

Port Macquarie Express newspaper feature

Work day to inspire all

ON any week day morning, 60 to 70 service users, all people with a disability, arrive at ACES's Fernhill Road premises.

The facility provides a base to meet and socialise before heading out to meet new people and visit new places in and around Port Macquarie.

A typical day starts with clients spending time with fellow service users, before a nutritious morning tea, served by staff and volunteers.

Some service users start their day in the computer room, where they can listen to music, go on Facebook or look up other websites of interest. Many have gained their computer skills and training thanks to the very successful partnership between ACES and the Port Macquarie Community College.

After the meet-and-greet rituals are concluded, service users split into their various activity groups. Staff and volunteers get everyone organised and into the mini buses, cars and vans used to transport groups to their activities.

For many, the opportunity to ride in the mini buses and get out in the 'real world' for a couple of hours is the highlight of their week.

Some groups go bowling, others go to cafes, parks, cinemas, training centres or other loca-

tions. Others have paid work or involved in regular voluntary work at a variety of community services.

According to staff, it's all about doing things others take for granted and giving their service users more options.

ACES's Outreach and Service Development manager, Dawn Davies has been involved with the centre for over seven years. She works hard to add interest, excitement and diversity to the range of activities on offer.

Dawn was also instrumental in developing opportunities for work and volunteer involvement at Mid Coast Care's Hope Shop and café.

"We help staff the coffee shop, which provides, not only delicious meals and beverages, but also a venue where our service users can contribute and learn

valuable employment skills," Dawn explains.

"We also have ACES people volunteering for organisations such as Meals on Wheels, Lifeline, Landcare, Pink Ladies and the library."

To say the place is busy is an understatement. The organisation has over 100 regular day program users, 50 full time and part time employees and approximately 30 volunteers. Although not everyone is on site every day, the busy morning and afternoon peak times can be frantic.

Chief executive John Faithfull describes the environment as "dynamic", which is probably an understatement, considering the constant sound and activity.

While no two days are identical, one can't help but notice how purposeful and meaningful all this "dynamic" activity is.



The lads: Dean Simpson, Mitch O'Brien, Ian Newham with Byron Hayburn, worker and school based trainee Jordan Verey.