

Media Release

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Parkinson's disease 'not just for old people'

"It's a big change to confront a life with disability. I've needed people around me to help understand the nature of my changing life."

Geoff was aged just 42 when he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, a progressive neurological condition that affects a person's control of their body movements.

April is [Parkinson's Awareness Month](#), a time to recognise and build awareness of the impact of living with Parkinson's.

Geoff is one of more than 219,000 Australians who have Parkinson's, and one of the 10-20% of people diagnosed in their 20s to 50s.

Working as a successful engineering lecturer, Geoff was fit and healthy, and, like many, viewed Parkinson's as "a disease for old people".

"It floored me," Geoff, now 57, recalls. He describes the impact on his life since then as "profound".

"It affects my mobility and balance; I'm constantly falling over. That's embarrassing as a grown man to be sitting at the doctors with grazed knees, I feel like a five-year-old."

One of the most challenging aspects for Geoff has been the knock to his confidence and self-worth. Finding and maintaining a job is a real struggle.

"I know at some stage I'm going to disappoint my employer – sometimes I can't get out of bed. You don't realise how connected you are with your job. When you meet someone one of the first things they ask is 'what do you do for work?' It's really hard. When you hit a life-changing illness like Parkinson, it's so deep the way it affects you."

And so, when Geoff found the [Cre8 Shed](#) in his hometown of Wangaratta, he describes it as a "revelation".

Run by for-purpose disability and aged care organisation VMCH, Cre8 gives around 45 people with disability the opportunity to learn new skills, build confidence, socialise, gain work experience, express creativity and have fun.

"I didn't know what to expect when I showed up here. But it was magical to meet people who actually understand the nature of disability, and a relief to speak to someone who understood my journey and wasn't trying to belittle me."

John Salafia, Disability Services Team Leader of Cre8tive Programs, describes Geoff as "determined, patient and kind with a great sense of humour and a wealth of knowledge."

"I feel Geoff has not only grown in his creative skills, but also his social outlet and interactions," John says. "Geoff tells us he 'feels hope again'. I think this is his greatest achievement of all."

Geoff has also become a part of the VMCH Disability Consumer Advisory Committee and the Wangaratta VMCH Advisory Group, advocating for people with disability.

The Cre8 team has also offered Geoff paid employment, when he's ready.

"The sense of having done a day's work and producing something is great," Geoff says. "That's always been important to me. I feel so comfortable and happy now that I have purpose and focus. Cre8 is like a home, like a big family."

For more information on Cre8 or other disability programs, call 1300 698 624.

Media enquiries

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, love, joy, hospitality and courage aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and passionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

