

FIRST GRADUATE OF NEW PATIENT SUPPORT COURSE OVERCOMES GREAT HURDLES

When Gary Wanstall of Langford had a debilitating motorcycle accident 14 years ago he never dreamt he would one day work in a hospital and make life brighter for patients experiencing the similar anguish.

However, with the help of the Australian Medical Association's Health Training Australia branch and EDGE Employment Solutions – Gary is the first graduate of a new Health Services course in client/patient support services.

Gary is now a patient care assistant where he can interact with patients, their family and the dedicated staff at St John of God Murdoch.

Gary was a chef before the accident but felt unfulfilled when he returned following his accident.

Five years ago he developed bi-polar, a psychiatric illness affecting his mood and thinking ability.

Gary has overcome this disability to succeed in his new career path and has plans for continuing his education in the health services industry.



Gary Wanstall (right) accepts his graduation certificate from Health Training Australia representative Kyle Lucy.

"I see people all the time that have injuries similar to mine so it's great to be able to be here to tell them what to expect and know how they're feeling," he said.

"I love this job so I am going to keep training and stay here (St John of God - Murdoch)."

After returning to work as a chef and then working in medical equipment sterilization Gary ached for a job he found worthwhile.

"I didn't feel useful where I was – I wanted a job that was fulfilling and to make people happy and laugh," he said.

"I can do that now in this job. I love coming to work every day and I hate leaving here."

EDGE, an employment agency for people with disabilities, has worked with the AMA (WA) to find Gary work in the field.

"He's brilliant with patients – this is his niche," EDGE job co-ordinator Matthew Eaton said.

"He brings sunshine in to people's lives."

EDGE FORGES RESEARCH LINKS WITH CURTIN UNIVERSITY

EDGE's Executive Director of Research and Development, Greg Lewis, has been appointed Adjunct Associate Professor to Curtin University's Centre for Research into Disability and Society and to the Curtin University School of Occupational Therapy. Dr Lewis' appointment follows a long association between EDGE and Curtin University. Over the past 10 years EDGE has supported more than 30 undergraduate and post-graduate occupational therapy students, plus a number of clinical psychology masters students, on practical placement at EDGE.



Dr Greg Lewis.

More recently, EDGE has collaborated with the School of Occupational Therapy on several research projects. These research projects have included tracking long-term outcomes for apprentices and trainees with disabilities (who have been placed and supported by EDGE) who successfully completed their courses, and determining the key success factors for people with disabilities who have established their own successful businesses.

"The formal research link with Curtin University will enable EDGE to tap into Curtin University's considerable information resources, research personnel and statistical expertise. In return, Curtin University will gain a research partner with 21 years experience in placing and supporting more than 1,500 people with disabilities in a vast array of jobs. Already a number of possible research projects are being actively investigated," Dr Lewis said.

OEEO: WALKING THE TALK!

With the release last September of the Premier's Accessing Abilities Plan for the Public Sector, the agency behind this document, the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (OEEO) has been one of the first to implement some of its strategies.

Last month Crispin Roberts, from the Professional EDGE Graduate Program, took up a position as a Corporate Communications Officer with the OEEO. Crispin, who completed his postgraduate studies in Journalism at Murdoch University earlier this year, has been quick to adapt to his new role and he is quickly becoming a vital member of a small but important team working to promote best practice in managing diversity through workforce planning and Human Resource management.

But this is only part of the story and there has been a lot of work done by OEEO, EDGE and Crispin in getting things this far already.

Alan Barrett from OEEO approached EDGE late last year with an identified need for someone with corporate communication skills and a budget and role description that was well suited to a graduate placement.



Crispin Roberts at his work station at the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity.

"The Office of EEO looks at every selection process as an opportunity to improve our workforce profile. In this instance, a targeted search was considered the most appropriate way to identify talent and to improve our insight into the issues and challenges facing people with a disability looking to work in the public sector," said Alan.

"The commitment of my CEO, Noela Taylor to the outcome was a crucial starting point, the acceptance of the business case for the recruitment by the CEO and ongoing process support from Human Resource staff also helped progress the appointment. While we felt very strongly that we needed to 'walk the talk' on the employment of people with disabilities, it was Crispin's skills and abilities that earned him the position," Alan added.

However before Crispin, who was injured in a Rugby Union accident in May 2003, could start at the OEEO, a lot of work had to be done behind the scenes. Matt Eaton, an Occupational Therapist at EDGE, undertook a full and comprehensive evaluation of the buildings accessibility and some of the technology available to assist Crispin. "Besides the accessibility issues another crucial area, was the assistive technology needed. Crispin uses Dragon Dictate, which is a voice activated software and great for the work that Crispin is doing," said Matt.

With the support of EDGE, the commitment of OEEO and Crispin's ability and attitude, it seems that Crispin has been able to successfully make the transition from university into employment.

"The move into the workforce has been smoother than I had anticipated" said Crispin. "The support EDGE has given in creating a wheelchair friendly workspace and the helpful nature of my colleagues in making a friendly work environment has been very comforting in what could have been a daunting and intimidating situation."

MENTORING CO-WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES COURSE 5TH OF MAY

Once again EDGE Employment Solutions is running its hugely successful, free, one day course for employers entitled "Mentoring Co-Workers with Disabilities". This short course provides participants with the skills and confidence to train and support co-workers with disabilities to become independent and productive members of their workforce.

Positions are filling fast so please call the office now on 9388 0077 to register your interest. If you are unable to attend on this day we run this course regularly throughout the year, so speak to our receptionist about this.