

## WORKING WHEELS THE PATHWAY TO INDEPENDENCE

In September we completed the online training component of the Working Wheels Work Readiness Program – the second year of a pilot program funded by ADHC designed to support people with NMC to access employment. Together with Loretta, Melissa and Peter we applied our diverse skills and personalities in training and mentoring 6 young people with a neuromuscular condition (NMC). From day one we said ‘we’re on a mission to change the world’ and I am happy to report that we are one step closer to that vision!

As Training Facilitator, I put my belief in the participants and my expectation for them to live a life of no regrets with no self-imposed boundaries. It all started with a fantastic first weekend together getting to know each other in person and have travel training adventures. For some participants this was only their first or second experience on a train and most experienced their first time on a bus and ferry! For 15 full day sessions we met online all connected by the power of modern technology. We did lots of work on self-reflection and awareness, knowing your needs and becoming confident in communicating them; goal setting, planning and thinking about the future – definitely outside the comfort zone!! Other topics included recruiting and managing care support, health care planning, discrimination law, rights and resources as well as effective email etiquette, writing resumes, cover letters, job applications and interview skills. There were also excursions to the Career and the PossABLE Expos and the Independent Living Centre. The focus was on developing skills in independence and becoming the CEO of your own life!



Carolyn, Mel, Calum & Melissa  
at Penrith expo

*I realised I wanted to do more, to be more involved with community and to start a journey where, in the future I have a paid job and live more independently. The realisation that I don't want to sit at home anymore, but go out, meet new people and learn new skills*



Riding the Rivercat

To my delight the participants grew, matured and stepped up to the challenges presented to them. I think they were quite surprised in how much there was to learn from each other – and just how much practice it takes to implement theory into everyday life. The participants reported that the practical exercises really opened their eyes to the possibilities available to them. Working Wheels (WW) participants now have self confidence, knowledge and skills to live a fulfilled, independent and valuable life. One of the most exciting spin offs is the Denmark Independent Living Project which involves 2 of the participants travelling to Denmark in November to research independent living models and presenting their findings to the community and government here in Australia. What a remarkable and innovative concept!!

I was truly touched to receive letters of appreciation and stories of what the WW program has meant to each of the participants. I feel so honoured to have shared in their incredible growth and development this year in our very special WW program; I will never forget it.

**We learned from the program that getting ready for employment for those with complex physical disabilities is not equivalent to general ‘job ready’ programs and very different to similar programs for people with other types of disability.** There are unique issues for our young people, and the program set out to work holistically with participants in a range of life areas. The WW program has highlighted to us just how important it is for people with complex physical disability to be a part of their community; to have high expectations of themselves; to have the confidence to challenge their thinking and others’ perceptions of them. It has also confirmed how parenting can so strongly influence the type of life their children will live and ultimately what they’ll get out of their life.

*I can't thank you enough for everything that you have taught me throughout the Working Wheels Program. You shared your story and experience and I will never forget the day when you said "a wheelchair is not a burden, it's freedom!"*



*Mel and Bronte enjoying a bus ride into the city*

Workplace Consultant Peter Hojgaard-Olsen has been the quiet achiever in all of this, the driving force behind making it happen and reinforcing with the team that they can actually do this. Believing in people is such a strong motivator to effect change. Melissa Wentworth-Perry has been the solid and reliable back of office support for this program, a true project manager and beautifully warm and personable to boot! Loretta this was your brainchild and I hope we have done you proud. The Association is incredibly fortunate to have such a diligent, passionate and competent leader in you – someone who genuinely cares about achieving better lives for people with NMCs.

Thank you to Muscular Dystrophy NSW for inviting me to support young people to create better lives for themselves. This work has been truly life changing for all involved!! Personally for me, it was such a rewarding experience, one that has absolutely consolidated my feeling that it is my calling to do this work. I believe the reason I have SMA is so I can mentor and support others with our shared experiences. Working with others to live a better and more empowered life – WOW how fortunate I am to do this with such remarkable colleagues and outstanding young people!



*How many wheelchairs can we fit into one carriage!*

The next stage of the pilot involves supporting the participants in their internships, getting real-life practical work experience in areas that develop their networks, skills and interests. In January we will be holding the Working Wheels Wrap Party where participants will present their WW journey, learning and outcomes from the program. There will also be a Presentation by the Denmark Independent Living Project team and a formal Graduation ceremony. Stay tuned for all the coverage in March's full edition of Talking Point.

A huge thank you to ADHC for the opportunity to undertake this important work. They trusted us to do something innovative for young people with neuromuscular conditions – and their investment was definitely worthwhile!

**Carolyn Campbell-McLean**, *Training Facilitator and Mentor*

*I would like to personally thank you for helping me to grow and become stronger in my independence. You have inspired us through your knowledge and life experience and helped us on our journey to a life well lived. Dream big and never give up!*