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2024

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The Guardian

GANNAWARRA
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Life in Focus Today

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How does the NDIS work?

How the NDIS is helping people live their best lives

The National Disability Scheme provides funding to eligible people with disability to improve their quality of life.

It is designed to create more time with family and friends, allow greater independence, access to new skills, jobs, or volunteering in community while providing links to health and community services.

The NDIS now supports more than 500,000 Australians with disability to access the services and support they need.

This includes supporting approximately 80,000 children with developmental delay, ensuring they receive support early so they achieve the best outcomes throughout their lives.

How NDIS creates choice

Previously, governments funded agencies to deliver services and programs within communities.

With the introduction of NDIS, participants were funded directly,

allowing them to source services and support that suited their individual needs.

A pay-for-service model allowed agencies to develop and cater for more specialised programs that cover a broader selection of supports.

Who is eligible for NDIS

Australians who have permanent and significant disability may be eligible for NDIS support.

This includes both physical and intellectual disability for adults under 65 years of age.

To find out if you are eligible visit www.ndis.gov.au

What kind of support and services does NDIS provide for

The NDIS offers funding for a wide range of support and services.

Local areas will have service providers, and each will offer a variety of options that participants can choose from.

Some of these might include:

- Support to access community

resources by providing transport, support workers and carers.

- Programs and groups to increase skills, education, health, social connections, employment options and access to mainstream services.

Creating your NDIS plan

Your plan is a written agreement, and everyone's plan is different.

You will be asked questions about how you are going in many areas of your life, what goals you would like to pursue and what kind of help and support you need.

This will help to develop a plan that provides the right support for you.

Once you have your plan, there are people who will help you start it.

Support Providers

There are many different service providers across the Mallee and each will offer a variety of supports and programs for participants.

To find which one is right for you, visit the NDIS website or call 1800 800 110.

Tayla's all smiles

Meagan McGregor

TAYLA Molluso is the face on the cover of this year's NDIS special feature magazine.

She was chosen as her joy for life clearly shines through.

The cover photo was taken on a trip to the Royal Melbourne Show last year and it is the NDIS that assists in making these kinds of outings possible for some families.

Tayla's mum Tracey said the 26-year-old had a ball at the show and NDIS allowed Tayla a level of independence not otherwise possible.

"Tayla enjoys time away with her friends just like many young girls do," she said.

"By having a support worker, it gives her a level of independence from us and she can do more of the things she enjoys.

"She recently went to an art camp in Echuca with friends and Vivid provided support and organised transport and accommodation."

Tracey said NDIS was life-changing for the whole family.

"Tayla's NDIS package goes with her and that allows for flexibility,"



Tayla Molluso enjoys art, visiting new places and hanging out with friends. Picture: supplied.

she said.

"As an example, last year we spent six weeks away from home housesitting and Tayla was able to access services where we were.

"It meant that she could still take part in activities she enjoys and

she went on a tour of Werribee Zoo.

"Our family enjoys running and we were able to take part in a fun run while Tayla was supported to walk the course.

"So it is really win/win for the whole family."

Peter's keeping up with the digital world

By Andrew Mole

AT the age of 66, Peter Barrett has been through enough hardships for several lifetimes.

Yet this amazingly upbeat individual is currently planning ways to increase his involvement in helping the Swan Hill branch of Red Cross get “a little more with it in the digital world”.

Not bad for someone who suffered a debilitating stroke which left him crippled down his righthand side and who describes his NDIS support workers as “critical” for his future.

“My stroke was a major setback and through a lot of hard work with my support team, I have restored function to my arm and leg,” Peter said.

“On a good day I need a walking stick, and often a wheelie walker, or I will fall.

“The stroke has also affected my short-term memory.”

Part of the assistance he receives includes daily tasks such as showering and monitoring his lower legs and feet, because he is also an insulin-dependent diabetic – a condition induced by the amount of steroids he must take every day to avoid the rejection of a double lung transplant he received in 2016.

“By the time I had that transplant my lung capacity had collapsed to 20 per cent,” Peter explained.

Peter receives movement training, works on his balance, and has made great strides with his handwriting, which was illegible earlier in his recovery.

Peter has been able to join the



Peter spending time digitising his great-grandfather's World War I letters, sent from the trenches of the Western Front. Picture: Sam James

Red Cross and has recently started taking photographs of the branch meetings and fundraising raffle draws.

“I am going to discuss setting up a Facebook page where we can post some of my pictures and news about the things the branch is doing,” he said.

“It is so good to feel you are going in the right direction and by having a worker come in each morning makes such a difference for me.”

Despite all that has happened, Peter remains a glass half-full kind

of guy.

“With support, I feel I can still contribute something,” he said.

When his late aunt in England forwarded him a large collection of World War I letters written by his great grandfather, Peter embarked upon a new project.

“He had enlisted quite early in the war and served in northern France and in that time he must have seen some horrendous things, and just days before the war was to end, he was gassed during a German attack.

“The army repatriated him to England, but the damage was too severe and sadly he died just months later.

“But the letters I now have will provide an insight of his life on the Western Front and I am looking forward to working through them and getting a better understanding of him and of what he went through.

“I am planning to catalogue and digitise them and add them to the family tree which my relatives and I have on ancestry.com.”

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Cooking up a storm for

By **Sunehra Ahmed**

A YEAR ago, if you had asked Joanne Stevenson to follow a recipe she would have been too anxious to make anything.

“If someone had handed me a recipe and told me to make something with all the ingredients, I would have just sat there frozen, wondering ‘How can I do that and how much of this do I need?’” she said.

Now, Joanne makes desserts almost every week as she and four others try to keep up with orders for their business, Honey Bee Treats.

“Last week I made an apple dessert almost entirely on my own following a recipe,” Joanne said.

“I’m getting a lot more confidence in baking now.”

It has been almost a year since Jo O’Bree from disability services and support organisation Echuca Discoveries suggested that Joanne, along with Brendan “BJ” Penno and Jonathan Wright, start a business with professional chef Blake Williams.

“It just started as a way for them to be financially independent, and now it’s almost been a year and they’re

total pros in the kitchen,” Blake said.

BJ, who has autism, said after some time, completing tasks became easier.

“When I first started baking for the business, I had so much anxiety about finishing tasks,” he said.

“But now, I can walk into the kitchen and I know exactly what I have to do.”

Joanne, who has an intellectual disability, said Honey Bee Treats had given her an opportunity to be hands-on.

“I’m not a visual person so I need to be doing things to learn,” she said.

“We’re learning so many different things.”

“We know how to handle money and packaging, and handle responsibilities.”

“We’ve all got to play our own roles.

“I help BJ and Jonno roll out the dough and then I ice the yoyos, put the lids on them and bag them up.”

She said working in the business had gradually improved her skills both inside and outside the kitchen.

“Lots of everyday tasks were



harder to do, and doing this really helped all of us become more independent,” Joanne said.

“We’re not just learning how to bake, we’re learning other life skills: new skills like maths and decision making.”

The group has been selling cookies and cupcakes under the

name Honey Bee Treats at Bridge Keepers Cottage at Tooleybuc, and their desserts have only grown in popularity within the community.

The sweet treats are now being sold at the Tooleybuc pub, Tooleybuc Club and every Tooleybuc Market.

“Now we are trying to keep up with



where ability creates opportunity



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Cottage team

By Sam James

DEDICATED volunteers have given the Tooleybuc Bridge Keeper's Cottage a new life while learning work skills and gaining more opportunities in the process.

Echuca Discoveries participants take pride in sorting and displaying donations, handcrafting merchandise and sourcing products from fellow participants and from across the region.

Manager Jo O'Bree has watched the positive impact the Bridge Keeper's Cottage project has had on participants.

"It was going to close down but it's been taken over by these guys, and now it's not just an op shop but it's a community hub with local produce," Jo said.

"Having their presence in the community showcases their abilities and the skills they're learning.

"It all flows through.

"If they're working at the op shop and the community can see what they can do, it flows through to bigger opportunities – I think that's an important thing that we forget."

Participant John White has taken

leadership in the store, opening the cottage in the morning, making wood crafts to sell in the store, doing stocktakes, and learning about Tooleybuc history and information to provide a tourism service.

This responsibility and engagement with the community gives him self-confidence and makes him feel part of the community.

"I'm learning the money side of things and I get to learn other new skills and meet new people," he said.

Shannon Hoare manages the store alongside John, inspecting and displaying clothing donations, setting up the display outside and balancing the till.

Shannon has also taken steps towards achieving her life goal of working in a cafe.

"Shannon's happy doing what she does with the Bridge Keeper's Cottage, and it seems like that has led to doing some work in one of the cafes – it can lead to bigger things," Jo said.

Participants who work shifts and contribute to the store are also learning valuable skills and



Connor Griffith-Andrews, Jonathan Wright, Matthew Brown, Liam Curtis and John White make wood products to sell at the store. Picture: Sam James



John White, Matthew Brown and Shannon Hoare in the Bridge Keeper's Cottage. Picture: Noel Fisher

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developing strong work skills

feeling the benefits of providing a service.

Charlee Sheahan enjoys exercising responsibility and meeting new people from the community, and from across the country as they stop in.

“I haven’t done much volunteering and work so I think this helps with my work skills and I just like helping the community out,” she said.

“When I was younger the community helped me out so I feel like I’m paying people back for it, which is really important.”

The participants’ visibility in the store and their active role in day-to-day operations is also changing customers’ minds about people living with disability.

“I like when people walk in and I go and help them, and then I explain some of my disabilities and they’re really shocked that I can do all this,” Charlee said.

“It changes some people’s view from bad to really nice, which is what I really like.”

Charlee also makes claywares to sell in the store through her participation with Echuca Discoveries.



The team takes pride in the storefront at the Bridge Keeper’s Cottage.
Picture: Echuca Discoveries

RIGHT: Charlee hand-crafts wares for the Bridge Keeper’s Cottage.
Picture: Sam James

Connor Griffith-Andrews is excited about building up his work experience and woodworking products to sell in the store.

“It sets good challenges when we get donations that don’t fit the standards or when clothes have holes in them,” he said.

“It’s building my work confidence for when I need to do more hours

in a workplace.”

The woodworking crew upcycle materials from other op shops around the town and make them their own, such as an old table or lazy Susan base, and make their own items from scratch like bird houses and dog kennels.

They can also take custom orders.

Local produce includes the Honey



Bee Biscuits made by other participants, honey from Wood Wood, Nanna’s chutneys and sauces, gourmet coffee that local winemakers roast, local nuts, and native plants sourced from a disability company in Mildura.

As a visitor information centre, they also commissioned Tooleybuc merchandise such as coffee cups and magnets from a local supplier in Goodnight.

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Unlocking potential

By Michelle Brady

SHARNI Loats is a teenager with a fresh outlook on life.

The 17-year-old is thriving, thanks to the mentorship through NDIS support.

She smiles as she reflects on what she has been able to achieve in the past 12 months.

Not only has she helped organise a number of events at a community level, but she's been involved in a range of fundraising initiatives for youth suicide prevention.

She also takes part in weekly work placements at Swan Hill Police Station and has helped to implement a number of youth-driven programs, while working towards gaining her driver's licence.

Her efforts were recognised earlier this year when she was awarded a Swan Hill College Cruise for Awareness Award in

recognition of supporting her fellow peers.

Accepting the award on stage at Swan Hill town hall in front of a packed crowd was a huge accomplishment for Sharni, who only 12 months earlier was finding it difficult to leave the comfort of her bedroom.

"I'd be locked up in my room and didn't want to leave," Sharni said.

The COVID-19 pandemic took its toll on Sharni and she lost all confidence.

She was in Grade 7 at the time, and was undergoing a period of huge transformation, transitioning from primary school to high school in the midst of state-wide lockdowns.

She was also navigating her recent autism diagnosis.

While there's been many scholarly articles documented on the psychological impact of the



Sharni Loats with Ability and Ambition founder Chevorn Barclay.

COVID-19 pandemic on children and teenagers with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Sharni described this period of her life as "really overwhelming".

With the support of her family, she was able to engage with support services through NDIS funding.

Sharni's journey is testament

to the power of one-on-one support, mentorship and the need for individualised programs which steer away from a 'one size fits all' approach.

With the ability to now make new connections, navigate tricky situations head-on and put herself out there, Sharni looks forward to the future.

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Confident sibling success

By Meagan McGregor

FOR siblings Lachlan and Madi Roberts, socialising in large groups and meeting new people is a challenge.

For 18-year-old Lachlan, venturing out on his own was difficult, and without support from the NDIS, he believes he would rarely leave his home.

Through NDIS funding, he has access to a support worker and is able to take part in activities and excursions he never thought would be possible.

"I visit with my support worker once a week and we go to the gym, play pool and basketball," he said.

"I love sports, hiking and gaming and have been on trips to Geelong and Melbourne and although I don't really like big cities, having support has meant I can try new places and new activities."

Lachlan transitioned from a mainstream school in year 9 and said the change has been life altering for him.

"Attending the specialist school is the first time I have ever felt comfortable in a school," he said.

"The NDIS has allowed me to get



Madi and Lachlan Roberts are achieving their goals with the support of NDIS. Picture: Meagan McGregor

the support I need to pursue a future I never thought I would have.

While Lachlan is well spoken and deep thinking, his lack of confidence was holding him back.

"I've learnt what life can be really like now and I am thankful that I have access to the supports I need to achieve my goals," he said.

Madi, 16, struggles with anxiety, meeting new people and going to new places.

She has been accessing Ability and Ambition for two years and receives support twice a week.

"Coming here is good, I chill here after school and we do lots of projects and go on excursions," she said.

"They've really helped me overcome anxiety and build social skills and I'm doing things I really enjoy.

"It's very inclusive here and I have been able to make more friends,

both here and at school.

"I feel safe and comfortable here and I don't get anxiety."

Madi enjoys fishing, camping and doing art projects.

She takes part in cooking and has been fundraising with her support worker to purchase new garden beds to grow her own vegetables.

"We went around to shops and handed out flyers and that was terrifying," she said with a chuckle.

"I might not have liked it, but I did it, and that's a huge thing for me.

"We asked people to donate clothing and then held a thrift store sale, I never thought I would be confident enough to do that.

"My social skills are much better, I have joined the CFA and I will be doing my GFF soon so I will be able to attend fires.

"The CFA has also been very inclusive and it feels like a big family."

While the pair still enjoy a healthy dose of sibling banter, they are clearly proud of each other's achievements, and both look forward to a life where social anxiety does not create barriers to success.

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Part of the work crew

By Nick Moseley

FOR three years, Vivid Kerang has provided 24-year-old Natasha Moloney with the opportunity to gain employment and build friendships within the community.

After leaving school in 2020, Natasha has become a reliable member of Vivid's work crew, as well as participating in supported group activities.

The registered Australian Disability Enterprise allows local residents who live with a disability to gain meaningful employment within their town.

Natasha has been earning money through her work every Monday and Wednesday since 2021, painting survey pegs within the workshop before they are sold to surveyors.

Natasha's mother, Sharon Fulton said her daughter was always eager to get to the workshop every morning.

"She really loves coming here to be a part of the Vivid work crew," she said.

"Natasha is always waking up early in the morning, ready to get to work for another day - she never likes missing a day.

"This is something she wanted to do as soon as she left school, she wanted to get her badge and uniform, and just have a job like other people."

But another part of Vivid's weekly group activities has become a real passion of Natasha's - the organisation's Seed to Plate program.

Natasha immerses herself in Vivid's outdoor garden each week, exploring her love of gardening at every step of the journey.

Participants in the Seed to Plate program have the opportunity to learn about growing their own cooking ingredients, from planting, growing and harvesting to eating.

Another skill Natasha has picked up through Vivid's support has been photography, undertaking a three-week course that saw her learn her way around a camera.

After learning about lighting, focus and how to operate a camera, a selection of Natasha's photos were then part of an exhibition at Sir John Gorton Library last year.

It's not all work and learning at Vivid Kerang though, as Natasha grows her social skills as part of Vivid's flexible support programs.

One of Natasha's yearly highlights at

Vivid is the annual Dinner Dance in Echuca, a chance for Natasha and other people with disabilities to catch up and get their boogie on.

She also takes part in the supported group activities and participates in flexible support days, including day trips to Bendigo and other local excursions.

Whether attending a show at the Swan Hill Town Hall, or simply walking down the street to buy her favourite sweet-treat, jelly slice - Vivid Kerang are there to assist Natasha.

Natasha's mother said that without the support from the NDIS and Vivid, her daughter's life would look much different.

"It's really

important that Natasha gets this help from the NDIS," Ms Fulton said.

"Thanks to the NDIS, Natasha has access to a communication tablet, which she uses to buy what she wants down the street each Wednesday.

"She wouldn't be getting the chance to do all these great things if it wasn't for that support."

Natasha Moloney and her mother Sharon Fulton in Vivid's outdoor garden.

Picture: Nick Moseley



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Work, footy and theatre



Stephen Casey works two days a week with Vivid Work Crew in Swan Hill.

By Nick Moseley

At 64 years old Swan Hill's Stephen Casey doesn't allow his age, or his disability, to stop him from ensuring every day leaves him feeling fulfilled.

Stephen is employed with registered Australian Disability Enterprise, Vivid Work Crew in Swan Hill, a group he has been involved with for 12 years.

The chance to engage in meaningful work and earn money for his time allows Stephen to keep busy and earn some extra money with the support of Vivid's team.

When a local resident starts up their wood fire, they may have Stephen to thank. Steven splits and packages kindling two days a week with the Vivid Work Crew.

Stephen also keeps busy at work by stamping mail or inserting letters and pamphlets into envelopes, this is on top of his independent work delivering pamphlets right across Swan Hill.

"It's nice to wake up and have a job to go to," Stephen said.

"Most of the people I see when I'm delivering pamphlets say hello to me."

But it's not all work and no play with Vivid for Stephen, who recently travelled to Melbourne to cheer on his beloved Collingwood Magpies with support worker Tony Frazzica.

Tony joked that the journey

with Stephen was the only way "someone could pay me to watch Collingwood".

Though for the footy-mad Stephen, the opportunity to watch his Magpies in person is always a highlight - whether in the AFL or the Central Murray league.

"I quite like watching the football," he said.

"Being there and barracking for my team is something I really like doing.

"I go to the local football and cheer on Lake Boga as well - I used to do the scoreboard at Lake Boga."

After suffering a stroke, Stephen has been unable to climb the stairs of the Lake Boga scoreboard - something Vivid Swan Hill are hoping to find a solution for.

Stephen also loves music and live shows, attending events with the assistance of Vivid's flexible support program - most recently attending the Faulty Towers interactive comedy theatre production including a three course meal.

Tony said without the support of the NDIS, Stephen would most probably not have the opportunity to get out to the events he enjoys.

"His daily routine would look very different to what it currently looks like," he said.

"It also gets Stephen out of the house and moving, so it keeps the body in shape as well."

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Stepping out of the comfort zone

By Michelle Brady

SWAN Hill resident Carina Byrne has always had a love of music.

Her living room walls are adorned with photographs of her favourite artists, which include Bay City Rollers, ACDC and Rose Tattoo.

"I just love music, I play it all the time," she said.

After growing up in a farming family, Ms Byrne moved to Swan Hill in 2003, where she took on a farm manager role at a local piggery.

Over the years she's explored many passions and has gained various qualifications along the way.

She became a Justice of the Peace, volunteering her time to help others, obtained her pilot's licence and undertook further study to become a qualified chef after landing a job as a general cook in a local pub.

"They kept referring to me as the chef, but I wasn't, so I decided to get my qualifications and become one," she said.

Looking back on her achievements over the years, Ms Byrne said while she'd had a "busy life", she'd also encountered many challenges which had proved to be major setbacks, taking a toll on her health.

"That was me in a past life," she said, acknowledging her accomplishments.

"That's not me now."

Faced with adversity, Ms Byrne continues to seek treatment for severe post-traumatic stress disorder.

"You don't know what's around the corner," she said.

"You just have to continue to put one foot in front of the other."

While living with PTSD has been difficult, music has continued to play an important role in her ongoing treatment.

Ms Byrne has been volunteering at Swan Hill's Community Radio Station 99.1 – Smart FM, producing her own radio segment entitled 'Let's spin another one'.

"I first started volunteering there

NDIS has allowed Carina Byrne to step out of her comfort zone and take part in more social activities.

Picture: Michelle Brady



to help with my mental health and to get me out of the house," she said.

"It was a little overwhelming at first, like a big jigsaw puzzle with all the different buttons and controls, but I love it."

Playing everything from the 1950s through to the early 1980s, Ms Byrne said the experience had been an eye-opener but one she had thoroughly enjoyed.

Through NDIS, Ms Byrne also receives ongoing support with KAC Care.

Ms Byrne said she was grateful for the help and support they had provided, enabling her to extend

beyond her comfort zone and take part in more community-based activities.

"It's been absolutely wonderful and has allowed me to get out of the house more."

In her spare time, Ms Byrne enjoys watching documentaries, knitting beanies for the Peter McCallum Cancer Centre, pottering around her garden and spending time with her rescue cats, which have helped her through her bad days.

"There's always someone worse off than you," she said.

"I'm a firm believer that you have to remember the past to create a better future."



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Logan Hatton is enjoying a fuller social life since discovering AFL.
Pictures: Meagan McGregor

By Peter Bannan

FOOTY has a knack of uniting and embracing everyone. It draws cultures, colours, abilities and skills together – no matter if you play the Australian Rules game or cheer from the sides. It also has the genius of giving people the opportunity to express themselves, to celebrate and to remember. For Swan Hill Primary School student Logan Hatton, the benefit

it is having on his journey through childhood couldn't be any clearer. His father, Anthony Gardiner, said Logan's participation in football had buoyed his social skills and sense of purpose. And it's thanks to NDIS, too, that Logan is kicking goals in social interaction with other children. Logan has been in his father's sole care for the past three years years, and in this time there's been tangible progress towards diagnosis.

"When I took over with the NDIS stuff, we progressed and got a few diagnoses done," Anthony said. "We got onto a good paediatrician and got onto the right medications. "Ever since, he's basically gone spots crazy ... before that he didn't want to even know about sport. "Most issues were with schooling ... a few suspensions." Logan's social skills weren't great, Anthony said, but had

greatly improved after he signed up to play footy and participate in group activities through the school holidays through his NDIS provider. The eight-year-old is off on a three-day school camp next term and support worker Daniel has been given approval from the school to attend. That allowed Anthony to heave a sigh of relief, but a backup plan was never far from his mind. "He's built up that connection

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DCIRS aims to provide quality supports that develop therapeutic relationships with each individual, and to focus on skill-building and independence so clients and participants can remain living in their own home.



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Social butterfly spreads his wings

By Peter Bannan

JAMES Randall, pictured, has never been more content than he is in his new environment.

After a negative experience in foster care, James, aged 23, is now thriving with support workers.

Hope is being chased and slowly conquered by the 23-year-old, who has autism and an intellectual disability.

"I was with my mum and dad, who weren't my real parents, but they kicked me out of the house and had my bags packed," James said.

"I moved to Swan Hill and people like me better here.

"I got my own house and all of my needs."

James attends Vivid three days a week and says he's happy to admit he's chasing money.

"I pay my bills," he said with pride.

"I do many projects at Vivid.

"I mow lawns, do some gardening – growing cabbage and beans and other vegetables.

"I just love being outside."

James had the opportunity recently to travel to the Mt Buller snowfields – he's saving up to go

again next winter.

He notes it wasn't as cold as he thought it would be, but just feeling the snowflakes was enough to warm his heart.

For the summer, he's planning a camping trip, but he's most looking forward to his favourite beer, zero-alcohol Great Northern.

His two-bedroom unit is where James feels purpose, making his own meals and washing.

Support worker Ken said James was a "much happier man".

His disability support service has recently leased a Moulamein property beside the Edward River, and Ken said it was a game-changer.



"There is a jetty there, there's quite a lot to do over there for clients," Ken said.

"There are canoes and life jackets; many weekends will be spent over there."

It's just as well the property is driving distance from home because James loves travelling in the car.

"As long as he has access to Spotify," Ken added quickly.

"If he's in control of the music, he's the happiest man in Australia."

James enjoys a broad range of music, but artists Sam Fischer, Pink, Adele and a "bit of" Taylor Swift come to mind.

"I don't care what anyone says about Sam, he's my favourite," he said.

Ken said James had become more relaxed and his communication skills had advanced.

"He can now comfortably introduce himself to people," he said.

"We have been over to Echuca and Balranald and when we walk into a shop, he will introduce himself and tell them where he's from.

"He makes friends quite easily, whereas before he was maybe a bit frightened and nervous to talk to people, given where his background was from.

"I don't think he was allowed to do much of that in the past."

Ken said if James wasn't in the right mood for being sociable, the unit set-up allowed separation from each other.

"If he's happy to socialise, we can go to the property, go down the street ... leave it to what they would like to do.

"If he suggests something, we make sure it's possible to make it happen for him within reason.

"He's watched a few of those Getaway shows and asks where they are in the world and if he could go there."

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Walking dogs just the job

By Sam James

LIAM Curtis has found joy in walking dogs for Tooleybuc residents living with disabilities and the elderly.

“It makes me feel good having that role in the community because I’m helping people and families out,” he said.

The 20-year-old started walking dogs in February through Echuca Discoveries, and it has since taken off, with him now walking five to six dogs, two days a week.

“People have said I’m doing a brilliant job and they love the idea,” Liam said.

“It’s really good seeing their faces when I’m helping them out, because they know their dogs are being looked after.”

For Liam, it’s a brilliant business idea because he gets to provide a service to the community while spending time with dogs, which he loves.

Having grown up in the region with access to family farms and their working dogs, Liam spent a lot of time with working kelpies and other dog breeds.

“It’s a big responsibility, but you

have that strong bond with the dog, and you know when you see that excitement in that dog’s face, it loves you, it loves everyone,” he said.

“The excitement in that dog’s face is pretty good.”

Liam brought the idea to Echuca Discoveries, and they agreed there was a need in the disability and elderly communities.

“We help people who can’t walk their dogs and people with disabilities who can’t get out of bed, stuff like that,” he said.

Echuca Discoveries Swan Hill manager Jo O’Bree has seen Liam grow in confidence and independence through dog walking.

“He’s kicking goals and doing a fantastic job, taking over talking with clients and arranging times and all of that,” she said.

Liam is able to combine his dog walking with his participation in Echuca Discoveries, and includes other participants in the business when he needs a hand.

“He’s a good role model and mentor to the other participants, and it’s a pleasure and privilege to support him,” Jo said.



Liam and golden retriever Charlie enjoy the sunshine on a walk.
Picture: Supplied



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Country calm suits keen crafter

By Sunehra Ahmed

IF you have ever stopped by the Bridge Keeper's Cottage in Tooleybuc, you may have encountered the work of Haylee Bosanquet.

Haylee is behind the shop's extensive collection of bracelets, necklaces and cards which she makes in Swan Hill.

Haylee remembers her first time making jewellery 21 years ago.

"When I was in school we did a jewellery making course where we all got to show our jewellery to our parents," she said.

"I just felt great making it."

What started out as a hobby is now a business for Haylee, who had encouragement from disability services and support organisation Echuca Discoveries to sell her works at the shop.

"I made a Pandora bracelet that's just been sold – I went to the op-shop and it was not there anymore," she said.

"I like that I can make things for other people here.

"I'm not sure if I would have gotten to do this in Melbourne."

After making the move to Swan Hill from Melbourne seven years ago,



Haylee Bosanquet says making things has always helped her keep calm. Picture: Sunehra Ahmed **INSET:** Haylee Bosanquet is behind Bridge Keeper's Cottage's extensive collection of bracelets, necklaces and cards. Picture: Supplied

Haylee, who has autism, said life was harder in Melbourne because it was a city that had "too much going on" for her.

She said she much preferred the peace and quiet the town had to offer, and thanks to NDIS transportation had been easier for her.

"I like Swan Hill," Haylee said.

"It's a lot more peaceful and quiet here.

"I would have a harder time trying to travel on buses in Melbourne.

"Over here, the buses come to the front of my house to pick me up or drop me off."

With daily tasks being made a little easier for Haylee, she has found

time now to focus on her crafts with Echuca Discoveries.

"Making things has always helped me keep calm," she said.

"On Monday mornings I get up and I come here to do water-colouring and card making."

"When I do the jewellery making, I bring all the pieces like stone and recycled material from home."

Haylee said participating in activities with others had helped her manage everyday tasks better.

"I didn't even wash a coffee cup when I first came here," she said.

"But now I'll offer to do all the dishes and clean up after we have social dinners.

"I do dishes for anybody now, and I love making everyone a cup of coffee every morning.

"I can also help out with other chores like taking out the garbage."

Haylee said she was glad to be given the opportunity to learn new skills to be more independent.

"I'd like to tell everyone to do their best," she said.

"And If you want to do jewellery making, you can."

"If you want to achieve something, you can do it if you just go for it."

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IN THE COMMUNITY FOR THE COMMUNITY

NDIS makes music dreams come true

By Nick Moseley

WHILE attending Vivid Work Crew in Swan Hill has become a key part of Chris Neill's weekly routine, it's not all work for the Swan Hill resident.

Working every Monday and Thursday with the Work Crew gives Chris routine each week, giving him a reason to jump out of bed in the morning.

Vivid Work Crew estimated that close to 60 per cent of the kindling across Swan Hill was split by Chris, the hard worker unstoppable with the kindling splitter.

Chris said he had been a part of the Work Crew for a very long time, and that he'd also had the chance to do many enjoyable things with Vivid.

Sixty-eight-year-old Chris is a big fan of live music and has attended a number of concerts with the support of Vivid Swan Hill.

The chance to travel to Marvel Stadium to witness the live

show of one-time Beatle Sir Paul McCartney last year was a highlight for Chris.

Chris said while the number of people in the stadium was a bit too much, McCartney put on a fantastic show.

Chris' love of music has been a lifelong passion, but there is one act that tops all of the lists for Chris: Elvis Presley.

Chris recently had the opportunity to travel to Melbourne on a supported holiday, where he attended the Melbourne International Elvis Festival.

Not only did Chris have the chance to witness some of the world's best Elvis impersonators live on stage, he also attended a meet-and-greet with them.

In the next best thing to meeting the real Elvis Presley, Chris met with and had his photo taken with five Elvis impersonators at one time.

His love of Elvis is so strong that he now has The King permanently inked on his forearm



Chris met all five members of the cast of the Melbourne International Elvis Festival earlier this year.

– a constant reminder of the musician he holds dear.

Chris received support to travel to a studio in Bendigo to have the tattoo completed, adorned with Presley's signature beneath his portrait.

It was the realisation of a dream for Chris, having aspired for some time to have an Elvis tattoo.

Without the support of NDIS, the team at Vivid said they wouldn't have the chance to support their participants to follow their dreams and explore the things they were passionate about.



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Ann is in control

By Andrew Mole

ANN Ayres is a veritable demon at the controls of her favourite game – *Grand Theft Auto 5*.

She also reckons she is a pretty dab hand when it comes to a crack at *Uncharted 4*.

Armed with her PlayStation 4, Ann enters another world where she is in control of everything, and she loves it.

The 27-year-old was born with an intellectual disability, and lives in a Kerang share home with her friend Sarah.

She works closely with her NDIS-funded support team to help widen her horizons and improve her ability to increase her all-round wellbeing and skillsets.

“My support workers help me with my personal care, going out and about, attending appointments, home care and meal preparation,” Ann said.

Her involvement with Shop Active is a highlight, twice a week.

“I take myself there and we can have as many as 20 people or so taking part and we do all sort of things together,” she said.

Ann says she has been at Kerang “for a few years” now after her mother Pearl passed away, and living with another NDIS participant helped make the transition to a new town much easier.

Her best friend is her dog Lady – a border collie-kelpie cross who needs, Ann laughs, a bit more exercise than she is keen to share.

“I do take her on walks, but I don’t really like walking alone, and when I do the pain in my back can get quite bad, but if one of my support workers or someone else comes with me and helps that makes things much easier,” she adds.

“But I love swimming, and Ben from Shop Active helps me with that. It is much easier on me because we are in the water, and I love to go to the pool.”

Ann says she went to the Specialist School in Swan Hill, for Years 8 to 12, and really enjoyed her time.

She says having so many people to mix with and do things alongside made it a great day.

“Since then my NDIS support

workers have really helped me become more active, to get up and do more things, which I know is good for you,” she explains.

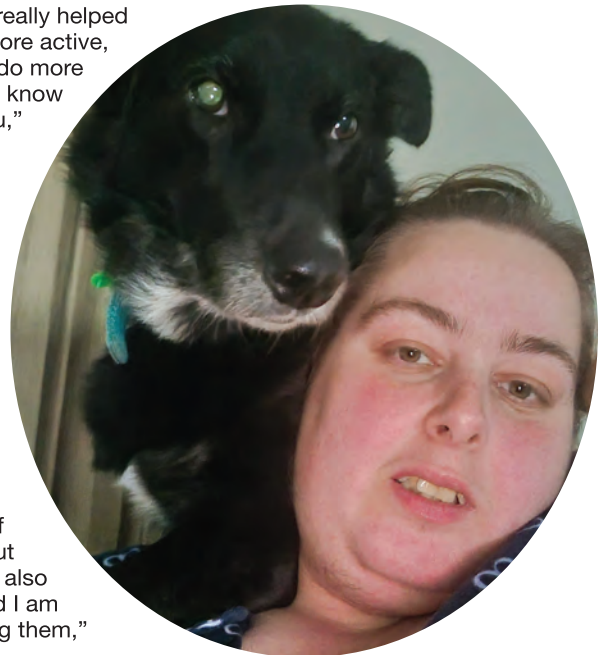
But ask Ann what she most looks forward to and her face lights up: “PlayStation, my PS4.”

“I play a lot of games where you do things, and yes, there is a lot of destruction, but the games are also a lot of fun and I am good at playing them,” she adds.

“Sometimes I play on my own and other times I hook up with other gamers and we compete.”

Ann says she is looking forward to doing more with her NDIS workers, with Shop Active, and especially with swimming.

Most of all, however, she is



Ann Ayres is taking control of her life. Picture supplied.

looking forward to Christmas and what she is really hanging out for.

“Grand Theft Auto 6 – it’s new and it’s on my wish list,” she says. “Right at the top.”

Access and Inclusion

PROVIDING LEARNING PATHWAYS FOR OUR DIVERSE COMMUNITY BY PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

Swim Lessons are designed to work with each person’s ability, not their disability. Our GOswim Program offers both group and private lessons tailored to the needs of each participant.

We aim to provide support for anyone who requires additional assistance or modified programming that will enable them to participate in aquatic activities and programs.

Programs will be planned, developed and implemented based on the needs of each individual or group.

For further information please email our Aquatics Services Coordinator Layla Mitchell: Layla.Mitchell@belgravialeisure.com.au



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Ability and Ambition

“Listen, Collaborate, Achieve!”

At A&A, we provide support to people living with varying abilities in the Swan Hill, Gannawarra & surrounding districts. Our mission is to assist our Participants to reach their goals in a fun and exciting way- encompassing adventure and joy in any way possible to make the shared experience fulfilling for all involved. It is one of our core beliefs that every person has the right to experience and live their life to the fullest.

Person-centric practice is paramount with Ability&Ambition!

Proving the highest level of support:

- Youth & Disability Services
- 1:1 and small group supports
- Bespoke STA
- Recreation & Leisure sessions
- Capacity Building sessios
- Peer Support
- Privately funded support (Non-NDIS)

Contact: 0475 970 387 | admin@abilityandambition.com



Creating a community where people of all abilities thrive



Vivid Employment provides a pathway that builds the ability and confidence to enter the workforce in a supported or unsupported capacity.

Pathways include:

- School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES)
- Supported Employment through Australian Disability Enterprise, Vivid Work Crew
- Supports in Employment
- Open Employment



Vivid Living offers support and services to ensure adults living with disability have choice and control over the life they want to live.

Services include:

- Group Activities
- 1-on-1 Flexible Support
- Supported Accommodation
- Supported Holidays
- Transport



Vivid Learning offers a range of short courses for people with disability to learn new skills.

Courses include:

- Bush Cooking
- Animal Welfare
- Photography
- Nature Walks



Dedicated Support Coordinators at Vivid provide assistance to strengthen each Participant's ability to organise and choose the supports they need to engage fully in life and in the community.

LOCATED: SWAN HILL, KERANG, ECHUCA & KYABRAM



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