

Rio Tinto gets an EDGE or two!

August 17 1999 was the day Robert Pike's future changed. Robert was a passenger in a car which skidded after hitting a puddle of water on a road, and eventually collided with a tree. He was the only one who survived - three of Robert's high school friends were killed.

"My best mate had been sitting right beside me," he remembers, "I think losing friends was the hardest thing. It reinforces the fragility of life."

Once a strapping young man with ambitions of making it in AFL or cricket, the smash left Robert a double amputee. He spent many long days in rehabilitation in Fremantle Hospital, learning to walk again, with the aid of prosthetic legs.

But the Robert Pike story is not one of pity, nor regret.

Still keen on sport, he changed codes, taking up wheelchair basketball, even played two professional seasons with FC Barcelona, in Spain.

Personally, he married, became a father. Robert has a special affinity with young people and went on to become a youth pastor. He also runs a business doing presentations to high school students to help them achieve, using stories from his own life experiences to inspire.

But when it came to finding a more mainstream job, Robert turned to EDGE.

"I didn't fit a mould," says Robert "People have this mindset that people with disabilities can't do anything. There's a lot of people in wheelchairs working behind a desk and you'd never know they were in a chair." Prior to joining EDGE, Robert had been out of work for months. Then, everything changed when EDGE helped him secure a position with mining giant, Rio Tinto.

"EDGE were very helpful in giving me a hand," says Robert. Employed as a Delay Accounting Officer, this means if the monster ore trains operating in WA's Pilbara are late, Robert analyses data to determine why - and help prevent it happening again.

"Initially, EDGE conducted an assessment to make sure the facilities were suitable for Robert - and of course, they were," says EDGE job co-ordinator, Kristine Lim. "Later, Rio Tinto consulted with Robert directly to see if there were any changes they could make if they employed more people with disabilities in the future."

"To us, Robert's no different to anyone else," says Tina Busellato, Rio Tinto Superintendent, Operational Readiness "He's fitted into our team at Rio unbelievably well. Robert's just the sort of person we're looking for."

Kristine says it's gratifying to watch Robert's advancement.

"He's just so independent," she says And that's also the case with 28 year old Andrew Chandler.

Andrew Chandler has Asperger's syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder that is often characterised by difficulties in social interaction and language.

But if conversation doesn't flow easily for Andrew, he reads data the way the rest of us might read a book.

Andrew was offered a graduate position with Rio Tinto as an Information Technology Analyst, after completing his university studies last year. In his job, Andrew builds data bases, then uses them to manipulate and assess information from Rio's mining interests.

Prior to Andrew starting work, EDGE assisted members of Andrew's team at Rio Tinto to better understand Asperger's Syndrome.

"For example, someone with Asperger's can be very literal in their language" says Kristine "They might answer a question with one or two words. Some people might take offence, thinking the person with Asperger's is being rude - but they're not meaning to."

Since joining the Rio workforce, Kristine says she's seen Andrew open up more.

"He even "goes out with the boys" from work, now!" she says "But the most pleasing thing for me, is the feedback I get from his supervisor, who describes Andrew as efficient and independent."

"The supervisor even told me that if more graduate positions come up in his area, he'd like more people just like Andrew!" she said.



Patrick finds Balance.

While the rest of us struggle to find a work/life balance, 22 year old Patrick Ricciardo has achieved it, in just his first job. What's perhaps more surprising, is that he even has time to work, at all!



Patrick combines working at Princess Margaret Hospital's Kite Cafe, with studying Business and English at TAFE, along with training six hours a week with the "Superfins" - a team of champion swimmers. A keen breaststroker, Patrick has competed at several International Down syndrome championships in Portugal, Ireland and Taiwan.

Mum Val Ricciardo says Patrick has a full and happy life, but EDGE's support in helping her son find a job has been invaluable.

"From the beginning, I encountered the best in support and a determination to place Patrick in a suitable environment for his personal growth and comfort. This was achieved in due course but required effort and patience along the journey."

Mrs Ricciardo told INSIDE EDGE "I believe every staff member at EDGE, with whom I have had dealings, deserves commendation. Patrick's very lucky to have this job. It's certainly given him a reason every day to feel good!"

Patrick's duties at Kite Cafe include wrapping cakes, making up cheese and biscuit packs, clearing tables and checking fridges. Asked what he likes most about working at the cafe, Patrick says he enjoys talking to customers - and "I like seeing lots of doctors, including my brother Andrew, they come over for coffee."

PMH's Retail Coordinator Antoinette Khoury believes Patrick has been an excellent addition to her busy team.

"I didn't know Patrick had Down syndrome, until he started but it was never an issue. I knew I had EDGE's support." She says "Paddy's a joy to have around - everyone loves him!"

EDGE Job Support Team Leader, Brian Rippingale agrees - "he overcome every obstacle that's been put in his way," he says. "You look at Patrick and think anything's possible."

Now I feel really good!

There's something inherently logical in the notion of customising jobs to people - rather than the other way around.

Identifying an employee's strengths, interests and passions and then finding a job that suits, can take a little perseverance on both sides - but eighteen year old Scott Murrell's experience proves it's well worth the effort.

Scott has an intellectual disability and Autism. During his final year of high school, Scott did work experience at Big W in Joondalup, in the Homewares Department.

EDGE subsequently negotiated with the company to have Scott begin a work trial. Then Job Search Manager, Myra Godfrey says she thought the placement would have been a good fit - but the initial feedback, was disappointing.

"While Scott had a good work ethic, he wasn't passionate about homewares," she says.

But the EDGE team was determined it wouldn't give up. Further investigation uncovered two important facts. The first, that Scott loved books and DVDs. The second, that the store's Book Department needed someone to take control - tidying, cataloguing, stacking shelves - and staff had no time to do it. EDGE staff saw an opportunity.

Mum Sue Murrell explains, "Scott had previously done work experience in libraries." Another trial period was arranged, this time in the Book Department, "That's where they said he'd come into his own," says Mrs Murrell.

EDGE job co-ordinator Mark Dodd tells INSIDE EDGE "Scott keeps it looking neat and tidy, he replenishes the shop. As a treat sometimes, if he's finished his work, he likes to spend a few minutes cataloguing in the DVD department!"

Big W Business Manager Scott Miller attended EDGE's Mentoring Co-workers with Disability course to familiarise himself with the needs of people with disabilities.

He says having Scott Murrell as part of his team has been a very positive experience.

"Scott's made a real difference," says Mr Miller "Having that extra pair of hands has been great and everyone loves him!"

The collaboration has been such a success that Big W staff are currently being trained to assist Scott to become more independent, helping him out, if necessary.

Obviously Scott has been one winner here, but Myra Godfrey says employers also get a great return from investing time and effort in people with disability.

"People with disability WANT to go to work," she says "Employers need to understand that they can lift the morale of a workplace. Also, they're very loyal, very dedicated."

Sue Murrell says she's seen an increase in Scott's confidence and maturity since he took up the new position at Big W. His organisation skills have also improved.

"Where he used to get up at 6am to be ready for school by 8, he's now up at 5.30 and ready by 7, to get the bus - by himself - at 7.30."

Mrs Murrell says she trusted EDGE to support Scott and thought the idea of "job customisation" made sense.

"If you can find something where you can match a job to their interests - it's just like you and I." she says "Would you do your job if it didn't interest you?"

"EDGE has offered Kimberley Personnel on-going support and mentoring, in getting Launch underway."

"While the Launch program is much smaller scale than EDGE's SWEAT® program, we are already seeing early signs of success," Steve Cook tells INSIDE EDGE.



The SWEAT® Team.

"Success is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration."

If this famous quote is to be believed, the trick to getting ahead in life is no trick at all - it simply comes down to hard work.

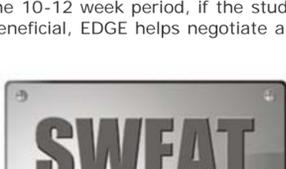
So, it seems especially apt that a hugely successful EDGE program, finding work experience - and jobs - for people with disability, is known as SWEAT®.

SWEAT® stands for Supported Work Experience and Training, says Team Leader, Rebecca Pileggi, "It involves supporting students, with any disability, in their final year of school to complete work experience placements with participating employers and help them make a successful transition from school to work."

The SWEAT® program has developed relationships with students and staff at more than forty public and private schools, across the Perth metropolitan area. And demand for the program is high.

"I would have calls from two new schools, every week," says Rebecca. After working with parents, teachers and the students themselves to identify each student's interests and talents, the four SWEAT® co-ordinators locate work experience for the student in a job that matches the student's job interests and skills.

One day a week, for a whole school term, they work alongside other employees. At the end of the 10-12 week period, if the student and their employer find the arrangement has been beneficial, EDGE helps negotiate a paid, ongoing position or a traineeship or apprenticeship.



"SWEAT® is an excellent program, with approximately fifty percent of students obtaining work. We're looking at having 120 students coming through in the next twelve months. I can only see positives!" says Rebecca.

The program has been so successful, it has also recently been adopted in regional WA.

With mentoring by EDGE staff, Broome-based Kimberley Personnel has started its own version of SWEAT®,

named Launch.

"...the program is all about helping students affected by disabilities to launch onto their chosen vocational pathway while they are still in the school system," says Kimberley Personnel's Steve Cook.

The aim is to find work experience - and jobs for people with disabilities, in country Western Australia. Around half of them will be indigenous Australians.