

# Port Macquarie Express newspaper feature

## ACES' winning formula

ACCESS Community Education services (ACES) provides day programs and support for 18 to 65 year olds with a disability. The programs offer recreational, leisure and educational activities designed to support families, develop individual skills and create successful and enjoyable community interaction.

When asked to explain their the secret to their success, staff point to the involvement of 'real families' and the way in which real family needs have shaped service development.

From the beginning, the aim has been to be responsive, not reactive. One of the key objectives is to create opportunities to reduce isolation and to integrate people with disabilities into the community.

As chief executive John Faithfull points out, the average adult interacts with approximately 150 people in the community, including a diverse group of family, neighbours, friends, workmates and others.

"The average person with a disability interacts with just five people, and up to three of those are paid helpers," John says.

With this in mind, John and his staff constantly reinforce the importance of building friendships and connections.

"Our staff, service users and their carers, make solid connections under our roof," John says.

"Many of these relationships continue to grow outside our organisation - people often say they've made friendships for life," he adds.

"We recognise that everyone has different support needs; some people need respite, some need to open up and talk, and others need to contribute," John says.

"Parents of children with disabilities also need

to feel confident that their family members are safe and are being well cared for," he adds.

Creating new and interesting opportunities to connect with the community and increase visibility has been at the forefront of service development in recent months.

As John points out, 20 years ago people would cross the street to avoid interacting with someone who appeared a little 'strange'. "It would be nice to think those days have

gone," he says.

Encouraging independence is another objective.

"Some people think it's easier to make a cup of tea for someone who doesn't have the skills - I'd rather show them how to make it themselves," John says.

When a person chooses ACES to provide their program, a meeting is held where the service user identifies their dreams and aspirations and tells the staff where they want to be in one, two or five years.

"Fulfilling dreams is

what ACES love to do," ACES Outreach and Service Development manager Dawn Davies says.

"When a person looks you in the eye or shakes your hand or ties a shoelace independently, this is a big win in our eyes," she adds.

As John prepares for a well-earned holiday, he admits he is trying not to get stressed by the finer details.

"Not everything runs perfectly here," he says, with a wry smile.

**aces** 21 Years of Community Service

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**Making ordinary extraordinary**

FORMERLY a sizable house, the property has been gradually modified, converted and repaired. Improvements have been made and continue to be made. As a result, the property is now a well-kept and comfortable home for a family of four.

According to Dawn Davies, vice manager ACES Outreach and Service Development, the renovation project was a success because it allowed the family to remain in their own home while receiving the support they needed.

Large recreation spaces have been created, complete with barbecues, game consoles, pool tables and books. There are also modern, modified kitchens and bedrooms.

Outside, a large vegetable garden, complete with irrigation systems, provides a great place for the family to spend time together. A fully operational pool will make a welcome addition to the outdoor facilities this summer.

Spine in how at such a premium that ACES' reputation has recently moved off site. This will allow a new sensory area to be developed for people wanting to interact when the stimuli in the main program is not available.

The goal is to provide a safe, secure, attached to the main service outlet, for those who need to be better addressed away from the main unit.

"We have been looking at different ways to interact this year, but a lot of people have reported that they would like to have a more structured program. Some people are looking for more structure and support. It's a challenge to develop a program that is engaging, fun, challenging and meaningful."

The service operates from the Fernhill Road property (Fernhill) in 2006.

**Dom's Pool & Spa Centre**

To everyone at ACES, Well done for everything you have done for the disabled communities.

Contact the experts today  
75 The Hub, Bellbird St, Port Macquarie  
**8584 0840**

**PORT MACQUARIE TAXIS**

CALL 131 008  
(02) 6581 0001 (see inside Port Macquarie)

**Lifeline Mid Coast**

Lifeline Mid Coast Shops congratulate ACES on their 21st Anniversary

122 Gordon Street PORT MACQUARIE Ph: 6584 0200 | 19 Central Road PORT MACQUARIE Ph: 6581 3444 | 41 Cannan Street WAUCHOPE Ph: 6588 5221

enhance grow enrich  
enjoy learn

Congratulations on your 21st anniversary! Best wishes from the Port Macquarie Community College, proud provider of quality education and training for ACES

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