

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

From: Catherine Butterfield, Media and Communications Consultant, Mercy Health

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Seeing the ability in disability

Debbie Morgan's colleagues have learned so much from working alongside her. It might even be fair to say they are better communicators for having worked with the Home Care Barwon Region Home Care Worker. There is a lot to be gained from having an inclusive workplace.

Debbie was born deaf but she does not let the disability get in the way of anything. Her adaptability, combined with the fact that she works in an organisation committed to being equitable, inclusive and accessible, has meant any barriers that have arisen during her two years with Mercy Health have been ably overcome. In fact, the way Debbie communicates with colleagues and clients has proven valuable for everyone.

"Debbie is an amazing communicator," Regional Manager Home Care Barwon, Karlie Keck says. "She uses everything to communicate – her hands, her face, her eyes. Working in Home Care, one of the most important skills that we advocate in our staff is communication. Debbie is a great example of how to do it and she has really taught us all to expand beyond the methods we would traditionally use to communicate."

Today is International Day of People with Disability. It is also one year since Mercy Health published its first Accessibility Action Plan.

The Accessibility Action Plan has helped Mercy Health to advance equality for people with disability by supporting employment opportunities, providing accessible physical environments and enhancing the care we provide. It also highlights the organisation's commitment to improving outcomes for employees, those who access services, and to reducing and removing barriers experienced by people with disability.

"Everyone has been fantastic here," Debbie says. "We have put in processes to help make sure that I can do my job well, and I sometimes have a support person with me in meetings to help if I can't understand what is being said. The organisation as a whole has been very supportive of me."

However, Mercy Health is the clear winner for having Debbie on staff, Karlie says.

"There is so much that our organisation has gained from having Debbie work with us."

Bethany Knight works as a psychiatric nurse for Mercy Mental Health at Werribee Mercy Hospital. She lives with cerebral palsy and believes that more organisations should be proactive in promoting the acceptance of disabilities in the workplace.

"I think if a workplace is accessible, it promotes staff diversity and safe workplaces for people with disabilities," Bethany says. "Flexible working arrangements are needed for all employees to do their best work. I don't want to be seen as someone's 'disabled colleague', but it does help to be open with your team, so that support is there if it's needed."

The message from International Day of People with Disability for 2020 is to 'see the ability in disability'. Bethany is living proof that living with a disability places her in a valuable position at Mercy Health.

"In my job we try not to define our clients by their mental health diagnoses, and I think that is the same for people with disabilities," she says. "We live with disabilities, they don't define us. Taking stigma away and seeing people as people, with unique gifts, and connecting from there, is important. Having CP actually helps me perform my role in some ways. I can empathise about certain challenges in a way that someone else may not be able to."

International Day of People with Disability (IDPwD) is a United Nations observed day celebrated internationally. It aims to increase public awareness, understanding and acceptance of people with disability and celebrate their achievements and contributions.

The theme for IDPwD 2020 is "Building Back Better: toward a disability-inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID-19 World".

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