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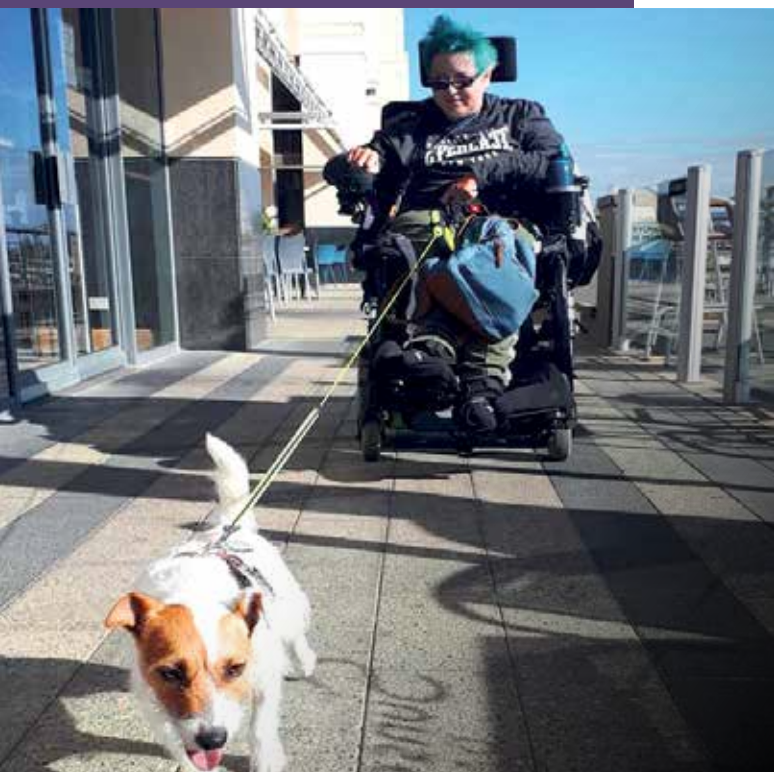
# 1 disability AWARENESS

Care for others

A community that sees the person and not just their disability, will discover that person's gifts and strengths, and create opportunities for meaningful participation in community life.

**“Honor others more than yourself. Don’t be interested only in your own life, but care about the lives of others too.”**

Philippians 2:3b-4 (ERV)



**“We all have a longing to be accepted and included.**

Being included is more than not being excluded. As filmmaker and student Alison says, “I want to be treated as though I don’t have a disability. Look at me and what I’m doing, not at the (wheel) chair.”

## **Did you know?**

- 34% of people with disability are managers and professionals!
- Graduates with disability take 56.2 % longer to gain fulltime employment than other graduates.
- People with disability aged 15-24 years are 10 times more likely to experience discrimination than those aged 65 years and over.<sup>4</sup>
- Many expect workplace adjustments to be costly, but research shows most adjustments cost less than \$500.<sup>5</sup>

The idea that a disability is something that needs to be ‘fixed’ can be hurtful. “A community that only sees deficits in a person with a disability creates barriers to participation and entrenches dependencies.”<sup>1</sup> When we focus on a person’s gifts, strengths and positive qualities, we nurture their potential. Everyone has something to offer when given the chance. We are richer because of our diversity and we are definitely better together.

We held focus groups with people living with disability and here are their suggestions to develop disability awareness in your church.

# TOP TIPS FOR DISABILITY AWARENESS

- **See our strengths:** We are all created in the image of God. That means the finger prints of God are on me, just as they are on you. I have unique gifts, skills, passions, life experience, abilities, and weaknesses. I'd rather you focus on what I can do. 'Every person with disability can lead a meaningful and fulfilling life that reflects his or her aspirations and personal interests. It may take some careful thinking and planning but a typical life in the general community, full of the experiences and opportunities that most of us enjoy and take for granted, is possible.'<sup>2</sup>
- **Be courteous:** We get a lot of stares, especially from children. If your child stares, encourage them to say "Hi", don't pull them away as if our disabilities are contagious! Afterwards talk about disability with your child, "The woman we met was really smart and funny wasn't she? She uses that wheelchair to help her move around because her legs don't work." It's important to normalise disability.
- **Celebrate diversity:** As a church or community leader you can promote inclusion by encouraging communities to accept diversity and appreciate human variety. For example, a pastor remarked that God was pleased when a woman with an intellectual disability sang loudly and a little out of tune. That response helped turn a situation some saw as embarrassing into something worth celebrating.
- **Think accessible:** When you are planning an activity ask yourself "Is this activity accessible for everyone? How can we make it easy for anyone to participate?" Can we create specific opportunities and respond to individual needs in ways that really enable inclusion?
- **Inclusion is intentional:** If you shift the focus from 'my/your' challenge to 'OUR challenge', we look for ways to work together to find a way forward. If things aren't working, we ALL take responsibility. When things are working we ALL get the benefit!

- **Create opportunities:** When we participate in community life we feel as if we belong. It builds our self-esteem, self-confidence and self-respect. Social and employment opportunities are sometimes difficult for people with disability because there may be barriers such as transport, speech difficulties, or a "you can't do that" attitude. Helping reduce barriers creates more opportunities for everyone to join in.
- **Volunteer / Paid employment:** Many churches have church offices, op-shops, cafés, community gardens, men's sheds, craft groups and other activities that offer volunteer and/or paid positions. Having a valued role is empowering and provides us with the opportunity to develop our capacity.

Working, whether paid or as a volunteer, builds our independence, social skills and life skills, plus it reduces discrimination. Some people have said that paid work increases their financial freedom

Karoo has speech impairment after experiencing a stroke. Since that time Karoo says some people now communicate with him differently.

"Some talk loudly or really slowly, as if I have a problem with hearing or understanding. I'm the same person. I still work as a mechanical engineer, I just speak differently now."

and opens up options. "Now that I'm working, I can book that holiday!" says Georgia.

A couple of things your church can do to promote our employment opportunities:

1. Be flexible: we need work hours and processes that accommodate our needs.
2. Use accessible practices and infrastructure: train your leaders and staff for any special equipment we may use. Make modifications to improve access and you will find others in your church will also benefit.
3. Provide a mentor: have someone to support us while we learn the ropes for any new job. When we know how, we will be loyal employees or volunteers, so please give us a try.

## RESOURCES

The Attitude Foundation, <http://www.attitude.org.au/>

Livability, <https://livability.org.uk/>

Resourcing Inclusive Communities, <https://www.ric.org.au/>

Leave No-one Behind, Luke 14 resources from CBM <https://www.cbm.org.au/about-us/publications/>

There are more useful resources for churches re disability awareness at [www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections) with live links to the relevant websites.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 'National Disability Strategy 2010-2020' Attorney-General's Department, Canberra, 2011, viewed 3 Mar 2019, p.18 <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/NDS%20PDF.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Resourcing Inclusive Communities website, viewed 26 Feb 2019, <https://www.ric.org.au>

<sup>3</sup> Holy Bible, Easy-to-Read Version, Bible League International, 2006.



Jenny is flourishing since she started to work as a volunteer in the church craft group.

Jenny helps to set up the tables, unpacks the art supplies and welcomes the ladies when they arrive on Thursday morning. Jenny enjoys the responsibility. She walks from home to the church hall, and shares a cuppa with Evelyn who runs the craft program.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Network on Disability, Disability statistics, viewed 6 March 2019, <https://www.and.org.au/pages/disability-statistics.html>

<sup>5</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Willing to Work: Good Practice Examples for Employers', Sydney, 2016, viewed 4 March 2019, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/publications/willing-work-good-practice-examples-employers-2016>, p.1.