

Pulse podcast 1: transcript

You're listening to a podcast from the Department of Human Services, Centrelink.

Tom:

International Day of People with Disability is a day to celebrate the contribution people with disability make to our communities.

Celebrated on the third of December each year, the day brings together individuals, businesses, community organisations and governments from every corner of the world, to acknowledge the contributions, skills and achievements of people with disability.

This year's theme is: "Breaking down the barriers".

Centrelink offices throughout Australia proudly support International Day for People with Disability. Offices are getting involved with local disability organisations, by participating in activities like morning teas and sausage sizzles.

There are two main payment types available to people with disability.

Firstly, the Disability Support Pension is a fortnightly payment that helps those who have a physical, intellectual or psychiatric impairment that prevents them from working for 15 hours or more a week for the next two years, or if they are permanently blind. It includes a concession card.

Secondly, Mobility Allowance is a payment that helps people who are looking for work, are in vocational training, paid employment or voluntary work, and have a disability which means they can't use public transport without substantial assistance. Mobility Allowance can include a Health Care Card.

Centrelink can support people with a disability if they want to do paid or voluntary work, or study. There are a number of disability employment services that can help people to gain or maintain employment, or access training programs. Some of these services are Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Disability Employment Network and Australian Disability Enterprises.

You can find out more about International Day of People with Disability by checking out the website at www.idpwd.com.au, which also has links to Facebook and Twitter pages.

For more details on Centrelink payments and services, visit www.centrelink.gov.au, drop into your local Centrelink Service Centre, or give us a call, on 13 2717.

Have you checked out Pulse? It's a website for people who receive a Disability Support Pension. You can find out the latest news, views and things to do. Share your opinion and sign up for the e-newsletter. Head to www.pulse.centrelink.gov.au to get in the loop!

Julie:

I'm Julie Lawrence and this week I had the chance to chat to Marie Kuchenmeister. Marie is the Director of Dal Gourmet Café and Catering in Geelong, who this year have won the Australian Disability Enterprise Award, acknowledging the organisation for its innovative training, social inclusion and employee participation.

Thank you for joining us today Marie, what we would like to know is a little bit about the business and how many employees you have working here?

Marie:

Well we were established in 1991, due to the lack of employment opportunities for people exiting Nelson Park special school here in Geelong, and have grown from having myself and two senior staff

members and four young people with special needs (they were the first employees here) to today we have 18 support staff and 50 young people with disabilities working here.

Julie:

And timeframe, how long has that taken to build up?

Marie:

20 years, yes we've just celebrated our twentieth birthday actually, last Friday.

Julie:

What do you think your employees like best about working for Australian Disability Enterprise?

Marie:

I would say that it's the fact that they have real jobs and they work in a very well respected business that's integrated into the Geelong community. I think that's the main thing. They also have opportunities to do further training at our local Tafe college. We do provide a Certificate II in hospitality in partnership with our local Tafe college which is a great partnership. And also gives them the opportunity to learn some skills that they can also transfer to their living skills and environment at home as well, and also to form wonderful friendships.

Julie:

Do you employ people with all types of disabilities?

Marie:

Pretty much, mostly intellectual disabilities, but they could have a secondary disability as well, but learning disabilities also. That's the majority of the young people that come here. They're usually coming through as integration students from mainstream schools or Nelson Park special school or Barwon Valley special school.

Julie:

And what skills and opportunities do you think your employees gain from working for your business?

Marie:

Well obviously they have a lot of hospitality skills that they learn here, and that gears them up then to move out into the community. Not everybody does move out into the community, but certainly many do. In the last fifteen years we've moved thirty young people out into jobs in our community. Most of those have happened in the last five years, but one of the most exciting parts about that is that we have a retention rate of over ninety percent. And I think that's really, very important. And I think it's a slow progress, that they work two days in open employment and two days at Dal, and eventually they're full time in their open employment.

Julie:

Fantastic, that's great to hear. Now what steps did your employees take to gain employment from your cafe?

Marie:

Well again, most of them do come through the school system, and what they would do is work experience while they're still at school, they do work experience here at Dal to make sure it's the sort of place they might like to work in. That's the main way.

Julie:

Why do you think it's important for an Australian Disability Enterprise to be recognised?

Marie:

Well I think it's important. To me, the most exciting part of winning this award was recognition of the young people with disabilities and what they can achieve given the opportunities to do that. And I think to me, that's really the most important thing out of everything. And it also too, we do run a commercially viable business which we're very proud of. And most of the money that we generate from that is actually put into additional programs. And they'd be things like people getting their learners and budgeting and money maths, and community access. Community access would be things like going to the Geelong hospital, or the police station, get them out to legal services, all those places that they need to know where they are, but might be a little bit apprehensive to go, so we make them feel familiar with those places.

Julie:

Isn't that wonderful. So you're making them very independent, which is fantastic.

Marie:

Yeah, we take more of a holistic approach, to the whole person. It's not just about employment.

Julie:

What role do you think your employees had in winning this award?

Marie:

Well it's because them we did win the award really. I mean we really pride ourselves on believing that our biggest asset is our employees, and it's through them and their participation at working at Dal and showing the community what they can do when they're given the opportunity. And I think people, I'm sure that we've had a small part in changing the perception of people's ideas of people with disabilities. People walk in to buy fabulous food and receive excellent service, and that's actually the reason we had to look for another site, because we were bursting at the seams here at Fenwick Street. So we found a great opportunity down in Pakington Street with a lovely big commercial kitchen out the back that we fitted out. Both of the cafes are buzzing.

Julie:

Well I think people should get down here and check Dal out, and maybe catch up with Marie if they can, and the lovely staff here, because they're all ready and willing to help. So thank you Marie for letting us speak with you today about Dal, and congratulations on the award.

Marie:

Thank you, my pleasure Julie.

Thanks to everyone involved in today's podcast. If you'd like more information about Centrelink payments or services, go to centrelink.gov.au, or phone 12 2850.