



There's a simple way to describe how Angela Barnes felt in the five years she was looking for a job - rotten.

"I felt like I wasn't useful for anything," she says

A bubbly personality and great skills weren't enough for employers to give this visually impaired 28 year old, a chance.

Then, EDGE secured a Receptionist position for Angela at the Forrest Products Commission – and life changed for the better.

"You feel like you're doing something, you're contributing," Angela told INSIDE EDGE.

Two years on - another setback. A "restructuring" meant jobs had to go - and one of them was Angela's. It was devastating.

"I was really worried about being unemployed again" she says.

"When I was first dealing with Angela, she was feeling extremely anxious," remembers Gordon Rendall, EDGE Employer Consultant.

Angela needn't have worried. The EDGE support machine swung into action, securing her a new position as an Administration Assistant at the Department of Education and Training's Shared Services Centre.

"This worked out, because everything EDGE said they'd do, they did," explains Cindy Barnard, Manager of Human Resource Services at the DET Shared Services Centre.

EDGE procured software and devices to help Angela do the job - and some of them are quite ingenious. Items like a "talking post-it note" - a sticker-like device that

allows notes to be left on a tiny microphone, instead of being written. A computer programme called "Jaws" reads typed text, out loud. And despite her visual impairment, even identifying the colour of something is possible for Angela, thanks to yet another gadget. A colour sensor, built into a pen tip, identifies colours - and even speaks!

All just "part of the service" for EDGE - Cindy Barnard believes these tools made Angela's placement possible.

"EDGE made a commitment to us that having Angela start with us wouldn't be any different to having any other employee start – and they were right!"

"It's a case of right person, right time, right place," says Gordon Rendall "Everything just fell into place. It just fitted."

Angela got a new job she loves, the department got a happy and willing employee - oh, and a new organisational system many would envy - no more rummaging around draws for paperclips.

"I reorganised the whole stationary cupboard and put Braille labels on them!" says Angela.

Gordon says Angela's "big beaming smile" and her renewed confidence are proof that the transition's been successful.

"It's like a different person to the one I first met!" he says Angela credits EDGE with her success.

"Other agencies couldn't even get me interviews, EDGE got me jobs." she says



"I don't care what I have to live with, in terms of injury or disability, just give me one more chance."

This was the prayer the then - 23 year old pilot Allana Corbin uttered, in the hours following a plane crash that killed 4 other passengers.

Trapped, bleeding, in the wreckage, Allana thought she would die.

But the Allana Corbin story is one of never giving up. A harrowing tale of hope, guts and inspiration. And Allana Corbin was a very special guest speaker at a lunch, hosted by EDGE, to mark International Day of Disability.

Ironically, the flight Allana was on that day, was intended to be a mercy mission. It was three days before Christmas in 1990. She and a group of fellow pilots were trying to find another plane that had ditched in dense forrest. Then their plane also went down.

"From the moment the engine failed, we had three minutes to impact." Allana told the EDGE audience. "It was like the biggest bang you'd ever heard."

Trapped in the debris, unable to feel her legs, for Allana, the terror brought a new clarity.

"What was truly important to me was crystal clear – not a house, a car or how much money I earned. All that was important to me was people," she said.

Allana Corbin made a pact with herself that if she survived, her life would be different. Better. And it's a pact she's honoured.

Left an "incomplete paraplegic" after the crash, experts told Allana she'd never walk again. Doctors even sent a social worker to treat her for denial, because she refused to accept the diagnosis.

"I was amazed, I was being packed up and put on a shelf and told "that's it, you're not going to make a contribution now."

"I had an enormous challenge."

What the experts had failed to take into consideration, was Allana's determination.

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The rehabilitation was gruelling, slow and painful. She found the experience of living in a wheelchair "humbling". Still, a steely resolve shone through.

"Twelve months to the day, I got out of my wheelchair."

The doctors who'd told her she certainly couldn't pilot an aircraft any more, were again proven wrong when Allana took up flying again – this time, helicopters.

She says she realised the fear of flying she'd developed since the smash, was holding her back.

"My fear was paralysing me more than any disability could."



Getting back in the sky, under the tutelage of a gruff (but handsome!) instructor helped that fear dissolve. Allana says she realised that 'flying isn't something that I do, it's part of who I am.' It lead to another important milestone.

"I looked through the record books and I realised no one had ever circumnavigated Australia solo in a helicopter." Of course... you guessed it... in 1997, Allana Corbin became the first woman to do just that.

Like the plot of a movie, she also married the instructor, they established a successful business - a rescue service, based in Tasmania. It's now the biggest in Australia.

Allana - also told she'd probably never have children - once again proved the doctors wrong - giving birth to twin daughters, both pretty, blonde and determined - just like their amazing mum.

She now has a second successful business, giving motivational speeches across the country. Allana says the whole community benefits when we break down the barriers of what we THINK people with disability can achieve.



Hard work and ambition

The determination that cemented Dianne Saunders' place in Australia's 2004 Athens Paralympics team, has now helped her to find a permanent job.

Despite being born with cerebral palsy, the 26 year old admits her competitive streak – and a good dose of both hard work and ambition - have encouraged her to set her own employment goals. Dianne has recently accepted a permanent, part time administration

position with Steggles.

"I was happy, really happy, really excited!" she says

EDGE Job Coordinator, Michelle Kruger says Dianne has far exceeded all expectations.

"Initially Dianne needed full support - someone with her all the time. Now, we only catch up for a chat once a fortnight!" says Michelle "Dianne has taken the role on herself, she is quite self sufficient, quite independent."

"She's doing an amazing job."

Dianne says Michelle's support, as well as kindness and encouragement from her new colleagues at Steggles, have boosted her confidence.

"They talk to me, they joke with me, it's a really nice working environment," she says " I'm comfortable doing everything by myself."

Indeed, "if things are too easy for me, I ask for more to do!"

Steggles' Human Resources adviser Rosanna Beard admits she was a little apprehensive at first, but decided Dianne deserved a go.

"Looking around me, a lot of people don't give people a chance."

"Now I think it's one of the best decisions I've ever made... she's one of us!"

Already a champion in the swimming pool, Dianne says her new job has now ignited another ambition - to move out of her family home, and live independently.

"This has helped show me I'm capable of doing things." she says.



Now I feel really good!

A talking computer, a few gadgets to enlarge the small print on paperwork, and a water bowl for his best friend were all it took to transform the life of visually - impaired Business Graduate Thanh Tu.

"At one stage I felt like a useless person," he says "Now I feel really good, I'm using my knowledge."

Despite stellar university qualifications, Thanh had been looking for work in Perth for six months, before EDGE secured a position for him at the City of Rockingham. Initially employed on a 6-month contract, as a System Accountant, Thanh is now a full time employee.

"It makes you feel really good that you're contributing back to the community and earning a living like anyone else," he says Edge Job Coordinator Kristine Lim praised the City of Rockingham.

"They were really good. They gave Thanh a shot and he proved he can do what anybody else can." she said

Instead of reading off a computer screen, Thanh has a computer that talks to him, through a special head-set. Workplace modifications, secured through EDGE, provided software to magnify documents, and a portable viewer that allows Thanh to enlarge the print on paperwork in meetings.

"This job makes me feel more independent," he said

And central to that sense of independence is Leila - Thanh's 3 year-old Guide Dog. Leila has the desk next to Thanh's in the City of Rockingham office, and has also become a popular "employee" with the other members of staff.

Accompanied by Leila, Thanh takes two buses and a train, spending just over a hour each way, to get from his Huntingdale home to Rockingham, every day. But you won't hear a word of complaint from either of them! Thanh says his job has boosted his confidence - and his prospects.

"I feel like nothing can stop me in the future!" he says.

Ask eighteen year old Hayley Prout about her hobbies and they're fairly typical for someone her age - listening and dancing to music, swimming, catching up with friends.

Ask Hayley who she admires, and Delta Goodrem is top of the list. Why? Because her music is "inspiring and uplifting" - and because the Australian songstress is a cancer survivor.

There are definite similarities between Hayley and her pop princess idol.

Both have had to fight hard to beat a nasty enemy - for Delta, her very public battle against leukaemia was played out before the world's press. For Hayley, the fight might have been more private, but was equally challenging. Hayley's foe was a brain tumour, contracted when she was only 10. Surgery that saved her life, also left her paralysed down one side of her body and affected her hearing and peripheral vision.

But, like Delta, Hayley was "Born to Try". Last year, she started a work-based traineeship in Business Administration at the Real Estate Institute of WA - and she loves it.

"Having this job gives me confidence and independence," she says.

And EDGE Job Coordinator, Megan Graham, agrees - saying that within just a few months, Hayley's progress has been remarkable.

"She used to wait for people to get her to do things, now she's taking the initiative - she's just blossomed!"

REIWA Member Relations Manager, Amanda Hardwick says having Hayley on board has also had a positive effect on the organisation.

"Understanding how Hayley's disability affects her work... gives a new perspective," says Amanda "It's also given us a better insight into dealing with the public and clients."



Amanda believes an EDGE course in "Mentoring co-workers with disabilities" was a key element of the successful transition. Seven REIWA staff attended the day-long session.

"EDGE has been fantastic," says Amanda. "I recommend other organisations to partake. It builds a bit of depth in the workplace - sometimes we have to work outside the square."