The Bridge Connects have been involved with Fusion Theatre for many years and each year they work together on an exciting project.

As an activity the drama group helps participants achieve goals such as: developing skills in concentration and observation, through various techniques such as mime; understanding the importance of timing through various activities; building on self confidence in performing in front of a large group of people; understanding all aspects of what is involved in a production and of course having fun!

In 2016 with the help of Fusion Theatre, The Bridge Connects launched the video ‘Microcosma’ which you can view via the following link http://www.fusiontheatre.com.au/

This year the team worked on a fantastic production at the Walker Street Gallery which was showcased at their Gala Event on the 28th June.

There were around 15 participants involved in the event along with staff and volunteers and it was a sell out with standing room only.

The Fusion Theatre team made the event even more special by organising some refreshments and had a photo booth set up for participants and family and staff to enjoy.

Stay tuned for the next event.
Message from our CEO
Phillip Toovey

More funding for youth
Since our last edition, there’s been more positive developments for The Bridge, with the announcement of the success of our application to obtain more funding from Jobs Victoria for employment services for disadvantaged youth. This builds on the first round of funding we were granted in late 2016 and helps The Bridge Employment strengthen its assistance to youth in the South Eastern Metropolitan area. There has been some great outcomes achieved with this funding from Jobs Victoria. See article in this edition for more information.

Reforms to Disability Employment Service program
The Federal Government has released more details about the reforms to the Disability Employment Services program, which commences in July 2018. Some of the key changes include;

- Removing market share arrangements so when it comes to choosing providers, participants can ‘vote with their feet’.
- A ‘DES Provider Panel’ will be established for an initial five-year period. This is more like a licensing arrangement and a move away from tendering for a contract.
- Fee payments to providers are going to be more focused on outcomes, including longer term (e.g. 52 week) outcomes.
- A trial is proposed to be offered to 1000 students with disability in the final years of their schooling to increase transition from school to work.

These measures are welcomed by The Bridge. They are more in line with the way we believe better services are delivered.
The NDIS attracts more scrutiny

People may have noticed that over recent months the NDIS has been getting quite a lot of attention in the media.

Much of this arose from the Productivity Commission’s position paper on the NDIS, which says that the responsible agency, NDIA, should “find a better balance between participant intake, the quality of plans, participant outcomes and financial sustainability.”

The rollout schedule for the scheme is very ambitious and would seem to be causing some concerning results, particularly with the quality of participant plans. It has been revealed that as much as 70% of these plans are being developed through over the phone discussions, which defies good practice, particularly for people who are unable to readily advocate for themselves. We wouldn’t accept this in other sectors, like education and health, so it is certainly a fundamental flaw that should be fixed if the scheme is going to deliver the much needed benefits it promises.

NDIS prices and the method of setting them is also a focus of the report, stating “present policy settings are unlikely to see enough providers and workers as the scheme rolls out.”

An independent price monitor has been suggested to address this area. Government had already announced its intention to invest in a Commission to oversee quality and safeguards systems for the NDIS. Of course we support this, but we worry about the insufficient funding for providers to appropriately resource this area.

It would seem that the evolution of the scheme has reached a pivotal point for many providers in the sector and the pressures of pace, pricing, system flaws (and more) are creating potentially serious risks and problems that could spoil the realisation of the NDIS principles and objectives and diminish the capacity of providers to support the delivery of the scheme.

We welcome more scrutiny of the scheme to support its success.

And finally, a new CEO for the NDIA has been announced. An experienced banker, Rob De Luca, is the Agency’s new CEO. Mr De Luca will replace David Bowen, who is about to retire after heading the Agency since its inception.

Moving on from NDIS concerns, you’ll see there’s still plenty of good things happening at The Bridge, so I hope you enjoy this edition!

The Bridge Employment strengthens its assistance to youth in the South Eastern Metropolitan area
A dream come true – meeting John Cena from WWE Wrestling

Matt was bursting to tell us about his excitement in meeting his hero John Cena. Matt is vision impaired and he loves to wrestle with his family just about every day. Matt is a big fan of John Cena and has always wanted to meet him. With the help of The Bridge Connects team and Matt’s family we were able to make this happen. When asked about the experience Matt said “It was so awesome to meet him and he was huge!”
Developing woodworking skills to make something for Mum

Chris worked with Phil and other participants in the KLC Men’s Shed on these beautiful planter boxes for Mother’s Day gifts. Chris’s mum came into The Hub to receive hers from him as she lives a distance away. It was a special occasion for him to give mum her Mother’s Day gift he had worked so hard. Chris’ mum said “It was a lovely surprise to get such a beautiful gift which he had obviously spent so much time on.”

Success with NDIS Support Coordination from The Bridge Connects

Recently, The Bridge Connects team had the opportunity to work with our first participant as Support Coordinators, assisting them to transition to NDIS. Following the major life changing circumstance of having his arms and legs amputated Greg* requested Support Coordination from Connects after his release from hospital.

At the time, Greg was staying with his family but was very keen to achieve independent living as soon as possible after getting used to using his prosthetic arms and legs. Through Support Coordination Greg was able to source a plan management agency and to arrange in-home support from multiple providers, to assist him with his personal requirements in Victoria and back home in Queensland.

Amongst other things, Coordination then focused on liaising with a range of allied health professionals to improve Greg’s mobility through submitting an assistive technology request for an electric wheelchair and specialised equipment such as indoor and outdoor ramps. Modified equipment has also been sourced to enable greater independence in his home with his day to day activities.

As a result of this successful Support Coordination, Greg has now move back to Queensland permanently and has a full range of supports in place to meet his daily needs. Coordination has focused on building Greg’s capacity to coordinate his own supports. He now liaises directly with his support providers to arrange support staff and negotiate hours. In the future this will be expanded to re-establish links with his local community and explore mainstream supports. Support Coordination is continuing to develop Greg’s skills and confidence in navigating through the NDIA processes, such as establishing agreement with service providers, managing budget flexibility, and setting and refining goals and strategies.

‘Without The Bridge’s assistance through support coordination I wouldn’t have had any idea where to start with navigating the system of disability services and supports. Thanks to Alex and the team, I’ve been able to re-establish my independence again and live my life the way I want to’ – Greg*

*Name has been changed for privacy.
Over the last 6 months staff across The Bridge Employment have been busy supporting people to create their pathways into employment.

We are excited to announce a new program supporting long term unemployed youth - Youth2You funded by Jobs Victoria. The new program will support young people (15-24 years old) across South East Melbourne, including Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula, to gain full time employment. The program will include a peer to peer mentoring program to develop initiative and leadership skills for disengaged youth. If you’d like to know more please get in touch!

From young people still at school and just beginning to think about work, those who are looking for their first job, through to people who are looking to re-enter the workforce, I am pleased to share some of their stories with you.

Ausra Wells - General Manager,
The Bridge Employment

New location for The Bridge 2017 AGM

To bring the annual general meeting a bit closer to the many people we work with in and around the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire, this year we have changed the location of our AGM to:

Atura Dandenong
Cnr Doveton Avenue & Princes Highway
Doveton Vic 3177

The Bridge Annual General Meeting will be held at 6pm on Monday 30th October 2017. We hope you can join us.

Further information will be made available closer to the date of the meeting.
Exploring the idea of transitioning into employment

Did you know that only about 4.5% of people in Greater Dandenong with a significant disability are in paid employment, compared with 56% of residents without a disability? We believe that people with disability should have the same opportunities as those without, and we know that creating employment pathways early in life can create lasting change!

Over the last year The Bridge Employment has partnered with Springvale Park Special Development School (SPSDS) for the INteractive Work Experience project. Funded by the Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation and Ian Potter Foundation, its focus is working with school students with disabilities, and their families, to explore and increase the options of work as students’ transition from school.

Pictured right, the INteractive Team of Lisa (Senior Teacher - SPSDS), Jackie (Principal - SPSDS) and Cindy (Employment Pathway Coordinator –The Bridge Employment).

Video on Pathways to Employment

Vanitti (pictured left) is one of 3 participants who will be featured in a short documentary by YARN video productions, to capture work experience and paid employment opportunities for young people with a disability.

We are also working with students and families from other local schools across the South East too. If you’re interested in learning more, please contact us on: 8710 8888 or email: info@thebridgeemployment.com.au
Employer Visits and Work Experience – a great way to learn about employment

Getting your first job is a rite of passage for everyone, and a stepping stone into adult independence. Learning what is required at work, and gaining experience is an important first step for many looking for their first job.

Next Step supports young people with a disability who have left school and are interested in gaining employment. The program focuses on building employability skills and confidence from a range of activities including visits to local employers and supported work experience placements.

Next Step participants went on an employment tour to Readings Cinema in Dandenong. While on the tour they learned about the requirements of working in a Cinema.

It often takes more than one try to find a job that’s right!

Javed, initially gained employment with the support of The Bridge Employment Disability Employment Support (DES) program approximately 9 years ago. Recently he was given the unfortunate news that the company he was working for had lost their contract and his role would be made redundant.

Javed contacted us again for help and within a week he started a new job however, after a few days it was evident that it was not right for him. With further support, a new job was found in Dandenong South which suited his skill set. The employer is very happy and Javed is grateful to be working again.

A picture can speak a thousand words and so can a smile. Javed is so pleased to have commenced full time employment and to be able to support his wife and family.
Supporting families to gain financial independence

Finding a job doesn’t only help you, it helps families and the broader community. Through Youth Jobs Now! Iqbal and Nor Atikah who have both been successful in securing employment! Brother and sister asylum seekers they both registered into our Jobs Victoria program in January after being long term unemployed. They have been successful in maintaining work in the manufacturing and hotel industry respectfully, and with their work, they are able to help their family to be more financially secure. Keep up the great work guys!

A big Thank you to our local employers for continuing to provide job opportunities!

Of course, none of the above success stories would be possible without the support of the local employers in South East Melbourne.

In June, The Bridge Employment attended an event at Supreme Packaging Pty. Ltd., an employer that has supported a number of people to gain work. The event was attended by a several local employers, community organisations and Jobs Victoria.

Interview with Chris, Supported Employee, about Inclusive Training

Do you like attending training with staff members and why?
Yes because we are treated the same and on the same level. I also get to learn more and gain extra knowledge and skills.

How do you feel attending training with staff members?
I feel valued and positive and maybe a bit more supported by having more staff members there to help. It is a little bit more challenging but I like the challenge.

What benefits are there by attending training with staff members?
We are all on the same page and having the same goals makes for better teamwork. I feel I can help the staff more and help others more as well.

Are there difficulties with attending training with staff members?
No I don’t think so. I haven’t had any difficulties.

Would you recommend attending training with staff members for other participants in the organisation?
Yes, because we often have the same needs and goals even though we have different roles.

Thank you Chris for agreeing to take part in this brief interview.

Inclusive Training at The Bridge Works

By utilising different modules of the Competitive System & Practices, The Bridge Works commenced facilitating training in a more inclusive way that provides training with a blended participation of supported employees and staff members.

Feedback from the supported employees was very positive as the training was aimed to meet the needs of the business operations, where everyone had the opportunity to participate as ‘a team’ and contribute from different levels of experiences.

There was also positive feedback from staff members as they recognise the benefit of a more flexible delivery and how the training component was applicable to everyone. This also had a team building benefit.

Preparing Supported Employees for the NDIS

The NDIS will become available in Monash from 1 November 2017 and Kingston from 1 April 2018.

In preparation for the transition and in conjunction with The Bridge Connects, The Bridge Works has been utilising The Bridge Future Support Options Plan tool to assist families and carers of Supported Employees to prepare.

This approach has enabled Supported Employees, their families and carers to have an ongoing open dialog about their current supports and their future support needs. In addition to employment support, the Future Support Options planning has resulted in developing individual goals in a range of areas, which so far has included education, social participation, independence, living arrangements and health and wellbeing.
Lifelong learning at The Bridge Works

Shazz has long had a passion for story writing and The Bridge has supported this passion through the use of a variety of computer accessibility options such as contrasting screen and zoom magnification, which has enabled her to publish her stories online.

In 2016 Shazz expressed the need to learn Braille as she considered that her current limited vision had been progressively declining over time. Shazz has said, “I wanted to learn Braille because it would help me in the future and this is important to me because I want be able to read and write my short stories.”

As a result of Shazz’s interest and need Vision Australia was contacted and they were able to provide information for Shazz to learn Braille remotely. In September 2016 Shazz commenced Grade I Braille which is the basic introductory level to learn Braille. Through The Bridge volunteer program we were able to engage Lydia as a volunteer to provide regular support for Shazz with this training.

Recently when speaking with Lydia she explained how much she enjoyed assisting Shazz with this training. She highlighted that because Shazz is so eager to learn it made the journey successful and rewarding for her to assist Shazz.

With support and ongoing encouragement, Shazz is able to recognise characters in public places and will soon complete the Grade I Braille course. In an effort to lead the way as an inclusive workplace, Shazz will have a role in implementing Braille text labels for safety signs and storage identification.

The Bridge Works would like to congratulate Shazz for her commitment to learn Braille! We also would like to acknowledge Lydia for her commitment and her outstanding level of adaptability she has displayed to support Shazz with this journey.

Shazz (left) and Lydia (right) during Braille training at The Bridge Works

Shazz (left) presenting Lydia (right) with a certificate of appreciation in grateful recognition of outstanding volunteer support.
Yes! I would like to HELP BUILD THE BRIDGE

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