

## Our fleet has just grown to 3 dual-wheelchair transporters

Yes, for 'Connections Plus,' 2018 started certainly with a 'Bang'. To solve the constant daily juggling of wheelchair transportation, we ordered and bought 2 Mercedes-Benz 'Sprinters'.

These vehicles are not only the 'state of the art' in wheelchair transportation, they are also the safest around and are equipped with electronic gadgetry to make access and travel comfortable for carer/driver and client. Now having 3 of these transporters should alleviate the transportation bottleneck of the past and greatly assist our wheelchair clients in transportation availability.

These Sprinters will be strategically placed in Eden, Bega and Quaama to ensure 'Day-Program' participants can be transported in air-conditioned comfort to their destinations, which could be in either Eden, Tura Beach or Bega, where we're planning to establish another 'Day-Program' base.

Stay tuned...

**Rainer L. Strassberger, CEO**



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# MAMMA MIA!™

## Excursion

On November 28<sup>th</sup> last year, a group from Connections Plus travelled to Canberra to see the musical Mamma Mia at the Canberra Theatre. The three car convoy stopped for lunch at Cooma Park and enjoyed a bit of fresh air and a break from travelling.

After settling into our accommodation, setting up equipment, and rearranging the furniture, as is often needed for people using wheelchairs, we made our way into the city to have dinner at the Labor Club in the Canberra city centre. It was a great location for dinner with easy access, close proximity to the theatre and good food. Everyone was excited to be going to the show afterwards.

At the Canberra Theatre some people bought Mamma Mia merchandise or snacks for the show before we headed to our seats, which were in the second and third rows from the front. It was great to be so close and see all action.



*Pictured: Sarah Clarke, Natasha Miles, Taylor Kearney, Matthew Balaam, Colleen Barrett*

The storyline followed that of the Mamma Mia movie (if you have seen that), where the main character is due to marry on a Greek island, the home of her mother. She would really like her father to walk her down the aisle, but does not know who he is. From secretly reading her Mother's old diary she deduces that it could be one of 3 men, so she invites them all to the island, with the expectation that she will recognise her biological father instantly. The musical follows the chaos that ensues.

The quality of the performance was exceptional from start to finish, with brilliant acting and character portrayal, fantastic set design and superb choreography for the dance and song items. A whole lot of ABBA favourites were weaved into the storyline. There was a little too much strobe lighting at one point, but it didn't last long, and the dancing young fit men in beach attire soon recaptured all our attention. The show ended in a shower of blue and silver shiny paper pieces which was quite the spectacle as it rained down over the audience. We found those pieces stuck in clothes, wheelchairs and even to skin under clothes for the following day.

We all returned home the following morning, with a short lunch break in Cooma again. The only hold up was the roadside cattle grazing between Cooma and Nimmitabel where one of our cars had to come to a complete stop for a cow to amble on past across the road. The trip was enjoyed by all.



*Pictured: Taylor Kearney and Natasha Miles*

## Article by Sara Gingold



*Sara Gingold began her career working on innovative community development projects in Cambodia. She worked on some of the Cambodia's leading education projects that received strong international support and informed local education policy. She has strong facilitation and research skills and has lead several participatory research projects.*

*Her passion for disability is informed by lived experience after she was diagnosed with ME/CFS and fibromyalgia in 2012. A keen advocate for invisible disability rights, Sara lead the 2016 Stand Up for Invisible Disabilities public transport campaign.*

The old idiom tells us “there is no time like the present.” There are few situations where this is truer than it is for the present environment of the NDIS.

The NDIS is often described as a plane built in flight. How the Scheme will be implemented and what it will look like in 20 years time is being determined right now. We are all intensely aware that building a plane in flight presents challenges for everyone, but we often overlook the potential opportunities. Every passenger on the NDIS plane - from service providers to participants - has the responsibility and the ability to help build the Scheme as we want it.

Cases brought to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) allow participants, their families and the sector to influence how the NDIS Legislation is implemented and operationalised. Participants, with support from service providers and advocacy organisations, can set a legal precedent in contentious and problematic areas of the Scheme's implementation.

We can see participants are already taking advantage of this opportunity. Last week participant Jessica King won her AAT appeal, with the tribunal ruling that the physiotherapy and gym membership that she argued helped her build the strength to leave her wheelchair were “reasonable and necessary” supports and should be funded by the scheme. We can almost see participants around the country breathing a sigh of relief, knowing that this outcome might assist them getting the same or similar supports from the Scheme.

There is also, of course, the highly publicised case of Liam McGarrigle from the rural town of Moriac who recently won a Federal Court appeal against the Agency's decision to only partially fund his transport costs. As transport is a contentious issue in the Scheme, most of the sector is keenly monitoring this case. All involved parties are acutely aware that the outcome will go some way to resolving this issue.

Appealing a decision by the Agency is no doubt time consuming, complex and potentially costly for participants. That is why it is essential that the service providers and advocacy organisations support participants in important and landmark cases. In the end, the potential benefits from a positive outcome far outweigh any time investment.

There are still many areas of contention yet to be defined in the NDIS. The question of what transport costs will be covered still looms over participants and the sector. There is also ongoing controversy over mental illness - both in regards to what is reasonable and necessary to cover and who can access the scheme. We are also still to determine what exactly the Scheme will mean for people with chronic illnesses and episodic conditions.

How these issues are resolved will impact the lives of potentially thousands of people with disabilities. We owe it to them to put our best foot forward now and to appeal against the Agency's stance when we believe it conflicts with the spirit of the legislation. There truly is no time like the present.

**Author: Sara Gingold**

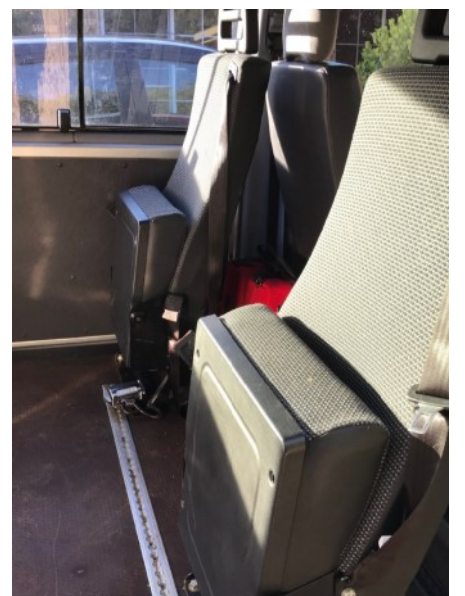


# FOR SALE



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