



## Metamorphosis after an acquired brain injury – Franklin’s story<sup>1</sup>

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*Franklin is a university student who acquired a brain injury in his early 20s and, in the decade since, has been focused on developing his strengths and acquiring new abilities. He is now studying physiotherapy with the aim of helping others with experiences like his to heal and adapt after injury.*

***I will be experiencing this injury for the rest of my life, so I might as well use it to help others. I’ve already gone where they will go, and if I can make their journey easier, why not. Why wouldn’t I? Franklin***

Franklin was in his early 20s working as a plumber when, through an accident, he suffered a brain injury that affected his fine motor skills. His injury meant that he could no longer do the work he was qualified to do. Franklin’s vocational and educational journey since his accident has been a process of trial and error to find out what type of work was going to suit his body as well as his strengths and interests. After the accident, Franklin completed a TAFE (Technical and Further Education) course, retrained for a “desk job” then changed direction again to become a personal trainer. This skillset strengthened Franklin’s body and developed his understanding of what type of work was a good fit for him.

*MyPlus Students’ Club provides free resources to guide university students and graduates to talk with employers about disability.*

**Key Learning: Franklin’s educational and vocational journey has not been a linear progression in one career pathway but one that has given him diverse vocational experiences and understandings about himself.**

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<sup>1</sup> This story is the experience of one university student interviewed as part of the research project: O’Shea et al. *National Career Development Learning Hub for students with disability*. National Careers Institute Partnership grant (2021–2023). The research involved interviews and surveys with students, parents/carers and stakeholders and analysis of existing data sets.

After these experiences, Franklin applied to university to study a Bachelor of Exercise Science so that he can assist other people with acquired brain injuries to walk again. This career aspiration emerged from his own experience of injury and rehabilitation and the desire to use those experiences to help others. Franklin also found inspiration from athletes with disability in his work as a personal trainer. He describes them as dedicated people, and his work with them confirmed that he had made the right career decision.

**Key Learning: Having lived experience of a disability is a key resource that individuals can draw upon when deciding what to study. Providing support to make the links between this lived experience and degree choices is key.**

Franklin has received significant support from his family but also found that the accommodations and adjustments provided at both TAFE and university were critical to his academic success.

### *University takes a lot of energy. Franklin*

The types of adjustments that Franklin has experienced include allocation of extra time and permission to use a computer instead of paper for exams. Franklin found the disability liaison counsellor valuable in helping him with any issues he had, and he felt supported by career advisors and academic staff.

**Key Learning: Accommodations and adjustments can be critical supports of university success, as can career development learning (CDL) and transition to employment activities.**

Navigating the best educational pathway to achieve his desired occupation requires Franklin's regular consultation with academic and career advisors. In Franklin's case, the degree coordinator assists him in planning his subject progression and provides guidance, along with the career advisor, on which graduate courses to apply for to work in the context he desires – acute hospital care. The university career advisor also helps him weigh up his options for staying in his hometown to study versus moving for study, a decision more complex for a student with disability who has additional supports in place.

*Regional University Centres support students from regional, rural and remote areas to stay in their hometowns rather than having to relocate for university study.*

**Key Learning: Course coordinators and career advisors are valuable guides to ensure that Franklin acquires the necessary qualifications to achieve his desired career.**

## Implications for CDL in further education

- Many students do not have linear journeys into education and work, particularly students from rural, regional and remote areas and from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Young people with disability are more likely to experience complex pathways with multiple transitions. Alternative pathways can be supportive options for students with disability.
- Tapping into the lived experience and interests of the student supports CDL tailored to the student, developing their aspirations.
- Career advisors working in partnership with student support units across an institution provide coordinated assistance, which best allows students to achieve their goals.
- CDL staff that are disability aware and confident provide an environment for CDL activity that is inclusive of students with disability.

## Implications for employers

- People with lived experience of the field can be highly empathetic, knowledgeable and passionate about their work and clients.
- Flexible working conditions such as variable hours; remote, part-time and casual work; and volunteering can provide opportunities for employees to work to their maximum potential.
- A guide to good practice in supporting students with disability in the workplace is available in the [CDL Hub](#) for students with disability.