

## Customers get top service from Town of Victoria Park's Bodie Huts

**Through the Lighthouse Project initiative, local government authorities are being supported and encouraged to increase employment of people with disability. Bodie Huts' story highlights the benefits of hiring a person with disability.**

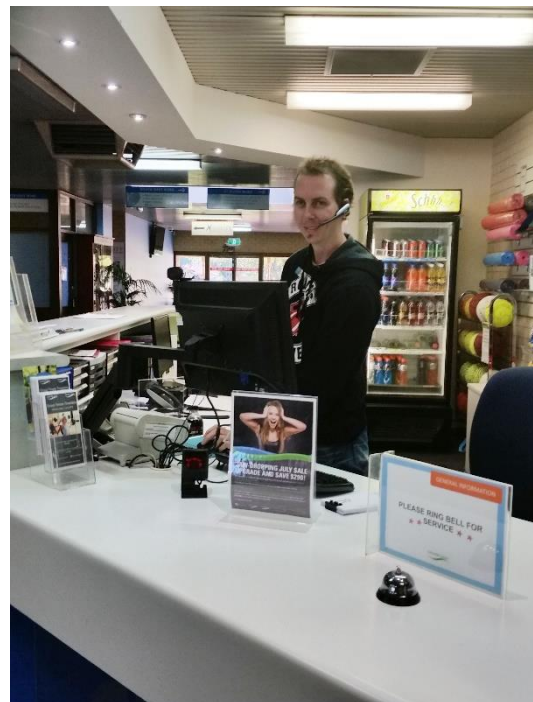
Bodie Huts is a young man of many talents – a customer service officer at LeisureLife and AquaLife at the Town of Victoria Park by day, and aspiring singer/songwriter/DJ by night.

He has auditioned for the X-Factor TV show, performed to thousands at the Burswood Theatre and other large venues, and dreams of working as a radio announcer or a full-time singer/songwriter.

Bodie has cerebral palsy and it affects the right side of his body and reduces his ability to use his right hand and right foot. When he gets tired or stressed, the direction of his left eye is affected.

Since he began working for the Town of Victoria Park in 2006, his left eye has caused him a few issues with customers who were not sure that he was actually addressing them as he didn't appear to be looking straight at them.

"I love to talk to customers, especially the regulars. I have now learned which customers are ready to chat and which customers, particularly at AquaLife, just want to come in, have a swim, and just leave," Bodie said.



"In this job, I love the freedom to be me, to play jokes and have a bit of fun, but knuckle down and get the job done when I need to." I pull pranks on my colleagues, and I really enjoy having a good time. Simple things like moving an unsuspecting colleague's mouse to the left instead of the right puts a smile on my face. Having fun in the workplace makes the day go quicker."

Bodie is a client of EDGE Employment Solutions, a Disability Employment Services (DES) provider that supports more than 500 people with disability to enter the open workforce. EDGE has placed Bodie in multiple roles since 2000, including at Big W, BP, and Ace Cinema.



In 2006, EDGE approached the Town of Victoria Park seeking a position for Bodie. After a brief chat to the manager, Bodie was appointed on a trial basis. Within a very short timeframe, Bodie proved he could do the job and he became a permanent part-time staff member.

"It's very handy. Getting a job in the best of times when you are able-bodied is hard . . . when you've got this disability, some people look straight past that, while others don't want to know you," Bodie said.

Bodie's immediate supervisor Paul Fulara said that Bodie's presence has given the Town of Victoria Park the understanding and experience of working with people with disability.

"If we were to hire Bodie or any other person with disability today, we would apply the learnings from our experience, make sure we clearly specify the tasks required for a particular role, and discuss and agree upfront the staff member's abilities to perform each task. This understanding would help separate performance issues from physical or intellectual disability challenges," Paul said.

The Town's Customer Service Team Supervisor Hayden Cooney believes local government entities are ideally suited for providing employment opportunities for people with disability due to the breadth of different positions they can offer that can meet multiple levels of physical and intellectual abilities.

"Once you are part of the organisation, local governments tend to be very accommodating," Hayden said.

Hayden recommended that local government job advertisements provided very specific detail about the tasks required of positions. He said clarity around a role would help people with disability decide if they could perform the tasks and this could encourage them to submit an application.

Hayden said the Town evaluated applications from people with disability in the same way they evaluated others, and if a person with disability was employed the Town would work with the person to ensure the physical workplace and/or workflow processes met their needs.

Bodie highly recommends working through a DES provider such as EDGE. His case manager provides support by meeting him off-site once a fortnight to have a chat, check on his progress and help out if any issues arise. She works with Bodie to understand any issues and help him work out the best approach. In some cases, she would contact his managers and the three parties would sort the issue together.

Both Paul and Hayden agree that organisations such as EDGE are very valuable, and they can help employers understand which issues are related to the disability and which issues are purely related to job performance or attitude. They give advice about equipment or tools that can make work easier for their clients. Based on EDGE's recommendation, the Town of Victoria Park has supplied Bodie with a telephone headset, to keep his left hand free to answer the phone, and a wireless



mouse, so he can operate the computer from a wider range of distances and locations.

According to Bodie, the Town's management is very flexible, supportive, approachable and understanding, particularly when he is having a 'down' day.

"I am now very comfortable going to my managers and saying that I am not comfortable with how to do a particular task," Bodie said.

Hayden echoes that thought. "Bodie does not hesitate to come forward and let us know if he is unable to do a task, but when we insist, he always says he will try his best," Hayden said.

"We like to push Bodie to extend himself. He has been at LeisureLife for a long time, and knows the job very well. While he shows no sign of lacking self-confidence when he talks about his music career, he is much less sure about his ability to handle new tasks, and sometimes needs a little bit longer to complete a task or just a push to keep trying," Paul said.

"Our experience with Bodie has taught us that employing people with disability is not so hard, and the Town is certainly very open to it and we have had an inclusion policy for a while," said Paul.

He said the Town was all about giving opportunities to stretch staff so they could grow. For example, they sent Bodie to spend some time at the call centre of the main administration building to work with some high achieving staff. He learnt more about how to excel in customer service, an experience Paul believes Bodie found valuable and enjoyable and from which he has started implementing some tips.

If at all possible, Paul suggests local government entities could employ an in-house disability coordinator to act as an internal resource for any employees with disability. He says such a role would also enable managers to work with their staff to resolve any issues related to their disability.

Bodie loves his job: "It pays the bills, is a good environment, has good people and it leaves me enough time to pursue my music and the radio as I only work 20 hours a week," he said.