

## Ability to link skills

ABILITY Links is a program for people with a disability, mental illness, chronic illness or learning difficulty.

The program aims to help people fulfil their potential and realise their dreams while building a more inclusive society where people of every ability are valued.

"Linkers" are available to work with people throughout NSW between the ages of nine and 64. There are no eligibility requirements, assessments, referrals or proof of disability required.

The linker will walk beside you and work with you to achieve your goals and create opportunities to improve access and engagement within your local community, and with mainstream and disability services where necessary.

If you would benefit from the help of a linker, or if you have any questions about the Ability Links program, phone 1300 792 940 and you will be directed to your nearest linker, or go to [www.nwalliance.org.au](http://www.nwalliance.org.au) for more information.

Ability Links is delivered on the NSW far-north coast by Northern Rivers Social Development Council.

# Everybody belongs here



Child participating in the Belonging Project

## A spectrum of abilities and various needs

HOW important is it to feel connected, a sense of belonging, and that you are a valued member of your community? These are the questions the Belonging Project set about trying to answer for families of children with additional needs.

The Belonging Project started as a research project jointly run by the Northern Rivers Social Development Council (NRSDC) and the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University to look at barriers to inclusion for children with additional needs.

NRSDC Belonging project co-ordinator, Linda Wirf said: "Children who are on the autism spectrum for example have additional needs but often they are not apparent, and they don't seem different in any way."

"This can be really difficult for families when they don't get the acknowledgement and recognition that children with more visible disabilities might receive.

"One of the biggest issues

for these families which emerged through this research, was the feeling of being judged and misunderstood by the community. Around businesses not understanding, and schools not understanding the needs of these families and the difficulties they have just going out, doing everyday things," says Ms Wirf.

Armed with this knowledge the Belonging Project began capacity building and working with families around key areas that would help them. A homework club was set up for the children and run by their parents. Art workshops were held with kids who were asked about their sense of belonging. They drew a map of their lives to show the places they like to go and the people they go there with and these were exhibited in public spaces, such as supermarkets, in an effort to raise awareness and help to make communities more welcoming places for people of all needs.

Parenting groups were

created which included activities for the kids and gave the parents a chance to get together to support each other, and kids with additional needs were provided with help to make the transition to mainstream schools.

"We also have two sensory tents which can be hired at no cost for community events. The sensory tent provides a haven for kids with additional needs like autism who might need to quickly find a quiet space to be in a crowded community event. The tent includes items such as headphones for quiet time, a bean bag and objects to feel, touch, squeeze and move which can help a child to feel calm" says Ms Wirf.

"Then it was felt the next step was to use everything we knew to promote awareness of the issues," said Linda. "We've developed a video which will feature on the website and Facebook page which will be a key tool for educating community."

The website address is [everybodybelongs.org](http://everybodybelongs.org).

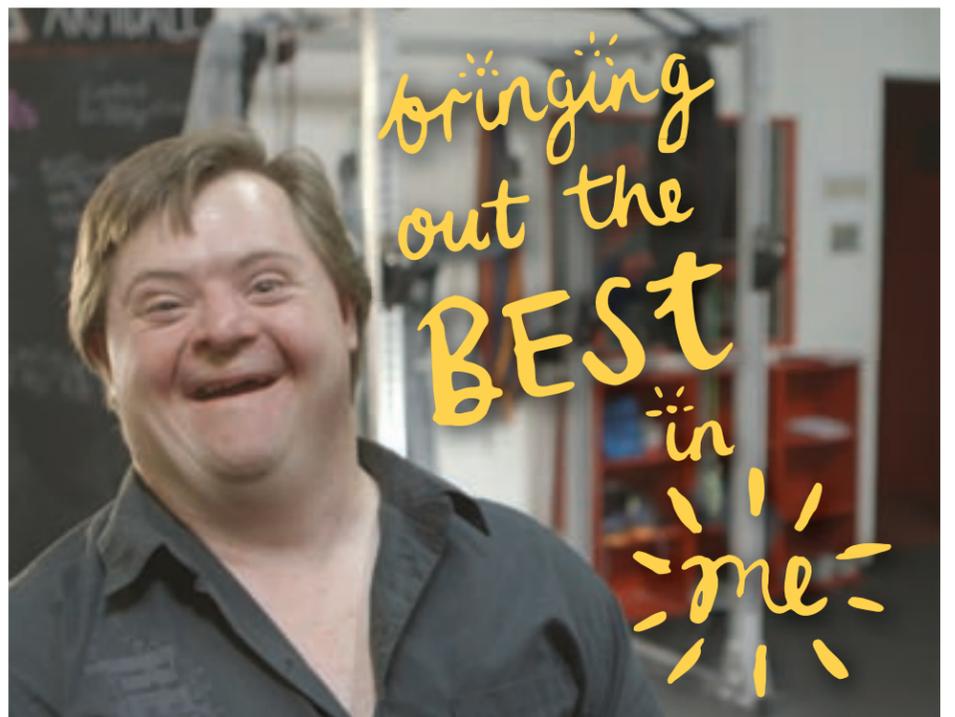
## Volunteer Grants

IT'S NOT too late to apply for a Volunteer Grant of up to \$5,000 through the Australian Government's Strengthening Communities, Volunteering fund. Funding is expected to be offered to around 5700 organisations with grants to be paid by June 30 2016.

Volunteer Grants will help with the purchase of small items and volunteers transport costs. The money can also contribute towards the cost of training and background screening checks for volunteers.

Grants close December 9 at 2:00pm see <http://bit.ly/1MjKtji> for more.

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"James never ceases to surprise us with what he's capable of doing. I'm sure HWNS will encourage him to fulfill all his ambitions."

Gaye, James' mum

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Let's Go!



Building Abilities.

Building Opportunities.

Multitask is dedicated to seeing people with disabilities living, working and sharing equally in the community. Through training and support services for people with disabilities, Multitask works to building happier, more secure and more meaningful lives throughout the region.



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