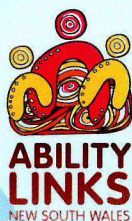
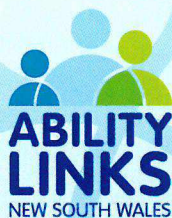


LINKING IN ACTION

A Resource for Linkers

Version 2, published 2015



INTRODUCTION

People come to *Ability Links* and *Early Links* with different goals and needs, and at different points in their life. Linkers work with people with disability, their families, carers and communities to help them get to where they want to be—so they live fulfilling and inclusive lives.

They do this by listening with empathy and understanding, building networks of knowledge and supports, opening up connections and opportunities, and being passionate and persistent.

The stories in this booklet show the difference that this approach can make. What's really exciting to see is how a link can lead to so much more. A newfound sense of confidence can lead to a new job. A volunteering role can enable a participant to contribute and connect. A different way of seeing things can open up an alternative pathway. And participants can become advocates and teachers.

Thanks to those of you who shared stories for this edition. We realise that they represent only a small number of the stories that *Ability Links* and *Early Links* have helped to make happen, but we hope that you find them as inspiring as we did, and we look forward to hearing many more.

*Names with * have been changed*

1. SCOUTING SUCCESS

Nine-year-old Kaleb recently moved to the South Coast with his parents and sister who has a disability. Since starting at the local school, he has been bullied by some of the other students.

The Linker who met with Kaleb and his mother could tell from the conversation and Kaleb's mannerisms that the bullying was affecting his confidence. To work out what could be done to turn the situation around, the Linker asked Kaleb what he loved doing. Kaleb's face lit up as he talked about camping, fishing and other outdoor activities.

Having built good relationships with local youth services, the Linker realised that scouts would be the perfect fit. So—with Kaleb and his mother's permission—the Linker called the scout leader to make the connection.

Kaleb has now been to a few meetings and a two-day camp, which his dad also attended to help out with. His mum says that he hasn't stopped talking about scouts and how 'awesome' the camp was. But, best of all, Kaleb has made friends with some of the other scouts who go to his school and the bullying has decreased dramatically. A couple of the older scouts have even stood up for him.

Kaleb is currently working towards getting some scouts badges and looking forward to next year's Jamboree. Meanwhile, he's also much happier at school.

2. SUPPORTING SCHOOL INCLUSION

Jill* is the primary carer for her seven-year-old granddaughter, Tracey*, who has an Autism Spectrum Disorder. She contacted Early Links when she was feeling stressed.

Through a three-day workshop with an autism service provider, Jill had developed a positive behaviour support plan for Tracey. This was working well at home, but Tracey was still acting out at school as her teacher was not using the strategies, and the school had decided to manage the situation by only allowing Tracey to attend for a couple of hours each morning. Besides limiting Tracey's opportunity to learn and socialise with other students, this was putting pressure on Jill as respite support is not provided during school hours.

After listening to Jill's story, the Linker offered her support to arrange a meeting with the principal and Tracey's teacher to talk things through. Jill was initially hesitant because of her previous

conversations with the school, but the Linker's offer to help her prepare and accompany her on the day made her comfortable to go ahead with it.

At the meeting, they discussed how important it was for Tracey to have consistency between home and school and the impact that the short school day was having on Jill. Having seen things from Jill and Tracey's perspectives, the principal agreed that the school would use the positive behaviour support plan and Tracey would build up to attending full time over the next month.

Tracey's teacher is now using positive behaviour support strategies, such as giving her headphones and allowing her time to cool down, and the principal is keeping a close eye on the situation. As things are going well, Jill hasn't needed to have further contact with the principal, but she feels confident to call her if there is something she is unhappy with.

3. OPENING THE DOOR TO ANOTHER OPTION

The McMillan* family—Jo* and Matt* and their six children—first moved to a small town in the Hunter about a year ago. While they had been well linked to support services that met their additional needs where they used to live, they struggled to make and sustain connections in the Hunter.

When Jo met with an Early Linker, it became clear that Jo's anxiety around making and receiving phone calls was leading to missed opportunities and appointments. Jo avoids listening to voicemails so she doesn't have to return calls, and, if someone does manage to catch her on the phone, she becomes so anxious that she doesn't take in most of what they're saying.

To avoid triggering Jo's anxiety, the Linker contacted her by email and text message and suggested that she contact other support services by email. Jo said she hadn't thought of this as she had been so focused on her anxiety about the phone.

Jo has since connected or reconnected with several support services and has let them know that emails and text messages are her preferred mode of contact. She is now feeling more confident and looking forward to making further connections by text and even in person.

4. GIVING A HELPING HAND TO SOME GREAT GRANDPARENTS

Cheryl* and Frank* care for their three-year-old granddaughter, Jenny*, who has a condition that severely impacts her mobility, speech and vision.

Over time, the Early Linker has connected them with a range of services to support Jenny's development, including preschool and early intervention. When the family decided that they wanted to use Jenny's Better Start funding for a trampoline to help her develop her gross motor skills and improve her balance and coordination, the Linker helped them to apply for support to level the space required in the backyard.

The Linker also sourced some help to sustain Cheryl in her caring role. An in-home volunteer, who is about Cheryl's age, now provides a listening ear and plays with Jenny to keep her occupied while Cheryl does what she needs to, like have a haircut, bake or catch up on a few loads of laundry.

As well as getting practical supports, Cheryl was really keen to speak with another family with a child who has the same condition as Jenny so that they could share their stories and support each other. She couldn't find a family locally because Jenny's condition is rare, but the Linker was able to use their network to find a family in another part of NSW. The two families have been keeping in touch by phone ever since, and have shared photographs. They have found the relationship so rewarding and supportive that they have even made plans to meet up face to face.

Cheryl is feeling a lot happier—confident that she and Frank have support and that they are doing the best for their granddaughter.

5. ART LINKS

When Ability Linkers in Coffs Harbour realised that several young adults in the area were interested in art and meeting new people, but were not feeling confident to attend an art group, they had an idea: fund a series of graffiti/ street art workshops to get them started. Coffs Harbour Neighbourhood Centre and Open Studio got on board.

A safe environment was created by the person with disability who ran the sessions and the group opened up to other community members, so that Ability Links participants could have the confidence and the opportunity to connect with other locals who love art. After only a couple of workshops, the participants became very comfortable with each other. And, by the end of the series, the participants had produced some fantastic individual and group art works and developed good connections.

Those who participated are feeling more open and ready to try new things. Several have remained involved with Open Studio and a couple are in the process of linking to other art groups. Some of the participants have also kept in contact and become friends.

6. LINKING: IT'S GOOD FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Lara* was concerned that her daughter, Janette*, who has a developmental delay, was not really involved in any social activities outside of school, so when she came across a flyer for Early Links in their GP's waiting room she decided to call.

The Linker who met with Lara and Janette learned that Janette really loved to dance, but she felt too shy to go to a class and dance in front of other people. As the Linker had met another girl in a similar situation a few months ago, she could recommend an all-abilities dance class not too far away.

Lara called a few weeks later to thank the Linker. The class had been really welcoming and Janette was really enjoying it. Her only challenge now was finding some support for her youngest son, who was feeling a bit left out and

struggling to understand his sister's needs. She was really surprised when the Linker said that Early Links could also help with this.

Through her network of local contacts, the Linker identified a family counsellor who specialises in the dynamics of families with a child with disability. She also wanted to find an information resource that Lara could take home, so she sought some advice from other Linkers. They were able to recommend a book for young siblings of people with disability.

A couple of months later, Lara got back in touch to let the Linker know that the book had helped her son to better understand his sister. He had even agreed to come to Janette's dance recital to support her, which he would not have done before.

7. LINKING AS A LAUNCHING PAD

John* was put in touch with Ability Links to find out how he could get more involved in the local community. After a few conversations, John's passion for cricket came out. So the Linker suggested that John play for the local club or assist the coach of one of the children's teams. John said he wasn't good enough for that, but he agreed to let the Linker contact the club to explore his options.

It turned out that the club was really supportive. The club representative explained that they had a fourth division team and one of the players had one leg. Playing was what was important, not winning. While the team was full and had many reserves, John was welcome to train with them.

The Linker went with John to check out a training session. As it went really well, John said he was happy to go on his own from then on. Some months later, John texted the Linker to tell him that he's now a full member of the team and, to top it off, he'd got a wicket one Saturday, and hit his first boundary the next.

As John had also told the Linker about his interest in music, the Linker had put him in touch with a band he could look into playing with. John is now a member and waiting to play his first gig.

He has also recently found a job with an Australian Disability Enterprise and is looking forward with confidence. From two small connections, John has really launched himself into his community.

8. OFF AND RACING

Jonathan was an elite competition gymnast until a training injury left him with quadriplegia. He has since shifted gear, turning his passion and drive to becoming a wheelchair racer.

He contacted Ability Links looking for some support to get on his way towards achieving this new goal. Since then, he and the Linker have set about finding him sponsorship.

The Linker connected him with a media agency that agreed to help him build his online profile free of charge. And, once Jonathan worked out that he would enjoy media and speaking opportunities, the Linker put him in touch with the South Sydney Herald.

The Linker and Jonathon kept connected in various ways—through online project management boards, email and phone calls—as Jonathan often travels for training.

Jonathan recently gained a Run Projects grant. This, now complete, NSW Consumer Development Fund program funded over 300 projects that gave people with disability up to \$5,000 to pursue something new that they wanted to do. Jonathan will use his grant to help cover his entry into major competitions and professional development.

You can find out more about what other people have achieved through their Run Project grants here <http://www.mychoicematters.org.au/run-your-project.html>

9. READY FOR THE NEXT STEP

Chloe first met with a Linker to get the support she needed to complete a floristry course at TAFE. She recently reconnected as she is now ready for work experience.

Chloe and her mum, Audrey, had found a local florist and cake store that Chloe was interested in working for. But they were a bit nervous about approaching the manager because Chloe is quite shy and they were uncertain whether the store would be welcoming and inclusive.

They all agreed that it would be good for the Linker to approach the manager to ask generally about their inclusive workplace policies. Once the manager said that they have had an employee who is deaf working with them for 25 years, the Linker took the opportunity to mention Chloe's interest in the store.

The manager was excited to hear about Chloe's love of flowers and cakes, and a meet and greet was arranged for the following week. The manager offered Chloe the opportunity to assist with preparations for their next big wedding, and the possibility of paid work further down the track.

Chloe and Audrey are also working towards having their own pop-up shop run by people with disability selling products made by people with disability.

10. FROM SMALL STEPS TO GIANT LEAPS

Steve* is an energetic eighteen year old with a mild intellectual disability whose varied interests include table tennis, bowling and board games.

He came to Ability Links eager to make more friends, do more physical activity, and be more independent. He was particularly keen to make use of his time between working in the school canteen and attending a Sunday outing group, as he felt he had much more to give. However, Steve had had limited experience going out on his own because he gets lost easily and his mother is quite protective.

When the Linker met Steve, he listened to his goals and the barriers to be overcome. Then they worked out a plan together.

The Linker encouraged Steve to start out by taking small trips on his own. Having conquered short distances, Steve then took the giant steps of attending an activity unaccompanied by his mother and travelling to meet the Linker at the local shopping mall. Steve is now also a regular participant in a table tennis group.

With each step that Steve and his Linker have celebrated, Steve has found that the world is not so scary after all. He is now well and truly set along the path to increased independence and a developed social network.

11. RECONNECTING WITH CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

At a local information day for Aboriginal Home Care, an Aboriginal Linker recognised an elderly man with an intellectual disability whom he had worked with previously. When they got to yarning, Tom* mentioned how important his Aboriginality is to him. While he had not grown up identifying as Aboriginal, he had always been aware of his culture. But he had found it difficult to come forward and be recognised because of the era he grew up in and the challenges he had seen his mother face.

Through further conversation, it became clear that Tom had reached a stage at which he was ready to reconnect with his roots. So the Linker contacted an Aboriginal organisation in Sydney, where Tom was born, to help them trace his family and gain formal recognition from his community.

While the journey has had its challenges, Tom has remained passionate and enthusiastic, and the Linker has felt privileged to be part of it.

12. BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

Matthew and Belinda weren't quite sure what to do when their youngest son, Thomas, was born with a club foot. But they knew he would need some equipment, so they contacted the local disability support service, which was already providing respite for their older son.

When Matthew and Belinda met with one of the service's Early Linkers, they got to talking more broadly about their family's goals and needs. Both wanted to be confident advocates for their family so that they could provide their children with opportunities and a good quality of life. However, they felt that some of the people and services that they had come

across had put them down, undermined them or left them out of conversations about their children because they both have a mild intellectual disability.

Because their Early Linker listened to them and their concerns, Matthew and Belinda felt comfortable talking things through with her. And, over time, they have worked together to break down barriers and achieve the family's goals.

The family has accessed supports to meet their needs and Thomas has received equipment for his foot, which is improving. Matthew and Belinda have also attended Early Links events to socialise and make friends with other families.

The two parents are now feeling more confident to speak up and be heard. With a bit of help from the Early Linker to set up a Facebook page, Belinda has even fulfilled a dream of hers to start a club foot support group to help other families. She is planning a face-to-face meeting in the near future.

13. COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR ONLINE CONNECTIONS

Phillip* contacted Ability Links to get some help to fill in forms, which he finds difficult due to literacy issues. He also wanted to learn how to use more of the functions on his laptop, particularly email.

The Linker arranged to meet Phillip down at the local community centre, which provides this kind of support. The two talked to the centre coordinator about the assistance that Phillip was after and what the centre could assist with. Phillip then arranged to attend computer classes every Wednesday.

Phillip was really excited to get support to use the laptop he had had for a few years, but had not been able to make full use of. He is now looking forward to sending and responding to emails and storing his photos.

14. SUPPORTING AN ARTISTIC ENDEAVOUR

Jennifer had always done some form of art before developing a tumour that affected her mobility and speech, so she came to Ability Links keen to connect with other artists.

Her Linker asked if she would prefer to study art at TAFE, attend a social art group or do something else. Jennifer decided she wanted to go to TAFE, so her Linker helped arrange this.

She has now been studying for almost a semester and is really enjoying it. Her observations of everyday experiences, desires and frustrations, are feeding into her work. And she says that time is passing very quickly, so it must be a positive thing.

More than that, Jennifer was recently invited to be part of a group exhibition at a local gallery. Opening night was a great success. A large crowd came out, and Jennifer's work was described as 'very powerful'. Her Linker said it was just amazing to see.

You can see Jennifer and her Linker tell the story in their own words here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-r4fJGDvyYk>.

15. WORKING OUT TO FRIENDSHIP

When local Ability Linkers realised that several participants would benefit from opportunities to get active and connect with others, they contacted the community gym in Kyogle to see what they could do. The gym welcomed in a Linker and six people with disability for classes over three months.

Over that time, the participants' self-confidence has increased. As the gym instructor has given them opportunities to try new things, they've flown with them. They've also connected over coffee and cake after class.

One of the participants, who used to get social phobia, says he's now 'getting to know more people, and they're great people down here.'

Another, who has had depression, said she was in a bad place and knew she had to get out of the house, so she came down to the gym and soon felt better. She says that participating in the classes has 'opened up a whole realm of life to me again, where I thought I was shutting down when I came to Kyogle, me in my little garden, suddenly I'm back into life.'

The local Linkers are really excited about how things have turned out—how Ability Links has been able to help people overcome the barriers they were facing to making connections and getting into their community.

You can see the class in action here

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIIpFI0gzNY&feature=em-share_video_user.

16. BUILDING THE CONFIDENCE TO CONNECT

James is a fifteen year old who has a mild intellectual disability and has been socially isolated for some time. Legal Aid referred him to Ability Links as part of a court order.

When he first met with his Linker, James didn't have the confidence to meet new people and he wasn't interested in attending any activities. The Linker and his mother didn't push him, but provided encouragement and suggested opportunities.

Eventually, James agreed to check out a local youth service with his Linker. This first visit was a success, so James decided to return a second time for a movie session, and he has been attending regularly ever since.

He is slowly connecting with the youth workers and other young people and has found out about more local activities he can look into. The youth service is also going to give him a mentor to support his social development.

James's mother has been happy to see his social network expanding. She says that this has been 'life changing' for him.

17. HELPING COVER THE DISTANCE

One-year-old Jimmy* was born with a genetic condition that affects his development. He and his family have to travel to Newcastle regularly to get the medical support he needs because this is not available in the small town they live in.

As both the travel and the equipment that Jimmy needs have been costly, the local community held a benefit night to raise money to help cover the family's ongoing expenses. The local Early Links was able to use brokerage funding to contribute a feeding chair.

Early Linkers also arranged Angel Flight—which provides free transportation for people who have to travel to access specialist medical care—to fly Jimmy to Newcastle. This really helped as Jimmy doesn't travel well.

18. MAKING LOCAL CONNECTIONS

Paulette, an Arabic-speaking woman who cares for her two young sons on her own, has experienced depression. The first time she connected with Ability Links she accessed volunteering opportunities, a TAFE course, recreation activities for the boys, and a suitable GP. As she was happy with her experience, she felt comfortable to seek further assistance when she saw some Linkers at a wellness expo.

Paulette let her Linker know that she was feeling lonely and concerned about her financial situation. She was after some opportunities to meet and connect with other people in her local community, as well as support to purchase groceries and access to counselling for her son who has challenging behaviours.

The Linker, who had developed a good knowledge of local supports and social opportunities, was able to introduce Paulette to an Arabic-speaking women's group, the local Women's Resource

Centre and another support organisation.

Now that she has made some connections and is accessing support, Paulette is feeling happier and more empowered to deal with any issues that arise.

19. GETTING OUT OF THE HOUSE TO HAVE SOME FUN WITH FRIENDS

Ben* and Patrick*, two Aboriginal boys aged 16 and 18, recently lost their mum. They live in a remote area and have stopped attending school as they're trying to keep up with the responsibility of making payments for the house while coping with their grief. When they met their Linker, they were also having some trouble with a few of their relatives, who have alcohol issues, staying at the house.

Their Linker helped them to organise a weekend retreat away with a school friend who they rarely see. The three boys, learned some cooking and life skills over the weekend, and had a great time just being teenagers.

Keen to help them identify more opportunities to get out of the house and have some fun, the next week, the Linker helped one of the boys get to the cinema with a couple of friends from school. They're now looking into transport options so they can make this a regular event because the only public transport available locally is the school bus.

20. FROM A SWIMMING LESSON TO FURTHER CONNECTIONS

Sharon* contacted Early Links to ask about recreation activities for her daughter, Denise,* who has a developmental delay. As she talked to her Linker she also mentioned that she has a disability herself, and struggles with confidence, so she and Denise tend to only leave the house to do chores like grocery shopping.

From the options for recreational activities that the Linker suggested, Sharon chose to take Denise to swimming lessons at the local aquatic centre. Sharon was nervous about going, but the other families were friendly.

As well as continuing the swimming lessons, they're now also attending a playgroup and Denise is going to day-care. Sharon is currently looking for ways to develop further friendships, and is preparing to get her driver's license, which will open up more options for her to explore with Denise.

21. PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR PLANNING

The Johnson's* son, Kevin*, has a developmental delay. When they first met with an Early Linker they were still dealing with the diagnosis and quite focused on getting into an early intervention service.

After providing them with information about local services, their Early Linker mentioned that she could also support them to develop a vision for Kevin's future and plan for their longer-term goals. But the Johnsons did not yet feel ready to do this.

Over time, as the Linker continued to provide information and support, she talked about what the planning process would involve, watched for what Kevin was interested in, and asked the family about their aspirations. This planted the seeds, so once they were ready to develop their vision and plan, the family's ideas about what they wanted to achieve

had already taken root. They knew their ultimate goal was for Kevin to connect more with his peers, and were now able to work out the practical steps and resources needed.

The family is currently planning to take their vision and plan with them to their NDIS planning meeting. In the meantime, they are working with their Linker to make some of the connections set out in their plan.

22. SPEAKING MY LANGUAGE

Lin*, who migrated from China about five years ago, lives on her own. Since having a stroke, which affected her working memory and cognition, she had felt as though she wasn't able to do things that she wanted to. She was also feeling quite lonely, so her community health caseworker suggested that she speak to a Linker.

Lin told her Linker that she was bored because she didn't have any family who lived locally and she wasn't really doing anything. She was interested in finding an activity or community group to get involved with, but she was uncertain about speaking English. Although her conversational English is quite good, she thought that being able to speak Mandarin would give her more confidence to engage.

The Linker was aware of a local cultural support group that seemed to fit Lin's requirements, so she suggested that they go together the following week. They worked out what bus they needed to take and, on the trip, the Linker helped Lin to record important details and landmarks so that she could remember how to get there on her own.

Lin really enjoyed connecting with the other women at the cultural support group, and is now attending regularly.

23. A VALUABLE VOLUNTEER

Hillary* grew up on a farm and has been living in an isolated rural area for several years. This distance and her recent health issues have prevented her from getting out much to meet people.

Over a cuppa with a Linker, Hillary mentioned that she was feeling quite lonely and would love the opportunity to connect with other people and get involved in her community. The Linker asked Hillary if she should be interested in volunteering at the local nursing home as she knew that they were looking for volunteers. Hillary said yes, so the Linker arranged for her to meet with the activities officer.

The staff and residents of the nursing home have welcomed Hillary and appreciated her skills, life experience, enthusiasm and warm personality. She is making a valuable contribution, as well as developing new friendships, and feeling part of her community.

24. FROM SUPPORTED TO SUPPORTING

James*, who is nineteen years old and has Asperger's Syndrome, had been working for a disability employment service since leaving school, but he was interested in pursuing other options. So the service connected him with Ability Links.

At their first meeting, the Linker asked James what he was really interested in and what he wanted to be doing with his life. James said he loved computers and playing games on his Xbox. He really wanted a job that was more 'hands on'.

The Linker set him up with a volunteer work program that is helping him develop his networks, social and employment skills.

James is now working as a volunteer in a drop-in I.T. support centre. He's really enjoying using his skills and knowledge to assist others with their I.T. needs, and his social skills are developing as he interacts more and more with customers.

25. THE BEGINNING OF A PERFORMING PARTNERSHIP

A Linker looking for community partnerships before the launch of Ability Links in Penrith thought that there might be something they could do with the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, so they contacted the manager and arranged a time to meet.

The manager was really interested to hear about what Ability Links has been doing because the Centre has an Access Ensemble—a performing arts group for people with mild to moderate physical and/or intellectual disabilities. The group meets weekly and tutors help the participants to develop their skills and confidence, express themselves, create a production, and work towards a public performance.

Seeing an opportunity, the Linker asked if the Access Ensemble would be interested in performing at the launch of Ability Links in Penrith. The manager was so keen on the idea that he suggested the Centre hold the launch, provided the director approves.

The Linker then spoke with a colleague who has a friend in a local choir to see if they would be interested in collaborating with Access Ensemble for the launch

At the moment, we're still waiting to hear how it will all work out. While you're waiting, you can find out more about the Access Ensemble here

<http://thejoan.com.au/learning/studio-q-acting-courses/access-ensemble/>.

26. GETTING BACK ON HIS BIKE AND OFF TO THE RACES

Joan* contacted Ability Links to see how they might be able to help her son, Matt*, who is thirty-five years old and has an intellectual disability. Since Matt's mate Tom* had passed away suddenly, he had been grieving and had lost interest in the things he used to enjoy. His mum was particularly worried because Matt was living on his own and not getting out much.

Matt told the Linker that he has a bicycle and likes to ride but he hadn't ridden for a while and he didn't really feel confident anymore. He also used to like going to watch car races with Jim, but he didn't want to go on his own.

The Linker offered to go with Matt to participate in a ride at the local velodrome, so that he could get back on his bike in a safe environment and meet

some other social riders. Since then, Matt has started feeling more confident in his cycling again.

The Linker also contacted the management of the local motorsport park to see if there were any possibilities there. The management said they would love to meet with Matt. They're currently working out what opportunities there might be for him to volunteer.

27. A GAMING CONNECTION

Seventeen-year-old Stuart* came to Ability Links when he was experiencing some mental health issues. Since he loves gaming, his Linker suggested they look into a local gaming group.

Stuart was up for this, so his Linker contacted the leader of a group he'd heard of. The Linker and the leader talked about what the group did, and what the other members were like, to work out if it would be a good fit for Stuart. It sounded like it would be, so Stuart went along the next week.

Stuart really enjoyed it and has been going ever since. He's also become a regular participant in some other groups run by the same leaders and recently started dating one of the other members.

He told his Linker that he's now feeling much better about how his life is going, so he no longer needs regular appointments with a mental health support worker.

28. A CLICK AWAY FROM CONNECTION

Roger* is a young Aboriginal man with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. He had struggled to make friends at school, and since leaving he had been spending most of his time at home.

His mother found out about Ability Links while having a yarn with a Linker at a local community event. After talking to Roger about it, she organised for a Linker to visit them.

Roger showed the Linker all the photos that he'd taken on his phone—of his family, and of things around the house and in the backyard. He said he'd really like to learn more about taking photos, so the Linker found an amateur photography society that Roger could attend.

Roger is now attending the monthly meetings and has been on several outings with the group, including a Mystery Night, day trips, and photographic tours. His skills have really developed and he's now looking into how he and other members of the society can share their photos.

29. GAINING A DIFFERENT OUTLOOK ON LIFE

Benny* is an Aboriginal man, who has experienced depression and addiction. He has been in contact with a local Linker for a while now, but most recently sought support following his separation from the mother of his two children.

His Linker has helped him start the process of applying for access to his two children and to get his résumé together and look for a new job. Benny has now had a few interviews and is waiting to hear back.

Over time, his Linker has seen Benny overcome addiction, with the help of a rehab centre, and gain a different outlook on life. When they first met, Benny was very frail and depressed, but he has now put on weight and is feeling happier.

Benny has told his Linker that his support has been really valuable and he doesn't know where he would be without it.

30. AN OBSTACLE BECOMES AN OPPORTUNITY

Nineteen year-old Marshall* has an intellectual disability. As a child, he'd loved taking the family dog for walks and playing fetch with him in the backyard. He would've really liked to get another dog of his own, but his apartment building doesn't allow pets. So he contacted his Linker to see if there was a way he could help take care of dogs.

Marshall and his Linker researched local animal shelters. They found one with regular volunteer introduction sessions, so they organised to go together, and the Linker helped Marshall to prepare some questions.

At the session, the staff and volunteers were really welcoming and willing to answer Marshall's questions. Afterwards, the Linker helped Marshall to fill in an

application form and encouraged him to approach the volunteer coordinator to ask the rest of his questions.

Impressed by Marshall's enthusiasm, the coordinator signed him up for an orientation session the next week. Marshall is planning to attend on his own as he's now made the connection and feeling confident.

31. FAMILY GETS BEHIND PASSION FOR ASTRONOMY

Piero*, who is a twenty-six year old with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, loves to play the guitar and also has a passion for astronomy. He contacted Ability Links to see if they could help him find some other people who share his passions.

When he told his Linker that he was interested in learning to play another instrument and perhaps playing with some other people, the Linker used her knowledge of the local community to connect him with a music school. This was perfect because the school also has a group of musicians that play together regularly.

The Linker wasn't aware of an astronomical society, but made some calls and was able to find one. The only catch was that it was too far way for Piero to travel to alone. He was keen to go though, so he and his Linker approached his family to see if they would go with him.

Piero and his family are now all members of the astronomical society and he is happily pursuing both of his passions with people who feel the same way he does.

32. HORSING AROUND

Fifteen-year old Susie* has been attending a local college that offers flexible learning programs since disengaging from the mainstream high school. The college connected her with Ability Links to see if they could help her pursue her interest in working with animals, and horses in particular.

The Linker looked into local veterinary hospitals that might be interested in giving her some work experience. One hospital said they would consider it if Susie could send through a résumé, so the Linker helped her prepare one, and the hospital followed her up for an interview.

The Linker also let Susie know about the Riding for the Disabled Association, which takes on volunteers to help look after the horses and assist people with disability to learn to ride. Since Susie was really interested, they've set up a meeting to discuss how Susie can support the Association.

33. FINDING HIS FEET

Jayden* is a young Aboriginal man, who has epilepsy and some psychological issues. He came into contact with Ability Links when his stay at a crisis accommodation service was coming to an end.

His Linker helped him make and attend an appointment with his doctor, so he could get a medical assessment, which he needed to apply for social housing. Once they had that, the Linker helped Jayden fill out an application and find out how long the wait for housing would be. When they learned it would take a few weeks, the Linker arranged for Jayden to extend his stay at the crisis service.

Jayden recently told his Linker how happy he is that his life is moving forward and thanked him for believing in him. He is currently looking into attending some cooking classes and getting financial counselling support.

