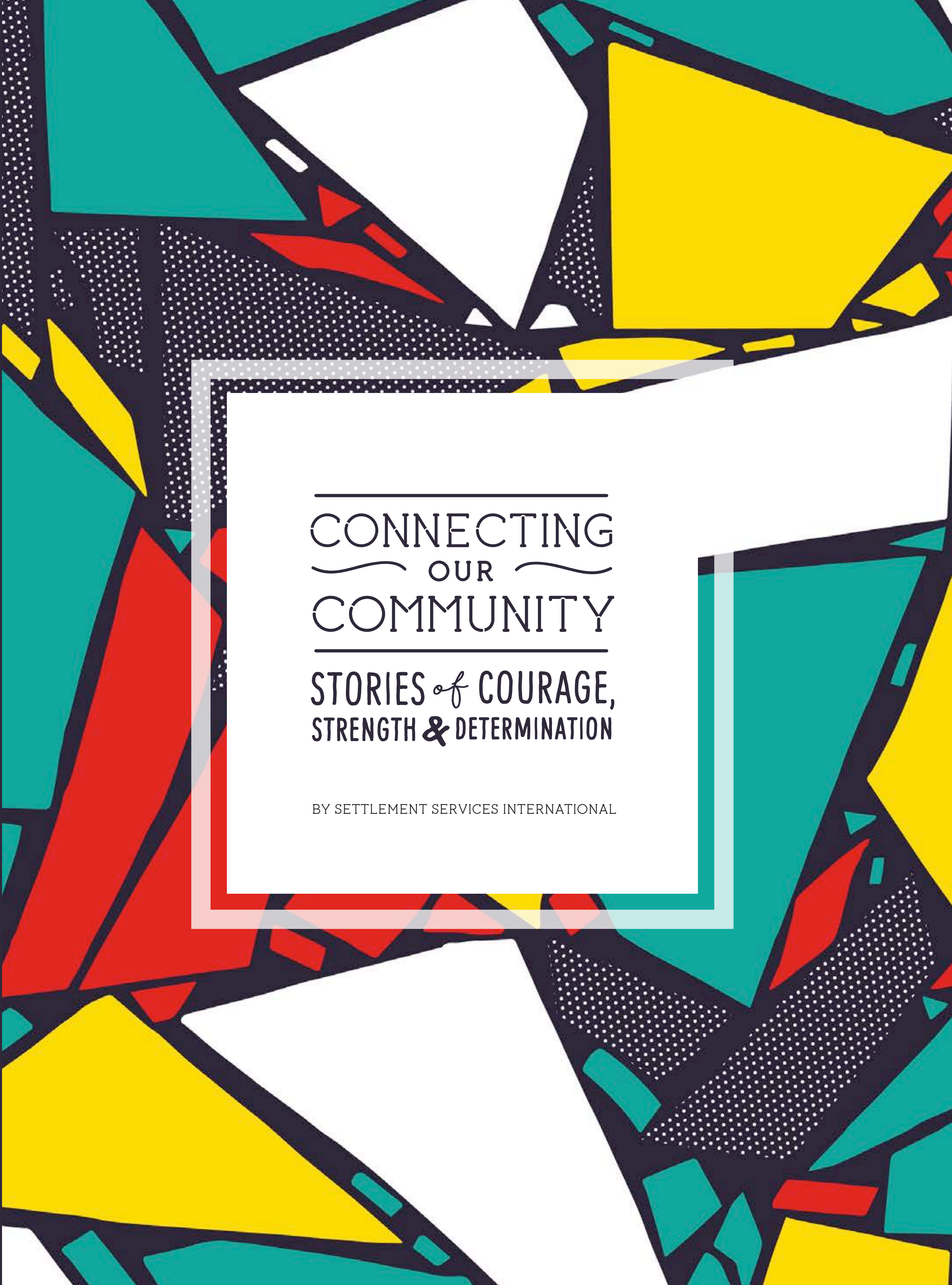

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

STORIES *of* COURAGE, STRENGTH & DETERMINATION

BY SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL

OUR
OPEN
FRONT
DOOR
HE MAKES
HIS WAY
INTO THE
WORLD
on
HIS OWN

my HEART
WAS
RACING
& I WANTED
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to DANCE
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FILLS IN
THE
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CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

STORIES of COURAGE, STRENGTH & DETERMINATION

BY SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL

Linking people and communities with opportunities

Settlement Services International
abilitylinks@ssi.org.au
www.ssi.org.au

Published July 2017

Designs by human.

Foreword

It is with great pleasure and pride that I present ***Connecting our community:*** *stories of courage, strength and determination.*

Connecting our community is a collection of personal stories of success and achievement, generously shared by people who have received support from the Ability Links NSW program.

Readers will find stories that capture the voice and journey of each storyteller; stories that will motivate and encourage change.
The stories aim to highlight the valuable contribution people with disability make, and illustrate the reciprocal benefit that inclusion has for individuals and communities.

Settlement Services International delivers the NSW Government initiative Ability Links NSW through a network of 60 SSI Linkers–38 of them multilingual and bicultural–embedded in more than 40 Local Government Areas throughout NSW. These stories demonstrate the transformative effect that Ability Links NSW has in communities, whether working with individuals, community organisations or businesses.

They also exemplify how exceptional outcomes can be achieved using individually tailored and culturally responsive support. Committed, flexible and responsive short term support goes a long way toward creating meaningful connections and building a more inclusive community; something we can all work toward, as individuals and organisations.
I'm confident you'll enjoy the stories within this book, and share SSI's commitment to honouring and celebrating diversity.

Violet Roumeliotis
CEO, Settlement Services International

WELCOME

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歡迎

आपका स्वागत है

· 어서 오세요 ·

CHÀO MỪNG

خوش آمدید

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Minister's Welcome

As the Minister for Multiculturalism and Minister for Disability Services, I am passionate about creating inclusive communities.

This book includes stories of people's experiences living with disability and the role of Ability Links NSW to support them to overcome challenges and barriers. The stories reflect hope, opportunity and joy. Above all, it demonstrates what is possible when we create inclusive communities, provide opportunity, or are prepared to see the world through another lens.

The NSW Government is proud of the investment in Ability Links NSW and its success in supporting people with disability, their families and carers. The innovative partnership between Government and not for profit organisations, like Settlement Services International, is responsible for creating a flexible and creative model of support.

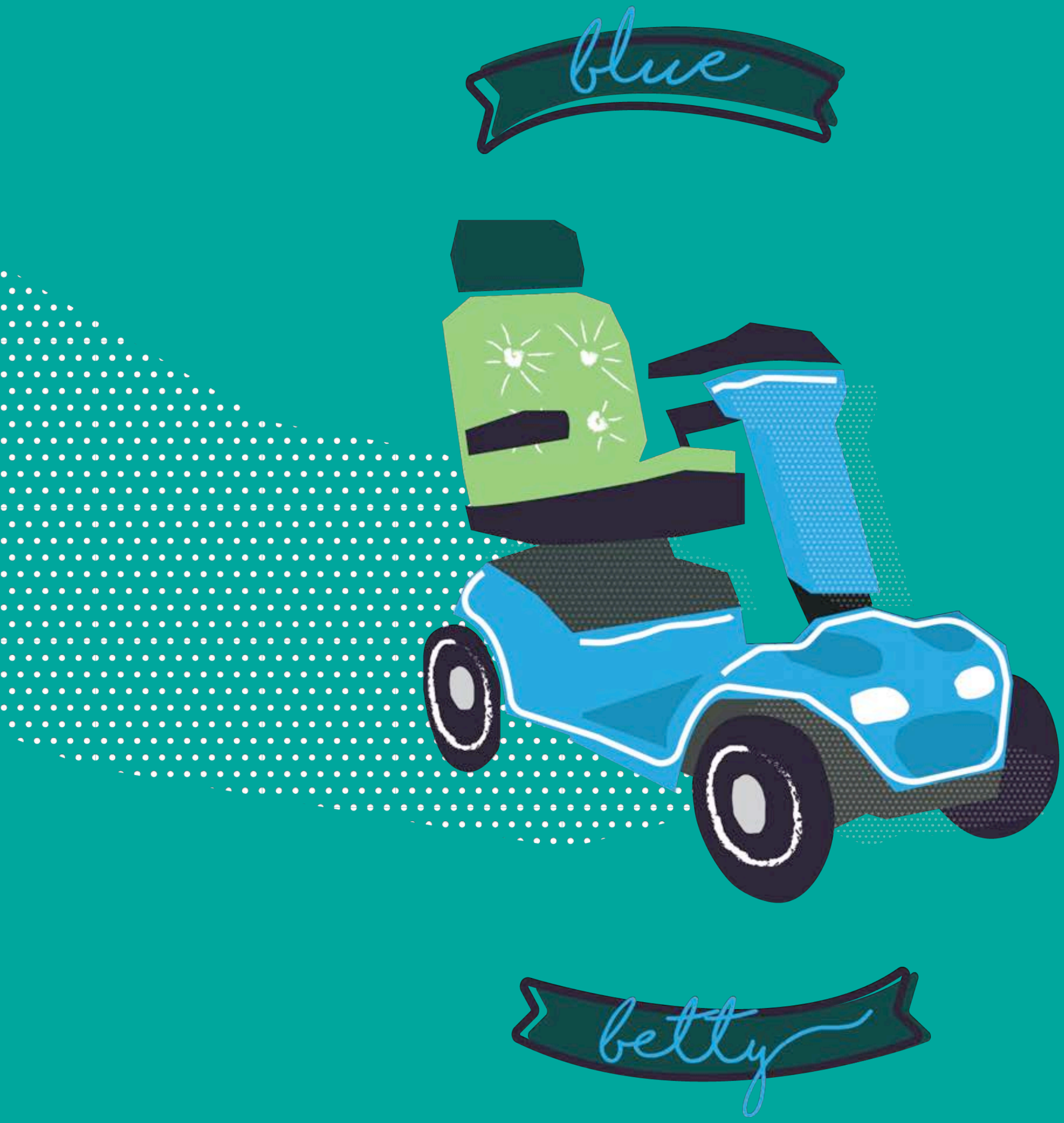
I would like to congratulate the 'Linkers' and the team at Settlement Services International for assisting people to tell their stories and in doing so helping others to see the possibilities.

This is a great opportunity to celebrate the achievements and the amazing outcomes told in these stories. It is also an opportunity to consider how we can assist someone to achieve their dreams in the future.

Together we can create a truly inclusive community.

The Hon. Ray Williams, MP
Minister for Multiculturalism, and Minister for Disability Services

we HOPE YOU
ENJOY
OUR
COLLECTION of
COMMUNITY
STORIES
of COURAGE
STRENGTH
& DETERMINATION


blue
betty

01

QUEANBEYAN CRUISERS

When I bought my mobility scooter I named her Blue Betty. I'd been driving my whole life, across New Zealand and Australia, and I figured it made sense to buy and name my scooter something flash. Driving is all I've ever wanted to do, really.

For instance, I got a taxi license when I first came to Queanbeyan, years ago. I loved talking to people—my friends told me I had a gift for it—and so being a taxi driver made sense because I got to combine driving and talking. I'd pick anyone up who wanted a lift, sometimes, like anyone, they had heavy things on their mind. Sometimes it was hard to hear, but I learned things from everyone, and I saw it as part of my job.

After I was done with taxis I started driving a bus, which meant even more people to talk to. I was doing a little country school run, and I'd pick up the kids, some of whom had disabilities. They were all good kids. One girl turned up one morning with a container full of yabbies. I remember saying to her: "If you had cooked them, we could have eaten them".

Trouble was, my legs started getting worse. I couldn't drive the bus and feel good about it, because I knew I wasn't well enough to look after my passengers right. I'd seen accidents, and I didn't want to destroy anyone else's life. That wasn't what I wanted to do. So I handed my license in. I sold my car too, and that's when I got Blue Betty.

When I was first getting used to my mobility scooter I'd ride into town and back. I'd talk to different people on scooters and in wheelchairs. I asked them what they do with themselves, and they told me they just hung out, and so I thought: 'Why don't we take our scooters for a drive to Fyshwick?'

My Linker and I chatted about this idea with a group of scooter riders. I wanted to see people getting out and going on adventures. My Linker said:
'Why not start a club?'

I lit up at that. I said: 'Of course!' and that's when I started the Queanbeyan Wheelies Club. My Linker helped set us up on Facebook, so we can let everyone know what's going on and where we're going next. Like I said, I've always wanted to help people, and now that I'm getting older, Ability Links is helping me help people in new ways. I can't take people places anymore, but I can talk to new people every single day, and I can do my bit for other people like me, and I reckon that's pretty good.

The first time we had a cruise out of town, a half a dozen of us took off together, and about half an hour later we were in Fyshwick. It was such a good day. We all got out, had a look at places, had lunch and checked out the shops—and then we went home. On the way home, with the sky getting darker behind us, we all felt fantastic and free. Everyone said: 'Gee, that was good.' And it was good.

Because older people need someone to talk to. It makes them—us—feel wanted. It can lift you up for a whole day, week, however long. Just so long as you've had someone be nice to you recently, you feel alive. That's what I hope to give to people. My Linker's helped me give that to more people than I thought I'd be able to after I handed in my licence. I'm not going to stop. I'm not going to slow down. I know how to make the world better, and I'll do it while riding Blue Betty into the sunset.

i'm NOT
GOING TO
STOP
i'm NOT
GOING TO
SLOW
DOWN

ANDREW

> FOR ME
> its ABOUT
> LOVING
> WHAT
> i do
> I HAVE BEEN
> SUPPORTED
> IN ACHIEVING
> my GOALS

ANDREW

02

NEVER SAY NO

Saying 'no' is something I don't believe in. Even though I have Down Syndrome and sometimes that means people don't think I can do things they can, I still do those things anyway. I have a life full of things, family, and friends that I love. I box on Mondays and Saturdays, help my dad at our local rugby club on Tuesdays and Thursdays by filling water bottles, go to TAFE on Wednesdays, dance on Thursdays and go to church with my mum on Sundays—I'm always so busy.

At TAFE I'm studying hospitality because food and people are my passions, and I want to be a chef so I can do what I love. I want to do this as my job, my career. I want to cook for all the people in the world. I could do it all my life. Ability Links helped me enrol in TAFE because they've been helping me achieve the goals I've been working towards, and I feel a little closer to my goal because I'm not doing it alone.

One thing I did do that I'm proud of was head over to Greece a few years ago for the Special Olympics as part of Australia's softball team. I didn't really have the Special Olympics as a goal in life, but I love playing sports, and that's what it's about for me: it's about loving what I do. And I loved what I was doing so much I went to Greece to do it even more.

Between my family, my friends, and Ability Links, I've been supported in achieving my goals. I think if everyone was so supported in life, then they'd be able to overcome their challenges and achieve their goals too. Down Syndrome is my challenge, but it doesn't stop me. I can achieve my goals and I can have my career. I can go out of the house and connect with people, talk about softball and drink some beers. I meet friends at basketball, at tai-chi, at yoga, at TAFE—these are all things I can do on my own. And so I want to tell my story because I know other people can do what they set out to do if they have support and motivation like I do. And also, they have to remember to never say no. If you say no you'll never ever get close to achieving your dreams like I have.

ANDREW

> If YOU SAY NO you'll NEVER COME CLOSE TO ACHIEVING your DREAMS

CECILIA

my HEART WAS RACING & I WANTED DESPERATELY to DANCE LIKE THEM

CECILIA

03

HOW IT WOULD FEEL TO SPIN

Once when I was watching Korean TV I saw a group of people wheelchair dancing. The whole time this was on the screen, I couldn't look away; my heart was racing and I wanted desperately to dance like them. To spin my wheels and my body, forwards and backwards. I've thought about how this would feel almost every day since.

When I lived in Korea I was unable to work because the country has no jobs for people with disabilities. Then, when I came to Australia, I had to look after my children, and language barriers made it hard to find work. As my children grew up, I found time to go to TAFE to improve my English, but because I didn't really leave my home it was not easy for me to improve my speaking or social skills. We did not speak English in my home.

I first called Ability Links after reading about the organisation in a Korean magazine, and the first person I spoke to during that phone call became my Linker. It was amazing. I met her for the first time after that in a local café, and over time she helped me improve my social skills and gave me a lot of information which has improved my quality of life.

When I look back on life, I know having a disability has given me extra challenges to overcome. It has made it difficult for me to face what I have needed to do in order to succeed at my goals. But now I feel I can face challenges, because Ability Links has made me feel supported. Not just supported, but inspired. I've learned I need to take initiative and I've started writing essays for the Korean community. I know my quality of life depends upon me and my motivation.

Which brings me back to the wheelchair dancing. Because I am always thinking about it. I told my Linker this, that I am always thinking about it. She nodded and said she would see what she could do, but I told her I had done research: there were no wheelchair dancing groups in Australia. So together we made plans. We agreed we would form our own wheelchair dancing group, and my husband said he would help us do it. A few weeks ago, I was told Ability Links has found an instructor and a function room — all we need now is a starting date. I've given up on dreams before, in the past. But if I do this, I will call it my triumph. I will say that I have won.

if I DO
THIS
I WILL
CALL IT MY
TRIUMPH
I WILL SAY
THAT i have
WON


SHU

04

THE TRANSLATOR

Late in my life I have become a translator. My English is not so good, but it is better than 90 percent of the Greenway Community where I live. So people have begun to recognise me as someone who can help them. And I do.

For instance: I read people's letters, tell them the community notices, help them pay their bills, and let them know if anything urgent needs to happen for them to remain okay. It is a good job, and an important one. By doing it I am helping everyone, and because I help everyone I know everything that happens at Greenway. All the Chinese people here are very old, and most have some sort of disability. I feel it is my role in this community to look after them.

I came to Australia nearly 30 years ago, and my mother followed me here around seven years after that. I am thankful to the government here because they understand that I need to look after my mother, and by helping her they allow me to look after the rest of the Chinese community around me. Of course, when I arrived I had no intention of taking up this role and becoming a sort of community translator. But that is what has happened and I do it gladly.

Perhaps I am able to be so useful in part thanks to my Linker. He comes by often to the community to ask how he can help. He asks me: 'What is the thing you most want? What is difficult for you? What is trouble for you? What is trouble for your community?'

I pass these questions on to the people who I help, and then I pass their answers back to my Linker. The community knows my Linker. They consider him a gentleman. They know he is from Ability Links, and that he wants to help all of us, and between my Linker and I that is what we try to do. We organise Harmony Day and Moon Cake Day and Chinese New Year, which are important cultural events for our community. This organising is not something other services have even offered to help us with.

It is a complicated set of circumstances that make my life good here. My mother receives the support she needs through different government initiatives, I help my community, and Ability Links helps me. That is how things work, and so long as they work I am happy. We are all Chinese people here at Greenway. We may be disadvantaged in some way, but we are not forgotten.

THE
COMMUNITY
KNOWS
— HE IS from
ABILITY LINKS
& THAT HE —
WANTS
TO help
all OF US

BEATRIX

I'VE GOT
my DOG
& I'VE GOT
MY
FRIENDS
& I'VE GOT
my
LINKER

05

FULLY BOOKED

I looked after my father for eight years in my own home. He is such a man—he's so stubborn. He's not easy to look after at all. He had me make breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner. All five meals. He'd wake up at three in the morning and say he had nothing to wear, even though he had something like a hundred shirts. I'd give him a shirt, and he'd say: 'That's not my shirt.'

It is hard to be a carer, but I did it, because I didn't want to put him in a nursing home. I'd have felt guilty, and I didn't want to feel that about something I did to him.

So I looked after him. For eight years I did something good for my father, and I don't look back and regret it. Not at all. But I also didn't know then about programs like Ability Links. I was doing it on my own, it was all I knew, and so I forgot myself in a way. I let myself go. Because of this the arthritis in my back got worse.

Six years ago I stopped caring for my father, and now I am awaiting an operation on my legs—I'm getting new legs—and I'm nervous. I have to be nervous. I'm going to be in the operation room for so long. But it will beat this life of pain. I am in 24 hour pain right now, from when I get up early in the morning to when I go to sleep again, even after I take my tablets. I don't mean to complain, because I'm all right, really. I have my dog, I have friends—sometimes too many friends; sometimes I have to tell them, I'm fully-booked!

My Linker is good to me too, like a friend. I found her after I was at a small festival in Blacktown and a lovely girl was promoting Ability Links. She put my name in a book and the next week someone called me—just like that. The person who called me became my Linker, and the first time we spoke she listened and then gave me information, and from there she helped me get mobility support, which I've needed for some time, because I live alone.

Together with my Linker I'm dealing with the new troubles that arise as I await my operation. My bedroom and my bathroom are upstairs, and I need a chair lift to get up there without hurting myself further. My Linker helped me find the information I needed and after that we contacted the company for help. But now I'm waiting until the NDIS comes in, which my Linker and I have already applied for. I'm waiting for my operation, and I'm waiting for the NDIS, and I'm waiting for my chair lift. And I'm happy to wait, because like I said, I've got my dog and I've got my friends, and I've got my Linker. Even if I'm in pain I know I'm not alone.

When I get this chair lift, this operation—when the waiting is over I know I'll feel better. I looked after my father in this house and now I'll look after myself here too. I feel supported.

EVEN *if*
I AM IN
PAIN
I KNOW
I'M NOT
ALONE

NILA

when you treat people like individuals you empower them

06

TOGETHER, WE MAKE IT HAPPEN

As a part of Ability Links program, Linkers engage in community development projects which involve with local individual community members, community groups, families, carers and their businesses and organisations in the Local Government Area to change their lives. Ability Links is a unique program which brings wide range of opportunities and benefits to their local community members. It helps them to be more confident and to spend their time in an effective way.

Below is an example of a Linker's journey with Ability Links and a community project in action:

I applied for the job of a Linker with SSI Ability Links because I liked the way the program was pitched–it was person centred, and I was promised a lot of autonomy, and I've been granted that the whole time I've been at SSI.

As a Linker I get to make my own action plans and strategies for each participant. This is important because everyone you work with is an individual, with different goals and aspirations, and it's my job as a Linker to connect individuals to what they need in order to get closer to their goals. So it's not case-management like a lot of other jobs—it's more personal than that. Which is what people need, I think if you treat people like individuals you empower them, and you'll both feel satisfied.

I noticed there were a lot of participants we were helping who were looking for employment, and they were struggling. I asked them all individually what the problem was, and the answer was often the same: they didn't know how to search for jobs, because no one had taught them how the system works. I realised that many people would be dealing with this issue, now and in the future, so I decided to work on designing something to solve the problem.

I started by putting together a consultation group. I'd ask questions in shopping centres, at expos, in libraries—wherever I could learn from people to find out what they were looking for. More than 70 percent of the answers I got were to do with employment. So, once I had that information, from there I searched for existing programs I could link people to, but there were very few that existed, and none in the immediate area.

Unemployment has immediate and long-term impacts on both individuals, their families and the wider community. I think that people who are unemployed are at a greater risk of poverty due to a lack of income, which over time can lead to economic and other hardships. They may also miss out on social contact and networks that are an important part of being in the work environment.

With all of this information in-hand I approached the Blacktown Library community development team and met the coordinator there, and I showed her the data I'd collected, and from there we discussed the possibilities around co-designing employment programs. I approached the SSI Volunteer program who helped find a volunteer facilitator to develop a four week employment program that included how to write a resume, how to prepare a cover letter, practical support in responding to selection criteria, mock job interview sessions in small groups, and personal presentation.

The four week sessions helped a lot of people to create a positive attitude to prepare for job searching; it developed the knowledge of job research and networking skills required, and also helped them to create the capacity and confidence of preparing for an interview and finding an outfit for the interview, important channels for finding employment.

Now there are going to be several employment programs that will run in Blacktown over the next few months, with the library assisting Ability Links by providing a venue and doing some of the promotional work. Together with the community we're working as effectively as we can to solve the real problems people face. That's what it means to work for Ability Links.

TOGETHER

• WITH THE

COMMUNITY

— WE ARE —

WORKING

to SOLVE

THE REAL

PROBLEMS

PEOPLE FACE

SHOBHNA

a MUM KNOWS WHAT IS WRONG & WHAT IS RIGHT

07

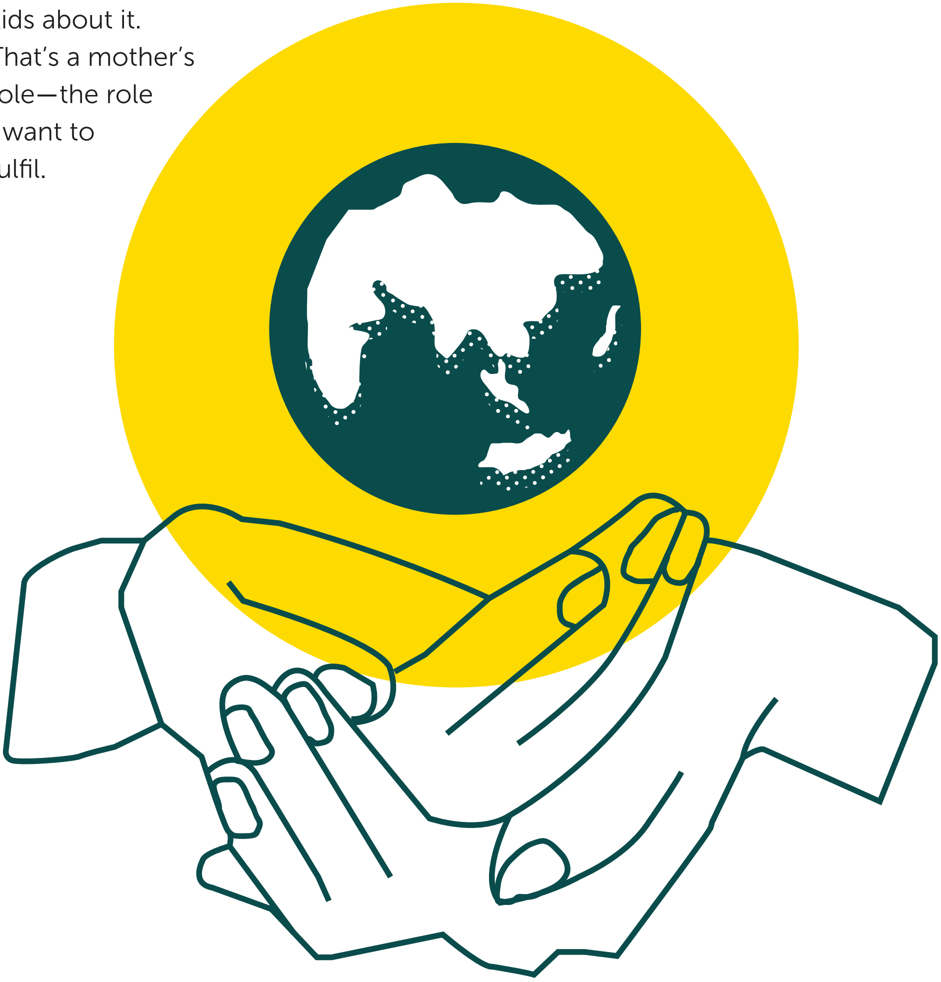
THE BOSS OF THE HOUSE

To me, the most important part of being a mum is that a mum knows what is wrong and what is right. I've been unemployed for a long time, and I worry that I'm not able to teach my kids properly, because I don't feel very connected to the real world. Sure, I've done a lot of volunteer work, like at playgroup when my kids were younger, or at the canteen of the school where my kids go now, but it's not a career. I don't make any money volunteering, so I can't feel like the boss of the house. But I still like to do it, and funnily enough it's actually while volunteering at the canteen that I met my Linker.

I asked my Linker to help me find part-time work. My kids are fourteen and sixteen, so I'm looking to get a job I can do during school hours. The first thing my Linker did was work with me to update my resume to the right format so I could start applying. Then we planned for courses of interest that would be important for particular jobs. My Linker was then able to connect me with First Aid and Mental Health First Aid courses which I completed. I believe these courses will hopefully make it easier for me to get a job in the future. Most importantly though, finishing the courses has given me the confidence to learn new skills again. I used to work at McDonalds before my kids became my priority, so I do have employable skills, but my Linker has been very helpful in helping me plan and work with me to bring back my confidence so I can get ready to start working again.

I am still working towards getting a job, and I'm applying a lot. My Linker has been great; supporting me to different ways I can make myself more employable, or do better in interviews—but the truth is I know I have a lot of those skills on my own. I know how to dress well, how to get myself out there. What Ability Links is doing is helping me prove that again. My Linker was able to introduce me to a Job Readiness Program, and I undertook all four sessions. With the support of my Linker, I am doing everything I can to get employed again.

I hope to be independent very soon, I hope I will be able to support my kids, and to prove myself to the world again. Once I prove myself to the world then I can teach my kids about it. That's a mother's role—the role I want to fulfil.



i WANT
TO
PROVE
MYSELF
TO
the
WORLD
• AGAIN •

LINDA

08

BROKEN IS JUST A NEW BEGINNING

I've been an artist my whole life, and for years and years I've worked with glass. I make collages with thin glass tiles, and solid glass sculptures, and I use a bunch of colours depending on how I feel on any given day. The other day I went outside and saw a colour of grass I've not seen in so long. Maybe it was beacause of a change in the seasons or something—I don't know what it was, but the colour was inspiring. I brought the colour home with me and I thought about it the rest of the day. I put it in my art.

I've always had that. A way of looking at the world—regardless of the stroke,before and after it—which is pretty unique. And now with the stroke I think being an artist has helped. I mean, for starters, it's kept my mind active, and it's let me find creative solutions to all the new problems I encounter, to search the world and find my own version of the answer. I've always said, even back when I worked the whole week, that glass is my real full-time job. Everything else has always been just a hobby to me. When glass is sculpted it's full of colour, and there's a weight and a brightness to it, and there's nothing more beautiful in the world. I like to make things with colour all through them, and after my stroke I've only wanted to do more of that—my work's only got more complicated, actually.

My stroke meant I lost the job I used to support my art practice. And then after everything happened I wasn't just unemployed but I was alone all the time, and so I started searching on the internet for ways to not be so alone, and I found Ability Links, and I left my phone number somewhere and a short while later my Linker gave me a call. I told her what I am trying to do.

My linker is always supportive and encouraging and she asks me about my art, and about the colours I've seen that day. And you know, she doesn't pity me. Not even a little. She hears me and she remembers what I say, and she doesn't ever forget.

After finding Ability Links I've met more people, and that's been magic like a great colour, because my Linker's done exactly what her name says she should do: she's linked me with the community. I haven't needed an organisation or anything; I'm doing okay. I just need people. People help people; that's how the world's always seemed to work from my perspective. I'm from the US, so it's a neighbourly attitude I suppose. That phrase has stuck with me: people help people.

And so now I have people and I can keep going. I can keep experimenting and working. I'm still the person in this body, even if it doesn't quite work the way it used to. I don't move or talk the same, but I'm still thinking, lovely, and friendly. In that way, the world's been pretty forgiving to me. And so I'm forgiving to the world, too. I work in glass, and if it breaks now, do I care? No. Because it's the nature of the beast, and broken is not the end of it. It's a part of it. Broken is a new beginning.

> THAT PHRASE HAS ALWAYS STUCK WITH ME: PEOPLE *help* PEOPLE

ABILITY LINKS
HAS BULIT
our CONFIDENCE
& WORKED
WITH OUR
COMMUNITY
to offer
TAILORED
OPTIONS OF
SUPPORT

we
FOUND
OUR
LINKER
VERY
FLEXIBLE &
RESOURCEFUL
she GAVE US
HOPE
& CONFIDENCE

09

HOW THINGS ARE

My name, Hiyam, means big love. Great and passionate love. I've been with my husband for forty years, and my love is still so big. Now time has passed and I'm a grandmother and I've spread that love to my grandkids as well. There's enough to go around. My third child, Nathan, has Down Syndrome, and I love him so much too. Sometimes I've had to give him extra love, and I have done it gladly.

I was six months' pregnant with Nathan when we came to Australia from Jordan. That was thirty years ago. When I had him, the doctor looked at him, and turned to me and asked: 'Do you want to put him in an institution?' Straight away I said: 'No,' because of course I'd still love him and care for him, Down Syndrome or not. It didn't even cross my mind to put him in an institution. Although, I didn't really know what Down Syndrome was. I asked the doctor for a long while if Nathan was getting better, if the illness had left him yet. But the doctor looked at me. He breathed and shook his head. He told me Nathan would always have Down Syndrome.

The doctor helped me learn more about the illness. He gave me advice too. He told me the three things I had to keep in my mind, raising Nathan, and I've always kept them there like he said. The three things are 'Admit', 'Accept', and 'Adjust'. I repeat them to myself like a mantra. And that's what I've been doing since. If I ever get stressed, or wish for a different world, I repeat some form of these words to get by, and this helps me do my best to support him, which is all I want to do really. I used to take him everywhere with me. We wouldn't try to hide it, the Down Syndrome, because we couldn't. The illness isn't my fault, it isn't Nathan's fault: it just is. It takes time to deal with, but it's how things are.

Once, many years ago, my middle son said to me something which hurt, and which maybe still hurts. He said: 'I wish I had Down Syndrome,' which meant to me that he thought I looked after him less than I did his brother Nathan. And I guess I did, because that was how it was.

For every hour you'd give one kid, you had to give Nathan four hours, and I have always tried to give him each and every one of those hours he needs. I want him to be as independent as possible. If I didn't want or try for that, I wouldn't be a good mother. I feel the rewards for my efforts every time someone tells me he's well-behaved. Every time someone says: 'Gosh, Nathan was good today,' I feel like I did things right. The CEO of the organisation where Nathan spent a lot of time thanked me for letting Nathan join them. She said: 'Your son is funny and has a great sense of humour,' and I was so glad to hear that, because it meant Nathan was bringing joy to people.

I first connected with Ability Links when we moved a couple years ago. We'd been living out west, and Nathan had been going to a day centre for five days a week, but when we sold the farm and moved into the city, we had to find a new arrangement for Nathan. I can't drive in the city, so we had to find a place with transport, and for the first little while we were matched with a day centre that looked after us no problem.

But just over a year ago, the centre told me: 'No more transport.' They were losing money, and they couldn't provide it. So they gave me three names: a community transport group, the Down Syndrome Association, and Ability Links. But neither of the first two could give me transport; the best they could do between them was a trip a day two days a week. It wasn't enough. I contacted Ability Links, and we were connected to a Linker and she tried to work out transport options with us.

Nathan and I discussed our needs with our Linker and found her very flexible and resourceful. Even though she didn't have the answer on the spot, but she gave us hope and confidence. The Linker provided us the contact of some local services, but they were only available two-three days per week. I didn't expect moving closer to the city would mean Nathan wouldn't be taken care of like he was out west. I began hating our new home, the whole area. This started to affect my blood pressure and health. I told my husband, my great love, how I was feeling, and he almost had us move away, just like that. He's a good man.

One day Nathan's Linker told me that she found another local centre that is offering us five days support including transport. After putting the phone down, my heartache was gone. I thought to myself that we should not lose hope, because there are people who can help. Ability Links has built our confidence, worked with us to look at different options of support and most importantly not to give up. Nathan is enjoying going to his day program five days a week, and the family is happy seeing Nathan smile again.

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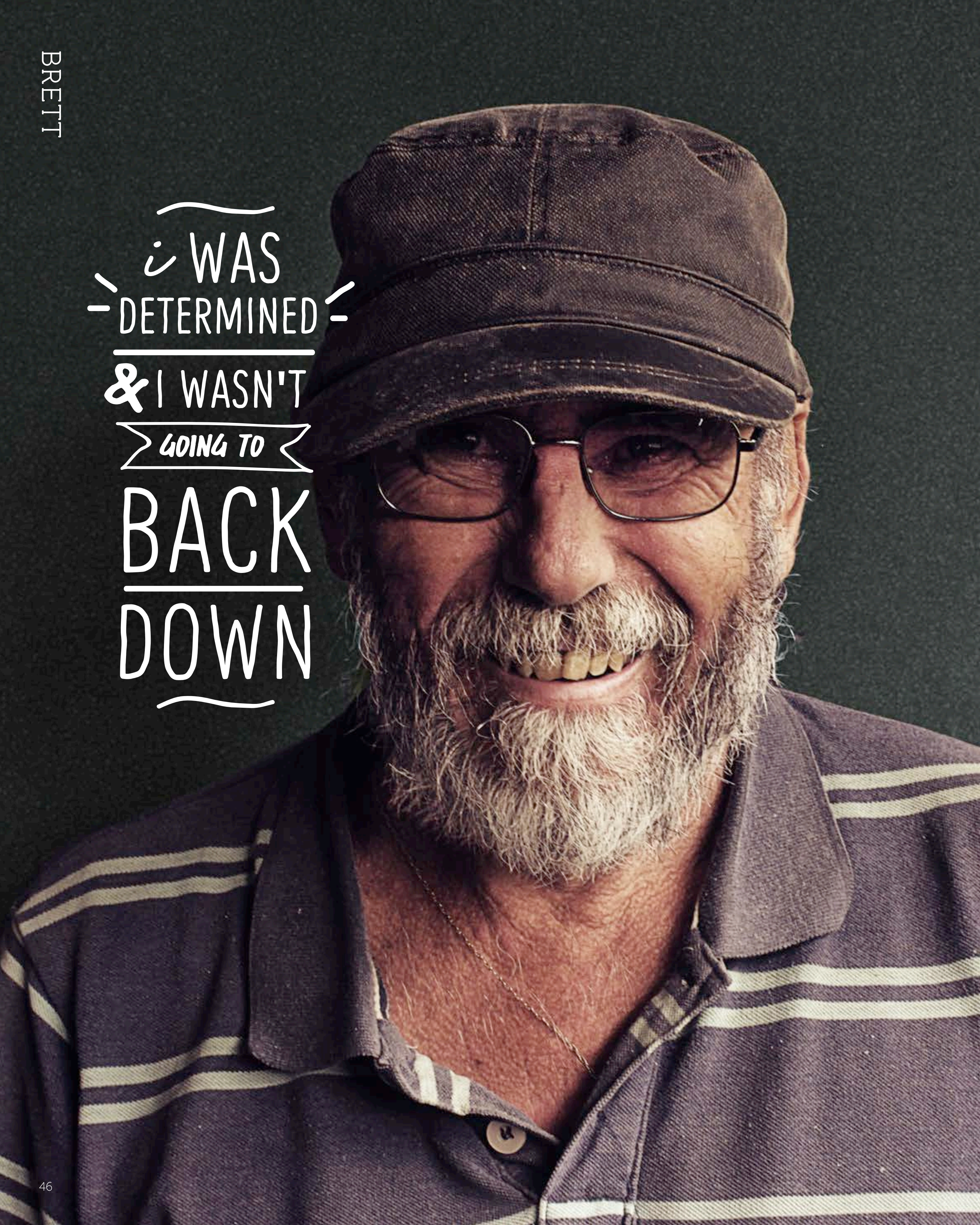

i WAS DETERMINED & I WASN'T GOING TO BACK DOWN

10

WHO GIVES A HOOT?

It all started off at an RSL club. It was an open day, and anyone could go and participate in a game of lawn bowls, and I thought: 'Why not? I'll give it a shot.' But there was so much negativity, with me being the way I am. It was hard. There wasn't equipment I needed to participate, and so there was a lot of umming and ahhing about it because I needed wheelchairs and ramps and all that, just to get on the green. I needed the whole shebang.

I asked to get lessons and they considered it for a while, but they didn't want to get any equipment for just me to do lessons. But I persisted, because I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to bowl. And so I planned, and I thought: 'I'll approach the committee; I'll approach the head of the bowls club. Certainly, I've got a disability, but who gives a hoot? I want to bowl like the rest of them.' I was determined and I wasn't going to back down.

Three months later, with my Linker helping me out and collaborating with others, the club agreed to purchase the ramps and the wheelchair for me. The wheelchair and ramp is also available for all of community to benefit from, so it is a massive win!! They told me I had to be careful with the wheels on the green, because the grass could sag under the weight of it all. And so I am careful, because I've been given an opportunity. A chance to get out and think and practice and try to win at something. Certainly, I get frustrated when I can't bowl on rainy days, but I get to go most of the times I want to.

Bowls is a great sport; that's the thing. It's magnificent. It gets me excited and it gets me thinking. I have to concentrate real hard when I play, and when

I hit the jack with my ball the feeling is unbelievable; I watch the two spheres glide together across the grass and it's certainly something. I mean, I feel like I've achieved a sort of goal. It's something I can watch happen; I can point to it and I can say: 'I did that!' And when I do it everyone else gets excited too. Not because I'm disabled and they pity me, but because I really did something great. They don't treat me different when we bowl at the RSL club; they treat me like they treat anyone else. I did my lessons like they did before playing, and they know that, so I'm not making a fool of myself or anything. I've done my hard yards.

I don't drink, but I do spend time at the RSL with people thanks to being able to bowl with them. It's good, being included. Certainly, it was hard to get here and I had to put the work in, and the club had to work out how to pay for the equipment, but they did it. We all did it. Because I planned, and I thought about it, and I made it happen.

My Linker was able to see my passion and motivation for playing Bowls. With this in hand, we were able to work together to make it happen.

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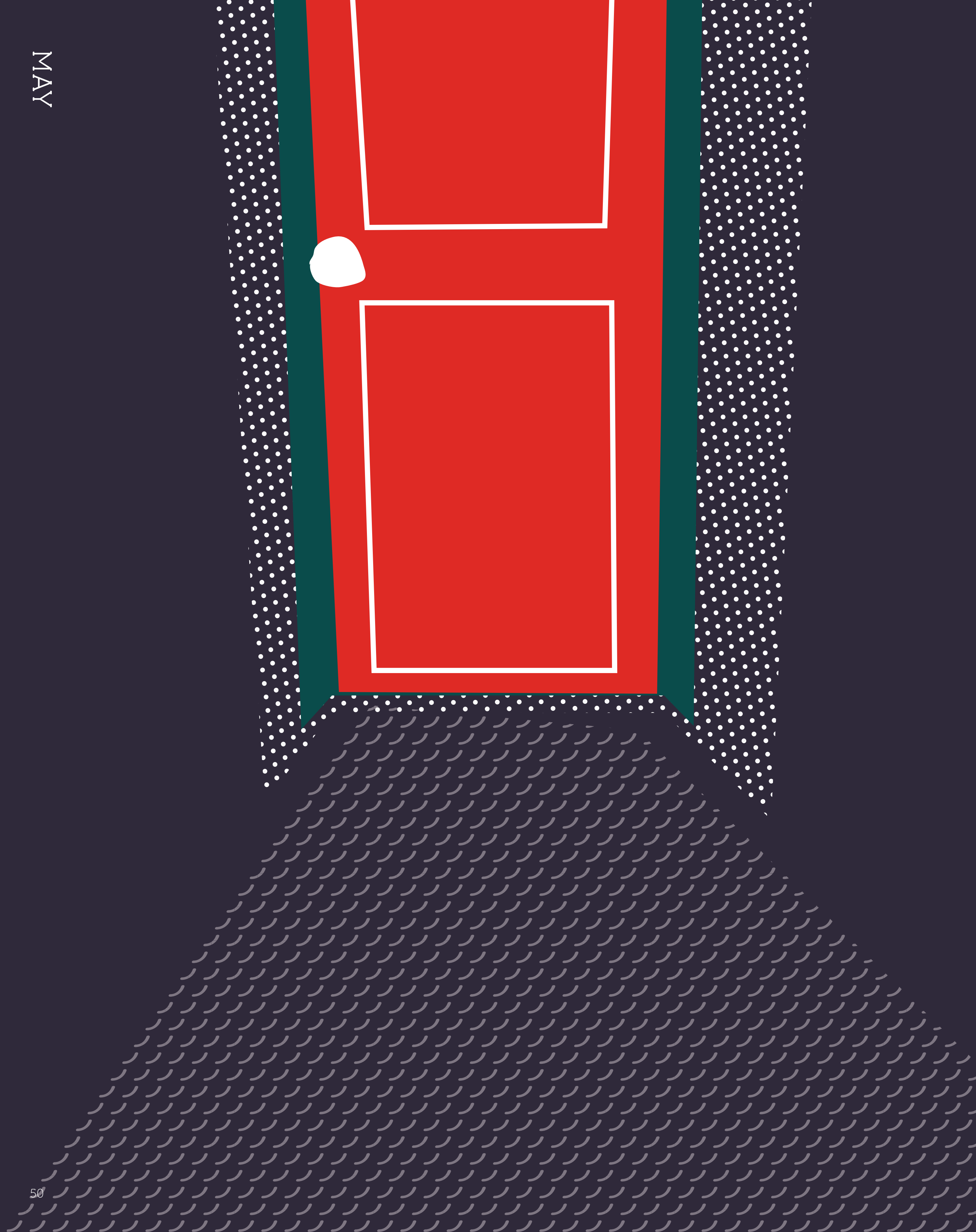

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OPENING THE DOOR

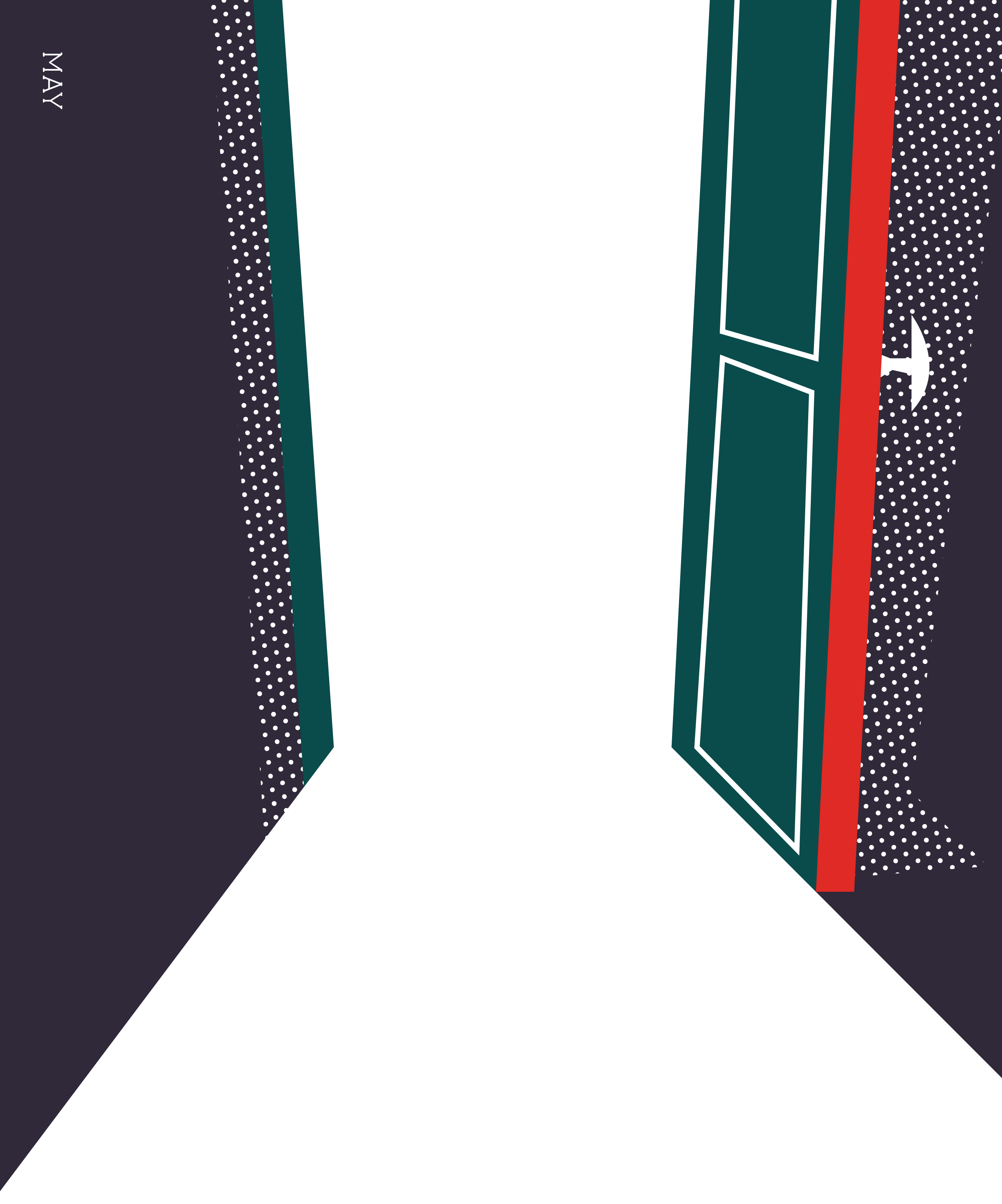
The hardest part about experiencing domestic violence after migrating from China is not knowing where and how to get help. I didn't know how Australian law worked, and I barely knew any help was out there, and because of that I felt trapped. I couldn't go out, and my son Jerome, who has autism, couldn't go out either. He locked himself in his room. We were alone.

When I found the courage to contact domestic violence services, they referred me to Ability Links for further support. From there, I was introduced to a Linker who spoke Mandarin and understood how to support women and children experiencing domestic violence. She helped me learn how to get protection, and now I'm confident enough to reach out for help. Now Jerome feels safer too.

After we started getting help, Jerome stopped being so scared of other people. Now he asks to go to the youth centre almost every day, and he's happy to take the train there on his own. He participates in activities, talks with everyone there (at the beginning, he refused to talk anybody). Now, he has friends there—it makes me so happy. Jerome even has his own Linker, who is around the same age as him (who is a young male Linker, Jerome likes to talk with him), and they get along so well, and because my son is so supported I don't feel worried when he goes out on his own. I know he'll be looked after.

Our two Linkers helped my son and I now feel much more confident in our place in Australia. Things are better now than before, when we could not leave our home, and when Jerome would not leave his locked room. Now I watch him from our open front door, as he makes his way into the world on his own. I can look away from him, because I know we are both safe.

MAY



from
OUR
OPEN
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HE MAKES
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JUSTIN IS NOW CONNECTED to a PLACE WHERE HE can be MADE TO feel HAPPY

KYUNG

12

TWENTY-ONE YEARS

For 21 years, I did not get any help with Justin. I thought: 'I can help my son, I can support my son, I can look after my son alone until I die.' But I did not know what would happen to Justin after I died, and I thought about that a lot.

Justin often struggles with talking, and so last year I took him to his GP to get some help finding a speech therapist. I hoped for Justin to be able to communicate better with me and his peers at the special school he attends. During our appointment, the GP recommended Ability Links, and shortly after that we met our Linker.

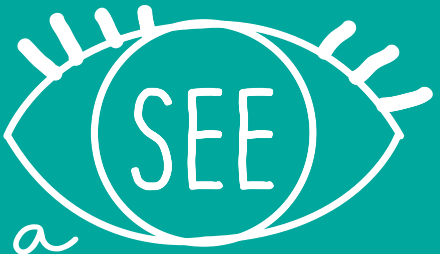
It didn't take long after that for us to be connected to services and communities we had never accessed before, and that we did not even know existed. As well as the many services that support Jerome, I have also been connected to a carers' group, and am now part of a community of people in similar situations to me. I have friends now who I can open up to and share my experiences with, and they understand me, and this has taken a lot of the weight off my shoulders.

My son loves the new Community Support Centre. Before we were introduced to Ability Links, I took Justin with me everywhere, even when he wasn't interested, because there was no one else to look after him. Thanks to our Linker, Justin is now connected to a place where he can participate in activities and be made to feel happy. And so I feel happy too.

What Ability Links has done is made me feel more confident in my son's future. I love Justin and I always will, and with the support and connections that Ability Links and our Linker have provided, I can now see a future where my son will one day be independent in the community.

KYUNG

I CAN NOW



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FUTURE

WHERE MY

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13

NAZIR

I was bullied for a long time at work by my colleagues and a manager. Not all the managers, just one in particular. He had it in for me, as they say. I kept reporting him and what he was doing and the people higher up said they'd look after it, but nothing really happened. I was just trapped in this cycle. I couldn't hide from him. They'd make fun of my accent.

I came to Australia from Bangladesh in 2001 to get my Masters of IT, and I stayed here for work ever since. I'm called Nazir, which is a common name, but whenever my colleagues would say it they'd mimic my accent as they spoke. They wouldn't say it like any other name; they'd single it out every time. And whenever anything went wrong at work, even on a project I had nothing to do with, they'd blame me. They'd come to me and ask what I did to ruin things, even though I didn't do anything wrong. It never really had anything to do with me.

After some more serious instances that occured at work, they sent me to their psychologist, and after a couple sessions she sent me to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist told me I had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and she put me on medication for it. Now if I miss my medication my situation gets bad. The doctor and the psychiatrist say that getting through all this is going to take time, and so I follow their instructions. I try my hardest not to miss my medication. I have left my job.

As a part of assisting me, my psychiatrist helped me apply for my wife to get a visa to come over from Bangladesh to help look after me. My doctor, psychologist, and psychiatrist all provided supporting evidence, and so Immigration granted her a visa and she arrived in Australia. It wasn't so long ago that she got here, actually. She lives with me and cares for me. She's my companion. She takes me shopping, to the doctors, wherever. But she doesn't have an income, any assets. She doesn't work—she doesn't even really know the country. It's her first time here in Australia.

To fill the gaps my wife and I cannot, we turned to Ability Links. I can't work with my PTSD, I can't afford my medication without working, so it's a cruel set of circumstances, but our Linker is helping. Ability Links was able to coordinate with appropriate community supports that resulted in my wife and I being together again. My Linker has been working with community to source affordable and nutritious food for us whilst also working with different people to help us get into affordable housing, because we can't afford the place we're living in anymore.

My Linker at SSI, has helped me find my connection with community again, be able to see the positive side of people. I can now see there are people who care and want to help, even though I couldn't see that for myself. I know it sounds awful, everything that's happened, but I don't want to paint a negative picture of Australia. I like this place, it's my dream country. Many people come to this country with big dreams and I do not want people to get bullied, harassed and suffer in the same way it happened to me.

But you know, if this had happened anywhere else, then I wouldn't have been able to get all this support either. In that way, I'm fortunate. Because my wife, my Linker, and the government here have all helped me, and that wouldn't happen anywhere else. So I do have things to be thankful for.

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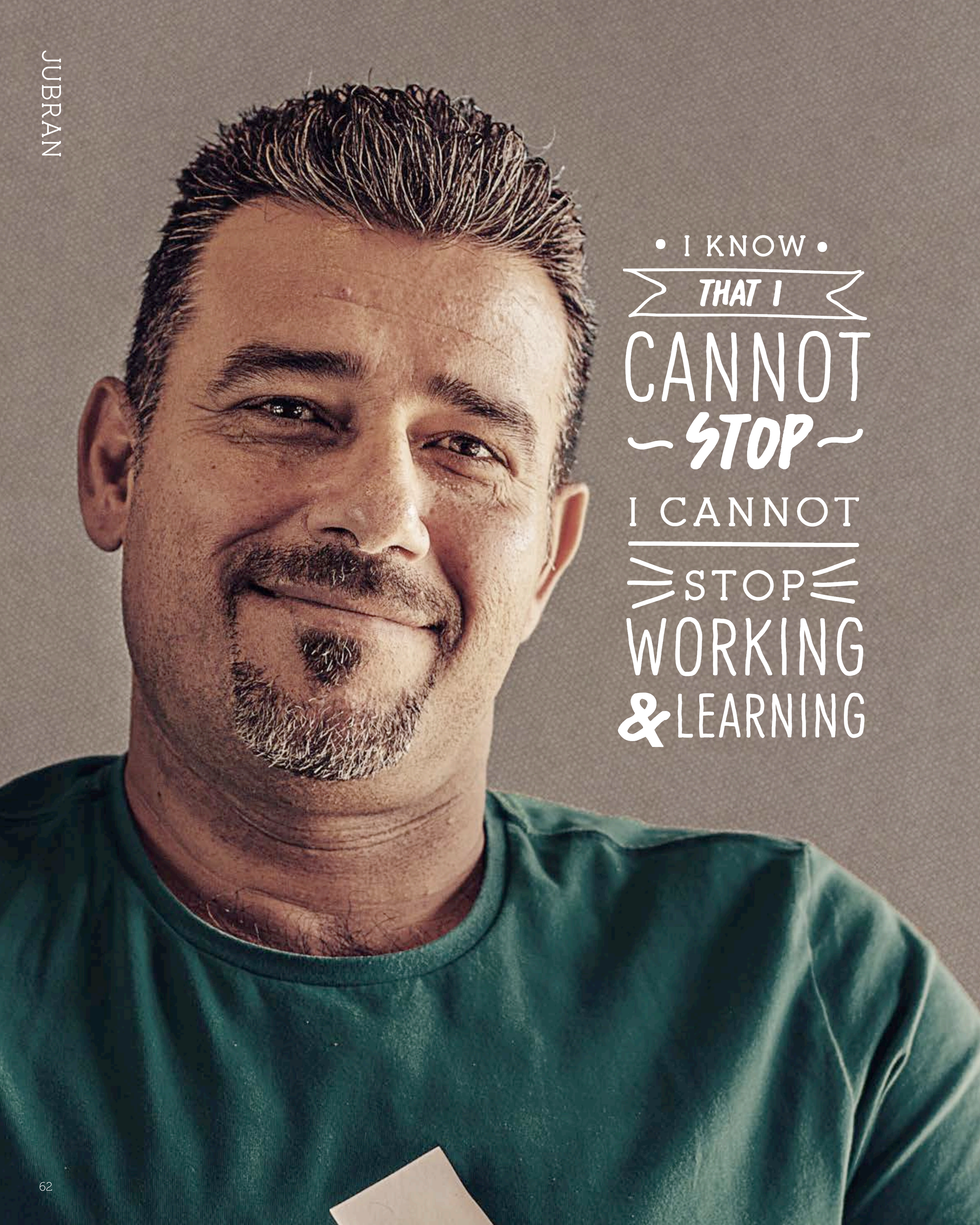


> I KNOW THAT I CANNOT STOP
> I CANNOT STOP WORKING & LEARNING

14

TAKING THE PAIN AWAY

When the car accident in Iraq happened, I didn't feel any pain. It's funny, everyone else in the accident, my brothers and cousins, they were all in so much pain, but I felt none. We were in hospital together, and while we were there I prayed to take the pain away and to help my family. And then something must have happened, because now I am the one with a disability, and everyone else is healthy and happy. Again, it's funny, but it's not so funny. I was 21.

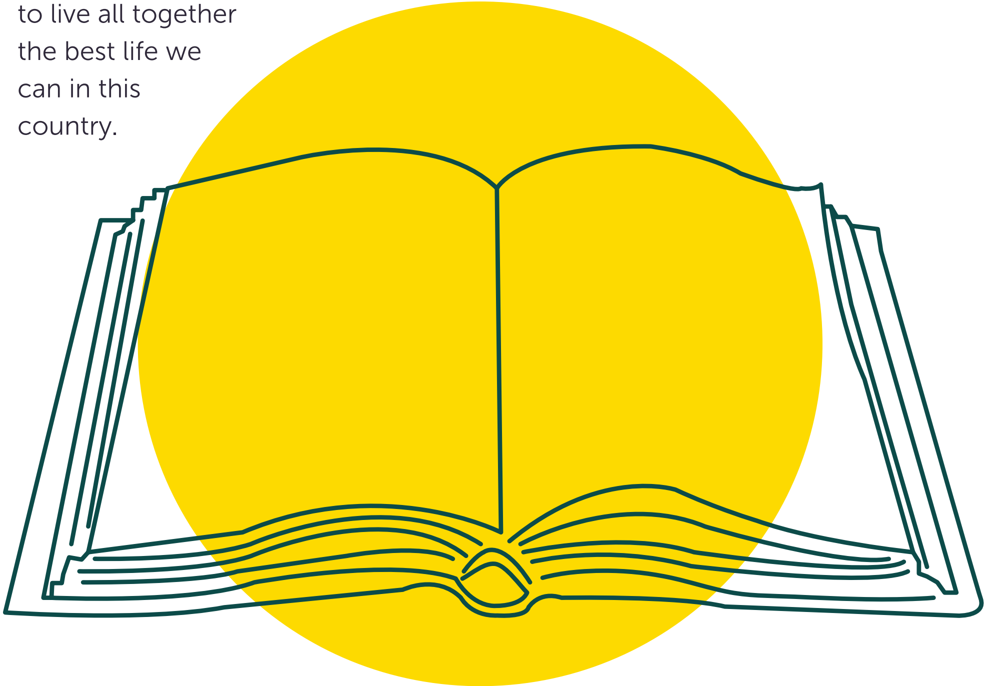
I didn't let the accident stop me. Even after the back injury became a part of my life I had a business and I was independent. In my house I had a coffee lounge, a Billiards table, a table tennis table, and a PlayStation. But Iraq was unsafe. I didn't want to have a family there. And so we came to Australia in 2015—my wife has a citizenship here, and I was able to travel over with my brother after a brief couple of years living in Turkey.

From the moment I arrived in Australia, I knew I loved this country. The weather, the people, even the government! I've felt very supported as an immigrant and life is much easier when you know you are safe in your own home and community.

My case worker connected me with Ability Links pretty quickly. My Linker helped me apply for the NDIS, for transport assistance, and for the companion card. Not every application worked out, but that was okay. We did as good as we could, and I know my Linker is around to help me if I need anything, anytime. Like I said, this life is good. I enjoy this country.

I enjoy this country so much, in fact, that I'm going to TAFE to learn English. That's my first priority right now, and my Linker has been very supportive of this as I look forward in time. I like planning, I like thinking of the future. Like I said, I used to own a business in Iraq, and so I know how to do good things in a community. I know I cannot stop. I cannot stop working and learning so I'll be able to support my wife and twins.

That's been the best part about living here instead of Iraq: feeling safe to raise my children. They are good and they will grow up strong here. I will teach them to be strong, even though I am disabled. Back injury or not, I will fight to support my family and to live all together the best life we can in this country.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements

Settlement Services International (SSI) would like to acknowledge the support of all the people involved in this project.

Most importantly we acknowledge the story tellers who generously gave their time in sharing their personal journeys.

Human Ventures Ltd has created a beautiful book that has genuinely and creatively captured the voice of each story teller. SSI recognises that this was not always an easy endeavour and we acknowledge their professionalism and patience.

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In particular SSI acknowledges Operations Manager Steve Gholab for his vision of a book that shares participants' stories in their own voice, and ensuring they were involved in every step of the production process.


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the FAMILY is HAPPY SEEING NATHAN
EVEN if I AM IN PAIN I KNOW I'M NOT ALONE
FOR ME its ABOUT LOVING WHAT i do I HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED IN ACHIEVING my GOALS
NOT ONLY DO I feel SUPPORTED BY ABILITY LINKS
WITH THE COMMUNITY WE ARE WORKING to SOLVE THE REAL PROBLEMS PEOPLE FACE
I DREAM of a TIME WHEN i am INDEPENDANT AND free
when SOMETHING HITS YOU, you JUMP BACK UP & GET
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