

A dream comes true for Melissa

For someone with a love of horses, landing your first job working for legendary West Australian trainer Fred Kersley, is akin to having driving lessons in a Rolls Royce!

For 21 year old Melissa Robinson, that dream is a reality.

Initial knock-backs meant Melissa was resigned to a future working in a pharmacy or café. But, with a little encouragement and careful guidance, Melissa's EDGE Employer Consultant Conrad Gomez helped her to find a more exciting and fulfilling direction in life.



"I enrolled in TAFE to obtain a Certificate in Stable hand" she says "Conrad also assisted me with some assignments and provided advice on how I should gain some extra support with my study, along with negotiating with industry contacts to find a suitable Work Experience placement."

Work experience at one stable in Ascot meant Melissa was able to put into practice the skills and knowledge she was gaining at TAFE. Next came paid employment at the famous Kersley stable - initially, Melissa worked eight hours a week, now she works full time.

"EDGE assisted me when I first began with Mr Kersley by providing on-the-job support in the form of Job Co-ordinators Craig Robb and Brian Rippingale, who attended shifts with me to observe and advise on my ability to complete various tasks" Melissa remembers.

"They continually worked me towards independence by communicating with Mr Kersley and the stable staff. These days, Brian's support is still there, however it's in the form of a visit away from work every few weeks and a phone discussion with Mr Kersley every so often."

Melissa says being paid to spend every day with horses is beyond anything she could have imagined.

"I am fast approaching my one year anniversary with the stable and I hope it is the first of many anniversaries," says Melissa "I love coming to work every morning." "This was my dream and EDGE made my dream come true".

Dr Greg Lewis

Disability Employment Hall of Fame



Photograph courtesy: The West Australian Newspaper.

Congratulations to EDGE co-founder, Dr Greg Lewis for his recent induction into the inaugural ACE Hall of Fame. Greg was honoured for his "significant and long term contribution" to the disability employment sector.

The announcement was made at this year's National Disability Services Employment conference, in Hobart. Other recipients included Dr Trevor Parmenter and Craig Harrison.

Greg said the award came as a surprise.

"I was thrilled," he told INSIDE EDGE, "I was humbled to be recognised by my colleagues."

A champion of people with disabilities for almost three decades, the qualified clinical psychologist says the sector has matured and become more widely recognised, but the aims of the organisation he established with his wife, Susan Robertson, remain the same.

"Our aspirations at EDGE have never ever changed," said Greg "We've always sought to get the best possible job, with the best possible wages, for every person that's ever come through our door. After twenty six years of working with over 3000 employers, it is easier for EDGE to convince employers of the commercial merit of employing people with disabilities."

"EDGE currently supports people in over 150 different occupations so we believe that there isn't a single job in the world that a person with disability couldn't do . . . it's about matching jobs to people."

Announcing the inductees, then-Minister for Employment Participation, Mark Arbib told delegates "The Hall of Fame is an excellent way to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of members of the disability employment community."

"I am sure that these recipients are the first of many to be recognised for their passion for building the best services to assist people with disability into work."

Greg believes employers are the real winners, when they give people with disability, a go.

"We know the people we've supported are safer, they have fewer accidents, fewer days off and that they stay there for a lot longer. Once they're on the job, we know they will deliver in spades to that employer."

While he's thrilled with his award, Greg says his work is far from complete. The next aim, not just to find jobs for people with disabilities, the new challenge is to develop career paths.

"Something I feel really proud about is the fact that we've now assisted around 50 apprentices to go through and get an apprenticeship, in areas where there are skill shortages and they're out there, doing those jobs. That, to me, is a crowning achievement."

Please meet Paul, both of them!

There are two Paul Lavers. By day, one is a psychology graduate – a dedicated professional, working as a Job Coordinator at EDGE committed to helping his clients to find work.

The "other" Paul Laver is an Olympic hopeful, training up to 30 hours a week, in his chosen sport of open water swimming. Paul aims to represent Australia at the London Olympics in 2012.

"I am currently training 15 times per week, made up of 10 swims, three gym sessions, one Pilates session and a cycle session," he says.

Paul admits it's a punishing schedule, but says working at EDGE has allowed him the flexibility to strive for his sporting dream.



"Since I announced my intentions to swim towards a national team berth – and hopefully the Olympics – I have been granted the opportunity to work for EDGE part time, allowing me to fit in the required training sessions, " he says "I can say that without such an opportunity, it would be impossible to reach my goals."

A keen swimmer since he was a child, like many West Australians, the water has always held a fascination for Paul.

"I swam competitively from age 8 until 13, when I was forced out of the water by an operation and never desired to come back. It wasn't until I was 19 and joined Sorrento Surf Lifesaving Club did I begin to swim again."

It was a "reunion" that soon led this high achiever to branch out into triathlons.

"My big break came in 2008 when I secured a spot on the French Grand Prix team Plomeur and spent 5 months of that year living and racing in France" says Paul "Upon my return (to Perth) I jumped back into training for the following season and was offered a new contract for 2009 with a different team in France, however with my triathlon goals achieved I decided to stop racing and start working a "real" job."

Having already completed a Bachelor of Science (Psychology) at the University of Western Australia and a Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology at Murdoch University, it was a friend's recommendation that led Paul to employment at EDGE.

"After doing some research, I knew that EDGE was the place for me, "says Paul "In particular, it was the ability to work one-on-one with people towards their goals that really attracted me."

"The staff at EDGE are a really special bunch, they have some amazing skills and fantastic personalities and I've been lucky to build good friendships with some really good eggs in my short time here!"

The money or the watch?

"What will you choose - the money or the watch?"

That was the question Richard Townsend was asked to answer recently, when he was presented with a 25 year service award by his employer, Bunnings, part of the Wesfarmers group.

Richard has been with the same company for his whole working life. Initially starting as a trolley collector at Coles, he joined Bunnings Belmont earlier this year.

Richard's EDGE Job Co-ordinator Denise Garner, says 44 year old Richard is a shining example of what people can achieve with perseverance and support.

"The thing with Richard is he'll give anything a go," she says "His disability isn't a hindrance. He's got such pride in his work – I'm so proud of him!"

While many employers lament that staff these days rarely stay with a company for a significant length of time, data shows that EDGE workers are bucking the trend. Recent analysis revealed the average tenure of a worker currently being supported by EDGE is 45 months.

Richard has surpassed that milestone, many times over – a point not missed by Managing Director John Gillam, in congratulatory message.

"As you can imagine, this is the kind of letter I am not called on to write very often," wrote Mr Gillam. He went on to compliment Richard on his strong work ethic.

"The loyalty, persistence and commitment required to contribute to the business over such a long period is very rare and I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the company, to sincerely thank you for your efforts over the years."

Richard says he was very excited to be acknowledged.

"I was rapt," he says with a grin "Absolutely rapt!"

He says he's hoping to remain with the company for the rest of his career.

"It's a good company," says Richard, ". . . counting down to 30 years now!"

Oh - and, if you're wondering whether he took the money or the watch . . . Richard took the money.

Having already inherited his father's gold watch, Richard says the money (or, in this case, a \$650 Bunnings voucher) seemed the sensible choice.

"I can buy anything I want in the whole store!" he said.



Remember Xavier?

Last edition we introduced Xavier Teo, a 29 year old Communications graduate, with experience in banking, sales and business development. Married, with a baby on the way, Xavier was very keen to find a great job. He told us:

"I'm hard working & I have a great deal of perseverance and I have a willingness to go above and beyond what is required to get the job done" - INSIDE EDGE, JUNE 2010



Xavier with his wife Alison and new baby Joshua.



Well, what a difference six months makes! After featuring in INSIDE EDGE, Xavier was snapped up by Medfin - a subsidiary of the National Australia Bank, as an Account Manager. Putting his education and experience to use, Xavier LOVES his new job!

"I think the culture of a company is very important. I love that Medfin has been so welcoming and positive" - XAVIER TEO, DECEMBER 2010

With support from EDGE's Rebecca Turpin, Xavier's happy, and looking forward to a successful career in the organisation. As well, he and his wife Alison, are also looking forward to spoiling baby Joshua for this, his first Christmas.



EDGE and its staff wish all a very safe and happy festive season.

