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Hunter NDIS participant, Geoff Locock has been nominated for a Hunter Diversity and Inclusion Collective Local Leadership Award for the dedication he has shown, creating an inclusive group for the Deafblind in the Hunter.

Geoff, 43, who is also Deafblind, and from his own admission quite social, cheeky and adventurous, decided he would take over the Hunter Deaf and Blind Group when its original founder moved away to keep momentum up and to get more people involved.

Described by many as living an isolated life due to communication constrains, Geoff knew how incredibly important it was to keep the group going and with NDIS support he could.

Now he’s got a huge group of people who are Deafblind, from all walks of life, socialising regularly at coffee catch-ups and activity days, sharing experiences and having lots of fun.

“We all love it. We do so much fun stuff together,” he said. “We try new activities and go to places many of us have never been before.

“We’ve done shark and sting ray feeding in the water; indoor rock climbing; we had a motorcycle group come to one of our events so we could all experience riding on a Harley Davidson.

“We also visited a fire station to learn about fire safety, and we ended up teaching them all about Deafblindness!”

Geoff said as a group they all decide on an activity and he coordinates the event to make sure everything is accessible.

“There’s a lot to think about to make sure the day and the activity meets everyone’s needs,” he said.

“Areas need to be well lit; not too noisy, wheelchair accessible, guide dog friendly; have suitable parking; room for all of us, and people need ample time to arrange their supports and interpreters.

“I try to visit each location first. Sometimes I need to talk to the venue operators to explain about our group so they’re prepared when we arrive.

“I enjoy doing all the research, then I send everyone the information via emails and send out reminders as the date gets closer.

“The Hunter Deafblind Project also assists me to organise outings. Some members live in group homes so we need to contact support coordinators and house managers to ensure people have support so they can come along.”

Geoff said when the group gets together he feels “fantastic”. “We’re out socialising, having fun; we laugh, stir each other up, and we’re creating great memories,” he said.

“I also love the fact this group gives us an opportunity to learn from each other and support each other with information, and occasionally we’ll use some of the time to conduct workshops on a topic we would like to know more about. It’s just incredible,”

Hunter Diversity and Inclusion Collective spokesperson, Bill Armstrong, said HDIC recognises Geoff as a true leader who works tirelessly to facilitate greater inclusion for Deafblind people throughout the Hunter region.

“Geoff goes above and beyond in his work facilitating the Hunter Deaf and Blind Group, and we think his work needs to be acknowledged and celebrated,” he said.

“He’s a dedicated advocate, committed to supporting his deafblind peers to ensure they don’t experience feelings of isolation, and because of his efforts they feel very much valued members of society and very much included in their community.”

Award recipients will be announced at an award ceremony in Newcastle on International Day of People with Disability, December 3, at the Blind Monk, in Hamilton.

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