

# Ability Links NSW Newsletter

Issue #2 February 2014



## Meet Nick Gleeson – the first Ambassador of Ability Links



In June 2013, Nick Gleeson was appointed as the first Ambassador of Ability Links. One of his first tasks as Ambassador was to host the official launch of Ability Links in Newcastle in June 2013. He is also an active contributor to other aspects of the program. We are currently looking into appointing more people as Ambassadors of Ability Links.

This is Nick's story.

*In May 1968 my life changed and changed forever! It was a late Autumn afternoon and I was with my mother at a supermarket in Broadmeadows, Victoria. As we left the shop the knob of the electronic swinging door hit me on the side of my head and there was blood, lots and lots of blood. We went back into the supermarket and a staff member and my mum cleaned up the wound, then we went home.*

*A few days later, on a Sunday afternoon, things started to blur. It seemed to be all distorted and changing shape. It was scary. I told my parents "I cannot see". I was sitting in the front seat of our car, between my parents, and wondering why the buildings were getting further and further away. In panic, I looked up into my mother's face and that was the last image I would ever see in my life. The lights went out!*

*They operated several times, and each time there was no change, I was left totally blind at the age of 7 and a half. I sit here and wonder why it is so important to say the extra half year, and I know it is because I understand the value and the significance of sight.*

*I occasionally think that it would be lovely to be able to have a certain amount of "sight time", maybe 48 hours of just seeing, just updating the visual world and remind myself of things I once saw all those years ago. However, life is about reality – and the reality is, more than likely, I will never see again. I have had to adjust to this way of living.*

*I have always known and believed that disability is very difficult to understand because each person is an individual with their own unique set of parameters. However, Government's historically have always tried to categorise, and to place disabilities into structural boxes. It just cannot work that way. Impossible.*

*In many ways, I have led a life of achieving personal goals, often involving positive people in the community to assist me. This is why I was so excited to learn of Ability Links. I love that it is not about disability, but about ability. It is not about "rehabilitation services" but about living life and having the freedom to experience it fully. I love that it provides supportive tools and initial human connections, so that people can take the opportunity to be part of their own community. People don't need to prove anything to anyone.*

*Recently, I started doing hydrotherapy sessions at my local pool. It was scary as I had to learn to get there, do some basic disability awareness training and, at times, be patient. Patient because the physiotherapists had never been in a pool with a totally blind person before and, of course, they were apprehensive. I love the benefits of hydrotherapy as the physiotherapists are fabulous and totally inclusive. I have gotten to know other people and I feel they have gained more awareness of disability. Through this one experience, I can confidently say there is now far greater understanding that a community is made up of people with extraordinary and various backgrounds, and that is why life can be so rewarding.*

*Ability Links is New South Wales' opportunity to show Australia, show the world, what is possible and how each community can be inclusive of all people.*

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## Ability Links in ACTION in the Hunter

Nora had been connected by a Linker with a local florist for some work experience. Having enjoyed her experience and gaining a huge amount of confidence from it, she returned to Ability Links seeking assistance to enrol in a floristry course at TAFE. Nora has stated that without the assistance from Ability Links she would probably still be sitting at home alone on the lounge watching TV, instead of finding her confidence to do something like go to TAFE.

A couple in their 60s who had lost their place in society regained a social life after contacting Ability Links. Madge had suffered a stroke that resulted in physical disability, including vision impairment. Madge withdrew from her active community roles due to the challenges she faced. Walter, her husband, focused on caring for Madge and the couple became socially isolated. With support and information from their local Linkers, Madge is now enrolled in a supportive writer's group after identifying her passion for poetry and desire to re-connect with her community. Walter is also now a member of the local men's shed and is re-building his social networks and confidence.

## What is Ability Links?

Ability Links aims to help build a society where people with disability are included, valued and equal members of their communities. It is about community inclusion and participation, so that people with disability are able to access and participate in activities available to the general community.

Ability Links Coordinators, known as Linkers, assist people with disability to build their informal networks to support them to achieve their goals and have their needs and interests met in their communities.

## Ability Links Briefings

We are currently briefing members of the community across the State about Ability Links. If you would like us to come to a community meeting in your area to discuss Ability Links please let us know by emailing us at [abilitylinksnsw@facsnsw.gov.au](mailto:abilitylinksnsw@facsnsw.gov.au).

## Where is Ability Links available?

Ability Links is currently available in the Hunter area with the St Vincent de Paul Society and Barkuma Neighbourhood Centre delivering the program.

For information about Ability Links in the Hunter, please visit

[www.vinnies.org.au/ability-links-nsw](http://www.vinnies.org.au/ability-links-nsw)

or phone **(02) 4905 0700** and

[www.barkuma.org.au](http://www.barkuma.org.au) or phone **(02) 4937 1094**.

We are currently undertaking tender processes for the delivery of Ability Links state-wide.

Ability Links will be available to all families across NSW from 1 July 2014.

## Evaluation of Ability Links

Urbis Pty Ltd will be evaluating the impact of Ability Links over the first three years of implementation, from July 2013 to June 2016.

Urbis is currently developing a page on its website regarding the evaluation which will provide regular updates and also include a portal for completion of surveys from people using the program and other interested stakeholders.

## Training for Linkers

In light of feedback received from Linkers in the Hunter and members of our two Ability Links Advisory Groups, we are currently reviewing the Linker training program with a view to developing a broader training package for Ability Links state-wide.

We will also be holding an annual Ability Links Conference. The first planned for late 2014. This Conference will bring together all Ability Links providers and Linkers from across the State and will provide Linkers with further learning opportunities and a chance to meet and share knowledge and ideas.