



# 'Normal' is just a setting

**"Normal is just a setting" is one of the many insights to come from NOVA Employment's Focus On Ability Short Film Festival.**

In 2014, Kellyville High School entered a documentary called 'I'm Marcus' in the annual film festival, that starts, "When I learned I had autism, I was puzzled."

The documentary goes on to show Marcus growing up through many of the challenges that life on the spectrum serves up to him, artfully speeding up to the present moment, where he is setting up his desk at his first job.

"Good thing Marcus realised early on that normal is just a setting on the washing machine," said NOVA Employment Chief Executive Martin Wren.

"This is the sort of life-changing shift that NOVA specialises in.

"We believe in the right of every person with disability to lead an independent life. As a disability employment service, we advocate that

people start doing this through paid employment.

"What better way to start you off on the road to independence than getting a job where you can earn a wage, save money, broaden your social life, and strengthen your work-related skills, such as punctuality, communication, travel and stamina; plus have a reason to get up in the morning – a reason to be proud of.

"While appreciating that everyone needs to start somewhere, NOVA aims high on behalf of our job seekers.

"NOVA staff listen to job seekers' hopes for the future, help establish clear and realistic employment goals and develop the skills to pursue those goals. We then find suitable, award-wage positions in the community to match job seeker hopes, goals and skills."

A scene from the film 'I'm Marcus'.

Martin said providing consistent, ongoing post-placement support helps the worker maintain their position unless, and until, he or she outgrows it. Then NOVA helps them to find their next role.

"Our driver is full participation in the workforce and the financial independence that comes with that," he said.

"I get sick of hearing about job seekers on the autism spectrum being pigeon-holed into repetitive or menial roles because other people assume that's what they want.

"Over 60 per cent of NOVA's job seekers on the spectrum gain work in industries as various as warehousing, administration, hospitality, information technology, horticulture and maintenance.

"For example, Chris has worked three days per week in a retirement village in Sydney's outer west for the past five years. As soon as he started, his colleagues in the administration department appreciated the commitment and accuracy he brought to his job in the mailroom. He enjoys the work and finds it easy, and is now a vital part of the organisation's team."

Martin said that as an employment service provider which cares about people, NOVA knows that "normal really is just a setting on the washing machine".

"We're not interested in washing. Our passion is getting to know each person's hopes, skills and goals then turning them into a job that matches," he said.

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