

Spire is a service division of AQA Victoria



Even our Rock can get COVID-19

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Spire NewsLink is the official newsletter of AQA Victoria Limited (AQA), and is published bimonthly.

Spire 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.

Spire 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.

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FROM THE CEO

How's your CoVid Clock? Many of us have noticed how with restrictions on movement around the community and on gathering in any numbers, the days of the week can lose their identity, weekends can feel a bit like any other day. Our seasonal calendar is also thrown out by familiar events leaving town including the AFL Grand Final in late October, and in Queensland, and after Bathurst. But welcome to Spring, to Day Light Saving here in Victoria and to some welcome changes in restrictions.

As we see the gradual easing of CoVid related restrictions across the Victorian Community and we all turn our minds to consider what this concept of CoVid normal will actually look like in our lives, it's a great opportunity to share a couple of very different firsthand encounters with CoVid19 from the last few months. Thanks to Jude and to Les for sharing their experience with our community in this issue.

Earlier this year I shared with you a motto that we adopted back in March as the impact of Covid began to emerge when we challenged ourselves to Maintain Momentum, Emerge Stronger. This has meant that while we have had to adjust most part of our operations and our strategic projects, our investment in those projects and in the capabilities of our people have all continued. In this issue we take a look at a new Allied Health Service led by Emma O'Brien and the expansion of our Support Coordination and Peer Coaching capability including welcoming Georgina Fiorentino. Underpinning this capability, our client & community service team including those with lived experience have been participating in coaching training so that all our services and activities share an approach to building capacity, goal setting and supporting a growth mindset. This will help foster a familiar approach and experience across all our services.

While last year can sometimes feel



Peter Trethewey
Chief Executive Officer
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like it was 3 years ago, invitations have been sent out to the 2020 AGM on Thursday 19th November at 3.30pm. The AGM will be held online this year and we look forward to welcoming all AQA Members to that meeting.

The AQA Community will also be hearing about our 2020 Celebration which will be held as a webinar this year. Our Practice Leadership Group have got some great things planned, so I look forward to seeing you there.

HIGHLIGHTS

Welcome to the October issue of NewsLink. It's great to see some of the COVID restrictions being lifted. We hope you have maintained a routine to keep your mental health in check.

On pages 6 and 10 respectively, you can read how two people from our community, Jude and Les, have dealt with being tested positive for COVID-19. Jude has paraplegia and Les has quadriplegia and both had different experiences.

AQA has welcomed our first occupational therapist to the team. Emma O'Brien will be offering her skills and leading an

expansion of AQA services. We see big benefits from embedding allied health specialists in the AQA ecosystem, where they can work closely with our support coordinators, our lived experience team and our support workers. Turn to page 13 for further information.

On page 14, we have Part 3 of the history of AQA. From its earliest days, AQA Victoria stood out as a place where people could find supportive relationships after a life-changing event that brought severe physical challenges. This edition is titled "The friendly organisation".

On page 17, we welcome Georgina Fiorentino to the AQA family. After being a long-time peer support mentor, she has accepted an invitation to extend her role with AQA, adding depth to our support coordination and peer coaching teams.

We hope you enjoy reading the above, along with the many other pieces in this issue.

Remember to let us know if you'd like something included in future issues of NewsLink, keeping in mind that the deadline for content for the December issue is the 1st of December.

Is a change as good as a holiday?

Victoria and Mark Eckenroth love where they live. They love their home and their garden, full of cherry trees and chickens. They want to share it with you.

Victoria and Mark live on the Mornington Peninsula, at Mt Martha.

When they've travelled, they've been disappointed by the supposedly accessible accommodation they've found: inaccessible doorways, beds too high or too low, and showers too small.

With the easing of lockdown in mind, Victoria looked to house swapping as a cheap and adventurous alternative.



After discovering a solitary accessible listing online (which turned out to be a mistakenly ticked box), she resolved to do what she could do to change that.

Victoria has found a site - Aussie House Swap - that is willing to offer a year's free registration for accessible homes. Use coupon code WHEELCHAIRFRIENDLY to redeem the offer. (The standard price for 12 months of membership is \$84.)

"It would be fun to trade out and explore locally, even for just a few days," Victoria says. "Walk around someone else's neighbourhood, eat at their restaurants, see what they see.

"I was talking to a woman in Lower Plenty the other day, and she was raving about where she lives the way I do. I thought, well I never considered Lower Plenty before, but why not!"

Victoria has made herself available if you have any questions about how it all works. Her email is veckenroth@hotmail.com.

By Dan Nathan

Shooting on wheels: A video guide

AQA video volunteer Richard Balsille has been helping people in communities like ours to tell stories for the past 18 years.

Recognising that a lot of us use smartphones to shoot video, he's created a guide to good practice.

The short guide brings you easy tips that go a long way - most of which are also relevant for taking photos.

If you're an experienced cinematographer, you might find that it fills in some gaps. If you're not, it might help you get in the game.

Here's a taste of the low-hanging fruit on offer:

- Stability's the word. Wheelchairs are a boon here, but if you're not in one, and there's no other stabilising option, hold the phone with both hands, elbows wedged by your side, then rotate from the hips for a pan shot, or bow for a tilt.
- Horizontal framing almost always beats vertical. It's the way our eyes are aligned, and there's generally more to see horizontally than vertically.
- If you're in a noisy environment, put your body between your subject and the source of the noise - it's surprisingly effective at minimising the interference.

For more tips, and to learn how bulldog clips and bags of salt are the lance and bow of the intrepid amateur, you can download Richard's guide from this link: <https://bit.ly/33Wko7w>



Online Community Networks

Are you interested in connecting with people and sharing your lived experiences?

The Community Networks have moved online using "Zoom", a teleconferencing platform. The Networks have expanded to include people living across Victoria and along the NSW-Victoria border, offering a way of meeting new people regardless of distance or transport. If you are interested in getting involved or for support on using Zoom, contact Spire 03 9489 0777 or info@aqavic.org.au

Northern (Shepparton-Echuca) Network

The Northern Network meet on the first Wednesday of each month, with people joining in from Deniliquin, Echuca, Albury and Wodonga. At one of the meetings, the group shared photos of things that were meaningful to them which included flying planes with adaptive hand controls, a 2-wheeled Segway used on the farm, and hand cycling bike.

Central West (Bendigo) Network

The Central Network meets on the second Wednesday of the month, with people joining in from Bendigo, Mildura and Barham. Last month, they had a productive and informative discussion on pain management strategies with a physiotherapist from Bendigo Health's Pain Rehab Clinic.

Gippsland - Mornington Network

The Gippsland - Mornington Network welcomes people from all over southeast Victoria, and meet on the second Thursday of each month. Recently, the group welcomed a dietician to discuss tips on improving general health and the importance of eating in moderation to enjoy food.

South West (Geelong) Network

The South West Network meet on the fourth Wednesday of each month, with people joining in from Geelong and Warrnambool. Last month, they discussed ways to maintain physical fitness through incidental exercise and setting achievable exercise goals.

Western (Ballarat) Network

The Western Network meet on the third Thursday of the month, with people joining in from Ballarat, Bacchus Marsh and Kaniva. In September, the group enjoyed sharing photos of hobbies and other things that helped them get through the recent lockdowns.

Professionals with SCI network

The SCIP network meets every three months and aims to support people with SCI or similar physical complex disability in all aspects of career development. The next meeting will be "your tips on practical transitions to work/study". The Network also has an ongoing relationship with TAC to raise awareness of the needs of clients.

Women with SCI Network

The Women with SCI Network is informed and led by women living with SCI. At the last meeting, the group celebrated Women's Health Week by catching up and discussing women's health and wellbeing topics with a Spinal Community Nurse.

Family & Friends SCI Support Network

Together with Independence Australia and the support of Austin Health, we run a monthly group to support family members and friends of people with a spinal cord injury. It's an opportunity to have your questions answered in a confidential and supportive group. You can also share information, experiences, knowledge and support in a friendly and informal setting.

For further information, please visit www.spire.org.au/community/community-networks.



Even our Rock can get COVID-19

If Pro-wrestler turned Hollywood actor Dwayne Johnson can get COVID-19, what's stopping our very own Rock, Jude Antony from getting it too? Jude contracted the virus from his wife who had contacted it in her workplace. Their symptoms were very different. Jude only had mild symptoms, while his wife had more severe symptoms. Naz sat down with Jude and had a Q&A session about his experience which could benefit others who have spinal cord injuries.



How did you know you had COVID-19?

My wife works at a retirement home where she contracted COVID-19 in mid-July. She was unaware at the time and it was passed onto me. I got tested after she received a

positive result. I had absolutely no symptoms at all until a few days after my positive test.

What were your symptoms?

I had no symptoms at all before getting the COVID

test. When they called me a few days later to tell me the test was positive, I still felt fine without any symptoms. However, five days after getting the positive test, I started to get an annoying dry cough. This cough lasted for twelve days. As I workout outside for fitness, I thought the cough could have also been related to the cold weather.

However, my wife's symptoms were a lot more severe. She had a high fever, pain in her chest and back, and some breathing problems. She didn't feel comfortable sitting or standing.

I had to keep reassuring her it was going to be ok and to stay mentally tough. I tried my best to keep my wife positive but noted mental health would definitely be a concern for those on their own and without supports.

My wife's symptoms came and went in waves and lasted for about 7 days. Her symptoms subsided immediately after the 7 days.

I believe my past experiences in dealing with pain and this disability gave me the strength to overcome any symptoms I had or might have had. This strength and mental toughness also helped me support my wife.

What were your thoughts/concerns/anxiety after the positive test?

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I was concerned that I would pass the infection onto my elderly father and my brother who both live with us. I wasn't concerned for myself as my symptoms weren't severe. I knew I had to keep my house clean as possible. I also knew the infection spread very easily so I constantly cleaned my wheelchair, my hands, my bathroom, and benches. I am now a clean-freak.

Did they ask (or did you tell them) if you had a disability?

I did tell them I had a spinal cord injury. I'm not sure if they would have asked me if I hadn't told them.

If so, did they offer support?

They offered me lots of support including counselling. They asked if I had a safe place to isolate and my own room away from others in the household. They also asked if I had family and friends that could help support me. I asked them if they could give me some PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and they said yes. We received a stock of gloves, masks, and hand-sanitiser. I'm not sure if they would have provided PPE had I not asked. They emailed me lots of info that covered lots of questions I might have had.

They also offered me a pandemic hardship payment for 2 weeks. I believe this is a payment they provide if you have employment.

They also asked me if I required accommodation which I thought was great. I'm not sure what type of accommodation this would have been, and if I would have to pay for it because I didn't need it.

I had a NDIS package, and found out the NDIS would cover the delivery fee of my online shopping.

and if safe, to self-isolate in my own room away from any other householders, including my wife. They also suggested using my own bathroom if I had one. If I shared a bathroom, I was told to give it a good clean after each time I used it.

They offered to organise a deep-clean of my house at my own expense of \$2500.



All the supports stopped completely after the 14 days isolation.

What action/precautions did they ask you to take?

They asked me, if possible

This was a huge cost so I got my family to clean the house instead.

While in isolation, they texted me each day to check on my symptoms. After the self-isolation was over, they called

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me to see if I was clear of all symptoms. I expected to be tested again, however they took my word for it. I think this is open to abuse from people who say they are rid of symptoms when they aren't, just to get the all-clear.

Did your care needs change?

My care needs weren't affected at all as I didn't have symptoms other than a dry cough. I am a high functioning and fully independent paraplegic and none of this was affected.

I didn't explore care options with them as my family was around in case I needed assistance.

Where did you get your PPE from (DHHS or Carer agency)?

They (DHHS) provided me with a supply of PPE but only when I asked for it. I'm not sure if they would have offered it anyway. I was also provided some PPE from my care agency.

Advice for others?

My advice to others is not to be scared and stay mentally tough. One of the worse things you could do is to constantly watch the news and read reports and see worst case scenarios. It's not good watching negative stories of people dying, people in intensive care units and on ventilators. Remember these are extreme cases. The majority of people have minor symptoms. But please don't take what I'm saying as not to take it seriously. My symptoms were minor but some cases are severe.

If you have a positive result, don't think of the worst because your mental health is important. Try and keep your mind busy with other things.

The weird thing about this virus is many people don't realise they could have it because they don't have any obvious symptoms. And because of this, you continue living your normal life in the community, unknowingly spreading the virus.

Everyone should wear a mask and keep their distance. Keep healthy and safe.

Jude is one of AQA's volunteer mentors and is living with T12 complete spinal cord

Peer health team COVID guide

Living in the age of COVID-19: A Peer Health guide

Not everyone can avoid falling ill with the coronavirus disease, COVID-19, by just holing up at home and bolting the door shut.

If normal life for you includes visits from your support team, your options for social and physical distancing are fewer and your close contacts may be more numerous.

You'll be spending quality time not just with others from your household but with a number of support workers as well.

And they'll have close contacts. So both staying healthy and minimising the potential for cross-infection may get complicated.

The AQA Spire volunteer Peer Support team have put their heads together and compiled a logical approach to navigating the brave new world that we entered in January, when Australia's first case of COVID-19 was confirmed.

Its likely you've given a fair bit of attention to these matters yourself and have put your procedures in place. This collection of tips and suggestions may confirm your own foresight. Alternatively, it may raise possibilities you hadn't considered.

The six-page guide is a bit lengthy for NewsLink, so we have made it available as a PDF document that you can download from this link: <https://bit.ly/2GrRqcN>.

Thanks to Peer Health mentor, medical educator and GP Mario D'Cruz for the big role he played in compiling the guide.



Disability, Senior and Pram Parking Information

We all know the frustration of arriving at a destination and finding all the accessible parking spots are full, then driving to more easily accessible spots to find several pram parking spots are available, as is some seniors parking.

So, should you park in these areas or give up and find a park further away?

In this article we explain the difference between disability, seniors and pram parking. Once you've read it, share the knowledge. You're likely aware that plenty of Australians get it wrong every day!

Who can park in Disability parking spaces?

Australia has a formal Disability Parking Scheme that is recognised in every state and territory. Unlike many other schemes, the eligibility criteria are nationally consistent. These parking areas have signage with the blue international symbol of 'people with disabilities', because that is who they're meant for – exclusively..!

The aim of these seriously important and necessary parking spots is to provide easier access to shops and other locations for people who have difficulty with their mobility.

Who can use it?

Every car that parks in an accessible parking spot must have a disability parking permit (DPP) displayed. The DPP holder may be a passenger or the driver. If they're not in the car, the permit cannot be used and the car cannot park in an accessible space.

The same applies if the DPP holder is in the car but doesn't intend to leave it.

Permits are allocated by the holder's state or territory roads authority, and contrary to popular belief they are not easy to come by.

Who can park in Senior's parking spaces?

Seniors parking was created with a similar intention to disability parking – to provide easier access to certain high traffic locations for older Australians.

Who can use it?

Unlike disability parking spaces, there is no legal

requirement for parking providers to provide seniors parking. This means there are no permits required to use these spaces and therefore, they are not enforceable by law.

Who can park in Pram parking spaces?

Parents with prams parking is provided by private car park owners to limit the distance young children need to travel with their parents to get to safety (ie. away from cars). These signs are often red also.

Who can use it?

As with seniors parking, these parking spots are meant to be for the people pictured on the sign – parents of children who are young enough to need a pram. However, unlike parking for DPP holders, there are no laws around who can and can't park here. This is great news for all manner of people with mobility issues (DPP holders or not) because it means these parking spots are open to them too.

What to do if confronted about using seniors or pram parking?

As stated above, if you're unable to find an accessible space you're allowed to park in either seniors or pram parking. These spaces are usually larger and they're close to entrances – making them ideal for people with disabilities.

Especially if you use any type of mobility equipment. While there's no need to display your disability parking permit, you may want to do so to demonstrate why you chose to park there.



Quadriplegia with COVID-19: One man's story

Now that he has adapted to living with a spinal cord injury, Les Clare is not easily rattled. So when he learned that he might have COVID-19, he didn't think it was such a big deal.

Les was pretty sure he did not have COVID-19. Even though his wife had tested positive for the new coronavirus illness a few days earlier. He had notified his care agency of her diagnosis, and had got himself tested.

Les's agency (which was not AQA) had alerted his team of six support workers, who had been delivering care round the clock - taking turns to sleep over in a spare bedroom that Les had reserved for them.

Les has an incomplete C2-4 spinal cord injury, from a road accident. He uses a powered wheelchair, has limited lung capacity, and needs help with dressing and many other daily activities.

'You think, that's nothing'

Les's wife, Dorothy, had picked up her infection at work. Her early symptoms from it were mild. Les says he wasn't worried even when he answered his phone on 27 July, a Monday, and was told he had tested positive.

"On that day I had started to get mild flu symptoms," Les reports from his home in Melbourne's west, where he is recovering strength after 18 days spent in hospital.

"It was so mild that you think, Oh, that's nothing.

"You know, we're in the middle

of winter. You wake up with a little bit of a sore throat, and you have a cup of coffee and things come right. And to have a little bit of a runny nose - that's nothing out of the ordinary. It might be hay fever. I'd been pretty sure I'd test negative.

"I'm a fairly strong sort of a person. I wasn't rattled by the positive result. I thought, any kind of luck and I'll just have light symptoms and that will be it."

Early precautions

Les had been on holiday from his work as a communications technician when, in March 2016, he fell asleep behind the handlebars of his Yamaha

motorbike. It had been a long day of touring Tasmania, with workmates. He remembers himself as wafting past a slow car at 100km/h on a straight piece of road.

"Next thing someone was doing CPR on me."

After the shock of his accident, and having adjusted to life with his injuries, not much alarms him, he says. "I don't think that anything is going to be a big deal for me now."

Nevertheless, the 60-year-old took early precautions on news last summer that the coronavirus had begun to spread in Australia.

"As soon as I found out about it, in February or March, I put myself into lockdown. I was just staying home, unless I absolutely had to go out. And I was doing quite well."

Concern for support team



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For an agency, notification that a member of a client's household has tested positive for COVID-19 requires quick action to protect support staff and possibly other clients. Les's support workers had to take tests, and isolate while they awaited results.

They were asked whether they were prepared to continue working with Les, using the recommended protective equipment. Les says his entire team said they were.

One of his carers, Vanessa, recalls that she had been surprised when the positive result came in for Dorothy.

"I'd been working with Les just before we had to get tested, and I didn't think she had COVID," says Vanessa, who had been on Les's team for about a year at that point.

"I was thinking it was just a cold and it wasn't going to be a positive result.

"My work laid it out explicitly that Les too could be positive. So I knew exactly the situation that I would be going into.

"I just thought, Les needs help. And I was happy to help. The agency pulled me off my roster, and just put me with Les."

Positive and isolating

From the test that was prompted by Dorothy's diagnosis, Vanessa tested negative for COVID-19. But she was told that such an early test might not be conclusive. She would need to take a second test 11 days later.

She says she was the only member of Les's care team to receive a positive result from

the second test.

However, she developed no symptoms, and none of her close contacts subsequently tested positive.

Like Dorothy, she isolated at home. Health authorities monitored her condition by phone, supplied her with equipment that could record her temperature and oxygen levels, and offered help with daily living needs.

"They were really good," Vanessa reports. "Really helpful."

"I think everyone thinks I'm a bit of a freak, because I didn't have any symptoms. The nurses stopped monitoring me after 10 days. They were asking me if I was actually positive, because they couldn't believe that I didn't have any symptoms the whole time."

Carers or nurses?

With care at home still available, Les declined an immediate invitation to be cared for in hospital, which he received during the phone call that advised of his positive result.

"The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) were on top of my situation," he says, "and they recommended I go to hospital straight away because of my diminished lung capacity. Which they already knew about - I'm not sure how they knew."

"I rejected the idea. I said, 'Look, I've only got very mild symptoms and we're doing quite well.'"

"I knew that hospital care would be very different from

home care. Nurses are not carers, and they do things differently."

"I said as soon as I feel sick at all, or the carers aren't happy, I'll go to hospital. And the next day, that's what happened."

When Les called for an ambulance, it was not because his carers would no longer work with him. It was because those on duty had recognised a decline.

"They pointed out that, Les, you're not yourself and things aren't going quite right for you. I started to take more note of myself, and agreed."

Six days without food

That was a good call. Les says he was admitted to the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg on Tuesday 28 July and placed in the COVID-19 ward.

"For the next three days I had really strong flu symptoms," he remembers.

"I also had loss of smell and taste. And with that, lack of appetite - I didn't want to eat."

"I had a very mild fever, and that mucked up my sleep."

"I didn't sleep for three days. For those three days, I didn't eat. I felt pretty unwell."

However, Les says his symptoms were never severe enough that he feared he might die.

"At no point was I scared."

"I managed to get my sleep back, and then I slept for three days - just about non-stop. Again, no appetite for those three days."

"About the fifth of August I started waking up -

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horrendously hungry. I think the flu part of it was over, and from then on it was fatigue. Fatigue partly from COVID-19 - which tends to have a lasting effect of fatigue - and partly brought on by the fact that I didn't eat for six days."

Recovering strength

For nearly all of his 18 days at the Austin, Les was the sole occupant of a four-bed room. He believes his isolation was driven by the possibility of patients cross-infecting one another with



different strains of the disease.

"It took me a long while to get a bit of strength back," he says. "I was feeling very weak."

Normally competent operating a keypad, he recalls himself as feeling so feeble that he had trouble selecting channels on his TV remote.

But he says he would have been well enough to leave hospital sooner. One constraint was his need for official assurance that he was no longer infectious, given that a recovered case, he says, might test positive for COVID-19 over succeeding weeks or even months.

Another was his need for his care arrangements to resume when he returned home. As it happened, his agency was able to reassemble for him his established support team.

"I've got awesome relationships with all my

carers," Les says.

"They are all still wearing PPE gear and gloves and masks. Some of them have started wearing safety glasses rather than faceshields. The faceshields muck up your peripheral vision."

Home, sweet home

Dorothy's symptoms remained flu-like and mild and she too has recovered.

However, about two weeks after the Austin discharged him, both Les and his wife are still feeling fatigue - a result widely reported by others who have had the disease.

"Dorothy is still feeling tired," he says. "I've felt weak.

"I'm gradually getting stronger. But the thing really knocked me around."

Les is a member of the Melbourne SCI community who has been living with an incomplete C2-4 spinal cord injury since 2016.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of A.Q.A. Victoria Ltd will be held via Video Conference on Thursday 19th November 2020 at 3.30pm.

Members will receive details through the mail.

The AGM will be followed by our AQA Celebration Event at 5.00pm.

AQA introduces OT service

AQA has welcomed our first occupational therapist to the team. Emma O'Brien will be offering her skills and leading an expansion of AQA services.

Emma started out with Spinal Life in Queensland, a not-for profit organisation supporting and advocating for people living with spinal cord injury. There she gained an appreciation for community-based support - working with people in their homes and having her thinking challenged and inspired by their creative solutions.

A few years ago, she moved to Victoria, plying her skills in community-based aged care. After joining an organisation as its sole allied health worker, she built a team of 65 that operated across three states.



Now she's building something with us.

"I'm excited to be reconnecting with the spinal cord injury community," Emma says. "I have a lot of fun tinkering with equipment. I love it when people come to me with a really crazy idea that they're not sure is possible. I love that because it's always possible. How you get there is the question."

Emma sees big benefits from embedding allied health specialists in the AQA ecosystem, where they can work closely with our support

coordinators, our lived experience team and our support workers.

"It's about being able to build a support team around you who are responsive to your needs as they evolve," she explains. "And because those people are all under the same roof, they can be providing more cohesive and meaningful support."

Naz Erdem, Practice Leader at Spire, has been working closely with Emma to tailor the emerging services for AQA. He sees slack in the current system for a more thoughtful and targeted approach to allied health, and sees AQA as well placed to take it up.

"The need for allied health services has really grown," Naz says.

"It's great that we're stepping in, because we know we can do it well."

Emma and Naz see AQA services expanding beyond occupational therapy to specialties such as physiotherapy and dietetics.

"We'll develop in the direction the demand takes us," Emma says.

If you would like to discuss your OT needs with Emma, please email her at community@aqavic.org.au or phone AQA on (03) 9489 0777.

By Dan Nathan

HAVE YOU GOT A STORY TO TELL?

We're always on the lookout for interesting, inspiring or unusual stories from our community. We are currently seeking volunteer contributors to share their lived experiences of SCI on our online community blog at www.spire.org.au/blog.

No blogging experience is necessary and if needed, one of Spire's skilled volunteers can help shape or edit your story.

For further information:

T 03 9489 0777

E info@aqavic.org.au

Part 3: The friendly organisation

From its earliest days, AQA Victoria stood out as a place where people could find supportive relationships after a life-changing event that brought severe physical challenges.

From its beginnings as an office where people with quadriplegia could find paid jobs, AQA Victoria was known for its welcoming and straightforward relations with workers, members and clients.

Robyn Canning, who joined AQA in 1989 as a receptionist, points to founding CEO Ian Bennett as setting the tone.

"Ian was a Ballarat boy through and through," recalls Canning, who would spend 27 years with AQA, 10 of them as Bennett's personal assistant and fixer.

"He was a country person. He made AQA an open place. Quads and paras were always dropping in to say Hi."

In the years immediately after it incorporated in 1987, AQA compiled accident statistics for VicRoads forerunner the Road Traffic Authority – while incubating other projects.

Workaday life

"There were at least eight of us doing that work, and possibly more," recalls Mark Waterman, who was among a clutch of people living with quadriplegia whom AQA had employed.

Waterman would rise at 5am to prepare for his hour-long ride to the office in Station Street, Fairfield, with an AQA driver in a specially equipped van. He would be delivered home about 6 in the evening.

A conductor on country trains before he was injured in a motorbike crash at 19, Waterman had found this workaday way of life more stimulating than his prior subsistence with his parents at Rosedale in Gippsland, and at Yarra-Me specialist accommodation at Croydon in Melbourne's east.

"I loved working at AQA," he recalls from retirement. "I worked there for 28 years.

"The VicRoads work was all paperwork. We would take the accident reports from the Road Traffic Authority, and we would code them.

"It was pieces of paper coming in, and one piece of paper going out with the codes."

Friday night drinks

Waterman would go on to overseeing the computer-automation of AQA's payroll, and to operating its desktop publishing service, Copies Plus.

He reveals that he was often home late of a Friday after partying with colleagues and friends at the office.



Greg Kidd, Day in the Park 1998

"We used to have a gambling thing happen," he remembers. "A mate of mine used to come over and a few of the guys would stay back.

"We'd play acey-deucey or poker. We'd have a video on, and we'd have a few drinks.

"Nobody won big bucks – we'd bet five-cent and 10-cent pieces, maybe a few 20s.

"But we were drinking beer and talking rubbish. It was just really good fun."

Larger than life

Waterman's wife, Sharon, tells of a period he spent in hospital for an arm operation. Abandoned by his desk at the office was his wastepaper bin, which had been fashioned in the form of a frog.

"Mark's workmates would send him photos of his frog from a Friday night, with a smoke hanging out of its mouth – or a bottle," Sharon remembers.

"And they'd say to him, 'The Frog had a really good time last week!'"

Canning recalls the Station Street office as "fairly

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dull looking, with dark wood panelling in the front and this gigantic room at the back that had a bit of partitioning in it.

"There were only about eight or nine employees," she observes of AQA's early years. "But they also had people who wandered in and out."

Memorable for her among the regular crew was Ray Kennedy, who had C4 quadriplegia. Kennedy directed AQA's incoming phone calls.

"Ray was larger than life," she says. "A bit of a larrikin, which he would admit himself, but a great guy."



Mark Waterman, 2016.

"They had him set up with headphones because he couldn't use his hands. But he could do things with a stick."

Keeness to help

Canning, who had significant secretarial experience when she joined AQA, remembers herself as groaning inwardly over slip-ups from Kennedy – slip-ups which did not seem to bother him.

But she says he transformed after AQA sent him on a training course for telephonists.

"Having come from a corporate background, it took me a while and some frustrations to understand the office environment I was working in," Canning remembers.

"Many of our people would never have been in an office in their lives if they had not received a spinal cord injury, I believe. For example, a lot of them had worked in trades.

"AQA was a good place to go, have a bit of a laugh, and do a bit of work to help others.

"They all wanted to help other people who were in their situation.

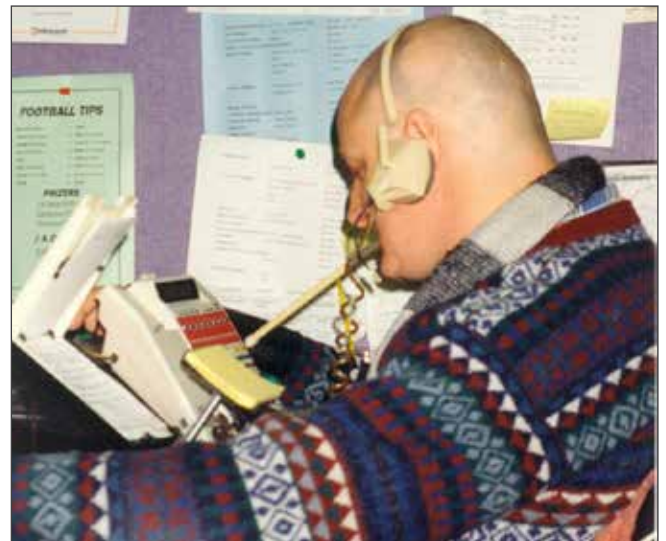
"But of course, you've got to have the infrastructure to support that work."

Among other employees Canning remembers well from her early years was Greg Kidd, who was developing a peer-support program. Kidd made regular visits to the Austin Hospital and Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre, offering hope from his lived experience to people recently injured. Often a companion in these adventures was Kennedy.

Bit of a character

Canning observes that the employment of people with disabilities not only supported those people but also attracted subsidies, and these helped Bennett expand AQA's services.

Among key initiatives were the AQA NewsLink newsletter and information service, created by Kidd and husbanded for many years by Ian Williams.



Larger than life: Ray Kennedy.

Naz Erdem, who assumed leadership of the Information and Peer Support team in 2000, joined AQA in 1994 as a volunteer assistant to Williams. Williams taught him how to write articles for NewsLink, and initiated him in the arts of its laborious – by today's standards – production.

Erdem had been living with a C6 spinal cord injury – the same level as Williams' – from a diving accident at the age of 20. He had contacted the AQA office about two years after his rehabilitation,

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HISTORY OF AQA

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seeking suggestions for how he could live more productively.

He had known of AQA from his days at the Austin.

"We used to have an outdoor area at the spinal wards, and some of us would spend some time there in the warm weather," Erdem remembers.

"I remember one guy coming around and just having a chat to all the patients.

"He was clearly a high-level quad – C3 or C4, in a power wheelchair.



Initiation: NewsLink editor Ian Williams and assistant Naz Erdem, 1998

"He was pretty upbeat, and was joking with the other patients. He was a bit of a character as well – very likeable.

"It was fantastic to see that he was acting normal. In the situation that he was in, I thought it was really unusual that he could be so upbeat.

"I found out later that he was from AQA Victoria, and that his name was Ray Kennedy."

Super-accessible

Peter Trethewey sustained AQA's tradition of openness when he succeeded Bennett as CEO in 2007.

"I think we are fortunate that our CEOs both have been super-accessible," Erdem observes. "You can go and knock on their door and talk to them about anything."

When the office relocated in 2019 to premises at 416 Heidelberg Road, a bespoke interior augmented broad aisles and warm acoustics with retreats where visitors and staff could chat comfortably.

Trethewey has sponsored the development of

support networks for people living in regional and rural Victoria. The AQA peer support team facilitates regular get-togethers and group activities in or near major regional centres. It has also fostered a women's network, and a group for professionals.

Information officer John Theodoropoulos, who helped Mark Waterman operate Copies Plus when he joined AQA in 2000, says the atmosphere at the office has grown more businesslike, however.

"It felt really good that I was providing value to somebody after my accident," Theodoropoulos, injured in 1992, recalls of his time working with Waterman. "I found the design work really enjoyable.

"Because we were smaller, it was more relaxed then than it is now. We've matured. We're doing more and better things for people, and today



Bennett and Canning at Bennett's farewell

when we come in we are all focused more intensely on our jobs. There is less time for informal talk."

Canning, who retired in 2016 but has visited since, describes the new office as "absolutely fantastic" and says that in some ways she wishes she still had a senior role there.

"I like to think that AQA still has its friendly feel," Canning says. "Even when the quality-assurance auditors came in, they would say, 'It's lovely to come to AQA.'"

"We were known as the friendly organisation. That's why I loved working there."

Support Coordination Strengthened

Long-time peer support mentor Georgina Fiorentino has accepted an invitation to extend her role with AQA, adding depth to our support coordination and peer coaching teams.

Georgina brings to the support coordination role her experience as an NDIS participant, which equips her with first-hand knowledge of how complex and confusing the scheme can look to those engaging with it for the first time.

She brings long familiarity with budgeting, too, having spent many years in accounting with a national transport firm.

Georgina will also be available for Peer Coaching engagements. Recently she delivered coaching to three participants in AQA's Discovering the Power in Me workshop, run over September and October this year and for the first time online.

"The peer coach's role is completely different from peer mentoring," Georgina explains.

"When you are providing peer support to someone as a mentor, a part of it is offering advice or ideas from what you do or what you have done in the past.

"Whereas peer coaching is pretty much helping your clients to find answers for themselves.

"You help them to look at what they really want to do, or what issue they want to work on. When someone realises that they're the one who has the answers, they feel confident that they can find solutions for future problems or obstacles that they may encounter."

Georgina has been living with a T7 spinal cord injury since 2003, when blood clotting developed on her spinal column - a symptom of the auto-immune disease lupus, with which she had been diagnosed at the age of 19.

She was 31 at the time of her injury, was working full-time, and had been married four years. As she has shared in a video hosted on AQA's Spire website, she had thought as her rehabilitation began that her life was over. She also had questions about what her injury would mean for her husband, Andrew.

"I was in rehab for four months at Royal Talbot," she recalls. "You go through thoughts about what's going to happen to your marriage. Almost to the point where I wanted Andrew to leave me, just to save him the trouble.

"Instead, I guess I feel that it brought us a lot closer together. I was one of the lucky ones, I believe. Our relationship became stronger, and Andrew is absolutely amazing.

"I've done so many things since, and we're as strong as ever. Like I say, I'm so lucky. But at the same time when I tell that to people, they say the opposite: that Andrew is lucky to have me too."



Georgina returned to work part time with the transport firm she had been with when she was injured, remaining until May last year when she was offered redundancy. She and Andrew took the opportunity to spend five weeks in Europe.

"We made it just before all this Covid," she says. "It was just amazing - we had a fantastic time."

Georgina lives in Melbourne with Andrew and their two dogs, Penny and Candy. She volunteered with AQA as a peer mentor about 10 years ago, motivated by her awareness of how helpful peer support had been for her as she completed her rehabilitation and returned to her community.

"I find peer mentoring very rewarding," she says. "I know that having someone with that lived experience talk to you, and show you that you can get back to live pretty much as normal after a spinal cord injury - it's something that you need at that point in time while you are in the ward, and it's something that you will never forget."



Use our lived experience to get the most out of your NDIS plan

We can assist you in building your capacity to implement your plan, connect with services and achieve your plan goals.

NDIS Support Coordination | Personal Development | Personal Care | Community Participation

03 9489 0777
ndis@aqavic.org.au
www.aqavic.org.au



FOR SALE

Likorall 250 – Ceiling Hoist

Comes with a Sling; Can be arranged to be removed from the ceiling for a serious buyer; 3 Years old; Serviced Annually; No Problems with it; Pick Up is in Mt. Martha.

Price: \$3,500

Phone: 0432 566 930 (Selina) (08/20#a)

Electric Standing Hoist

Oxford Journey Standing machine is in excellent condition sold and serviced by Fisher Lane (Abbotsford) 10/ 2017. Purchased for (\$3,780). Also includes a large sized sling, battery & battery charger.

Price: \$2,700 (Coburg)

Phone: 0419 884 106 (Lou) (07/20#a)

Standing Frame – Easy Stand

Comes with strap; Excellent condition; Hardly used.

Price: \$2,500 (Cash on pick-up)

Phone: 0449 881 200 (Hadyn) (07/20#a)

2017 Mercedes Benz Valante 116 BlueTEC

Auto; 2.1L Turbo Diesel ; 24,000 kms; Rego until April 2021; RWC Supplied; Service History; Flint Grey Metallic; Includes: Fiorella Wheelchair Lift with seatbelt and 4 Q'straints; capacity for 6 passengers plus wheelchair passenger; Electrical Operation of Sliding Doors; 3rd Row Seats; Privacy Black Glass; every possible extras are fitted.

Price: \$64,900 ONO (coburg)

Phone: 0419 884 106 (Lou) (07/20#a)

Wymo Wheelchair Hoist

Used; Good Condition.

Price: \$600

Phone: 0402 204 992 (Colin) (01/20#a)

Quantum iLevel Power Chair

Good condition; Only used occasionally in 3 years; Comes with Roho cushion; Side supports; Serviced regularly.

Price: \$3,000

Phone: 0432 566 930 (Selina) (06/20#a)

Mattress – Oska Pressure Relief

Dimensions 200cm x 105 x 18; In excellent condition; Mattress type (Swedish) Oska CuroCell Area Zone with Heel function; Will need to be collected or could be couriered at receivers cost.

Price: \$200

Phone: 0408 213 847 (Patrick) (06/20#a)

Quickie Explore - Electric Wheelchair

Height adjustable; Tilt in space function; Comes with backpack; Very good condition.

Price: \$8,000 (Cash on pick-up)

Phone: 0449 881 200 (Hadyn) (07/20#a)

FOR SALE

Bruno Wheelchair Lift

Bruno Out-rider PUL-1100 lifts - Manual chair into back of ute; Only used 6 months; Installed by Mobility Plus; Stored indoors; Manual and parts

Price: \$1,000

Phone: 0418 314 006 (Kate) (02/20#a)

2004 Chrysler Grand Voyager

211,500 Kms; Good Condition; RWC; Fitted out by Capital Conversions; Auto Side Door & Ramp; Docking System to Drive from Chair; Suit C5 / C6.

Price: \$20,000

Phone: 5756 2016 (Phil) (06/20#a)

2014 Renault Kangoo

Black in colour; Only 22,000 kms; Bought in 2014. Underwent \$30,000 in modifications; Full service history; Receipts of any work/modifications; Air conditioned; Automatic; Cruise control; Electric windows etc... Roadworthy and no work is needed; Rego paid, Comfortable to drive; Asking \$28,000 (negotiable); Good value given the amount of kms and original investment (over 60k)

Price: \$28,000 Negotiable

Email: steve@escor.com.au (Steve) (12/19#a)

Electric Wheelchair Handcycle

14 months old; Cost \$1,500; Attaches to most wheelchairs; Comes with battery charger - All attachments and instructions; 16" tyre; 36v Lithium battery; Max speed 25 km/hr; Range approx.20 kms; Charging time 5 hours.

Price: 250

Phone: 0409 705 900 (Philip) (05/20#a)

Apollo Residential Hydraulic Lift

Apollo lifts are a brilliant concept that makes installation a very simple project; Complete with own prefabricated shaft; Only needs a recess of 80 mm; Easy to plumb with the supplied control cabinet; Only requires a single phase 20 amp power supply and is suitable for internal or external installation. Lift is a few years old but has never been installed or used; The Apollo Lifts are sold new through Aussie Lifts.

Price: \$6,500

Phone: 0414 593 790 (Mal) (05/20#a)

Trailer for Electric Wheelchairs

Trailer holds two large electric wheelchairs or the smaller electric Wheelchairs; Specially made for me by TRIK Trailers in 2017; Features Include: Two hand winches; Ramps; Front stabilizers; Spare Tyre; 3 months registration until June 20; Wheel Lock; Size of tray: 2.4 x 1.5 metres; Overall size: 3.9 x 2.0 metres; Can be attached to any car with a tow bar; Used 4 times, like new.

Price: \$2,800 – Negotiable

Phone: 0408 594 129 (Philomena) (02/20#a)

MORE CLASSIFIEDS:

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.

ADVERTISEMENTS

FOR SALE

Handcycle - BATEC Manual (Not Quad Version)

Was \$6,800 new; Barely used; Suit any wheelchair user with Injury level L1 and lower and hand function; Comes with brackets, front and rear led lights, front wheel weights if required; USB with product data and setup instructions; Attaches to rigid wheelchairs.

Price: \$4,250 (Geelong)

Phone: 0415 669 131 (Keith) (09/20#a)

Easylift Liftboy II

Manufactured by Lehner 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; This lift can be packed up and moved in less than 10 minutes! A fully mobile or permanent solution for the home or business; The unit was \$12,000 brand new.

Price: \$5,900

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

ITEMS FOR FREE

Bathroom Stool & All Purpose Trolley

Free to a good home.

Phone: 0479 066 712 (Darren) (08/20#a)

Top Form Omega 2 Maxi Lift Chair

Triple Tier; 4 Button, 2 Motors; In black leather; Original cost \$2,400; Includes a message mat; Suit a large person

Phone: 0407 332 761 (Carol) (05/20#a)

Freebies - Quantum 6000Z - Electric Wheelchair

10 years old; Still runs OK; Batteries removed; Battery Charger; Control screen 1 year old; Really only good for spare parts; I intend to dispose of the wheelchair after 2 months if no interest is shown.

Phone: 9509 0363 (Con) (10/20#a)

Freebies - Wheelchair Manual

Mobility Plus Manual Wheelchair; 16' x 17'; 24 Inch wheels; Can use for Lawn Bowls; Pick up from Mansfield.

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

Freebies - WYMO Car Hoist

WYMO Car Hoist; Works well; Includes all parts for installation; Pick up from Mansfield.

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

WANTED

Mobility Equipment / Aides / Accessible Vehicle

If you have any mobility equipment / aides that you either no longer need or have upgraded from, we would love to hear from you. Also looking for a wheelchair accessible vehicle with a minimum of 4 regular seats.

Phone: 0403 515 605 (Christine) (05/20#a)

SUPPORTING SERVICES TO PEOPLE WITH A SPINAL CORD INJURY

Making a bequest...

Bequests provide a legacy to an organisation you already support or want to support in the future. Making a bequest to AQA in your will is a meaningful way of supporting people with spinal cord injury. All bequests help strengthen the services provided by AQA that promote independence, quality of life and inclusion of people with disabilities in the community.

If you have included AQA in your will, or you are considering making a bequest to AQA we would love to hear from you so that we can acknowledge your support.

We would also like to include you on our list of supporters who receive our bi-annual supporters newsletter that provides an update of our services, the year's events and other activities that AQA is involved in that support people with spinal cord injury.

If you would like more information about making a bequest to AQA please contact Peter Trethewey CEO on 03 9489 0777.



Did you know AQA is registered not only to provide standard needs assistance with self-care activities and community participation but also high intensity?

MORE CLASSIFIEDS: 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

Qualcare
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You are invited to the AQA 2020 Annual Celebration Thursday 19th November

In these unprecedented times, we are having our 2020 Annual Celebration event online.



It will be a great opportunity to come together to share and celebrate in the achievements and contributions of AQA **and that includes you!**

We will be acknowledging and celebrating our staff and volunteers and the work that has been done to support others in all areas of life.

We are looking forward to welcoming you, our community, Members, Volunteers and Staff, Directors and Committees, Clients, Supporters and Service Partners acknowledging everyone's contributions in the past year.

Details of the event are as follows:

Venue: Online in the comfort of your own home

Date: Thursday 19th November 2020

Time: 5.00pm to 5.30pm

Please register online for this event from the page at this link:

RSVP <https://www.aqavic.org.au/celebration-2020>

Phone: Reception (03) 9489 0777

Email: admin@aqavic.org.au