

Epilepsy Action

NOVA Employment is both a registered charity and a public benevolent institution.

So what on earth were we doing raising money for Epilepsy Action?

The answer is Renee made us!

Renee Maconachie is a former job seeker (now worker) who came to NOVA for help finding a job. Renee has built strong friendships with my Forster team and Margo Isbill, the Forster Manager was persuaded to help Renee raise money for Epilepsy Action. ***What to do?***

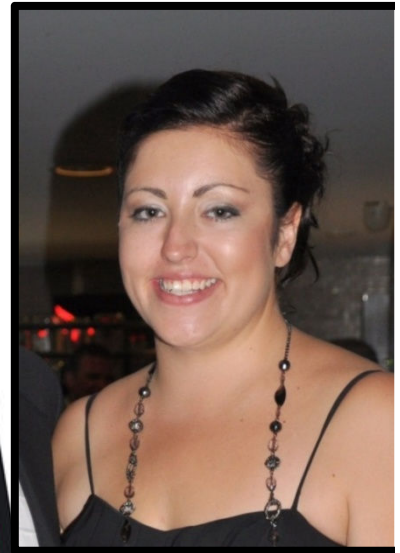
The ladies decided on a fundraising dinner and invited some high profile epilepsy sufferers to get on board.

Without NOVA's official help they sought sponsorship from other local businesses, acquired some great items for a auction that included some significant sporting memorabilia, jewellery, holidays, clothing and more.

So much enthusiasm did my North Coast staff show that getting on board as official sponsors was the only right thing to do. NOVA Employment became the major sponsors

There was a modelling parade from two local clothing stores and a couple of great bands.

I also made a brief speech learning never again to come on after Paul Wade, former Socceroos captain who's truly inspirational, funny and motivating on a cause that is obviously important to him and Wally Lewis (by video) as a sufferer.



Renee Maconachie

To view video of the night
click here

www.novaemployment.com.au/webcast.a

Renee's Story

"Since the age of 13, I have had epilepsy. They say that high school is meant to be the best years of your life, well for me that wasn't the case. In my first year of school, I had my first seizure in front of my class mates. They had no idea what was happening, as did I at the time. The teacher had no knowledge of epilepsy. As you could imagine, I was the talk of the school and living in a small coastal town word got around quick. Suddenly I went from regular school girl to the talk of the town. I was teased and called all types of insulting names. The girl I was before this episode was confident, well liked and accepted. I always wanted to participate in sport and school activities. I was captain of my soccer, netball and touch footy teams. But I couldn't do that anymore. I became depressed trying to find the answer as to why it had to be me. Suddenly I lost a lot of friends as they didn't want to be around me in case I would have a seizure. At the time I was angry and confused as to why they didn't want to be my friend anymore, but now that I have lived with this condition for seven years I can understand. My friends were no different to anyone else in the community, no one knew about epilepsy until my story got out. But still they weren't educated. I was looked upon as a girl with a disability. Three years passed from my first seizure. Not a day went by when I didn't have a seizure. I would have up to 30 a day. My family and I did some research into epilepsy which then led to knowledge of breakthrough surgery. My parents then contacted a well known Neurologist and Neurosurgeon at Sydney's Westmead Hospital. I was assessed for surgery [and at] 16 I was told I would be having brain surgery.... I was terrified but still wanted to go ahead with the operation with the hopes of it stopping the seizures, and I could go back to the girl I was before. Recovering from the operation was hard. Learning how to talk, walk and communicating again. Something I never thought I would have to go through. My operation was not as successful as I hoped for I was depressed and became suicidal wanting to end everything. Over the past seven years I turned to drinking to try and get away from the girl with a disability, just trying to fit in. This became another problem. I have had ongoing counselling which has helped me. I have now learnt to live with the condition and have a lot of support from family, friends and support groups such as Nova Employment who helped me find employment. When I started working a lot of those thoughts I had in my head would go away, and working made me feel like a normal human being. My goal now is to raise funds and awareness by having a benefit night about epilepsy supporting the foundation 'EPILEPSY ACTION'."





Wally Lewis clearly remembers the day his world turned upside down. "I was sitting at home one morning watching television and just started getting this uncomfortable feeling," he said. "The things I was hearing made no sense. The things I was watching seemed to be backwards, upside down, and the wrong way around."



This disturbing experience was an epileptic seizure.

Wally was first diagnosed with epilepsy in the late 1980s, while still playing in some of the most famous matches of his career. He was prescribed medication and thought that was it. Even though his football career continued until 1992, the public did not become aware of his epilepsy until two years ago when he experienced a couple of on-air episodes while reading the Nine sports bulletin. Doctors told him the TV incidents were symptoms his medication was no longer effective. Agreeing to surgery was difficult, but unavoidable.

Wally's battle was not just with epilepsy, but also with the depression it caused and he has since admitted that he even considered suicide. Wally said that his feelings had ranged from an incapacitating sense of failure, embarrassment and fear of having a seizure in public, to panic and sadness after undergoing brain surgery in early 2007 to treat epilepsy. Wally used to arrive on the set of Channel Nine every night and would be absolutely petrified that he was going to have another seizure on camera.

Renee felt that this night would not be the same without the man that inspired her to take action. So she wrote to Wally Lewis and bravely told her story. The letter, published on the cover page of this e-zine, concluded with the following invitation for him and his family to attend

"I personally look up to you. I watched the 60 minutes interview and felt overwhelmed with emotion, because I identified myself in everything you said. I may not be in the public eye but I still know what it feels like. Whether you are a well known identity or a person in the street, having a seizure is very confronting and embarrassing for people. The courage you had to do that interview has inspired me to hold this benefit night. So I have to thank you for this. I want to show others that just because they have this condition it does not mean they have to sit on the sidelines! They can be out on that field instead! Whether it be acting, playing sport or working in a regular store. They can be on the field just as much as any other person. My dream would come true if you were able to make it down for this benefit night I cannot tell you how much it would mean to me and my family if you were able to come...."

Wally is now looking to help others and hopes to be an inspiration to those that are suffering. It is for this reason that he responded to Renee's letter with a moving video presentation.

This incredible night was hosted by Marshal Loadsman a local radio presenter, sports fanatic and charity worker. Marshal welcomed guests, introduced guest speakers and thanked NOVA Employment and others for their promotion and sponsorship.

Thank you Marshal for your generosity and support.



Welcome to Country was presented by Aunty Donna who paid respect to the Worimi Nation, traditional custodians of the land and acknowledged and paid respect to the Elders past and present.

LOVING WORK

Whilst job seeking with Renee and we attended an interview for a position at the local Kmart store. During the Interview with the store Manager Michael Gill Renee disclosed her disability and described how her epilepsy impacted on her daily life. Michael seemed truly interested and wanted to know what support she may need in the workplace. At the conclusion of the interview Michael said that he was willing think about employing Renee. To our surprise, before we had even made it out of the store Michael caught up with us and actually offered Renee a position and start date. Renee started to cry. She could not believe someone would listen to her the way he had and then make such a quick decision. I think he knew what he was doing – he had just hired a responsible worker, who wanted to work.

Renee began working at Kmart and soon the negative thoughts she had experienced went away. Renee told me that working made her feel normal and that she was finally able to feel that she had purpose in her life. Renee loves her job and now feels she can support her family in return for the support they had given her.

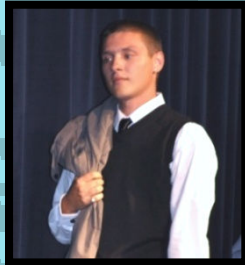
Renee's manager has nicknamed her SMILEY and because of her enthusiasm and reliability she has been nominated for worker of the month.

It's amazing what can happen when given a chance!



Fashion Affair

The night began with a fashion parade hosted by Jan Williams. Jan is the owner of ONE HAIR & BEAUTY in Forster and loves being involved in promoting a good cause, her enthusiasm is contagious! Models Luke, Kate, Cameron, Kay, Jamie, Christy, Judy, Gail, Jess and Dorothy enjoyed showing the great fashions that can be found at Ed Harry's Menswear, Sassii Boutique and Margo's Fashions. Jewellery by Michelle's, make-up by Aqua Marine and hair by One Hair and Beauty. **Thank you to you all.**



Paul Wade

Despite having epilepsy, "Wadey" as he is known around the world, had a remarkable International career including the Olympic Games, two world cup campaigns and one of the toughest tasks in world football to "mark Diego Maradona" in the two legged world cup play off with Argentina.

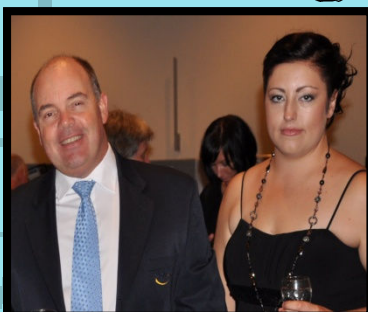
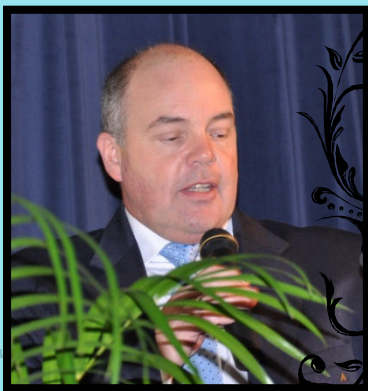
In a career with over 100 appearances for his country, Paul also won two National Soccer League championships and was voted NSL player of the year in 1988.

As well as his illustrious club career, Paul was one of Australia's greatest and longest serving Socceroos. In an international career spanning 10 years, in which he was captain for a large part, he won 118 caps for Australia.

As a special guest speaker for the night, Paul was inspirational when he spoke about the need to find a balance between living your life and epilepsy. At one stage Paul was experiencing up to five seizures a day. These seizures left Paul embarrassed and confused so he under went brain surgery to prevent more seizures. His surgery was successful and today enjoys a better quality of life.

Paul acknowledged Renee's strength and it was for this reason he attended the night Paul encapsulated the night when he said,

"I don't want your sympathy just your understanding".



Martin Wren - C.E.O. NOVA Employment

Martin Wren has been C.E.O. of NOVA Employment and Training for nearly 20 years. He has a set of fixed beliefs that include an absolute conviction in the right of each person to work, an appreciation of the value of every person's contribution and, perhaps above all other things, a conviction that a duty exists to empower every person in our society to achieve their full potential. Martin sees participation in the workforce as both vital and life defining.

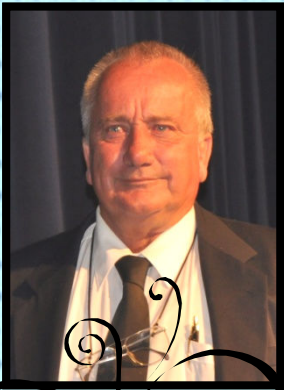
An inspirational speaker, Martin asked us to go back to a time when we were younger and people asked us what we wanted to do when we grew up. He reminded us that a lot of our life revolves around our employment. He then asked us to imagine what it would be like to be unemployed as well as having a disability.

For over 20 years, NOVA has helped people with a disability overcome their barriers to employment. NOVA focuses on ability, not disability, and exists to help people with a disability who want to work, find meaningful jobs of their choice. To help people with a disability go from jobseekers to taxpayers.

Martin said that NOVA was very pleased to sponsor this night and to support Epilepsy Action and the important work they do.

At NOVA Employment our professional staff's mission is to help people with a disability find and keep satisfying jobs of their choice. For more information please visit:

www.novaemployment.com.au or freecall 1300ABILITY



The Auction

Local businessman Doug Bennett, graciously acted as auctioneer for the evening, encouraging guests to bid on a range of items that had been kindly donated by businesses and local sports personalities. Items included autographed NRL jerseys, a cricket bat signed by NSW cricket great Steve Waugh and even a pearl necklace.

The night raised an incredible **\$17 000 for Epilepsy Action Australia.**



NOVA's Dedicated Staff

When it comes to management and employees you would be challenged to find a more dedicated and hard working staff than that of NOVA Employment and Training. Once again their support and their care for others was shown in their attendance at this fund raiser. Many, including NOVA's volunteer Management Committee, C.E.O., Senior Executive, Outlet Managers and staff travelled from around the state to attend and demonstrate their support.



And the FUN continued

The fun, laughter and dancing continued throughout the night thanks to the incredible sounds of **OZ Connect** and **Darren Jack Band**.

Special Thanks must go to Ray Lawlis, Rachael Hartly, and the staff of NOVA, Ian Johnson, Heather Smith, Sandra Ayoub, Sharon Mulliet, Leanne Wood and Jess Burton, who volunteered their time to ensure the night was a great success.

