

# Port Macquarie Express newspaper feature



**Part of the magic:** Elaine Jackson and Joh Lakke with client Robert Allen.

## Making ordinary extraordinary

A HOST of truly extraordinary things happen behind the walls of what appears to be a residential property in Fernhill Road, Port Macquarie.

The property belongs to Access Community Education Services (ACES), a not for profit community organisation that provides specialist resources for people with a disability.

The organisation formed over twenty years ago when a small group of parents applied for funding to assist them to gain better resources and community access for their children.

"These parents could see the benefits of getting their kids out of the house, away from institutions and out into the community," ACES chief executive, John Faithfull explains.

"They also realised that their families would be more functional if their son or daughter could become less dependent on institutions and high needs support services."

From these early days, the tradition of developing services based on personal experience and real needs was started. These needs include; the need for people to meet and socialise, the need for free time, the need for stimulation and creative outlet, the need to get out into the community and the need for carers to support each other.

In 2001, ACES became an incorporated association and set about developing ways to assist people with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential. Since then, the organisation has thrived and expanded in ways the original founders could only have dreamt about.

Today ACES provides day services which are engaging, fun, challenging and rewarding.

The service operates from the Fernhill Road property it purchased in 2006.

Formerly a sizeable house, the property has been gradually modified, converted and expanded. Improvements have been, and continue to be a 'work in progress' as the list of services grows.

According to Dawn Davies, who manages ACES Outreach and Service Development, the purchase of the Fernhill Road premises gave the service users a sense of belonging and a place they could call their own.

Large recreation spaces have been created, complete with televisions, games consoles, pool tables and books. There are also meeting rooms, modified kitchens and bathrooms.

Outside a large vegetable garden, trampoline and fenced gardens provide plenty of space and points of interest. No doubt the keen swimmers are keeping an eye on the pool resurfacing project currently underway. A fully operational pool will make a welcome addition to the outdoor facilities this summer.

Space is now at such a premium that ACES administration has recently moved off site. This will allow a new sensory area to be developed for people wishing to retreat when the stimuli in the main area becomes overwhelming.

The goal is to build a specialised unit, attached to the main service outlet, for those whose needs can be better addressed away from the main unit.

"We had been looking at different ways to extend the centre, but a lack of funds has meant we have had to make do with what we have," Dawn explains.

### ACES' winning formula

ACES' winning formula is simple: it's about people. It's about the people who work for us, the people who volunteer, the people who support us, the people who inspire us. It's about the people who make a difference.

### Making ordinary extraordinary

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ACES is a not-for-profit community organisation that provides specialist resources for people with a disability. We are proud to be part of the Port Macquarie Community College family.

**Lifeline Mid Coast**

Lifeline Mid Coast Shops congratulate ACES on their 21st Anniversary

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**On the day of our visit to ACES, it didn't take long for the magic to become apparent. It started when I realised how much happiness was all around.**

I couldn't help but notice how many faces positively lit up as new arrivals were greeted by name. I watched Peter, our photographer, move from one group to the next and saw how excited and flattered people were to be caught in the camera's flash. Then I noticed how the faces of the volunteers were shining too. There is purpose and respect everywhere you look. You can sense the joy and satisfaction people feel, just by being there. It made me want to come back another day and become part of it all. There's no doubt about it – that place is magic.

PERSONAL FOOTNOTE FROM  
PORT NEWS JOURNALIST, JAN DENNIS.