

## **ACCESSIBILITY IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

I can't recommend getting involved with your local community enough. I live in the Sandgate, Shorncliffe, Deagon area and I'm often called upon by council to give my opinion on access. Get to know your local member of State Parliament, your local councillor and make sure they know you! Making yourself available to your local State member or your local councillor can really help in becoming the 'go to person' whenever accessibility issues arise. Become a good citizen of your community and your environment.

I was instrumental in the building of the new Woolworth building and increasing the number of accessible parking bays – the ramp up from the underneath car park is not perfect but it is functional. I received a \$50 gift card for my trouble.

I was included on the Community Reference Group (CRG) for the redevelopment of the Sandgate/Shorncliffe foreshore which led to me doing an accessible report for the Manly foreshore redevelopment also. Be generous with your time and expertise. The Sandgate/Shorncliffe CRG were not keen on the amount of concrete around the BBQs and picnic tables but when I illustrated just how difficult it is to get around on grass in a wheelchair to make use of the facilities, it is now an area enjoyed by all.

Organising the Commonwealth Bank in Sandgate to have a shade over their ATM – sadly their modifications to the branch layout took away the area set aside for using the ATM's securely and under cover, placing the ATM outside the bank in the weather but this is progress. They now have a shade over the ATM but no protection from inclement weather. Nowhere is perfect.

Being President of Qualtime (a day respite services for young people – 0 – 65 years with physical and intellectual disabilities), I was approach by good friend Dr Ian Plowman to join with him in organising The Great Queensland Bush Walk. Ian suggested the wetlands at Nudgee Beach – he and I did reconnoitre of the area to see whether it would be suitable

for the varied clients of Qualtime. There was quite a bit to think about and organise but with the combined expertise of Ian and me, we were able to cover most things. We had a lovely afternoon planning and trying out the facilities and the help of the staff at Qualtime, all of us organised a wonderful day for everyone.

It turned out to be a magnificent day, better than we expected, we had drinks, BBQ's, bush walks and kite flying. It was a day of inclusion and was thoroughly enjoyed by all. Qualtime has now included the day in their calendar of events – so the day will become an annual event.

My local State member invited me to morning tea recently – I felt great about being included but the venue chosen was not particularly accessible for me. I had been to this café before and I knew that I couldn't enter through the front door like everyone else but I was relegated to the side/rear entrance passed the rubbish bins, kitchen staff etc. I know from now on that she will think of access every time that she books a venue.

Since being in a wheelchair it is not uncommon to enter and exit venues in this way. There is nothing worse than having a lovely meal then to be wheeled passed smelly rubbish bins – it puts a whole new meaning to 'being left with a bad taste in your mouth'!

Accessibility is so important – I know personally what it is like to go through the bowels of a restaurant, café or function venue. It makes you feel degraded as a human being and think of the 'upright' helping you.

Much of what happens to me is 'like water off a ducks back' and I have a choice on how I react to it. As I said before 'I choose my battles' and really people are not intentionally mean – it is just ignorance.

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