

Life-changing accident leads to new career

An electrician on WorkCover's RISE program becomes a workplace trainer

When Patrick Kavanagh was working as an electrician back in 2003 he received an electric shock but in no way was he able to see what a life-changing event it would be.

There was massive nerve damage to his arm, and damage to the tendons. He was operated on that night, and the plastic surgeon said he wouldn't know for 12 months if the operation had even been successful. He began having physiotherapy three days a week. Many operations followed, and he was off work for two years.

"After a few months off work you start climbing the walls," says Patrick. To combat the frustration, he started taking some courses. He did a Certificate IV in Youth Work, then one in juvenile justice and, for a time, helped disadvantaged youth.

It was when he did a course in new electrical standards at a company called PEER VEET – a registered training organisation that employs apprentices and trainees on a contractual basis and places them in work – that opportunity came his way.

"Although I didn't know it at the time, it was the principal who was lecturing at that course, and he asked me if I wanted a job as a trainer. My initial reaction was, who me – teaching?! But then I thought, well, why not give it a go?"

It was this can-do attitude that set the course of Patrick's life in a new direction.

"When one door closes, another opens," he says. "I think that when a worker is seriously injured, they need intensive support to get them going – to enable them to see that other options are available.

You can get into a mindset after 15 or 20 years doing one thing that that is all you can do. I think it's really important that the people in the WorkCover system can help to identify what other qualities a person might have that they could utilise for work in other areas."

After Patrick said yes to giving it a go, he did a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment, and worked at PEER VEET for the next three years, part

The RISE program supports employers to provide a job to injured workers who cannot return to their previous employer.

By providing a job to an injured worker, the employer may be eligible for a significant financial incentive and support through RISE.

"It's a good incentive for employers to take on people who have been injured," says Patrick.

"Work is vital – I don't think people realise how important it is – to keep you busy, for the social contact, to keep you from getting depressed. Not working can be a slippery slide, especially for the long-term people on WorkCover."

Patrick's career as a teacher has gone in leaps and bounds. These days he is a lecturer at Charles Darwin University, teaching electrotechnology to apprentices.

"Five years ago, there's no way I would've believed this was possible," he says.

"People who have been in a trade should consider upskilling and becoming a trainer like I did. There's a real demand in vocational education training."

Malcolm Baxter is the OHSW Manager at PEER VEET and has been involved with the RISE program for several years.

"We've had four skilled trainers come through the system on the RISE program over the last few years. We advertise through the rehab organisations for injured workers who are trade qualified in areas that we teach, and who might be interested in becoming a qualified trainer.

"They tend to be placed with us for work hardening, and if they/we feel they are right for the job, we'll give them an interview, assist in upskilling them, and while undertaking their work hardening program, get them to complete certificates in workplace training and assessment, mandated notification training and a police clearance.

Once they obtain this training and gain their qualifications, they are employed by PEER VEET through the RISE program, and start teaching apprentices/trainees.

“For us, it’s a real benefit taking someone on this way, because we are able to source a trainer with contemporary knowledge and skills which the apprentices appreciate and relate to.

“Of course, it’s also a financial advantage for PEER VEET too, taking people through the RISE program, working with apprentices and upskilling other trades to obtain their restricted electrical licence.”

For more information on WorkCover’s RISE program, call 13 18 55.

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