with Elias.
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A world-first luxury resort for people with spinal cord injuries has opened on Sydney’s northern beaches.

Life’s a beach

The $22 million Sargood on Collaroy has uninterrupted views of the beach and includes 17 specially built, self-contained apartments.

Activities include adaptive surfing, adaptive yoga and adaptive shooting.

Resort manager James Dakin said the resort bridges luxury and accessibility for people with spinal injury, with a state-of-the-art therapy area, gymnasium and expert staff who are up-to-date with the latest research and evidence-based innovations in spinal injury management and recreational therapy.

“Sargood on Collaroy provides people with spinal cord injuries and their families a unique experience to stay in a luxury resort built for full accessibility,” Mr Dakin said.

“The resort includes equipment that guests would usually have to bring with them, and is staffed with world-class carers so all you have to do is relax and enjoy your stay at beautiful Collaroy.”

New South Wales Minister of Disability Services Raymond Craig Williams recently visited Sargood on Collaroy to celebrate “this pioneering initiative in education, recreation, and wellness support for people with spinal cord injuries.

“The resort is invaluable for people living with spinal cord injury, and I applaud the staff for their commitment to improving the resilience, self-management and community inclusion of people with spinal cord injury,” Minister Williams said.

During his visit, Minister Williams learned about the resort’s unique design, exploring the bedrooms, common areas and recreational facilities. He met guests and staff at the resort to learn first-hand the impact that it is having on those with spinal cord injuries in Australia.

Mr Dakin said he was pleased Minister Williams was, “able to see first-hand how guests benefit through use of the resort’s specialised gym, riding waves in the adaptive surfing program, and how guests can enjoy and learn from the community of people who live with similar injuries.
that are staying at Sargood with them”.

The Minister also spoke to Mr Dakin about funding methods for guests to stay at the resort. Currently, the NSW disability service iCare covers a certain portion of guests, with many others funded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

“It was great to be able to speak to the Minister about the different funding options supporting our guests’ accommodation, care and adaptive recreation sessions, and discuss how we can address future gaps in funding to give more people opportunity to enjoy this unique facility,” Mr Dakin said.

“However, some very generous benefactors, including the Sargood Foundation, have set funds aside so that there is no reason for anyone with a spinal injury to not be able to afford to come here.”

The resort is operated by NSW rehabilitation and disability services provider Royal Rehab.

sargoodoncollaroy.com
As a travel destination, it has become one of the most wheelchair accessible travel spots in Asia for those traveling with a disability. There is a range of accessible accommodation, activities, attractions and services, as well as convenient ways of getting around the city.

**Accessible**

**HONG KONG**

It’s easy to understand why Hong Kong is often referred to as the ‘City of Life’. This vibrant, colourful and energetic metropolis is famous for its breathtaking skyline which boasts the most skyscrapers in the world (currently 317). Hong Kong’s ‘East meets West’ culture is visible in its architecture, traditions, food and fashion.

**Cuisine**

Wow! Hong Kong’s food is simply to die for! Often listed among the top culinary destinations in the world, Hong Kong’s cuisine is mainly influenced by Cantonese, British, Japanese and other parts of South East Asia.

Its thriving street food scene has become one of the city’s most unique and eye-popping experiences. With cheap stalls teeming the bustling streets you can try fish balls, dumplings, dim sum, wonton noodles, stir fries, roasted duck or even chicken feet (if you’re brave). You might even like to try some fruit and vegetables that you’ve never seen before. When it comes to fine dining, Hong Kong also has a plethora of quality eateries plus a variety of Michelin Star restaurants. Be prepared to loosen your belt!

**Disneyland**

Hong Kong’s world-famous theme park is located in Penny’s Bay, Lantau Island. Here you’ll enter
a magical kingdom inspired by treasured fairy-tales and beloved Disney characters. The park consists of seven themed areas: Main Street, USA, Fantasyland, Adventureland, Tomorrowland, Grizzly Gulch, Mystic Point and Toy Story Land. Hong Kong Disneyland is accessible for guests with mobility, cognitive, vision and hearing limitations. All restaurants, shops and restrooms are wheelchair accessible, as well as many of the park’s attractions.

**Shopping**

For some Hong Kong is a place of neon-lit retail pilgrimage. With endless shopping malls, boutiques, department stores and street markets there’s plenty of bargains to be found. Prominent international brands have outlets here, and they are supplemented by the city’s own retail entrepreneurs. In Causeway Bay,
you can indulge in some late-night shopping under the bright neon lights, while Mongkok has markets devoted to everything from flowers to goldfish. Looking for authentic Chinese Art? Check out Hollywood Road. Stanley Market is a popular market town on the sunny south side of Hong Kong Island. You will find a fascinating selection of little shops selling silk garments, sportswear, art, Chinese costume jewellery and souvenirs.

The Peak

If a solitary picture could sum up Hong Kong, it would be the iconic view from Victoria Peak. Gazing down at the city from this famous vantage point, you’ll enjoy a stunning 360-degree panoramic outlook over the harbour and audacious skyline all the way to the green hills of the New Territories.

You can reach the summit via the Peak Tram, the 120-year-old funicular railway that departs from its terminus on Garden Road. The ride is quite steep and it climbs up to 396 metres above sea level. The tram service is accessible to most people with disabilities including wheelchair

A Symphony of Lights

Every evening at 8pm, Victoria Harbour brightens up for the Symphony of Lights show. Over 40 buildings on both sides of the harbour light up for this this dazzling spectacle which celebrates the energy, spirit and diversity of Hong Kong. The pyrotechnic fireworks, laser show, coloured illuminations and accompanying music all combine to make one heck of a show. And best of all it can be experienced for free! The Guinness book of world records named this light show as largest accessible taxi.

Getting Around

As is to be presumed of a modern city like Hong Kong, public transportation here is extremely progressive with respect to accessibility for people with disabilities. Together, the Government and transport operators are committed to improving transport facilities and they’ve have also made significant advancement in the promotion of public awareness and understanding of the “Transport for All” concept.

Nearly all Mass Transit Railway (MTR) stations and trains are equipped with gates wide enough for wheelchairs and strollers, as well as ramps or lifts at entrances and exits. Furthermore, there are special aid devices for passengers with visual or hearing impairments.

Ferry services generally also offer adequate accessibility. However, you should clarify details with the operating ferry company.

Taxis probably provide the most convenient point-to-point transportation services for people with disabilities (wheelchairs and other mobility aids are carried free of charge in the taxi hire).
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☐ employment organisation

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☐ health worker

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Dr Allison Milner from the Centre for Health Equity in the School of Population and Global Health has conducted several studies into disability and employment.

Her most recent research, published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, found people with disabilities are more likely to experience underemployment and are more likely to have their mental health adversely affected by it.

Dr Milner (pictured right) said compared with other workers, people with disabilities are much more likely to experience greater pay inequity and greater job insecurity than those without disability.

“We sought to examine whether being underemployed – defined as when a person wants to work more hours, but these hours are not attainable – has a different effect on the mental health of people when they do and do not report disabilities,” she said.

“There is increasing evidence that poor-quality working conditions are associated with considerable declines in the mental health of people with disabilities.”

Dr Milner used data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey – a longitudinal, nationally representative study of Australian households – to assess whether the presence of disability modified the association between underemployment and mental health.

She said disabilities were reported in about 15 per cent of the data sample overall.

Being underemployed was reported by 23.62 per cent of people with disabilities, compared with 19.54 per cent of people without disabilities.

Dr Milner said the estimates obtained indicated that the combined effect of being underemployed and having a disability on mental health was greater than the summed independent risks of having disabilities and being underemployed.

Dr Milner said that more so than other groups, people with disabilities are at greater risk of exclusion from employment, as well as other forms of social and political exclusion.

“People with disabilities are also more likely to face multiple types of social and economic disadvantage compared with those without disabilities,” she said.

“We also know that workers reporting disabilities are much more likely to experience greater pay inequity and greater job insecurity than those without disability.

“The combination of these disadvantages is likely to go some way to explaining why people with disabilities experience greater declines in their mental health when they report underemployment compared with those without disability.”

She said that in Australia and many other countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, there is a renewed commitment to improving the employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

“At the same time, we know that there is worsening underemployment and an increasing concern that employment is becoming ever-more precarious, particularly for the most vulnerable in the community,” she said.

“There is a need for more research and attention on how to ameliorate the effects of underemployment on the mental health of persons with disabilities.”
Ben’s beard shave for AWEtism 2017

Mentor at the I CAN Network in Melbourne, Ben Carbonaro, set himself a challenge to grow a beard over AWEgust – and raised $3,150 shaving it off to raise funds for autism awareness and acceptance. The funds raised by Ben for AWEtism 2017 will help fund the I CAN Network’s mentoring programs. In another AWEtism fundraiser, I CAN Network in Sydney’s City to Surf team raised over $10,000 in this year’s popular Sydney fun run. They are pictured below before the run. All up, almost $22,000 was raised this year to support the I CAN Network’s mission of helping young Australians with Autism find their strengths.

A truly accessible film festival

Nova Employment in Sydney proudly sponsored the 2017 Focus on Ability Short Film Festival. This year there were a record number of 210 entries from 19 countries, with 600 people enjoying the gala night that focused on the ability of people with disability.

 Winners are pictured here with NOVA Employment CEO Martin Wren (centre) and include international winner John Lawson from the United States of America, and Nova Employment Choice Award winner 18-year-old Blaise Borrer.

Ice Factor Plus

Dignity Party Leader, Kelly Vincent MLC is pictured with Humphrey B Bear at the launch of Ice Factor Plus at Adelaide’s IceArena. Ice Factor Plus allows South Australians with disabilities to experience snow and ice activities for free on Tuesdays (excluding school holidays).
Loud Shirt Day
Stu Stayers and Andrew Le Lievre are pictured here at a special Loud Shirt Day event held in October by Cochlear Australia New Zealand and The Shepherd Centre. Shepherd Centre ambassador and TV personality Mike Goldman hosted a fashion show at Cochlear Headquarters based at Macquarie University in Sydney. www.loudshirtday.com.au

Stars of Minda
South Australian disability organisation Minda Incorporated held its sixth annual Stars of Minda event at Morphettville Racecourse in October. Stars of Minda is an awards night for supported employees which recognises the employees’ efforts and talents across Minda and SA Group Enterprises. James Shelton from SA Group Enterprises’ Electronic Recycling Australia won the top award, the RACV Unsung Hero Award. James was presented with his trophy by Salary Solutions’ Paul Ogilvie-Mitchell and Colleen Stallion, and President of Minda, Dr Susan Neuhaus.

what's on?
December 2017

1 Dance Party
Kyeamba Smith Hall, Wagga Wagga Show Grounds, Cnr Bourke & Urana Streets, Wagga Wagga NSW
About 300 people who have a disability, their families/carers and friends are expected to fill Kyeamba Smith Hall to celebrate their abilities and achievements at the Dance Party.

1 International Day of People with Disability
The Cube Courtyard, Wodonga
The event will be held in The Cube Courtyard, Wodonga, with community transport available from QE2 square, Albury.

3 International Day of People with Disability (IDPwD)
Nation-wide
IDPwD is a United Nations sanctioned day that is celebrated internationally. It aims to increase public awareness, understanding and acceptance of people with disability and celebrate the achievements and contributions of people with disability.

5 South West Disability Expo
Whitlam Leisure Centre, Liverpool NSW
The first of its kind in the region, the South West Disability Expo is set to be the biggest and most anticipated Disability Expo on the 2017 calendar.
www.southwestdisabilityexpo.com.au

5 Australia’s Not-for-Profit Leaders Forum
Sydney (Swissôtel Sydney)
Developing practical strategies to navigate an organisation through an era of change.

To view the full ‘What’s On’ calendar visit Link Online at linkonline.com.au/whats-on
If you have an upcoming event and would like to be included in ‘What’s On’ please email whatson@linkonline.com.au
Two things changed Huy Nguyen’s fate in the earliest years of his life. Born in Vietnam, at 18-months-old Huy contracted polio. It invaded his nervous system causing irreversible paralysis to his legs. This was only part of the catalyst for the second significant change just three years later, when the Nguyen family made the 12,000km journey to Australia to start a new life.

Today, the 32-year-old humanitarian engineer and technology entrepreneur, often reflects on what could have been his ‘alternate life’. As a person with a physical disability he is acutely aware that had his family stayed in Vietnam, he would not have had the same opportunities afforded to him in Australia.

Huy explains that Enabler is a new way to train disability support workers. Instead of broad-ranging, theory-based courses and death-by-PowerPoint, Enabler uses a mobile 3D platform to put learners into real-life situations.

“It’s scenario-based and immersive training – putting people into real life simulated environments. By using 3D animated scenarios, support workers are able to practice real-life and emergency scenarios,” Huy explains.

And it can be accessed anywhere, any time – creating easy-to-access, bespoke training for people in regional and remote areas. What’s more, there’s a desperate need for Enabler.

“Did you know that Australia needs to double the amount of well trained disability support and aged care workers by 2020?” Huy says. “That’s 600,000 we need to train. Enabler is going to help achieve that.

“Enabler was born out of my personal need,” Huy says. “But this is not just about me. It’s about the one in five Australians who have a disability, it’s about our fast-aging population. These people need disability support services to be able to fully participate in society.”

Remarkable is an accelerator for early stage startups using technology to change the lives of people with disabilities. A partnership between the Telstra Foundation and Cerebral Palsy Alliance, Remarkable is Australia’s first inclusive startup accelerator and provides funding, masterclasses and world-class mentoring through a 16-week program.

“To me, Remarkable is about starting an important cultural shift in business innovation,” Huy says. “For too long the disability movement has been seen as a charity and hand-out cause. It’s anything but that. Remarkable is about showing the value that accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities brings to our community – both socially and economically.

Find out more about Enabler: www.enablerinteractive.com

Applications are now open for the 2018 Remarkable Accelerator program. Remarkable is Australia’s first disability focused impact Accelerator. A partnership between the Cerebral Palsy Alliance and Telstra Foundation, the program connects inclusive startups with the tools, skills and network they need to succeed.

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