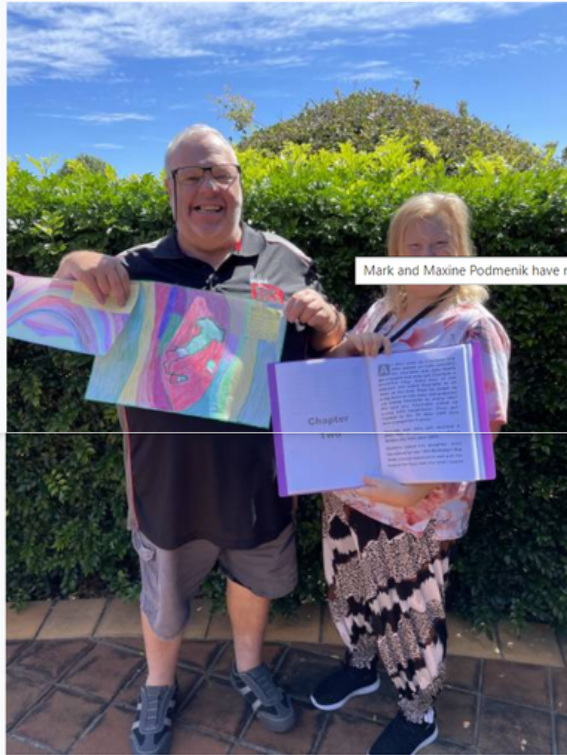


Mark and Maxine inspiring couples with disability to achieve their goals together

Advertising Feature



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Maxine Podmenik is about to publish her first book on Amazon Kindle. She has been working on it for months, but it's a story she has wanted to tell for a lot longer than that.

As a woman with disability, Maxine has suffered her (un)fair share of discrimination.

"I've been bullied my whole life," she says. "I was bullied at school and then I went to work at [an ADE] and I wasn't treated well there at all."

Throughout the hardships, Mark, her husband of 23 years, has been by her side. "Mark's my rock, he is fantastic," Maxine says.

"He's been amazing with my daughter too. He's been in her life since she was two years old and loves her like she's his own."

Mark says: "I'm grateful I've had the opportunity to be a father, even without having children of my own."

Coworking space

In May last year, Mark and Maxine joined Avenue Newcastle, a coworking space where people with disability are empowered to contribute to thriving microbusinesses and share in the profits, or run their own businesses as entrepreneurs.

Mark has had the chance to express his love of art as an entrepreneur at Avenue. He creates beautiful designs and uploads them to be printed onto products which people can purchase through a site called Redbubble.

Avenue is a social enterprise of Fighting Chance, which designs, builds and scales social enterprises which move the dial for Australians with disability and their family.

For Maxine, Avenue is where she found the space and support to write the book that she knew she had inside her.

"I always wanted to do it, but I just didn't know where to start. Then [Avenue staff] encouraged me just to do it. To sit down and start writing. I started writing and didn't stop. Hours at a time, two days a week at Avenue, for five months, until it was finished."

Both Maxine and Mark feel well supported at Avenue. "The people are incredible, they really care about you. It's a nice environment, we're good friends with a lot of the other people who come here, too," Mark says.

Mark and Maxine want to encourage other couples to support each other the way they have.

Communication is key for couples

Their advice for others? "Communicate, always. If something's not right, talk about it," Mark says.

"You can't be happy unless you accept yourself, and accept your disability," Maxine says. "I didn't accept my disability when I was younger."

That's why she's already looking to her next project - a children's book. She wants to spread the message of self-acceptance to those who need to hear it most: young people growing up with a disability.

Mark's next step will be a collaboration with Avenue's Markets Team, to sell his products at community markets.

"There are a lot of opportunities out there," Mark says. "We're excited to see what we can do next with Avenue."

