

Belonging Matters' Podcast

Transcript

Series 2 Episode 11: JACKmail

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Welcome to Belonging Matters Podcast, Series Two, Employment. Also available on Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Spotify, and www.belongingmatters.org. You can email Belonging Matters on info@belongingmatters.org, and please, subscribe and share. Series Two, Episode Eleven, "JACKmail". Sally Richards is mother of Jackson West and has supported Jackson in setting up and operating JACKmail, a micro courier business operating in Canberra since 2007. JACKmail offers mail pickup and delivery to and from various businesses and the post office and has 15 clients. The service

is carried out by Jackson West with his support worker Sandor. Sandor drives the work vehicle, facilitates interaction between Jackson and JACKmail clients, and supports Jackson in all aspects of the work tasks.

In this podcast Sally describes the operational and administrative tasks involved in running JACKmail and discusses matters relating to employment and staffing. It was first published as an article by Belonging Matters in their periodical, issue 30, 'Thinking About...Micro-businesses.'

Ten years ago, a small red Berlingo van with logo, signwriting, some mail bags, a clipboard, my son Jackson and his co-worker, started delivering mail to Canberra businesses. Over 34,950 deliveries and 134,320 kms later JACKmail is still in operation!

An idea in the wee small hours gave birth to a fledgling enterprise which has developed into a sustainable, successful, valued business in the Canberra commercial arena. Like new human life, it took a good nine months to gestate and like many births it was long and painful but ultimately rewarding. And of course the product of the birth was, and is, beautiful in the eyes of its creator.

JACKmail is the business created for and around my 3rd son Jackson who has Phelan- McDermid syndrome, a small

deletion of chromosome 22. The missing piece has proteins essential for brain development and consequently Jackson has profound intellectual disability. He needs support for almost every action in every area of his life.

I could list the things he can't do but it might be more useful to name those he can. When I conceived the idea for JACKmail he was very mobile; a fabulous walker who could stride 5 kms without any trouble. He is not so active now. After a 3 month stint in hospital, he aged dramatically. But he is still able to carry objects, he loves going in the car and he loves music. Those 4 very simple things: mobility, strong hands, love of music and love of driving are the elements I focused on to develop a business for him.

A courier business made sense but what kind of courier business? This required some more thinking. The work had to be regular and predictable as this job has a deeper focus of forming relationships and of people getting to know Jackson very well. I wanted him to be missed if he didn't turn up to work.

I sought the advice and wisdom of others. Janet, a friend with a small business, suggested that there would be a market for picking up business mail from post office boxes and delivering the mail to the business premises. Over several meetings we discussed cost and how it might work. We decided to give it a go and went into action.

Unfortunately there wasn't much action for a while and so I had to do the dreaded job of business promotion. Fliers, phone calls, cold-calling businesses, articles in local newspapers, radio interviews and word-of-mouth eventually had us working at full capacity – which is still the case today.

Jackson works 5 mornings a week from 8.30 to 12.00. The mail is delivered without fail. If Jackson is sick then his support worker and driver goes solo. If the driver is sick I step into the breach.

JACKmail has never missed a day. This is despite the suicide of Jackson's father Mac, in 2009, the accident which wrote off the JACKmail van just 3 weeks after Mac's death, Jackson's 3 month stay in hospital in 2011, his being on life support for 10 days in 2014 and many other illnesses, accidents and difficulties.

Jackson has a legitimate and valued place in the ACT business community. People greet him; not just people in the offices he delivers to, but people in the street. Jackson has a high profile, the JACKmail car is distinctive and he has a positive reputation in Canberra.

More importantly, he is not seen as a passive receiver of funding, support, time, energy and resources. Jackson is seen as a contributor, a worker, a man about town, a man with a business, a uniform, a car, a colleague, a purpose and an income.

None of this could happen without partnerships and the partnerships are many; every business customer is a partner and so is Hartley Lifecare Inc. As the business has developed and as the NDIS rolled out in the ACT, it has been necessary to make changes in partnerships.

There has also been change in some of the businesses we deliver to. Businesses leave JACKmail because they move to a new suburb which is out of our area of business, they move to premises literally next door to the post office or, in one case, they moved their mail operations to another city.

JACKmail has exceeded my wildest expectations. It still requires work but this is easily incorporated into the routine of my life. I do the run sheets, invoices, bank reconciliation, seek out and visit potential new customers and keep all records.

JACKmail has given Jackson a quality of life I previously only dreamed about. He has an interesting, productive and active life and a co-worker, who respects him and values the work they do together.

The continued success of JACKmail can be attributed to a number of factors:

- The business is designed around Jackson and his likes, strengths, and support needs. JACKmail is underpinned by a clear vision for his life that includes having a meaningful job and a valued and contributing role in the community. The vision is shared by the family, the support organisation, and Jackson's support workers.
- The business is genuine – offering a real service that is reliable and fulfills a specific need for the clients. About half of the businesses have been a customer of JACKmail since the business first started.
- The business has grown a customer base in a specific geographical area, focusing on southern Canberra. This means that the deliveries remain manageable, whilst maximising revenue through a strategic route. New customers have to be in the exact geographical area.

There is a real difference between somebody giving you a job and having a job. Nobody was ever going to give Jackson a job. It didn't mean that he couldn't have a job, but it had to be a job that was his job. And I think that's possible for everybody and that the potential for other people to create person-centred employment is limitless.

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