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Centenary University Takes the Fear and Stigma Out of Disability Services

By Marsali Endrizzi



I haven't always been disabled. When I got sick, it changed a lot of things. Not only did I suddenly have physical limitations to the things I normally did. But I suddenly had to change and modify nearly everything. With other things, I simply had to accept that I couldn't do them anymore. It changed my identity. While I don't view myself as "disabled", there are clear indicators that I am. Every day there are things that physically remind me that there are now limits to what I can do. Every day, I am faced with these limitations I cannot deny or hide from.

The time between my becoming disabled and becoming a student was large enough for me not to have to deal with both at the same time. But when I did become a student, I was faced with the idea of having to say it out loud. It wasn't just a placard in my car for closer access to a building or having to use a motorized cart in a grocery store, or a cane or walker to walk on bad days.

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It was on paper. In the place I intended to get my college degree. It would ring in the ears of the person I dared utter the words “I have a disability” too. It almost put a stop to my journey of getting the very thing that would enable me to get a decent paying job to support my family; a degree.

It was made real all over again, brought freshly to the surface by the idea of getting the disability assistance I was entitled to. Services that I needed. So, I did what to me, any other person dealing with that would do. I ran from it. I denied myself the opportunity to be reasonably accommodated due to the seemingly insurmountable task ahead of me to get it.

The daunting task of collecting all my medical paperwork, filling out the application, contacting my busy doctor’s office and talking to someone in the Disability Services Office. Fear stopped me. Being seen stopped me. For two years I went without the assistance I needed. Two years I struggled to get to a classroom. Two years I forced my body to do what it couldn’t, just to show up and get the work done. It was difficult. It resulted in more problems than solutions in terms of my illness. I missed classes because I became physically unable to attend. I had more and more/ new symptoms; I caused unnecessary stress to my body and agitated my condition because of fear.

Then I moved to a bachelor’s program and a new school. Centenary University took my version of Goliath and crushed it. They saved me from my own struggles with my disability. They took this daunting task and broke it down and made it as easy as choosing my classes. The process was a far cry from what experience had taught me was an impossible and stressful task.

Centenary’s Disabilities Office provided a stress-free process that moved along at my pace. They made it clear that my medical condition was confidential and made sure I felt comfortable with every step of the application process. They took my fear of the beast called Stigma and slayed it. No one, outside of those who needed to know, knew that I am disabled. The fear of being treated differently is no more.

Centenary University has taken the time to place people in the Disability Services Office that not only makes you feel comfortable but welcome and by extension made me more comfortable with my limitations and being open about it. The University has made the office, and my classes easily accessible so that whether I’m having a ‘good day’ or a ‘bad day’ I have full access to my classes and their services.

Thank you, Centenary. You’ve made a world of difference for someone who assumed everything would always be a struggle after their diagnosis.

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