

Spotlight on Disability

Words: Geoff Crockett Photos: Contributed

A car accident. A surfing mishap. Falling the wrong way in a tackle.
For some people, disability comes after a life changing event somewhere along their life's journey.
For others, it is their life's journey.

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Statistics from the last Census, captured by demographic group .idcommunity, show that in 2016 there were 16,853 people in the Sunshine Coast Council region (about 5.7% of our population) who reported needing help in their day-to-day lives due to disability. Of those, almost a third were under the age of 59.

As a region, we were among the last to receive the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) - waiting until 2019 for it to become available to local families and service providers.

While NDIS has been welcomed by the sector, the scheme comes with its own challenges. A fresh set of service provision has even been spawned, with businesses now springing up to assist people to manage their NDIS plan, to navigate the processes involved in establishing NDIS eligibility and choosing relevant providers that meet their specific needs.

For Integrated Family and Youth Service (IFYS) Executive Manager Community Services, Vicky Meyer, one of the biggest challenges, and conversely also one of the biggest thrills of the work she and her team undertake in the disability sector, is finding out what might help someone with a disability to live their best life - and assisting them to do so.

For Vicky, the 30 people her 65 staff at Supports by Design Sunshine Coast and Rockhampton work with every day provide all the inspiration that's needed for them to continually develop the services they offer and strive for exceptional outcomes.

'We all have something we are good at or like to do. Our job is finding a way for people to make the most of those abilities, and live a full and active life,' Vicky said.

'We assist individuals that work - and love having a job - and others that are sporty - everyone has their own interests and everyone is individual. Our role is to support people to access opportunities in their community. This is something we are all entitled to, regardless of our level of ability.'

'Disability does not discriminate based on social status or background, or anything like that; this really has no bearing. There's no reason disability can't happen to any of us, any day, and its impacts can be minor to really significant.'

Vicky said, like many service providers, Supports by Design offers a wide range of services from assistance with daily living and personal care, teaching everyday life skills such as maintaining a home, how to connect to local sport and social opportunities, and navigating government departments and managing appointments.

Every person the team works with has their own needs, their own level of comfort in living by themselves or with others, socialising in a group, working, playing sport or participating in hobbies.

Vicky talks of a recent experience of working with a mother and son to navigate the next stage of his life as he grows older and is looking to move out of home.

'For that mother it's daunting. You're trusting your child into someone else's care. It's a very emotional business. It's

"Disability does not discriminate based on social status or background.."

Vicky Meyer



an emotional decision,' Vicky said.

It is at this part of the journey, particularly for younger people, that Vicky sees major challenges for the disability sector and an example of work still to be done to help make life easier for those with disabilities to live happily on the coast.

She said ideally young people with a disability would move out into their own accommodation, gaining independence and developing everyday life skills. It may be a two or three bedroom share accommodation setting with flatmates and friends, and be set up to stay for as long as they like - potentially even as their forever home.

In reality, Vicky says, there are not enough units or housing options available so it's not uncommon for people to have to move regularly depending on their stage in life and factors such as housing affordability and the location of a property, which is disruptive for anyone, especially for people with a disability who may find change particularly challenging.

'There has been a significant underinvestment in disability,' Vicky said. 'We have a huge amount of work to do as an industry to build our capacity, workforce and service delivery options for individuals with a disability to manage their own lives. Through Supports by Design I am keen to be able to support people through their whole lifespan and for them not to have to move if they don't want to. This requires different thinking around accommodation and supports.'

For those working to support individuals with disabilities and their families on the Sunshine Coast, the job is never done.

Every day requires a creative and exploratory approach in order to offer each person the best available options for their particular situation - be it a temporary or permanent disability - physical or mental in nature.

'It's not a 9 to 5 job. It's more than a job - it's a vocation,' Vicky said.

With the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) on the Sunshine Coast in 2019 there are a wide range of service providers registered to provide assistance to families needing support. To find out more about the NDIS and disability services available on the Sunshine Coast, see www.ndis.gov.au or phone 1800 800 110. If you are interested in further information about Supports by Design, visit www.supportsbydesign.com.au or phone 1300 001 058.