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EDGE

Dale's landed the dream job!

Dale Schwinkowski has an eagle-eyed teacher, EDGE and his own strong work ethic to thank for landing his dream job.

The seventeen year old is an Apprentice Chef at Crown, Perth. He earned the position after successfully completing months of both paid work and work experience.

"This is it," says Dale. "This is what I'm going to be doing for the rest of my life!"

Dale's first job at Crown was working as a Kitchen Hand, but an Apprenticeship was always his goal.

Tracey Ashman, Apprentice Chef Coordinator at Crown said that Dale was determined to undertake an apprenticeship from the very beginning of his career journey.

"Every single day he came to work, every time he saw me in the corridor, he came up to me and asked me if he could have that opportunity," says Tracey Ashman. "That's what he really wanted to do, he wanted an apprenticeship."

"He wore me down completely!" she laughs. Ms Ashman struck a deal with Dale.

"I said to him, let's have a look at your skills and what you're actually made of. I asked him if he was prepared to come in one day a week for twelve weeks of work experience in a kitchen and be assessed each day, which he did."

"He basically proved to me that he was willing to do the job and capable of doing the job."

Indeed, neither a learning disability, dyslexia nor ADHD have prevented Dale from pursuing the position he's coveted since he first started cooking classes at school.

"About four weeks into Home Economics I fell in love," Dale tells INSIDE EDGE," and that was it, I decided I wanted to be a Chef."

It was an ambition first nurtured by teacher Ying Jie Choo, Education Support Coordinator at Ellenbrook Secondary College. She arranged work experience for Dale at a local café, one day a week.

"Then I got him in with EDGE," says Miss Choo.

"EDGE and his work placement was probably the best thing, it started him off, driving that passion."

Supported by EDGE, Dale completed a fifteen week SWOT (School to Work Transition) placement, then a Certificate 3 in Hospitality, followed by another six months in the Kitchen Hand job at Crown Perth.

"I proved myself by doing that," says Dale. Crown Perth's Tracey Ashman agrees.

"Everything I've asked him to do, he's taken on board. He's "teachable," she says. "Like a football coach saying to a football player, you're coachable."

"Can I coach that kid? Can I help him? Can I teach him to get the best out of him? Yeah I think we can.

"His attitude far outweighs any disability he might have. He comes in each day, he's on top of the world, he loves his job. He thinks it's absolutely fantastic he's got this opportunity. He loves going to TAFE, he's fantastic with the other staff, he's helpful with the work experience students - he's actually quite a good mentor."

Dale's grandmother Keeva Triscari says the focused and determined seventeen year old is very different to the "sometimes really naughty" child who'd regularly disrupt lessons at school.

"He always wanted to be a chef, he wanted to be a cook. He just got all this help," she tells INSIDE EDGE.

"We always say to him, gee Dale, I'm so proud of you!"

Danielle's off to a good start!

With a clientele that can include up to ninety-nine children a day, aged from new-born to five years old, the Good Start Learning Centre is a fun but busy workplace.

goodstart early learning

Blayne Carroll (Centre Director) and Danielle Bentley.

It's the last place you might expect to find a staff member who has chronic fatigue syndrome.

But that's the reality for eighteen year old Danielle Bentley. Despite having the condition, she believes her job as an Early Education and Care trainee actually encourages her to achieve.

"I love working and I really want to work. It kind of gives me motivation," says Danielle. "Because I'm not doing it for myself, I'm doing it for the kids, it kind of makes me work more."

For Danielle, completing an EDGE-facilitated work experience while she was still in high school not only cemented her ambition to work in the child-care sector, it also led to a work based traineeship.

Good Start Learning Centre does its own on the job training. This means Danielle can work in the field while also studying towards a Certificate 3 in Children's Services.

Danielle works with the children three days a week. Half a working day each fortnight is reserved for study on set subjects ranging from the developmental needs of children, caring for babies and working with families, right through to the legal and ethical framework of the industry.

Regular meetings between Danielle, EDGE Job Coordinator Megan Thomason and Centre Director Blayne Carroll mean she is well supported.

Ms Carroll says she's had both university students and students on work placement at the Good Start Learning Centre. She believes the work placement arrangement offers better continuity of service.

"University students come for week-long blocks," she says. "These students come for a day or two or three, every week for a semester."

She admits she didn't know much about chronic fatigue syndrome when Danielle started, but was willing to give her a go.

"I was blown away, I wasn't expecting a then 17 year old student to come in and be as efficient as she was," says Blayne Carroll. "She used her initiative, she was very engaging, she was friendly, she was easy to talk to and she took everything we said on board."

"Her skills with the children, the way she engages and interacts with them, the way that she's able to follow tasks and work well with everyone in the team far outweigh the fact she has chronic fatigue."

Danielle's mum, Helen Bentley also agrees the job has been the making of her daughter.

"I was worried that chronic fatigue would hold her back. Initially, she withdrew and I was concerned she wasn't going to be able to go out into the workplace," Mrs Bentley tells INSIDE EDGE.

"This was perfect. It's definitely given her a purpose and made a great deal of difference to her confidence."

"Danielle loves her job and she loves her children!"

Work experience pays off for Chris

Work experience can be equally valuable in helping you to decide which jobs you don't want, as which ones you do.

For Chris Edlington, the opportunity to try out several jobs while he was still at school helped him to decide which area to pursue after graduation.

"In Year Ten, I did horticulture, in Year Eleven it was construction and Year Twelve automotive," he tells INSIDE EDGE.

The work experience helped Chris to decide on a career in bricklaying.

Chris Edlington and Greg Lewis from EDGE.

"I found bricklaying more interesting. I had all my options because I'd experienced them all," he says.

Still, it wasn't to be a direct road. After working for a year, one job fell through and Chris spent months unemployed.

Then EDGE and the Apprentice Board stepped in, introducing the then eighteen year old to bricklaying company boss, Cliff Warner.

Cliff took Chris on as an apprentice.

"I don't mind giving anyone a go," he says. "He's a good lad."

Mr Warner paired Chris with Foreman Dave Fletcher, a gently spoken Englishman. The pair has formed a strong working relationship.

"Chris has got a heart of gold," says Mr Fletcher. He says, despite Chris's learning disability, he hasn't needed any more guidance "no more than anybody else."

"With bricklaying, he just took to it. Every time I tell him something, he just takes it on board."

Chris describes the foreman as a nice guy - "He sort of tells you to do things, but doesn't get grumpy or anything."

Chris completed his studies at Challenger TAFE in Rockingham, attending classes at least one day a week. His EDGE Job Coordinator was able to provide extra support with questions about paperwork or other small issues that might crop up while working. Chris says he would have struggled without EDGE's support.

Now twenty-one, he's fully qualified.

Dawn Edlington, Chris's mum, says his bosses at Warner Bricklaying have come to treat Chris more like a member of the family. She tells INSIDE EDGE she's grateful to both the company and EDGE for making it happen.

"EDGE has done a lot for him. They've always contacted me and Christopher, they got him this job which I was absolutely rapt about and got him into a nice company who took him on board as their own" she says.

Glen's a true regular!

Two years ago, INSIDE EDGE featured Glen Hawke, a nineteen year-old apprentice horticulturist, working at Curtin University.

Glen's office is in the great outdoors!

Glen Hawke at his Graduation BBQ at Curtin with Lynda Kell, Head of Horticulture, Challenger TAFE.

Now twenty-one, it's pleasing to report that Glen's success continues. He's recently completed his apprenticeship and is working full-time as a qualified horticulturist on campus.

"One of the best things I've ever done!" he says.

Indeed, Glen's story is being held up by industry as a good example of the benefits of including people with disability in the workforce. Glen was recently featured in a WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry publication.

Glen got his start with a school-based traineeship. Help from EDGE and group training organisation South Metropolitan Youth Link (or SMYL) subsequently secured the opportunity to embark on an apprenticeship.

Glen studied at Challenger TAFE in Murdoch one day a week and worked at Curtin the other four days a week. Colleagues reinforced his lessons with practical help.

"He's a nice kid," says Jacqui Addison, Curtin University's Parks and Gardens Technical Officer. "You don't mind helping someone who helps himself."

TAFE staff also adapted their teaching styles to assist Glen.

"Challenger would send an assessor on site and teach him things on site, rather than having to go to TAFE and sit in a classroom with other students."

Glen's Curtin colleagues celebrated his graduation with a barbeque in his honour. Glen says he's happy to have completed the course and is enjoying the free time and financial benefits of having a full time job.

"I feel really, really happy. Means I can do more, can get a car," he says.

A keen martial artist, he's also saving his pay, hoping to attend a muay thai bootcamp in Thailand.

Curtin's Jacqui Addison says the collaboration has been mutually beneficial.

"It's been a good evolution, and a really good learning curve for me." she says.

"Glen's always positive about everything."

"He's inspirational really!"

Joshua finds, if it works, then it works!

It mightn't have been the most conventional career path, but it's worked for Joshua Pleydell-Bouverie.

Joshua's first position came when he was still at school. He worked in the operating theatre of St John of God Hospital in Murdoch. For the son of doctors, it was a nice twist to get to wear hospital "scrubs" while working on the tasks required to complete a Certificate 2 Business Administration Traineeship.

Joshua worked two days a week supported by his school and EDGE.

After finishing high school, Joshua employed the skills he'd learned at the hospital in a new role. This time, EDGE Job Coordinator, Anna MacMahon, liaised with Joshua and his colleagues to help him to complete the tasks required as a filing clerk in the People Services section of the Department of Parks and Wildlife (formerly known as the Department of Environment and Conservation).

Joshua's mother, Dr Nichola Wood, credits Anna with the fact her son has gone from requiring full support to being an independent employee, working three days a week.

"Anna MacMahon has been absolutely fantastic," says Dr Wood. "She's helped Josh so much."

Interviewed by INSIDE EDGE, Joshua happily outlined his responsibilities.

"Filing, making new files - working for wages!" he says. "It's amazing!"

As well as the work skills, Dr Wood says EDGE also helped Joshua to gain important life skills. Staff taught Joshua to catch buses to and from work, accompanying him on journeys until he was confident he could do it alone.

In fact, the only glitch came when he was navigating the public transport system so well, he'd often arrive home, having forgotten to eat since leaving the house just after seven in the morning!

EDGE's Anna MacMahon suggested Josh might be better catching a taxi home. He now books a cab online - and hasn't arrived home famished again!

"Josh is very competent, very organised," says his mum. "And once he's taught how to do things, he'll do it forever."

Joshua continues his studies, attending literacy and numeracy classes at Central TAFE, as well as computing and music sessions at Challenger TAFE.

In his spare time, he plays Australian rules football in an all-abilities, integrated team for Christian Brothers College. This year, his team won their division. They also travelled to Melbourne, where they were given a tour of the MCG and even took on some interstate teams.

Nichola Wood says her son has a full and happy life - and EDGE's support allows her to concentrate on being Joshua's mum, rather than his constant advocate. "It takes the pressure off me having to support him in every single way," she says. "If there's a problem with work, EDGE sorts it."

A passion for horticulture.

Mitchell McKenna didn't need anyone's help to answer an advertisement for a job as a Horticulture Trainee at the Shire of Kalamunda. After spotting the vacancy online, he made his application.

Mitchell listed EDGE Job Coordinator, Jenny Fuller, who had supported him previously, as a referee. Coincidentally, when the Shire checked Mitchell's references, Jenny Fuller knew the Team Leader and could honestly recommend Mitchell for the position. He got the job.

"All credit to him," Jenny says. "He really wanted to work and he really wanted a traineeship."

Mitchell's enthusiasm for horticulture was ignited when he was still at school. Like Dale Schwinkoski - also featured in this edition of INSIDE EDGE - Mitchell was taught by Ying Jie Choo, Education Support Coordinator at Ellenbrook Secondary College. She encouraged him to pursue a Certificate 2 in Horticulture at Leederville TAFE, when he was still in Year Twelve.

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Mitchell McKenna (centre) with Jerry Hutter and Michael Alison. Insert, Mitch in Year 7.

The reason Mitchell enjoyed the work so much is simple.

"I just love horticulture because I like to work outside," he told INSIDE EDGE.

"I don't like to work inside. Inside gets boring! "As a Trainee at the Shire of Kalamunda, Mitchell now spends every day outside. Duties include mowing lawns, trimming hedges, planting trees and maintaining the parks.

Mitchell's also discovered a new talent - for fixing reticulation.

"Love my retic. It's the best!" he says. "In summer, you don't get all hot and sweaty cos you've got water going everywhere, keeps you nice and cool."

EDGE gives Mitchell practical help with his new role - from arranging a grant to buy him prescription safety glasses, to organising a tutor to help him as he studies for a Certificate Two in Horticulture at Polytechnic West.

"I struggle with school work, so that'll help me a lot," says Mitchell.

"The combination of school and EDGE have set him up for life," says Megan McKenna, Mitchell's mum.

"It's fantastic. It's a weight off my mind knowing that if there are any problems at work that he doesn't want to talk to mum about . . . it's a relief knowing he's got that support."

Megan also credits the Shire of Kalamunda.

"His workplace is really good. They made him feel welcome from day dot. They've really taken him under their wing. It's been such a great opportunity for him and he loves it."

Michael Alison, Team Leader of the Horticulture Section at the Shire of Kalamunda says he hopes Mitchell will become a permanent member of staff when the twelve month traineeship is completed.

"I'll certainly go into bat for him," says Mr Alison. "I would give my hundred per cent support!"

Happy, productive and staying for the long haul.

Twenty nine year old Mahima Pandit is proof that by combining carefully chosen training courses, with EDGE support, employers get staff who are happy, productive and who often stay in the job long-term.

Mahima has recently marked her ten year anniversary, working for Big W Mirrabooka. Her colleagues even threw her a party!

Mahima works evenings, so the event was a special tea, attended by colleagues. The store manager was on holidays but came in especially to recognise the achievement. Mahima's parents, Neera and Anoop Anand, were also invited.

Mahima Pandit with Melissa D'Mello. Right, Mahima with her Ballajura Community College Certificate.

"They were so nice. We never expected it, we were so thankful to them," says Mrs Anand.

Mahima, who has an intellectual disability, started with Big W when she was not long out of high school. At EDGE's suggestion, she completed a three-month course at TAFE in retailing.

A two-week placement at one Big W store led to an on-going position at the Mirrabooka branch.

It's hard to believe that the bubbly twenty-nine year old of today ever had trouble chatting to anyone, but Mahima used to be very shy, keeping to herself and not mingling with others very easily.

With EDGE's comprehensive support covering everything from training to help her to navigate public transport so she could get to work, through to on the job support to learn new duties, Mahima's confidence grew.

Initially charged with affixing security tags to clothing, later Mahima started working on the shop floor, folding clothes and keeping the shelves neat.

"Mahima's a really enthusiastic worker," says Big W Apparel Business Manager, Melissa D'Mello. "She's part of the apparel team and they've got jobs they need to do to get the store up to scratch each day, for the next day's trade."

"We really do value the work Mahima does for us!"

"She is working at her level," says her mother. "She's so happy with what she's doing. She knows what's expected of her, she knows what she's doing and she knows that if ever there is any problem, EDGE will help her."

More recently, Mahima was thrilled to be made a permanent part-time, rather than casual member of staff. She works three hours per evening, five days a week - and loves it.

Mahima told INSIDE EDGE, "For me, the important thing has been that, since my school days, I've always wanted to be like everybody else, never wanted to look like I'm very different to everybody else and I'm not. But with a bit of help I can do this stuff and I'm happy."

SWOT and John XXIII College.

How does work experience at the WA Headquarters of British Aerospace sound?

Left to Right: Ewan Dewar, Julian Poon, Stuart Massey (teacher) and Dylan Broadway.

Or, for the mechanically minded, a stint working in a panel beating business that leads to an apprenticeship?

These are some of the success stories to have come out of the School to Work Transition (SWOT) program, run in collaboration between EDGE and John XXIII College over the past five years.

JTC is a co-educational college with fifteen hundred students and one of sixty schools to have liaised with EDGE to include the SWOT program in its curriculum.

One day a week, for up to twelve weeks, students with a disability do work experience in an area of their choice. At no cost to the school or employers, a team of six EDGE Job Coordinators facilitate the placements and support the students on the job.

"We place students in a work experience that suits their job aspirations and skills," says Melanie Stevenson, SWOT Program Coordinator.

"For example, one student wanted to do avionics, so we placed him in a company that does aviation. Another wanted to do sport and recreation and he went to Rugby WA. It's based on the students' career goals."

Stuart Massey, Learning Enrichment Coordinator at John XXIII College says the work experience is an important learning opportunity for the students and complements what is already being taught at the school.

"What you've got remember is that some students need to have a focus beyond school and this allows them to see the picture," Mr Massey tells INSIDE EGE. "They can become self-sufficient, self sustaining in the post-school world. That they can actually get meaningful employment, actually earn a wage." The life lessons they draw from experiencing work are equally beneficial.

Melanie Stevenson tells INSIDE EDGE. "The students are learning what's required on the job, they're finding out what it is they want to do.

They mightn't have a true understanding about what the job involves until they get into the workplace."

"They also have to understand that you don't go in at the top level, you go in at bottom to medium level and you work your way up."

Ms Stevenson says the feedback from JTC has been very positive.

"We communicate really freely with John XXIII to make sure that the placements are working for the students as well as for the school."

Stuart Massey believes EDGE's expertise is also vital to the program's success.

"It presents opportunities for students that they wouldn't normally have," he says. "EDGE's portfolio involves working with young people with disability, whereas other agencies aren't really in a position to help our students."

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