

Cameron Whitelaw's Story...

Who is Cameron Whitelaw?

To all who know him, Cameron Whitelaw is quite a character. He is a young man with a quirky sense of humour who enjoys having as much fun as possible who also has an intellectual disability. Typical for his age, he loves listening to music, watching TV, going to the beach (any time of year) and just hanging out. Cameron also likes fast, loud cars – particularly when he gets to ride in them! Cam is fortunate to live in his own home, is the Principal operator of his business CAM CAN & Associates and is an active contributor in his local community. Above all, Cameron now has people in his life that he is proud to know as his friends.

Cameron is a family member with several brothers and sisters from blended families, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. A number of Cameron's family are actively involved in helping him to achieve his goals and wishes. He very much enjoys going out with friends and family but is always happy to return to his own home. Cameron's house mate is another person who Cameron has grown to become good friends with, not to mention his next door neighbour too!

Life for Cameron has never been better however, getting to this stage has taken quite some doing. **Believing** in Cameron, **planning** using a [Person Centred Thinking](#) approach and forming a circle of support – “Cameron Whitelaw's Support Crew” have been the three key ingredients bringing about a good life and a safe life for Cameron.

Early years and school days

Although Cameron was born with a disability, it was not noticed until he was approximately twelve months of age. The older he grew the more apparent his disability became. Most of the support provided to Cameron in his early years was at best underwhelming. His life before school consisted of doctors' appointments, specialist assessments and endless therapy. His family experienced exclusion and isolation.

When Cameron started school things quickly took a turn for the worse. The Education Department decided that their multibillion dollar system could not cope with educating a six year old child in a typical classroom setting. Cameron became a label that needed to be managed. He spent his entire primary and secondary school years segregated and congregated in educational support. Cameron's 13 years of schooling amounted to very little.

At the age of 17, Cameron was unsure of what he would do when he left school. Cameron's parents were also perplexed as to what he would/could do at the end of his school years. Most people in Cameron's life thought that he would leave school and attend a sheltered workshop or maybe spend the rest of his life wandering around our community aimlessly. All the so called professionals advised that Cameron was too challenging and that little should be expected of him or for his future.

This was not the life Cameron's family wanted for him. They held him in high esteem and expected much more of him and for him. The challenge to create a better life for Cameron was one his family and friends embraced willingly.

The inspiration

Four years before Cameron finished school, Cameron's family decided that if left to "the system" Cam's life after school may once again take a turn for the worse. At that point there were no recognisable friendships or relationships outside the family in Cam's life. His parents knew they needed to do something about this as a matter of urgency. They were fortunate enough to meet a number of very creative and knowledgeable people. One such person was Eddie Bartnik. Eddie is well known to many people with disabilities in WA as he has dedicated his life to improving government and non government support to people with disabilities in WA. Eddie has also spent a great deal of time promoting the importance of family leadership and governance.

It is very rare in life that one experiences a light bulb or eureka moment, it is rarer again that one recognises the importance of that moment. Cameron's parents were very grateful that they experienced such a moment. Having been invited to attend a meeting where Eddie

was to talk about a new idea that he discovered on his travels around the world. Eddie had recently been to Canada and met people who described their strategy of gathering a small group of friends and family to assist their family member with a disability to plan for their future. A circle of support, friends, a network, and this idea takes many names but its beauty is in its simplicity. The notion of inviting others to help Cam plan for his future was the challenge that Eddie left with them that day. Not the sort of people to shy away from a challenge, Cameron's parents decided that this idea was exactly what they needed.

Looking to the future

Initially Cameron's family were apprehensive about asking others for help, firstly because it is difficult admitting that help is needed and secondly, they were scared of being rejected yet again. However, in the true Aussie spirit of a fair go for all, people stepped up to be part of what is now called [Cameron Whitelaw's Support Crew](#) (Cam's Crew) and they have never



looked back.

Using the Person Centred Thinking approach a Planning Day was arranged for Cameron. Cameron gathered together with family and friends for an afternoon with the assistance of two helpful facilitators spent identifying all the things that were important to enable Cameron to experience a good life, his goals, dreams and wishes.

Cameron's life was laid out from that particular point of time, right up to how it could look in one year and what steps would need to be taken for the goals to be achieved.



Not long after Planning Day, Cam's Crew started meeting on a regular basis to bring the Plan to life.



This group of incredible people have spent many hours helping Cam create a good and fulfilling life in his community. Together, amongst many other things, they created Cam-Can & Associates; Cameron now has a number of people that he can call friend and he has also moved into his own home in Willagee.

Cameron still needs the support of people around him and everyone acknowledges the importance of the paid support in his life however, who amongst us would embrace a life devoid of freely given friendships? Which one of us would like to be congregated and segregated based on a wayward gene developed before we were born? And who would support a system that did not acknowledge, respect and cherish the individual that is you? Remember, anyone of us are a slip in the shower, a motor vehicle accident or sporting injury away from being recipient of services, a disabled person and “a client of the system”. What Cameron’s Crew wanted for Cameron is what everyone wants for themselves. **THIS IS THEIR MISSION.**