

# WORKING TOWARDS AN INDEPENDENT LIFE WORKING WHEELS SUCCESS

The last weekend in January saw participants from both phases of the Working Wheels program reunite in Sydney, together with family, MDNSW staff and Board as well as representatives from ADHC and funding bodies My Choice Matters and Duke of Edinburgh International. The occasion was an official graduation from the Working Wheels program, where participants shared their experiences and celebrated their achievements. There was also a bit of social time at The Brewery!



The Gang

During the past 2 years we did lots of work on self-reflection and awareness, knowing our needs and becoming confident in communicating them; holding a can-do attitude and great expectations for ourselves was key. The focus became much more than getting job-ready and practicing interview skills; our work was about gaining the tools for independence and becoming CEO of your own life! And I am so proud to report that this is exactly what has happened!

So what were some of the outcomes for participants? One participant is now working as a Lifeline Counsellor and studying counselling after years locked in his bedroom gaming; another is working as an Ability Linker supporting people with disability to connect with their community; another is a Project Officer for a Design project – their chosen career!; four are now in paid employment; one now has his own community radio program; at least three participants have secured their own care funding and one now has an accessible vehicle; four participants are doing voluntary work in their local communities and there is a really lovely little network of ongoing support, friendship and camaraderie between participants that can't be replicated in generic employment readiness programs.

At the graduation event each participant was asked to share their journey – their words were honest, insightful powerful and reflected the enormous difference the program has made to their lives. Each and every participant was so well prepared for their speeches and really spoke from the heart! It was obvious the participants matured and developed so much confidence over the past two years. The audience responded with tears, there were offers of further speaking engagements and the funding bodies were clearly impressed!

Kate Thomas presented a fabulous presentation about her adventurous journey to Denmark, with fellow Dukie Philip Hojgaard-Olsen. This was an excellent collaboration between MDNSW, Duke of Edinburgh Award International and My Choice Matters, and the entire idea stemmed from our very first Working Wheels weekend! WOWSER despite the freezing conditions – Denmark looks incredibly accessible!! (see Denmark article)

A huge thank you to ADHC for funding this important work. They trusted us to do something innovative for

young people with neuromuscular conditions – and their investment was definitely worthwhile. MDNSW genuinely cares about achieving better lives for people with NMCs, and I believe this pilot program has done just that!

Finally, a huge thank you to the young people who participated in the WW program. Thank you for your trust, your willingness to listen and try new things. I was truly touched to receive letters of appreciation and stories of what this has meant them. As I said in my article last edition I feel so honoured to have shared your incredible growth and development in our very special WW program, I will never forget our time together. Working with others to live a better more empowered life – how wonderful is it that our Association can work with such outstanding young people! The next generation of leaders is coming!

**Carolyn Campbell-McLean** Training Facilitator

**WW had a focus on practical information and skills and finding opportunities to put them into practice in real life. Some of the areas covered included:**

- goal setting, planning and thinking about the future
- understanding Neuromuscular Conditions
- understanding yourself – strengths and areas to develop - and presenting yourself to others
- identifying and communicating support needs in relation to employment
- care support packages, recruiting staff and planning for NDIS
- health care planning
- discrimination law, rights and resources
- consultancy / being a contractor / sole trader
- family dynamics and informal supports
- networking and forming community connections
- acceptance, loss and grief
- dealing with change