



HELPING LOCALS: Ability Links Tamworth's Anitra Larsen, left, and Annemaree Davis are getting ready for the office's official opening on December 4.
Photo: Gareth Gardner 241114GGD01

Links help carers make connections

By Lyndsay Jameson

THE Tamworth office of a program that helps people with a disability feel included in their community will have its official opening early next month.

New England North West Ability Links Tamworth's office at 127 Bridge St has been operating for about the past month, but will be officially introduced to the city on December 4.

Ability Links co-ordinator Lynn Lennon said the organisation was also focused on helping the families and carers of people with a disability to connect with resources and opportunities in their community.

"We're sort of moving to this person-centred and individualised funding arrangements through the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme), so the Ability Links program is being brought out as a stepping stone, so that any of the people that want to work with our program have got a one-stop shop," Ms Lennon said.

"They can come and ask about services, but more importantly ask about those community groups – social groups, sporting groups – that are out there that they previously may not have known about.

"The other part of our program is about social inclusion – working with businesses, community groups and sporting groups and having conversations about how they can be more inclusive of people with disabilities.

"This program is sort of broadening horizons for participants, so that they can be included in their communities in all shapes and sizes.

ties that they can share with us and that we're not actually embracing at the moment."

Ms Lennon said the group could link people with a disability to locals who could help them to do things like play music or go for a bike ride.

"If we (able-bodied) people want to go for a bike ride, we just jump on a bike and zoom off. We take those small things in life for granted," she said.

"When we meet with individuals (clients), we actually sit down and we talk about their hopes and dreams and what they would like to see happen in their lives. Those kinds of questions are really unheard of in the service world. We really take a different approach.

"By doing that, it sort of facilitates a more of an open conversation, because people see that we understand where we're coming from."

Ability Links' clients are aged between nine and 64 and don't require a formal disability diagnosis from a doctor to enjoy the program's benefits.

"We've had people ask us for assistance to get to karaoke, horse riding and joining a lapidary club. You'll often see the linkers out and about and attending social functions," Ms Lennon said.

Ability Links was made a reality thanks to Pathfinders and the North West Alliance and other local organisations.

The launch will include a performance by students of the Tamworth Conservatorium of Music and be followed by an afternoon tea and a chance to meet both of Tamworth's "linkers" and find out more about the program.

For more information call Tamworth