

Case study: Sharing stories of inclusion

Mary and Andrew

Disability Support Worker Mary Elliott works for Interchange Outer East. A couple of years ago she decided on a career change from her former work as a naturopath and owner of a health food shop.

She returned to TAFE and studied for her Certificate in Community Services. That led into a “real interest” in disability support services.

“It’s a really positive environment to work in... I am in specialist services supporting young people and helping them with work and volunteering opportunities.”

Mary has been working with 22-year-old Andrew for the past 18 months.

“He’s very shy and we’ve tried a lot of different work ideas like gardening, cleaning and currently we are doing some deliveries for Knox Infolink’s Share the Joy Christmas Appeal, and he really enjoys that and hopes to become a removalist assistant. At the moment we are involved in transport and deliveries. We pick up donations given to local organisations, and we drop them off to the Share the Joy hub,” she said.

Mary’s main role as a disability support worker is to help Andrew build confidence and learn the tasks that he needs to complete.

“Someone might give him directions and he might get some of it but not all of it, so I just help to support him and maybe give him some ideas and how things might work a bit better. He doesn’t drive so I’m the driver and he is the jockey, and I might prompt him on how to approach people. We see a lot of different people and due to his shyness, that can be a bit hard, so we might talk about what we might say when we meet people.”

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Mary said Volunteer for Knox has really supported her in finding volunteering opportunities for Andrew and other clients.

“They are excellent and can’t do enough for you...They usually give me a list of what’s available and workable for our participants.”

Mary believes volunteer-involving organisations can really benefit by providing opportunities for people with disabilities.

“It’s a win-win all the time because the people in the organisation get to know the participant, they generally build good relationships with them and they often get tasks done that other people may not want to do,” she said.

“It really helps the participant and can be life changing for them just to be out and about in the community and meet other people. It helps people working in the organisation interact with different people and it’s always good having diversity in your organisation.”

Some tips she can give for other organisations is to really listen and find out what the person actually wants to do, rather than forcing them into job roles they do not really like.

“Listening to Andrew about what he actually wants to do rather than what might be easier for us to find can be a sticky issue sometimes,” she said.

“When someone is doing what they love to do then they are more open to learning and it really helps their mental health, their confidence and wellbeing.”

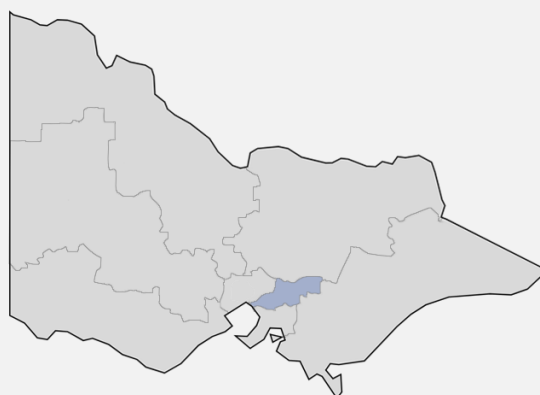
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<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>



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