

organisational member profile:

Cathy's Life and Support



by Coral Farr
and Cathy



During this era of the NDIS implementation, it is all too easy to get caught up in the “big picture” of successes and difficulties. However, we can learn so much from the small achievements that are made by people with complex disabilities in their daily lives.

Onemda services operate in the Doncaster area of Victoria. The themes that underpin the values and culture of the Onemda community reflect the collaborative nature of the organisation. Service delivery is based on social justice, advocacy, access, compliance, commitment and teamwork. There is an emphasis on community building with participants, families and carers. Participants contribute to and take part in community events. Notably, Onemda operates a café as a vocational training facility, four days a week at a local Community House. Onemda also operates a mobile coffee van in partnership with the local council. Volunteers continue to assist professional staff to provide learning opportunities to participants. Onemda is currently participating in the trial of robots as teaching aids for participants. The small steps taken towards achieving goals are valued as much as the big steps.

A continuous feedback model operates throughout the organization from the Board, to sub committees, advisory and operational committees. This model engages participants, families, management and community members to have input and control in the provision of services. According to Simon Lewis, the Chief Executive Officer of Onemda, the aim is to develop “... a meaningful, responsive and empower-

ing model of support aimed at increasing the success of a person of a disability to live with some form of independence within their local community.” Lewis believes that this can be achieved through opportunity, co-design, evidence-based practice, innovative and creative solutions that empower participants to make choices and achieve their goals.

Throughout its history, the Onemda Association has adapted to the shifts in government policy, translating research into practice outcomes and advocating for the rights of people with complex needs to be part of a supportive and inclusive community. Cathy is one of the people Onemda has supported and she is happy to be sharing her story with you.

Live your Life by Cathy

Hello my name is Cathy. My real name is Catherine but I like to be called Cathy. It's important to be able to speak up for yourself and say what want to happen in your life. I'm 28 years old and I would like a boyfriend. I would also like to travel and get a job to earn more money so I can go overseas to visit Disneyland. I live in a shared house in north Balwyn sometimes I find it really hard to speak up for myself and I have to try harder and believe in myself that I can speak up for myself.

I have a disability and its called Noonan syndrome. I didn't realise I had one when one night I was at home with my aunty and she wanted to talk to me. So I listened to what she was saying to me and she told me do you know that you have a disability and

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I was very quiet at first because I was acting all normal and I was worried about what other people would think of me and I said that I didn't know then she explained to me what disability I have. And it involves that I have trouble standing up for myself like when somebody yells at me for something I get really scared and very emotional to try and face them and I can't talk or anything. I just freeze and I even have difficulties with my money skills and maths too. But I want to try and get better at my money skills and my maths too so in a couple of years time I can see if I can own a puppy and you would have to have good money skills to be able to have a job especially if you are helping a customer out and while you are getting older it's important to have some and enough money to keep you going. Besides I'm still in my 20's. Next year I'll be 30 and that means I'm still young so being young means that you still have lots of time ahead of yourself so being young means you still have enough and heaps of time to see what jobs you would like to do and my disability is mild so if I need help looking for a job I can talk to my Aunty or my house supervisor Rosi. And they can help me decide what kind of job is best for me. I love working with animals especially dogs and puppies because they are so cheeky and really playful and get to lots of mischief and I would also like to work as a check out chic because I like that idea of a job but before being able to do that I have to really get better at my money skills because once I get really good with my money skills than I can do anything I want and it will be a lot easier.

When I was young and still going to school I struggled a lot because a lot of people were teasing me and saying horrible things to me and I didn't even have the courage to stand up for myself. It was too hard so I ended up being friends with my school teachers instead of students because it was easier for me to talk to them and they were always really nice and gentle. But the problem was I kept getting told that I can't be friends with staff. I need to be friends with students but I never go there. Because I got so attached to my favourite staff at school that I couldn't let them go and whenever one of my teachers left I was heart broken because I liked them so much and I was very scared that I would never see them again. And before my Mum died she

was my special buddy and when she went I felt so lonely because I wanted someone special in my life again but that never happened so now that I'm 28 I want to still try and speak up for myself because I'm a lot older but it's still really tough because my life will never ever be the same again. But it's good that I have Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays because you can always make me laugh and being part of the Onemda council makes me really proud of myself because you have really helped me a lot with conversations and speaking in front of a huge bunch of people and you even encouraged me a lot to do things which I wouldn't of been able to do without your help and for you being there for me too. And Tuesdays I love Tuesdays because I get to work on the Xtend cafe Trailer And the things you get me to do are very impressive like making sausage rolls, frothing the milk and greeting all the customers is really fun and hard work and even challenging because It's something that I have never done before. And like I said without your help and you guiding me through it all I couldn't of done it without you. You are amazing Julia. Thank you so much for all your help.

This article is written by Coral Farr in conjunction with Cathy (Surname withheld to preserve confidentiality). If you want to know more and contact Cathy please contact her via Coral at cfarr@onemda.com.au

Note: Cathy is a *Speaking Up For Yourself* Prize winner of Dulcie Stone Writer's Award through Writers Victoria

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