

Diverse Hawkesbury

Doug from New Haven Farm Home



with Roz Chia

I was walking down Windsor Street the other day, doing that careful walk one does to avoid those solid-yet-soon-to-be-fluffy balls that are shed far and wide by the grand boulevard of plane trees that line the gateway to Richmond. I was thinking about how lucky I am to be a writer, in whose mind it's never lonely, and where there's never a shortage of words to describe any given moment of even the dreariest day. Yet, my mother describes me as one of her quieter children.

I had just come from the home of my new friend Doug, who lives in a beautiful place that's managed by New Haven Farm Home. Doug is a Darug man. He is a painter, he likes a quiet cuppa at his table, and a bit of classic rock beating away quietly on the radio. He is a man of many interests. He is also a man of very few words.

The perspectives of people with less verbal ways of communicating are so often unnoticed by us "talky" types. We live in a noisy world, and we assume that if someone doesn't speak, they have nothing to say. Sometimes, we have to learn how to listen to things other than words. It may be the world's most challenging task to write articles about people for whom words are a secondary form of communication. Of course, video is a great format for these situations, so I couldn't resist that challenge. You can find my videos at www.diversehawkesbury.net and there are still more to come in the YouTube series.

In the making of this series, I was welcomed to the homes of locals who taught me about their work lives, their creativity and their special interests. I also heard directly from them about how much they enjoy life since the nature of disability support has become far less restrictive and far more individually-tailored. You may have already noticed that the practice of herding entire groups of people into buses to drag them all to the same activity is being phased out.

In fact, CEO of New Haven Farm Home Jacques Stap says that one of the first things he did in his position as CEO was "get rid of the buses", as they were already

considered a relic of the old way.

Interestingly, New Haven Farm was the first in the entire region to establish as a social enterprise model. A working farm that allowed residents that freedom to make their own living and find empowerment via individual choices and support.

Through a historical swing through the restrictive "hostel" days and back once again to person-centred care, we now see a return to the "village" way of life. Now - just as you or I might - a resident of the Freeman's Reach and Richmond homes managed by New Haven wakes up each morning, prepares their own breakfast and heads off to work, or some other individually-tailored activity of their choosing.

Doug graciously interrupted his coffee break that day a few weeks ago to go and fetch all his painted items and display them for you all to see in my video. He channels his connection to culture and country via his art. He also showed off his wonderful painting of an Australian digger standing in a sunset-lit field of red poppies. This work was part of a recent public exhibition, and Doug takes part in creative arts groups as well as tirelessly producing his own work at home.

The fact that Doug produces painting from "both" worlds tell us that he thinks about that shared European and Darug history. You don't need to be a psychology student to imagine how beneficial this is for someone like Doug, whose innate pull towards finding identity in his ancestry is being explored via his deeply creative personality and ability.

The best thing about this kind of community inclusion is that we can all find opportunities to learn from Hawkesbury locals like Doug, whose lifelong learning and abilities are so broad and complex that they transcend language.

The Diverse Hawkesbury project is about using oral histories to educate people about all kinds of differences - differences that provide learning opportunities for all. Do you have an interesting story to tell? Head along to www.diversehawkesbury.net and let's work together to tell it.



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