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# Cam Can Services

## Your Time is My Business



*The concept of creating Cam Can, a Disability Services Organisation in Western Australia, was borne out of Marc and Anthea Lema's personal experience in creating innovative supports for their son Cameron who has an intellectual disability.*

*Cameron is the proprietor of his own business which has been successfully operating for over a decade. Cam also moved into his own home at the age of 18 where he continues to live with his flat mate, now good friend. Cam lives a meaningful and active life in his local community. In this article Anthea and Marc describe the reason Cam Can Services was created, how it works and other important features of Cameron's business.*

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### **About Cameron, the proprietor**

Cameron is a young man with great zest for life! Cam lives in his own home in the community - he has shared his home with a fabulous guy in a typical flat mate arrangement since 2009. Cam also has a profound intellectual disability, he has an unsteady gait, epilepsy and some visual issues. Cam is not able to speak and receives support to help with daily tasks and personal care. In spite of any perceived obstacles, Cam lives a full life, not only operating his own business but also enjoying the opportunity to participate in a variety of recreational and community activities such as swimming at the beach, going to the gym, learning to box, watching indoor table tennis and basketball. Cam has also developed a love for music as numerous people around him, including his flat mate, play guitar and sing and always include Cam. Over the years that Cam has been living in his home, he has also made a few friends and numerous contacts in the community.

### **Why a small business for Cam?**

Cameron's parents strongly believed in Cameron's capacity and had a vision for him to run a proper business as a real alternative to attending a sheltered workshop which was the only option the service system could offer Cameron at that time. The proposed business was centred around Cameron's needs and interests. One of the Guiding Principles was that "All support/services will be customised and individualised for Cameron with a focus on expanding Cameron's personal community and his social connections."

### **How did Cameron's business "Cam Can Services" get started?**

To develop the original plan for the business a group of 11 people including Cameron, worked on the concept. This group or "Circle of Friends" became known as "Cam's Support Crew".

The group consisted of family members and a few friends who knew Cam. Some of Cam's Crew members also had experience in areas that would be helpful in setting up a small business enterprise. Even before developing the business plan, a set of fundamental Operating Principles were established to ensure that all decisions made could be tested for their integrity. Once the Business Plan was in place, a subgroup of Cam's Support Crew formed consisting of four members and they became primarily responsible for developing the business, regularly feeding progress back to the larger group and engaging with them for consensus and future direction. Important principles developed by the group which determined the development and direction of Cam Can Services were:

- The business needed to be flexible to suit Cameron
- It must be built around Cameron's interests and skills and must be meaningful to him
- It shall provide the opportunity for Cam to further develop skill and meet people
- It must be a typical small business offering quality services – NO cap in hand
- Opportunities for mutual benefit must be sought and
- Finally, the business will provide Cam with a real income and potentially financial independence.

### **What is Cam Can Services?**

Cam Can Services "Your Time is My Business" provides a waiting service. It is designed to save busy people taking time away from work to wait for deliveries or a service to be provided. While waiting, Cam (and his support worker) offer a range of other services such as washing the car, sweeping the path, raking the grass – for a nominal cost.

Who would have thought of a waiting service? Cam's father experienced the "light bulb moment" while waiting at home for a tradesperson during a renovation project. He was frustrated at having to take half a day off work waiting! (Time he would much rather have put towards annual leave). He noticed Cam sitting patiently on the couch and thought... "Cam is very good at waiting". Cam has to wait for someone to get him up, to dress him, to help him with his meals, to take him anywhere. He asked himself "How can we turn this skill into a business??"

### **What's in a name?**

Why "CAM CAN"? Throughout his life, everyone said that Cam couldn't. People said he was not capable of doing anything. He wasn't allowed to participate in many school events or activities, he was excluded from mainstream life. Cam Can is an ingenious and catchy name which lives up to what it stands for – no longer does anyone say "Cam can't" because Cam most definitely CAN!

Cam's business is targeted at busy working people. These days, customers tend to be people who want to support Cameron's business and returning customers who generally live within a 20 minute drive of his home.

Cam has a business Coordinator who takes the calls from customers, schedules bookings, prepares invoices etc. and communicates between the customer and the people who help Cameron to provide the service. Cameron's support workers are the quality control to ensure work is done to a high standard. It is also their responsibility to actively engage Cameron in the work being carried out.

## **Looking Cool**

Cameron and his support workers look the part – they wear shirts and caps branded with the business name and always look smart. The gear they use is maintained in such a way that the kit is always fully stocked and ready to operate with each new job. Cam now has his own vehicle which the support worker drives. The vehicle is also easy to identify with the Cam Can Services logo affixed to the windows.

A great benefit to Cameron is that he knows what to expect each day from the moment he puts his shirt on. His reliable team of support workers know exactly how to engage Cameron at work so that he can work at his best every time. They are experienced in providing support to Cam and have the capacity to ensure a high standard of service is delivered. Feedback is actively sought and a strategy for continuous improvement has been implemented.

## **Short term pain for long term gain!**

There is no hiding from the fact that a lot of work was involved in getting a small business enterprise up and running successfully for Cameron. The early stages were particularly challenging. Asking people to help was not easy however it was very pleasing to see people were actually excited to be invited to be a part of something which had the potential to make a huge difference in Cameron's life. Having a vision, a clear plan, people who were willing to get in and walk the walk along with a leader who could direct and keep the group motivated and on task – these elements were all critical to the success in creating Cam Can Services.

## **Is starting a business really worth considering?**

It might not be for everyone. However, for Cameron there was no other reasonable option as his family would not settle for any alternative that the system offered. Cameron's business is tailored to suit him and has been extremely successful in more ways than one:

- It gives Cameron meaningful things to do every day and he feels a sense of purpose
- The business is flexible and works around Cameron's health and other factors
- Cameron has responsibilities – people have high expectations of him
- The cost in setting the business up was minimal
- Working with universities and TAFE colleges to build his website, design his logo and provide marketing assistance resulted in the formation of strong bonds
- Cameron continually meets new people
- He builds on the skills he has and continues to develop new skills – he experiences variety in his work
- Cameron has matured. He is a contributing member of his community
- Cameron is challenged
- Cameron has made some friends and many acquaintances
- Cameron earns an income!

Above all, Cameron is now a content and happy individual who is highly regarded for his accomplishments and well respected in his community. He is no longer stressed and angry. Cam can be trusted to do things his family always hoped would be possible. In a relatively short period of time, Cameron has become a likeable, cooperative and engaging young man. These qualities alone speak volumes in favour of the benefits gained from customising a small business enterprise for Cameron.