

## “My Internship Experience” by Sarah – a marketing student

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[Stepping into...™](#) is a unique internship program designed to assist students with disability enter their chosen profession. The program has been designed to give you, the student, an opportunity to understand the inner workings of a professional organisation, and gain valuable work experience. This is an important opportunity to showcase your talents and gather experience, information and skills to better assist you to enter the competitive marketplace of employment. For more information please contact Rebecca Brooks, “Stepping into...™ 2011”, Australian Network on Disability by email at [rebecca.brooks@and.org.au](mailto:rebecca.brooks@and.org.au) or visit the website [www.and.org.au](http://www.and.org.au)

Sarah is a marketing student who has a physical disability. She participated in the *stepping into* program earlier this year and found the experience ‘life changing and really rewarding’. She found out about *Stepping into* through the National Disability Coordination Officer program and has agreed to share her experiences (and lessons learned).



### **PART ONE**

Thursday - Today is the first information day for the Stepping into program. I've filled out and sent in my forms and all the other documents that were asked for and today I'm heading down to Pitt Street to meet with the organisers and other students like me that are looking to get internships.

It's a bit of a rainy day - and that makes me nervous because I'm not that steady on my feet when it's wet and slippery so I've decided to book a taxi because I know it can take me right up to the door and I won't need to worry about falling over.

I've been thinking about what I'm going to wear today. In my information book it said to wear business attire but I know that can mean a lot of different things depending on which business you're working in. I've decided on something pretty standard and safe for this first session -- black shoes, black pants, a white collared shirt and black blazer. Very simple and a little bit boring but I think it's better to start conservatively and then get a feel for how other people dress.

I hear the call that my taxi has arrived and before long I'm getting out right at the front of the building on Pitt Street. I know exactly where I need to be because I came to check it out when I was given the address last week. I'm here about 10 minutes

early but before long the other students arrive. My first impressions are pretty mixed some people arrive on time in appropriate clothing and have obviously taken some time to read through the information we've been provided with but others arrived late, are wearing casual clothing (even tracksuits!) and are continually asking questions that they already have the answers to if they had bothered to read the information book.

The information session begins and we are told about the different components of the internships that are available. During the break I get chatting to some other students and they are all friendly and excited about the possibility of being asked to take part in the stepping into program. The students have a wide variety of disabilities and we are all given the opportunity to talk one-on-one with the coordinators about the adjustments we would need if we were to get an internship. This is really great because it's the first time I'll be working in a corporate environment and I don't know much about reasonable adjustments. The coordinators are really helpful in talking to you about exactly what you need and the ways that companies can accommodate you. It's clear that we won't be given an easy ride but adjustments will be made so that we are on level ground with the other employees. For me, I am able to ask for accessible parking, use of my voice to text software and also the possibility of working shorter hours.

The session comes to an end and I leave excited and hopeful about getting an internship. I've applied for a marketing program and I'm really looking forward to finally putting all the theory of land at uni into practice. The next step is an interview with an employer and then, hopefully starting an internship.

## **PART TWO**

Tuesday - It's the day of the interview and I'm heading down to Castlereagh Street for my appointment at 11am. It's not the first interview I've been to but it's the first one since acquiring my disability so I'm pretty nervous. Leading up to today I've been thinking about the questions that the interviewer is likely to ask me, the type of clothes I should wear for this particular company and some questions that I can ask them to show my interest in the kind of projects they do.

I've taken a family member along for the journey down and we plan to part ways when I get to the building and meet up again after my interview. I'm really lucky that someone in my family can give me this support on my interview day and it makes me feel a lot calmer. We arrived at the building and I'm now on my own. One of the company's human resource employees has been in touch with me via e-mail and given me directions and information on how to get to my interview. In the e-mails we've also discussed any adjustments I need on interview day. For me this means lift access and minimal amounts of walking. Because it's such a large company there

are numerous lifts available to get me around the office and I easily find the reception level where I sign in and wait.

There is a lot of action going on with people walking up and down stairs, going in and out of offices and meeting clients. It makes me feel less anxious because while it feels like a really big deal for me to be here it's a very small part of what's going on overall and I don't feel like the focus of everyone's attention. I'm also wearing clothes that are pretty similar to everyone else's that I see and that makes me feel good.

After about 10 minutes I'm greeted by two of the marketing team members. They introduce themselves and asked me to go with them down to the level that their team works on. Before I know it I am directed to a small room looking over the beautiful harbour and the interview is about to begin.

First the marketing team manager describes the type of things the marketing team are involved in and more specifically about her role. In front of her she has my CV and the application that I put in for Stepping Into. She then asks me about my studies in marketing and about the type of marketing I would like to do when I finish uni. There are questions about the sports and hobbies that I'm involved in and where I see myself in the future. Most of these questions I have anticipated and I'm ready to respond to - others I have to answer on the spot.

The interviewer then asks me about the type of adjustments than I would need to be put in place in the office. Even though I know this is a disability program I am quite nervous about discussing my disability. To my relief I am only asked what adjustments I need, not details about my disability. I have thought about this and am able to state the adjustments I feel will be helpful. We discuss the use of my dictation equipment (as I find typing long document is difficult) and they say that they will liaise with IT team to make sure I can install it. We also talk about work hours and my concern that I will struggle with a full time job. My request for a four days week is agreed to easily and they tell me that they have a number of part-time staff in the team. I can tell that the team leader is very experienced at interviews as she is patient and explains things when I asked questions. This makes the interview much less intimidating and it feels like the time flies past very quickly.

20 minutes later they are wrapping up the session, thanking me for my time and letting me know that they'll be in touch. I'm really happy that it's over and I feel confident that they would be a great team to work in with. It really wasn't as nerve racking as I thought but preparing myself thoroughly in advance made a big difference to how comfortable I was. I'm excited about hearing from them in the next week and hopeful about the possibility of doing a Stepping Into placement at this company.

## PART THREE

I've come to the end of my internship. Tonight my colleagues in the marketing department are taking me out for a night on the town. We will be hitting Grasshopper Bar and then the Ivy and who knows after that. It's been a fantastic five weeks! I have learned so much and feel much more confident about approaching future employment opportunities. I thought I'd give you a bit of a recap of my time since starting my job.

The first day was really all about introductions. I met up with my supervisor and another colleague who I had met previously and they took me around the rest of the marketing team giving me a brief description of each person's role in the group. The adjustments I had asked for – part time work, voice to text technology and accessible parking were in place, so I was able to concentrate on what I can do, not what I can't! I also met a couple of the other employees that worked in departments that were located on our floor. There was a lot of names to take in but they were all really friendly and before long I was shown me to my desk, set up with my login to access the Internet and given a list of files to have a look at to get an idea of the type of work I'd be involved with.

My expectations were completely surpassed in terms of the work I thought that I'd be doing compared to the work I actually did. From the beginning I was really involved in attending meetings with clients, making suggestions and recommendations for marketing programs and liaising with agencies that were contracted to undertake our marketing briefs. I thought that I'd have more of an observational role and I was really happy that I was more than just a token intern and felt more like an employee.

To those thinking of embarking upon an internship especially in the Stepping Into program I would say "just go for it!" It was one of the best experiences that I had during my time at uni and I really couldn't recommend it enough. To make sure that you get the best out of your internship don't be afraid to put yourself out there - by this I mean make an effort to get involved with conversations at work, get to know your colleagues and do a bit of work prior to going to the internship so that you know a bit about the business before you start.

The other thing I learned was that by knowing the impact of my disability and working through workplace adjustments before I started meant that everything was confidential, the adjustments were in place and I could concentrate on the challenges of my job and the interactions that came with it without too much of a worry.

I decided to continue study and complete marketing honours. I may apply for another internship through 'Stepping into'. For me, this was a fantastic experience – one I am sure will help me get a job.

The **WSNDCO** is funded by the Australian Government and hosted by UWS. We support people with disability including chronic medical conditions and mental health conditions who are transitioning into Uni, TAFE or work, and then transitioning out of Uni and TAFE into work. You can learn more about us on our websites:

**Program website:** [www.uws.edu.au/ndco](http://www.uws.edu.au/ndco)

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