

strength

Isabella wants to be a writer.

She was referred to our service via her CMH clinician. The referral form stated 'eating disorder', 'partially blind' and 'emotion issues'. I made contact with Isabella and arranged to meet her in the hospital ward.

I arrived at our meeting and noticed a frail, young woman slowly making her way down the ward. She stopped in front of me and in a clear, confident voice introduced herself. My heart sank. Not because I didn't think she was work-ready but because despite her obvious physical deterioration her greeting was strong, upbeat and confident.

We talked for two hours about her skills, life journey and ambitions, and we slowly completed the relevant forms. This was a feat in itself. Due to her partial blindness, Isabella can make out colour and shapes only. With direction she signed the forms with ease.

What I learnt from our initial meeting was that Isabella was an intelligent young woman eager to prove to herself that she had the potential and drive to succeed. She was supported by an OT, a psychologist, a dietician and her hospital nurse. Her daily regime was filled with extensive physical, mental and dietary programs. I saw in her strength beyond normality. She would become my inspiration.

Our journey together started with trying to source funding to allow Isabella's dream of a writing career come to fruition. She needed to study and required many resources to do so, such as a viewfinder which she desperately needed to be able to write. Unfortunately many doors closed short at student loans.

We decided to take 'option Z' to find work. I spoke to many employers who couldn't see past her being partially blind.

I was in shopping at a chocolate shop for myself one day and started to share Isabella's life with the employer, Jessica. Jessica didn't shy away from Isabella's story instead she appeared very keen to give her a chance.

Jessica knew of Isabella through church. I spoke at length to Jessica about how we could cater for Isabella within her shop. We decided it would be best to start slow. Jessica and I liaised on a regular basis and brainstormed ideas about Isabella's employment: lighting, heating, eating regimes, her dog, getting to and from work, her extensive rehab program, her family, her life journey, her emotional supports, her working with others, the various tools/equipment needed to enable Jessica to increase Isabella's hours and, the most important aspect, her earning power.

Jessica stressed to me from day one that she didn't want Isabella to be a token worker, she wanted her to specialise in at least one aspect of the chocolate shop and to become an essential part of her team, working at least 15 hours per week.

Isabella started work; without me for the first month. After this initial period, Jessica said Isabella needed resources and equipment. I arranged for all parties associated with Isabella to start putting pen to paper. I liaised with Workbridge, Blind Foundation and WINZ to come on board and make this opportunity happen for Isabella. I commend all these services for their assistance and empathy with the situation. Within two months Isabella had everything she needed to work successfully.

I left Isabella at the chocolate shop as my role ceased. However, I have mentioned to her and Jessica that if there was ever anything I could do, to please use the Workwise Open Door policy.

I often see Isabella walking unattended to work. She has a new hairstyle and groovy clothes. My heart no longer sinks. Instead I cherish the time I had with her and the strength she has shown me. I admire her relationship building skills and I commend the drive of her clinicians - we were all one.

Isabella works up to 10 hours per week; she continues her rehab and clinical support. She is completing her correspondence writing course and she grows from strength to strength.

Isabella has recently been re-referred to our service to assist in her writing career, which is all too exciting. We are all looking forward to her continuing her journey.