NEWSLINK
FEBRUARY2022



FEATURE:

DISCOVER GIPPSLAND

With a boutique accessible travel guide PG10

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

WHEN YOU FOLLOW THE DREAM PG12

THE FUELSERVICE EXPERIENCE PG16

PROVIDING SUPPORT DURING THE OMICRON WAVE PG07

AND MORE

News, events and resources for people living with complex disability and their friends

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We love contributions from our community! If you have an experience you would like to share, or a story you would like to tell, please get in touch.

Not a confident writer?
No worries - we can help shape or edit your story.
Below are the upcoming contribution deadlines:

1st April
1st June

For further information:
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NewsLink is the official newsletter of AQA Victoria Limited (AQA), and is published bimonthly. NewsLink seeks to publish material of interest to people experiencing issues in life arising from a spinal cord injury or other physical disability, their family and social networks, clinicians, professionals and other organisations with an interest in this community. NewsLink welcomes content for publication. Content will be published at the discretion of the Editor who retains the right to edit all submissions as they see fit. Information in NewsLink is furnished solely as a guide to the existence and availability of goods or services. Any opinions expressed in NewsLink are not necessarily those of AQA or the Editor. Original material in NewsLink can only be reproduced with permission from the editor. Donations towards production costs are greatly appreciated. Copyright © AQA Victoria Ltd. All rights reserved.



Finding a way, or making one

Welcome to the first issue of NewsLink for 2022. In many ways this issue encapsulates what's important for all of us in what continues to be challenging and uncertain times: to find some kind of balance between the ever present effects of COVID-19 on the way we live our lives, and those aspects of our lives that give us pleasure, satisfaction, meaning and growth.

With much of the news cycle, and our sense of the world, dominated by the disruptions to life as a result of COVID-19 it would be understandable if that started to take up our whole attention. Our Discovering the Power in Me course shares the idea that our mind works as a filter that tends to prioritise those things around us that represent a threat. These are the things we see, these are the things we talk about and think about. Once we see them and think about them, we tend to see them everywhere, and they can start to dominate our thoughts. Sometimes they become our whole world.

It's really important that we go out of our way to let other things through that filter, to balance us with information, conversation and connection to those other parts of life that also deserve our attention, and that are in fact continuing in and around the realities of a COVID-19 affected world.

In this issue we share stories from Gerard, a member of the Gippsland Community Network, describing his hot picks for accessible destinations in the region. Geoff speaks about his involvement with the Mouth and Foot Painting Artists group. Georgina shares a piece from Sorayya, who is creating clothing for herself and other women given limited appealing commercial options.

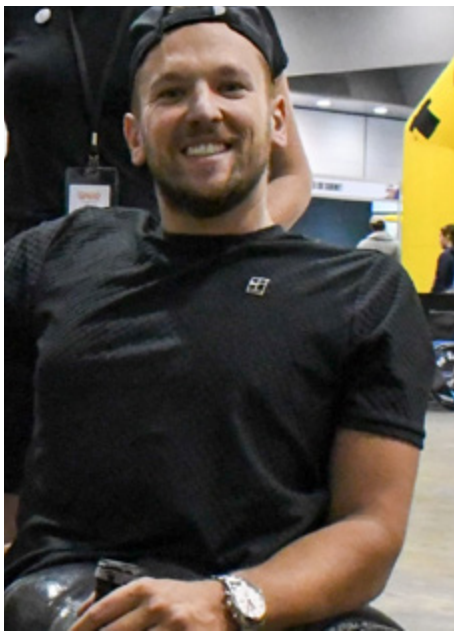
There's a proverb attributed to Hannibal, said to be in response to his generals who believed it was impossible to cross the Alps with their elephants, that: "I will either find a way, or make one"

I'd like to take this opportunity, on behalf of everyone associated with AQA, to acknowledge and to thank our Scheduling and Allocation Team, our Support Workers, and our clients, for finding a way, or making a way, through the massive disruption to our workforce due to the Omicron wave in January.

In this issue Julie, who heads up our Scheduling and Allocation Team, shares aspects of that experience and the response of our team.

Peter Trethewey

PETER TRETHEWEY
CEO AQA VICTORIA



DYLAN ALCOTT NAMED AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR 2022

Dylan Alcott, wheelchair tennis champion, ex-wheelchair basketball player, radio host and motivational speaker, was named Australian of the Year for 2022. He is the first Australian living with a disability to be awarded the honour, and AQA offers him our heartfelt congratulations.

In his acceptance speech, Dylan spoke of growing up different and hating himself, and of how he has grown to love himself and his life. He also had this to say about living with disability:

"Before I go, I want to leave you with this – one of the number one questions I get asked by people is 'Dyl, mate, what is your advice to a young person with a disability or anyone with a disability so they can start living their life?'

"And my advice is this: you don't need my advice. You know what to do, and you've had people telling you what to do your whole life."

Dylan has announced he'll be leaving professional wheelchair tennis after the 2022 Australian Open. We're lucky to have you Dylan, and we're excited to see what the next chapter holds for you.

CAN OUR ALLIED HEALTH TEAM HELP?

AQA has expanded its Support Coordination & Occupational Therapy team. We have immediate capacity to accept new participants. Informed by lived experience, we aim to build your capacity to understand the NDIS and get the most out of your plan. Our Community Engagement Coordinator, Mark Hanson, is available to answer any of your questions.

Contact Mark Hanson: p. **(03) 9489 0777**

Or submit an online Service Inquiry at:
https://www.aqavic.org.au/contact



WHY RESEARCHERS WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Your experience of living with spinal cord injury is becoming much more widely recognised as an essential resource for scientific inquiry, among researchers and also their funders.

What can make your input more helpful is an understanding of why your voice matters.

A consortium of SCI groups across Canada and the US has been compiling a free online course for people who would like to contribute, worldwide.

You can visit their web page on the course, and watch two short introductory videos.



JOIN THE AQA TEAM

AQA is looking for new team members across a number of roles, and we invite you to consider and apply, or to share with people you think may be suitable for the roles.

For details on: Scheduling and Allocations Officer, Return to Work/OHS Officer, and a Service Coordination/ Client Engagement role, check out our Seek page.

For details on our Disability Support Worker positions, visit the jobs page on our website.

Get in touch if you have any questions: **9489 0777** or **community@aqavic.org.au**

WHEELCHAIR SKILLS DAYS

- 19 March: Location TBC
- 29 & 30 April: Location TBC
- 27 & 28 May: Location TBC

Join us to further develop your wheelchair skills and build your confidence when moving about in the great outdoors. Be guided by Specialist Peer Trainer and wheelchair user Dave Ball in negotiating your way across different terrain and slopes.

If you'd like to be involved, please get in touch: **9489 0777** or **community@aqavic.org.au**



DISCOVERING THE POWER IN ME COURSE

- Online: 19, 21, 26, 28 April & 3 May

Discovering the Power in Me (DPM) is an online motivational and goal setting course which is specifically designed for people with SCI or similar physical disabilities.

The purpose is to help build hope, inner strength, resiliency, and self-efficacy in people with disabilities - and their families - in order to reassert control over their lives.

If you're interested in participating, or would like to know more, please get in touch: **9489 0777** or **community@aqavic.org.au**

SKILLS FOR INDEPENDENCE COURSE

- Citadines on Bourke, Melbourne: 28 Feb - 4 Mar
- Sargood on Collaroy, NSW: 9 - 13 May

Skills for Independence is AQA's tailor-made program aimed at boosting your confidence, no matter what your goals are. Developed for people with SCI or similar physical disabilities, and led by people with lived experience, this five-day program focuses on useful topics such as wheelchair skills, transfers, planning holidays and staying away from home, promoting verbal independence, healthy living, activity and exercise, goal setting, pain, fatigue, dressing, body image and intimacy.

The Skills For Independence course is funded typically through your NDIS funding, under your Core and Capacity Building Supports. For those not on the NDIS, or unable to access insurance, a limited number of subsidised places are available. Arrangements can be made if you require day or overnight personal care support during your stay and participation on the course - please let us know in advance.

If you'd like to be involved, please get in touch: **9489 0777** or **community@aqavic.org.au**





WHAT'S OUT THERE DAYS

- April 13
- August 17
- December 7

What's Out There (WOT) days are community living expos which showcase the possibilities of life with a spinal cord injury.

A typical WOT day program starts off with a panel discussion, where speakers with lived experience of SCI speak about their experience of returning to the community, what they currently do, and how they do it. This is followed by a Q&A session, and a BBQ lunch, where panel members and the audience have a chance to talk informally.

Lunch is followed by small-group discussions, covering the day's topics, or anything else that might come up. Nothing is off the table at these discussions, with members often discussing subjects ranging from bowel and bladder to relationships and sex.
If you're interested, or want more information, please get in touch: **community@aqavic.org.au**, or call **(03) 9489 0777**.



IT MADE SENSE TO LOWER MY RISK

Peter Van Benthem

Even though I wasn't super excited about getting my booster shot, it's definitely better for me to lower the risk of having a bad reaction if I get COVID-19.

I organised my first two covid shots through the Vic Gov website, and got them at a Vic Gov vaccine hub. For my booster, I just wanted somewhere nearby, so I did a web search for local pharmacies that offered the booster. When I rang, I luckily got a booking on the day. I must admit to receiving my booster booking quicker: I told them I was a quadriplegic, and they said they would hold a booking for me on that day.

So up the road I went to the local pharmacy, presented my medicare card, rolled up my sleeve and received my Pfizer booster. I had a very slight reaction the next day, I noticed that I felt a bit cool even though it was a hot day. All in all, it was a quick and easy process getting the covid booster at my local pharmacy.



THAT WAS COVID?

Josh Hose

In early January I contracted Covid. I was on a four-day getaway with my partner, down on the Mornington Peninsula, where we visited wineries, hot springs and ate out. Given this amount of outing, and the several Uber trips in between these locations, I guess I wasn't surprised that I may have caught Covid.

On my return home from the getaway I had a dry cough, so I thought I would do a RAT test. It came back positive. The dry cough pretty much lasted 12 hours, and I felt fine for the rest of my quarantine.

To note, I had my booster vaccine in November. So I guess in my case, one could suggest it helped lessen the severity of my symptoms.



A TIRELESS AND EFFICIENT BOOSTER

John Theodoropoulos

Last December, time had arrived for my COVID-19 booster vaccination. I telephoned the COVID-19 hotline to make the appropriate arrangements. I was asked numerous questions so they could locate me on their system. Once found, I was asked where I would like to receive the booster shot. I said Sandown Racecourse.

I explained I was in a wheelchair, to see if it was fully accessible. I was told that it was, and that if I had no way of getting there, they could arrange and provide a taxi service - free of charge - there and back. I told them it was not necessary, as I would drive in with my Disability Support Worker.

My appointment was for 1pm, but I arrived at 12pm - there were no issues. I was personally escorted inside the racecourse and into the vaccination rooms, along with my DSW. I was prioritised, which saved me some time.

My whole experience was tireless and extremely efficient.



YOUNG AND HEALTHY, BUT QUITE SICK

Dan Nathan

My Christmas break felt like a brief fantasy where COVID-19 had never arrived. I really dived in: lots of family and friends, big lunches, and big nights. It was a blast, of course. And then, a few days into 2022, I started feeling pretty crook, of course.

I was in a bad way for a good five days: feverish, body aches, headaches, wet cough, severe fatigue, and brain fog. I ended up doing a full 14-day isolation, as my cough stubbornly remained. A month after I got sick, my fatigue and brain fog have lessened, but I'm still not completely free of them.

I was young, healthy, and double-vaxxed. It's been a sobering experience.

Providing support during the Omicron wave

Clients and support workers coordinated with AQA's Scheduling and Allocations team to meet the challenges of Omicron, as the new wave of COVID-19 swelled rapidly in the community.

Julie Norman
TEAM LEADER OF SCHEDULING AND ALLOCATIONS AT AQA



I am so proud of the Scheduling and Allocations Team (S&A), and our mobile workforce. When the case numbers from the Omicron wave were skyrocketing, and many in the disability community were struggling to find available support workers, we worked in partnership with clients whose programs were affected, to ensure they continued to receive the support they needed and to innovate where that was helpful.

We listened and supported our workforce on the front line; we were strong for them when they were in tears. We listened to and supported clients who were fearful of getting COVID-19, were fearful of how their supports would be delivered while people were in isolation, or had concerns about how they could get tested.

In the first week of 2022, the S&A team had 50 calls from staff or clients that needed to isolate. We needed to fill another 398 shifts.

We reassured our clients that we would continue supporting them, sometimes asking them to change their shifts around, asking family members to help, and sending full personal protective equipment (PPE) packs via taxi to their homes. The flexibility and understanding of our clients is greatly appreciated.

On Christmas Eve last year, the S&A team had celebrated our having set up the supports our clients needed to enjoy a relaxed festive season. We had looked forward to starting 2022 on the front foot.

Sadly, that was not to be the case. In the three days after Christmas, something was changing. We could see the COVID-19 cases increasing in the community. Before we knew it, we had 186 additional shifts to fill.

On our return in 2022, the first four days were just as challenging as the week before: our hard work of 2021 was wiped out by the avalanche of COVID-19 cases and contacts. And we were down two members of the S&A team, due to isolation.

The team stepped up and put in extra hours, and in turn we asked more of our already limited mobile workforce. We had to start working from home every day, which changed our working dynamics and tested the team.

Our language changed: no more "Covid-19"; now it was just "covid-positive". "Quarantine" is so last year! In 2022 it's "isolation", or simply "iso". We started asking about dates - not the fun dates - dates of PCR or RAT testing, and dates for when iso ended.

In the first week of 2022, the S&A team had 50 calls from staff or clients that needed to isolate. We needed to fill another 398 shifts.

Our mobile workforce! What an amazing group of people we have supporting our clients. The diligence of our support workers in alerting us to symptoms, and their concern for client safety. The staff who without hesitation took on extra shifts, and put on full PPE in the heat to continue supporting our clients.

The second week of 2022 bought another 31 covid-positive related calls, and 275 extra shifts to fill.

We talked of RATs like they are as elusive as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. "Close contact" were not words we wanted to hear. "Stay safe" became a plea and a heartfelt message to support workers, colleagues and clients who were worried and scared. Testing centers closed down due to extreme heat. PCR tests were taking over seven days to get results, or worse, were lost forever.

And this was just our first two weeks! Welcome to 2022! We look forward to the rate of new COVID cases falling - and whatever happens, to supporting our fabulous community to stay safe and well.

Our vision for 2022

COMMUNITY NETWORKS UPDATE

Georgina Fiorentino
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & NETWORK COORDINATOR



The Women's Network put on a month of badminton sessions during January, in partnership with Para Badminton Victoria.

The purpose of the Community Networks at AQA has always been to provide a platform that enables our members to share and learn from each other's knowledge and experience, surrounding numerous topics of common interest, but particularly topics relevant to those who have sustained a spinal cord injury.

We have empowered many members over the years, ranging from those who live in metro Melbourne to those in regional Victoria, enabling them to connect and participate actively within their communities and improve their lives. Specialised networks have also been formed to cater for special interest groups, such as the Women with SCI Network.

AQA's vision for the Community Networks is to continue supporting the networks, but also to assist those networks, particularly those in regional Victoria, to build their capacity to coordinate their own gatherings, and to become adaptable to changes in the world. We've witnessed the importance of that adaptability over the past two years.

We want to recommence our presence in regional Victoria, with the aim of visiting and supporting those members that have felt more isolated. We want to empower the regional communities to stand on their own, with the help of their local organisations and councils, to build and improve accessible services so they're not as reliant on the services provided in Melbourne.

In the next 12 months, we're looking to create new networks formed around topics, for example, a dedicated NDIS group, or a dedicated Student group. We're also looking to engage younger members to learn about how they could benefit from joining a community network, in contrast to what they are currently accustomed to joining, eg. a social media platform.

Please look out for an invitation to one of your favourite Community Network meetings, where we hope to reintroduce face to face meetings, social activities and specialty guest speakers to talk on important topics chosen by yourselves!

In the next 12 months, we're looking to create new networks formed around topics, for example, a dedicated NDIS group, or a dedicated Student group.

AQA's community Networks run across Melbourne and are heading to Tasmania soon.
For details or to get involved contact us on:

03 9489 0777 or
info@aqavic.org.au

Finding better ways to support young men

Michael Moriarty, a departing coordinator for the Living Your Best Life project, fills us in on developing strategies to better support young men living with SCI.

Michael Moriarty



The Living Your Best Life project has found that a focus on good interpersonal communication is critical to successfully engaging young men with community-based services and activities.

Men under 35 are overrepresented in the SCI community, and they are often not well equipped to seek or accept support. In recognition of these facts, the Victorian Transport Accident Commission (TAC) has commissioned a project called Living Your Best Life.

The project aims to support young men who have suffered traumatic spinal cord injury in managing their health and wellbeing, beyond outpatient rehabilitation.

The project is being delivered by three project partners: AQA, Austin Hospital Spinal Unit and Monash University

The project aims to support young men who have suffered traumatic spinal cord injury in managing their health and wellbeing

Behaviour Works. It commenced in January 2020 and is due to finish later this year.

Central to the project - and the design of the intervention - is participation and input from those with lived experience of SCI.

Phase 1 of the project, which collated information from research, health professionals and men living with SCI, has uncovered some key barriers and key facilitators to making optimal decisions on health and wellbeing, as well as suggestions for interventions in the community.

Key Barriers:

- Perceived norms of masculinity
- Lack of knowledge
- Financial barriers
- Fear

Key Facilitators:

- Social and/or family support
- Treatment with a focus on good interpersonal communication

Suggestions for interventions in the community:

1. Take an 'opt out' rather than 'opt in' approach to providing support, without being pushy.
2. Move away from clinical settings and medical perceptions.
3. Use male role models or mentors to reverse negative norms of masculinity (eg. takes courage to seek support).
4. Initial focus on connection over content.
5. Avoid 'one-size-fits-all' approaches.
6. Mitigate society's low expectations of those with disabilities.
7. Foster the desire for independence and ownership of activities.
8. Timeliness of personalised information provision.
9. Facilitate skills development & overcoming challenges.

Phase 2 of the project is now commencing, which is the co-designing of one or more suitable interventions with men living with SCI and health professionals. The final phase will be piloting the intervention/s and evaluating the outcomes.

The project partners, myself included, are thankful that the TAC was willing to fund this project when the intervention hadn't been preconceived but instead will grow out of a co-design process involving lived experience.

AQA plays an important role in the project by encouraging and supporting people who have that lived experience to participate in the project. This is crucial in the current phase, as the design of an effective intervention is more likely with input from those with lived experience.

I have enjoyed working with this project, where all involved show genuine excitement at the prospect of an innovative approach to supporting young men to optimise their wellbeing and live their best life. I am now moving on from AQA, but I'll be keen to hear how the project progresses.



Gippsland's accessible gems

A Traralgon resident shares favourite destinations in his region.

Dan Nathan

Walhalla: Gerard appreciates both the rich history and lush scenery of Walhalla, an old mining town at the bottom of the Victorian Alps.

Growing up in Warragul, at the western end of Gippsland, Gerard Jarvis spent his weekends hiking and exploring the bush.

Since he sustained a spinal cord injury six years ago, his favourite hobby of mountain bike riding has been off the table. But he can stand, walk short distances, get in and out of his Toyota Landcruiser, and theoretically use his camper trailer.

Gerard, a member of AQA's Gippsland Community Network, recently gave a presentation to Network members from around Victoria, showcasing some of the best bits of his region.

He says he was just getting settled back home, and building up his strength, when the pandemic hit. Hence, he hasn't been four-wheel driving or camping since he was injured.

"This is the year," he says.
"I'm going to get back out there and start exploring again."

Gerard settled on Traralgon, east of Warragul, as his home because it has good facilities and is about an hour and half from Melbourne, the ocean, and the hills. These features also make Traralgon a great base for a weekend of exploring, he says.

If coming from Melbourne, Gerard suggests making a weekend of it, as most of the destinations would be a tight day trip from the city.

GERARD'S TOP PICK:
Walhalla

"For me, it's a really nice timeout," says Gerard.

"Whether it's rainy, or misty, it's just a lovely time. And I like places with a bit of history, and Walhalla is steeped in it."

Located about a 45-minute drive north of Traralgon, Walhalla is an old gold-mining town, tucked away in a lush valley on the southern edge of the Victorian Alps.

"If you've got the arms for it, something I've really enjoyed is just rolling down the main drag. There are very few cars, and it's on a hill, so I just pushed up to the top, and rolled all the way down - it was a lovely roll."

ACTIVITIES:
Long Tunnel Extended Gold Mine

Explore an old mining tunnel, and hear about the mining techniques used, with a guided tour. The tour operator's website says the tunnel is wheelchair accessible, and Gerard confirms a friend of his did it in a wheelchair.

Walhalla Goldfields Railway

"I haven't been on the train since I've been in a chair," says Gerard. "But I would have paid for one of the carriages the amount of times I've caught it over the years - it's a great experience, and the scenery is beautiful."

Gerard says the railway operator has assured him they have a ramp for wheelchairs, check out their website for more details.

SIGHTSEEING AND CAMPING

Wilsons Promontory National Park

A well-known and loved coastal park, the Prom is also one of the most accessible parks in Victoria, with accessible accommodation and tracks, and beach wheelchairs for hire. Gerard says he hopes to organise a camping trip to the Prom with the Gippsland Network, and anyone else who's interested. please contact Gerard through AQA if you're interested. Check out this video from Parks Victoria detailing the accessible experiences on offer at Wilsons Prom.



Country drive to Licola

About 1.5 hours north of Traralgon, Gerard says the drive is quite scenic, and includes lookouts and nice places to camp.

Gerard recommends stopping and taking in the views at Lake Glenmaggie, but avoiding the caravan parks on its shores. If you're looking for somewhere to stay, and up for camping, Gerard suggests Paradise Valley, a picturesque spot on the Macalister River, with a small accessible toilet facility.

Arriving at Licola, you'll find a charming little town, as well as a campground which Gerard's been assured has an accessible shower and toilet (but no commode).

If you're feeling adventurous, Gerard recommends driving northwards from Licola, and visiting Howitt's Hut, a hut built in 1899 by cattlemen who'd spend the summer grazing their stock in the Victorian Alps.

"It's fascinating to see how these men lived for months at a time - they were made of tough stuff," says Gerard.

Gerard says the road to Howitt's Hut is two-wheel drive accessible, if you don't mind your car getting dirty. But he cautions that it can snow at any time, so be sure to bring cold-weather gear.

Art

Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale. While in town, Gerard says there are some nice boardwalks along the river.

Latrobe Regional Gallery, Morwell. Gerard describes the gallery as small and modern, with a very nice restaurant attached. "But unfortunately, the food is very healthy," warns Gerard.

Yarram street art. A street artist called Heesco has been invited to paint murals all over Yarram, to incredible effect.

Car museums

If you're into cars, Gerard recommends the Gippsland Vehicle Collection in Maffra, and the Holden Car Museum in Trafalgar.

Coastal towns

Gerard reports that some pretty spectacular fish and chips can be found at Port Albert Wharf Fish and Chips, in Port Albert. And while you're digesting lunch, you could check out the Port Albert Maritime Museum, detailing the port's rich history as one of the oldest in Victoria.

A bit further west along the coast is Port Welshpool, which boasts an 800m long jetty. Gerard says the jetty is a great place to catch fish from and is also a lovely roll along its length.

A winery

The Narkoojee Winery, just 15 minutes north of Traralgon, hosted the Gippsland Community Network for a lunch last year. The Network members were the first to use a freshly installed ramp at the winery's restaurant, instigated by Gerard.

"There are other wineries in the area, but this one is good because it's quite flat, and the food and wine are pretty good," says Gerard.



After a six-year hiatus following his injury, Gerard hopes to get back into four-wheel driving and camping this year, along with restarting his favourite hobby of mountainbiking.

A well-known and loved coastal park, the Prom is also one of the most accessible parks in Victoria

When you follow the dream

Geoff Dossetor built a thriving business on sharing the magic of hang gliding. After a freak accident in his 30s led to his taking up painting, he swiftly found support for his art.

Ian Baker





Strapped in: Geoff relies on chest support from his chair. Top: The Kombis that ate Camberwell.

Geoff Dossetor lives and paints in south-eastern Melbourne in a thoughtfully renovated two-bedroom flat. His home has a living room that includes a bed, shower and kitchen, a second bedroom and bathroom, and a third room that serves as his studio. The second bedroom is reserved for Geoff's young adult daughter, Taylor.

Geoff's mum also lives in the complex. Another flat there houses Geoff's support worker team: he rented it for them when the COVID-19 crisis arrived. Team members help him start work, by squeezing paint onto a palette.

Geoff paints from a powered wheelchair that has the capacity to raise him to a standing position. While it extends his ability to cover canvases, he also uses it hourly to relieve pressure areas. It is much better for him, he says, than an ordinary chair.

High flier

Taylor was born at a time when Geoff had been, literally, soaring. Work as a relief teacher in Melbourne had supported a passion for hang-gliding. An early instructor had identified him as a natural. He had taken his flying overseas, had won national championship events in New Zealand and Canada, and had taken a job flying tandem with intrepid tourists. He had purchased acreage in New Zealand near the tourist Mecca of Queenstown, and had set up a small but thriving business flying thrill seekers from nearby Coronet Peak to his personal landing ground. He had married his Canadian girlfriend, forming an instant family with her two girls.

"People say hang gliding is dangerous," he says today, "but it wasn't for me."

By September 2001, when an awkward landing left him with complete C4-5 quadriplegia, Geoff had completed more than 5000 tandem flights. He believes his injury arose from a freak point of contact with his passenger, who was unhurt. Taylor's birth had expanded the family to five: she was seven weeks old.

Geoff took on fully the raising of Taylor in 2007, at a time when, he believed, he

needed to take more responsibility for her. He had been living independently near the family property, with support funded by compulsory insurer the Accident Compensation Corporation. A court had awarded him permission to take Taylor to Melbourne, where his parents could help him look after her. He became one of very few people, he says, to reside outside New Zealand while receiving ACC funding.

Geoff paints from a powered wheelchair that has the capacity to raise him to a standing position.

Brought to earth

Geoff credits a moment from Taylor's infancy with his electing to make the best of his circumstances. He had been strapped to his chair in the back of the family van, outside the lakeside hotel where he had been living, and Taylor, strapped into her child-capsule, had been crying. In a moment of frustration, Geoff's wife had walked away from the vehicle.

Geoff had said: "Would it be easier for everybody if I just went and rolled off the end of the jetty?"

"As I told her this," Geoff recalls, "this crying baby, she just stopped crying and looked at me.

"And I took that as a sign that I had better stick around as long as I can."

Soon after he returned to Australia with Taylor, Geoff joined AQA as a peer support volunteer.

"I wanted to give back," he says. "I had people help me in the early days. Some people don't have a little sign that keeps them going."

Geoff took up painting during years after rehab that he spent in a nursing home. He doesn't see himself as a natural artist, and he faults himself for laziness. He completes about a dozen paintings in some years, and fewer in others.



Familiar setting: Geoff demands honest feedback.



Support workers help Geoff set up by squeezing paint onto his palette.

Nevertheless he is able to tell people, he says, that he is living not just from the proceeds of his becoming disabled. "I'm actually doing something," he observes, "and I've got income to cover my expenses."

Keeping it real

The income arrives in the form of a scholarship, renewed three-yearly, from the Association of Mouth and Foot Painting Artists, an international organisation set up in the decades after the Second World War. The association raises money from card collections it mails to households at random, along with an invitation to make a voluntary payment.

Founder Erich Stegmann was adamant that the association support only people whose work stood up on its own, or that had the potential to do so. Geoff was awarded his scholarship in 2007, after submitting six paintings. He is one of only four living artists listed on the Association's Australian website. He took Stegmann's principle to painting classes he has attended online.

"I wanted to get realistic critiques," he says, "Not somebody saying 'Oh that's good!' - you know, for a mouth painting artist."

He says it would be difficult in any case to find instruction that accounted for his capacity.

"Even among mouth painters, there's different reasons why we're mouth painters," he observes. "Some people don't have hands. They can't pick up a brush. But they can walk up to an easel.

"I'm at the opposite extreme: I can't do much at all. I need to be strapped into a chair. That's one of the reasons I was able to get this kind of chair. I said: It will be good, because I'm able to raise it up and down, whether I'm seated or standing, to get to bigger canvases. That's probably part of the reason I got funding for my first one of these, and this is now my third."

Watch a video Geoff has made about his life and work.

Making comfortable clothing that's fun to wear

A woman in Geelong, fed up with drab adaptive clothing available in stores, has been sewing her own.

Georgina Fiorentino
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & NETWORK COORDINATOR



Sorayya believes that clothing shouldn't just be comfortable, it should also make you feel good about yourself.

Last month I had the pleasure of driving to Geelong to visit a lady who has a spinal cord injury. Her name is Sorayya Shemirani. We learnt about Sorayya's artistic flair in the April 2021 issue of NewsLink, and her love of abstract acrylic painting. During Covid, Sorayya completed numerous amazing art pieces that are proudly displayed around her home.

Sorayya's creative talent has since shifted to another craft. Her dedicated painting room has been converted to a sewing room, giving her the space to embark on her new project and passion: fashion. Sorayya learnt how to sew many years ago from her mother, who was a professional machinist, and Sorayya has been sewing most of her own clothes for more than 30 years.

Frustrated, and not willing to settle for gym wear, uncomfortable ill-fitting outfits, having to pay for alterations, or alter clothes herself, Sorayya embarked on sewing her own stylish wheelchair adaptive clothing.

A long-term wheelchair user, Sorayya expressed her disappointment over clothing stores not adequately catering for people with disabilities, particularly wheelchair users. For example, she would often try on clothes that were unflattering: either too long on the arm, or too bulky at the waist, such that it would cause interference at the wheels of her wheelchair, dirtying and ruining the clothes.

Frustrated, and not willing to settle for gym wear, uncomfortable ill-fitting outfits, having to pay for alterations, or alter clothes herself, Sorayya embarked on sewing her own stylish wheelchair adaptive clothing. She has sewn dresses, skirts, blouses, pants and jackets for herself which are appropriate, well fitting to her own shape, and fashionable,

Sorraya has thought of adaptive alternatives, such as: using different material on the back of leather or silky skirts to avoid slipping around on the wheelchair cushion; adding magnetic buttons on jackets; avoiding heavy materials; and being mindful of where to place zips, pockets and buttons. Sorayya believes clothes should not only feel comfortable, they should also make people feel



Using a non-slip material on the back of leather or silky skirts is just one of Sorayya's wheelchair-adaptive designs.

good about themselves. To add to her creative ambition, she recently enrolled in an online course to learn how to make her own shoes, to match some of her dressier outfits.

Sorayya's dream is to one day showcase her more formal adaptive designs in a fashion parade. We discussed ways that she could pursue this dream in an environment that would enable her to learn the ins and outs of holding such an event, having no prior experience.

Sorraya is a member of the Dance & Roll dance group. She approached its founder, Rocca Salcedo, with the idea of asking other Dance & Roll members to be her fashion models, and holding the fashion parade alongside one of the group's events. Rocca is supportive of this idea, and is willing to offer the venue that Dance &Roll uses, seeing the cause of highlighting the importance of self-expression and creativity in people with a disability as a valuable one.

Ultimately, Sorayya would like to hold a fashion parade event in Melbourne on the International Day of People with Disability, with the aim of increasing public awareness that fashion and self-image is important for everyone.

You can check out some more of Sorayya's designs at her Instagram page. If you would like to find out more about her project, or would like to participate, please contact Georgina Fiorentino at AQA: **georginafiorentino@aqavic.org.au**



How the fuelService app is helping me fill up at APCO petrol stations

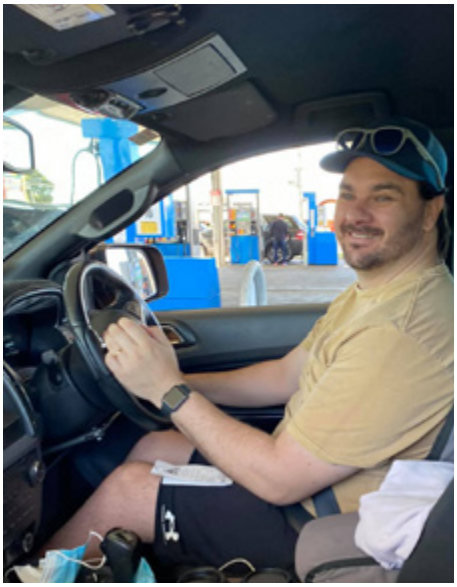
Hear a firsthand account of a Geelong resident's experience using fuelService, the app that allows you to fill up your car without having to get out.

Nazim Erdem



Owning a ute with a high clearance, James is grateful the app means fewer transfers.

I told my physio about it and they thought it was a fantastic service and asked for the details.



James thinks fuelService could help the elderly, people with short-term injuries, or parents with kids in the car, as well as those living with disability.

Over the past few issues, we told you about the fuelService app for smartphones that makes it easier for people with disabilities to fill their cars up with fuel.

APCO is trialing the service at 3 of their stations in Geelong, before rolling out the service at all their 27 stores in the next few weeks.

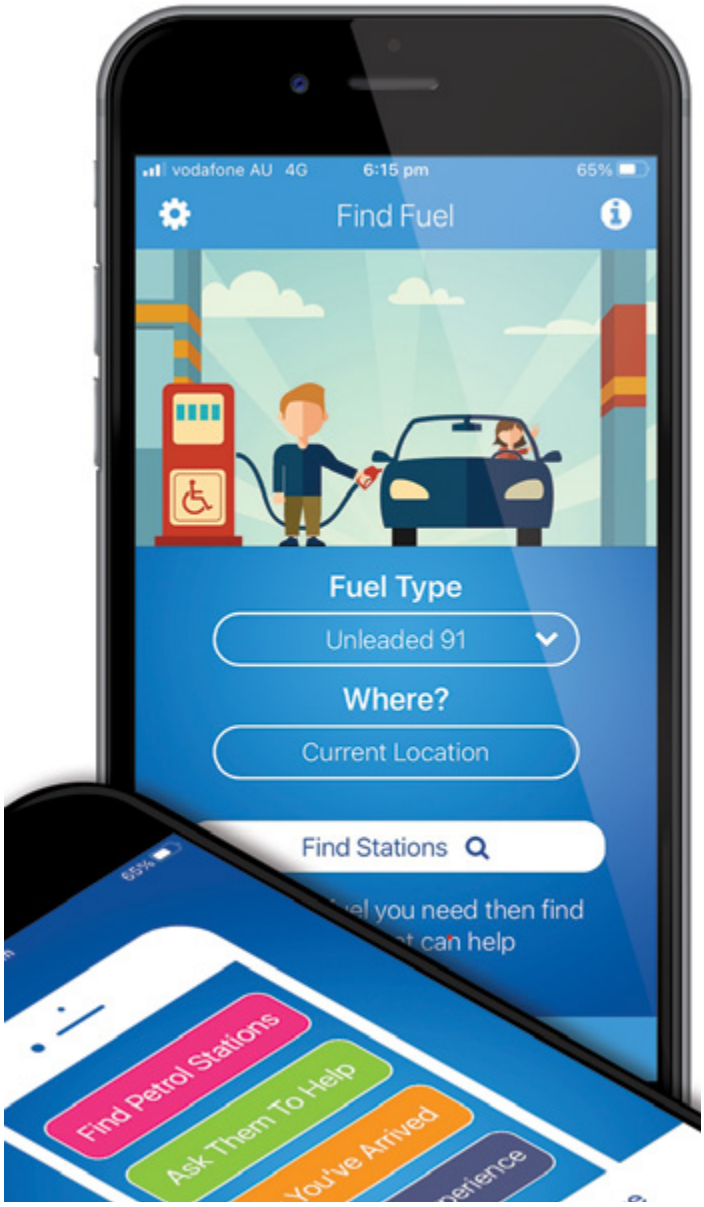
The fuelService app allows users to make appointments at APCO service stations for having their cars refueled by an attendant. It alerts checkout staff to expect your arrival, and tells them which pump you've parked at. After a staff member has filled your tank for you, you can pay from your car.

AQA spoke with James Paslawski, a Geelong resident who made use of the service recently at one of the trial sites.

How did you hear about the fuelService app?

It's sort of a long story, but I was told about it by Victor Bibby. I met Victor after my spinal injury in 2012, when I started taking part in Sailability in Geelong. Victor was a volunteer with them back then. Victor was actually the person who campaigned to have the app adopted in Australia after his son Simon had a spinal injury only a couple of years ago.

Victor sent me a message asking for my opinion if the service would be useful if it was offered here in Australia after he heard about the service operating in the UK.



James found the fuelService app simple to use

My opinion was that it would not only benefit people with disabilities, but also people with minor or temporary mobility issues as well as the elderly. I was very pleased with knowing APCO was considering rolling it out for the community.

How did you fill up your fuel tank previously?

I drive a Ford Ranger. To fill up, I used to set up my wheelchair and transfer into it. This was my normal routine and I was used to it. I am very independent and it never was much of an issue for me. However, I always needed to make sure I left enough room for my wheelchair to get in between my car and the petrol bowser. I always was conscious that I was holding up other drivers wanting to fill their cars up because it took me longer.

What was your experience like using the FuelService app for the first time?

It was actually perfect timing for me as I had a shoulder injury when I went to use the service. It was at a time I needed to limit my transfers in and out of the car.

I was the first customer the APCO employee came across who used the service. She was super excited to service me. She was very pleasant, helpful, and friendly. My experience encouraged me to continue to use the service and tell everyone about it.

What was the process you followed?

I timed my drive to the petrol station when I knew it wouldn't be a peak time for them. Using the app was simple. After opening the app on my phone, I select the location I'm in, followed by the type of fuel I want. The app then brings up a list of stations available in the area. I choose the station. APCO then responds in the app confirming that I can arrive in the next 20 minutes, or suggesting the next available time. Once I arrived at the station, I notified them through the app, stating the number of the pump I was parked at. After a couple of minutes, the staff member came out with the eftpos machine and filled my car up. They also gave me the option of paying with cash.

"it gives me more options, and it saves my shoulder from overuse by having to do fewer transfers. I also have quite a bit of neurogenic pain which is very intense. Fewer transfers also equals less pain"

In what way has it made it easier for you to be more independent?

I'm very independent anyway. But it gives me more options, and it saves my shoulder from overuse by having to do fewer transfers. I also have quite a bit of neurogenic pain which is very intense. Fewer transfers also equals less pain for me.

Would you encourage others to use the service?

Yes definitely. I told my physio about it and they thought it was a fantastic service and asked for the details. As I mentioned before, it's also useful for people with short-term injuries, the elderly, and parents with kids in the car. As it stands, parents need to unbuckle their little kids and take them with them to go inside the store. Imagine the staff member coming out to you instead of the other way around. It reminded me of the good old days when petrol stations had driveway assistance.

I truly believe that the service needs to be aimed and targeted at the general community and not just for people with disabilities.

Is there anything else you'd like to mention?

I congratulate APCO for taking this on. I wish other companies would follow suit because their customers are missing out. I actually go out of my way to fill my tank up now just to support APCO. I avoid other stations even if they are closer or cheaper. And finally a huge kudos to Victor for campaigning for the service.

You can download fuelService app from Google Play or Apple's App Store, or by visiting www.fuelservice.org. Users must register their phone number and email address, as a means of controlling inappropriate use.

Videotelephony: The Videophone age

Naz Erdem

Back in the 2015 issue of NewsLink, Videotelephony was described as "two-way video and audio communication between people in real-time via the internet". The article went on to say "For people with spinal-cord injuries who are limited with their movement from home, combining audio-visual communication is an easy and wonderful way to keep in touch with family and friends."

The article went on to talk about some tech options that we already knew about, and some we didn't, for example Skype, Google Hangout, and FaceTime.

Over the past 2 years, because of Covid, individuals and businesses have had to succumb to using digital technology as a way of life. Skype and FaceTime are still around, but we now have newcomers who are more recognisable.

This technology has allowed us to see and hear others in the online format. As people have increasingly been working from home, businesses now meet online on a regular basis and it has become the norm. This is the same for government, healthcare, and education.

Zoom is now a common word we use in our vocabulary

Zoom is now a common word we use in our vocabulary and is used to mean "meet online". However, like Zoom, there are other formats we are familiar with, for example GoogleMeets, and Teams.

It's amazing how technology has changed in just a few years, and also how it has been accepted. Of course, nothing beats face-to-face. Hopefully soon we can go back to our normal live pre-Covid. In saying that, online meetings and conferencing is here to stay.

Let's see what new technology innovations bring us in the next seven years.

Finally, if you have any questions around Assistive Technology, or how it could help you, please get in touch with our Allied Health team on **03 9489 0777** or **community@aqavic.org.au**



EQUIPMENT FOR SALE

RT300 IFES CYCLE

Restorative Therapies RT300 IFES Cycle (Leg/Core 12 channels); It's a clinician IFES which means you have more control over settings and logging in; In very good condition; Pick up location is Euroa.

Price $20,000

Phone 0409 636 989 (Emily) (10/21)

GLIDE CENTRO MID WHEEL DRIVE POWERCHAIR

In excellent condition; Purchased in 2019 for $17000 - Receipt attached; Rarely went outside and was used in the aged facility; Many additional extras.

Price Reasonable Offer Accepted

Phone 0436 010 284 (Val) (02/21)

QUICKIE - SPORTS WHEELCHAIR WITH ROHO CUSHION

Cushion size 100cm - High profile; One Quickie cushion - 70x80cm x 6cm: Front wheels 570mm: Four New tyres 25-590mm: Two sets of Mobility Plus wheels 25mmx 590mm. The support chair also has an16 inch Height Profile ROHO Cushion, which is in a very good condition. It also has a Jay Cushion that accompanies the chair, which is a bit smaller than the ROHO Cushion: This is all included at the bargain price.

Price $600

Phone 0424 710 446 (Michael) (12/21)

EASYLIFT LIFTBOY II

Manufactured in Germany and tested to all Australian specifications and approvals; Virtually brand new - Used for 1 week only; Suitable for indoor and outdoor use - fully waterproof; 240V plug in - no hard wiring or hydraulics required; Suitable for a max. lift height of 830mm, or any required height in between, maximum lift weight of 300kg, user and attendant capable; The unit was $12,000 brand new.

Price $5,000

Phone 0438 008 584 (Gerard) (06/19#a)

RAZ – TILTING SHOWER COMMODE

With Headrest; In good condition; They sell for $3,900 - $5,000 new.

Price $800

Phone 0432 566 930 (Selina) (03/21#a)

STANDING FRAME – MANUAL LIFT

As new condition; Comes with tools; Straps; Extra tray; Instruction booklets.

Price $2,000

Phone 0414 428 882 (Lissa) (08/21#a)

HOUSE FOR SALE

DOREEN

This house has been extensively modified to assist in maintaining as independent a lifestyle as possible. It sits on 312m property, is currently 5 years old and in fantastic condition, single level, 3 bedrooms - 2 bedrooms with built- in robes plus 1 master bedroom with walk-in robe and ensuite.

Continued next column.

There is a separate bathroom, open plan living space with lounge kitchen and dining area, a 1.8 car size garage, air conditioning, ducted heating, ducted vacuum, security system, solar panels and a 5.5 kw converter. The house has a courtyard with low-maintenance style back yard. The house is across the road from a very large park that leads onto Plenty Gorge Park that offers a very quiet peaceful living area and a supportive neighbourhood. Please contact me via private messenger if interested and would like to discuss or view property.

Price P.O.A

Phone 0402 227 594 (Cheryl) (02/22#a)

CARS FOR SALE

2017 MERCEDES BENZ VALANTE 116 BLUETEC

04/2022 Registration; Auto; 2.1L Turbo Diesel ; 24,000 kms; RWC Supplied; Service History; Flint Grey Metallic; Meticulously looked after and fitted with a long list of factory options and safety options and most importantly a Fiorella Wheelchair Lift with seatbelt and 4 Q'straints secure retractors in 2017 by Mobility Plus in Fairfield (VIC)

Price $51,000 ONO (Excludes Govt Charges)

Phone 0419 884 106 (Lou) (07/21#a)

FREEBIES

CONTINENCE EQUIPMENT

Free to a good home; 8 Boxes of UltraFlex Clear 32mm & 40 Careline 500ml Short Tube Leg Bags.

Phone 0426 274 401 (David) (10/21#a)

2 X HOSPITAL KING SINGLE BEDS

Two Hospital King Single beds to give away for free; Collect from Melton West. One has two functions and the other has three; The one with three functions also has a foot piece at the end of the bed for hanging, perhaps the machine for a pressure mattress; There are also good quality mattresses for both beds if required.

email maree.jongkryg@sov.net.au

FEMALE CATHETERS

Female InLine Releen 2-way Foley CH 20 catheters; 5-10ml balloon (for urethral and suprapubic use)
2 boxes (5 catheters in each) Expiry: 2022-12

Phone 0467 039 699 (Young) (07/21#a)

WHEELCHAIR MANUAL

Mobility Plus Manual Wheelchair; 16' x 17'; 24 Inch wheels; Can use for Lawn Bowls; Pick up from Mansfield or ring and arrange somewhere to meet.

Phone 0477 011 153 (Kevin) (09/20#a)

For a full list of classifieds and items for free, please visit: www.spire.org.au/community/classifieds
or contact us on **03 9489 0777** or info@aqavic.org.au

AQA
SPINAL INJURY INFO & SUPPORT ONLINE
Like us on facebook for news, information, photos and more.
facebook.com/AQASpinalSupport

AQA

Resourcing you to live well



MARK HANSON
B.OccThy (Hons)

LIFE IS COMPLEX. WE GET THAT. CAN WE HELP?

AQA has expanded its **Support Coordination** & **Occupational Therapy** team. We have immediate capacity to accept new participants.

Informed by lived experience, we aim to build your capacity to understand the NDIS and get the most out of your plan.

Our Community Engagement Coordinator, Mark Hanson, is available to answer any of your questions.

Contact Mark Hanson:
p. (03) 9489 0777

Or submit an online Service Inquiry at:
https://www.aqavic.org.au/contact

Registered NDIS Provider

AQA is a not-for-profit organisation
Learn more about AQA and our services at **www.aqavic.org.au**