LIFE IS FULL OF HURDLES.
WE CAN HELP.

DISABILITIES

DEPARTMENT GUIDE 2015

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WE CAN HELP.

CYSTIC FIBROSIS | POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS | BIPOLAR DISORDER | SPINAL INJURY
OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER | CHRONIC FATIGUE
ANXIETY | MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY | BODY DYSMORPHIA
BLINDNESS | DEPRESSION | HEARING LOSS | BRAIN INJURY
DYSLEXIA | EATING DISORDERS | ASPERGERS | GENETIC
WHAT IS THE DISABILITIES DEPARTMENT?

The Disabilities Department has been established within the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) to properly represent students with disabilities in the cultural and activist life of the University of Melbourne. ‘Disabilities’ encompasses everything from sensory to social, mobility to mental illness.

The university has its own health service with doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, as well as services like Legal and Advocacy and Financial Aid. There is also the Disability Liaison Unit, which you can talk to about any assistance or provisions that you may need and they’ll help you sort it out. While services like the Disability Liaison Unit are vital for securing academic adjustments, the UMSU Disabilities Department can finally offer marginalised students the chance to socialise, network and fight for better supports at the University.

Some of the services on campus can be a bit intimidating if you’ve never dealt with them before. As fellow students, hopefully we’re a little less scary, and you can come and see us if you’re not sure what’s going on or who to turn to.

Importantly, we want your university experience to be the best it can possibly be. We at the Disabilities Department run a series of events throughout the year which we hope are a combination of fun and supportive. Anxiety support group, accessibility tours, guest speakers and film screenings are among some of the great things we’re aiming to provide to you this year. There’s also the advocacy side of the department, where we campaign to get better services and make this campus safer, more accessible, and more enjoyable for all students.

Contact the Disabilities Department:

Phone: (03) 8344 9768
Email: disabilities@union.unimelb.edu.au
Facebook: www.facebook.com/UMSU.disabilities

FINDING THE DISABILITIES DEPARTMENT OFFICE

The Disabilities Department Office is located on Level 1 of Union House, between the elevators and the main staircase. For students on campus before 2014, this was formerly the Clubs & Societies office. Look for the large poster of our logo in the window.

Access is via the main UMSU offices entrance.
Hey folks, my name is Susannah and I’m finding it tricky to express how excited I am to be one of your Disabilities OBs for this year. My basic profile is this: I’m a fourth year Arts student studying Politics and Creative Writing, finishing half way through this year. I’m also involved in a wonderful choir through Engineering Music Society, which I love dearly. I’m a bit of a messy bundle of passions – writing, literature, music, politics, and a variety of social justice type issues.

The basis of my relationship (and passion!) for disability activism comes from my own experience with mental illness. Depression, anxiety, and a lovely assortment of related issues often shaped my life throughout high school and university. One of my biggest regrets is that up until very recently, I didn’t take my issues seriously enough to seek help, even as they obviously impacted my academic life as well as family, relationships, and general ability to function as a human being. The past few years have been about learning how to manage my issues in healthy and sustainable ways. Sometimes this means seeking help – psychologists, GPs, and as of last year, the Disability Liaison Unit (DLU).

One of the major things I want for this department is for it to be another place students with disabilities of any description can get help. We would love for you to get involved and come along to any events they sound like your kind of thing. So have a flick through this guide, have a wonderful O-Week, and hopefully we’ll see you again throughout the year.

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POWER IN NUMBERS: DISABILITIES DEPARTMENT COLLECTIVES

DISABILITY COLLECTIVE & LUNCH
EVERY THURSDAY, 12PM ONWARDS
TRAINING ROOM 2, LEVEL 3 UNION HOUSE.

You know what’s great? Having a chance to talk about issues that are important to you in a safe, welcoming space. Having fun chats and hang outs with friends is also pretty great. And free pizza. Free pizza is great. Particularly when vego, vegan, and gluten free options are available, which they will be.

If you’re interested in the Disabilities Department and the above description sounds like your sort of thing, come along to the Disabilities Lunch and Collective. We’d love to hear all your opinions on everything department related - events, campaigns, activism - as well as providing you with a chill, safe environment to relax and talk to like-minded folk. It will be held every Thursday at 12, Training Room 2 in Union House. Fun times guaranteed!

NEURODIVERSITY COLLECTIVE
EVERY SECOND TUESDAY (STARTING WEEK TWO), 2PM
TRAINING ROOM 2, LEVEL 3 UNION HOUSE

We all know that every person’s brain is wired differently. Every mind is naturally adept at some things and ill-suited to other things. Brains that are partly shaped by Autism, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia, Synesthesia, Tourette’s Syndrome and other psychological abnormalities are no exception. Their strengths are often overlooked because they are so unusual, but they are no less unusual than their weaknesses, and no one seems to overlooking those. The talents of neurologically diverse people deserve as much appreciation and awareness as their difficulties. After all, the human race has been running on Neurodiversity for a long time now, even if it hasn’t realised it yet. The Neurodiversity Collective aims to make The University of Melbourne part of that wakeup call that is now happening. The collective is open to people with any neurological difference and meets fortnightly, every Tuesday at 1pm. It is a safe place to talk with other neurodiverse people and improve the current understanding of different kinds of minds. We also run off-campus events such as film screenings and discussions centred around Neurodiversity.

ANXIETY SUPPORT GROUP
EVERY MONDAY, 1PM – 2PM
TRAINING ROOM 1, LEVEL 3 UNION HOUSE

Anxiety Support Group aims to be a safe space to discuss your anxiety with other sufferers without fear of judgement or “advice giving”. While it is a place to discuss our own experiences and share strategies, so often people with anxiety and depression will receive unsolicited advice from people who do not understand our illness and this only breeds resentment and withdrawal from these relationships.

ASG is an environment where we can support each other and be able to talk about the reality of our illness without fear or misunderstanding. It can be very scary going to a support group for the first time, so ASG tries to be as welcoming as possible and there is no pressure to share anything you do not wish to (including your name, if that is what you wish). It is safe, anonymous, and supportive.
DISABILITY DEPARTMENT EVENTS

ACCESSIBILITY TOUR & START OF SEMESTER PICNIC
THURSDAY WEEK 1 - MARCH 5, 2PM
MEET AT NORTH COURT

First, we’ll take a stroll around campus and examine/discuss the more nuanced aspects of accessibility. Immediately after (approx. 3:30pm) we’ll mosey on over to South Lawn for a nice little picnic – finger food and beverages provided. If you can’t make it to the accessibility tour, you can head straight to South Lawn. Help us celebrate the beginning of the Disabilities Department’s second year! This will be a dry event.

The following events are still in the making, so details will be confirmed as soon we have them. Keep an eye on our Facebook page!

WEEK FOUR: FILM SCREENING AND SOIREE
Meet new people, eat nice food, and enjoy some fabulous entertainment. In the evening we will be screening a movie (TBA) that is both excellent and relevant. Afterwards, there will be food and drinks and a space for us to relax and discuss the film. This will be a wet event, but alcohol will only be served after the film.

WEEK SIX: EATING DISORDERS VICTORIA WORKSHOP
The fine folks from EDV will be running a workshop on how to talk to people close to you that may be struggling with eating disorders, and how to be a supportive friend.

WEEK SEVEN: RAD SEX AND CONSENT WEEK
This is an interdepartmental, week-long event that aims to teach us all what we missed out in our high school health classes. Disabilities will be helping to run some workshops, along with the Queer and Wom*n’s Departments. It’s always stacks of fun and super informative. More details to come soon!

WEEK TWELVE
Mystery end of semester event! What will it entail? Only time will tell, but probably fun! Maybe even an actual mystery.

CAMPUS ACCESSIBILITY

As one of the oldest in Australia, the University of Melbourne has a large number of heritage listed buildings sprawled over an area that constitutes a suburb in its own right. Familiarising yourself with the campus is a must.

University of Melbourne Access Map
http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability/resources/links
If your disability affects your ability to access buildings, then a copy of the University of Melbourne Access Map is a must. Available as a pdf, it can easily be printed, accessed online, or downloaded onto your computer or smartphone. A particularly important asset for first year students who are only beginning to familiarise themselves with the campus.

University of Melbourne Safer Community Program - 9035 8675
http://safercommunity.unimelb.edu.au/
Download the unisafe app from the apple or google store. It puts a lot of support services, maps, emergency contacts and all hours access to security guards and escorts directly into your phone, ready for the moment you might need them.
DISABILITY AND STUDYING: SOME REALISTIC PERSONAL ACCOUNTS

Combatting your coursework whilst facing the hurdle of disability is a fight that is unique to every person. No single personal story you could possibly read will ever perfectly reflect your own experience. But the knowledge that others are in the same situation as you are writing their own success stories can be a valuable weapon. In this section, Amy and Kyle share their experiences at the University of Melbourne.

Kyle Webb

It has been very difficult for me to write something that is meaningful rather than some spiel that is trite and wooden. My journey with disabilities goes way back to my infancy where I suffered a severe Acquired Brain Injury. Remarkably, I survived the experience by the skin of my teeth after meeting my old friend, Death. The resulting trauma meant that my health practitioners at the time had predicted that I would have a severe intellectual disability – the kind that leaves many people in a kind of institutional limbo in this society. At worst, cleaned off the streets by our illustrious prison system, courtesy of Jeremy Bentham.

Today, it is listed as a ‘learning disability’ on my university enrolment. What is funny about this, is that I was never treated as a child who could swim in an environment of intellectualism and I was always ‘that’ child at school who always needed the special needs unit. I was seen to be unfocussed and uncompetitive in the school environment, and someone to be managed in a particular way.

Rather, I was a stubborn jackass, righteous, imaginative, an explorer, a dreamer, a rebel and very emotional – none of which are a disability. All of which are fundamental aspects of me.

There is no doubt that suffering serious brain trauma affected my development (reading, writing and even tying my shoelaces happened a bit later than for most of my peers), but there’s always been some quantum of self-worth; some sliver of pride; an aching for independence and a yearning for the outside.

The remarkable thing about the brain is that it is capable of amazing feats of resilience, coupled with the spark of life that pushes us to survive and adapt as mortal beings. Whether through a combination of neuroplasticity and sheer force of will, I forced my way through an institutional system that did not place much value in who I was. I remember quite clearly, the first time I was told I had any sort of talent that would lead to a future of dignity, was in my last year of school. That single, little and almost throw away event for a lot of people, is a defining moment of my life.

It’s difficult to explain the experience of an intellectual disability as I do not have any physical scars to show. People see me and see charm, a little quirkiness, good looks and some pompous righteousness. I hope people see me as a thinker, lover, dreamer and a fighter because that is what I see in myself. The good, the bad and the ugly. My experience with disability is just another challenge to overcome. Another question to be answered.

Sharing it is tough, but hopefully someone will read this and take something positive away. That it might help someone see the beauty and strength inside of themselves. That’s the only reason I wish to share this at all.

Jess Kapuscinski-Evans

When I first came to university, I was surprised to learn that staff employed by the university to assist me with taking notes in class and at the library were not allowed, under Federal legislation, to assist me with eating, medication and other personal care. This means that I must either have two people with me where one could easily be sufficient, or I must take preventive medication before my support worker employed by the Department of Human Services finishes their shift.

In terms of representation of the experiences of disability within the culture of the campus, I have found that in many ways I was often the first student with disability to put on a theatre show for example, and that adjustments have had to be made hurriedly because there is not an assumed knowledge of the fact that students with disabilities have specific needs that need to be taken into consideration. This sometimes means that students without disabilities can be ignorant of some of the disabling aspects of university life. In first year I had someone ask me if my support worker was my sister. I wasn’t able to adequately explain to the person what my relationship to the worker was, and I felt that a generally better understanding of disability issues on campus could have prevented an awkward situation like this.

It is important for there to be a Disabilities Department within the union, as distinct from the Disability Liaison Unit, because there was inadequate representation for this group of students within the union, which is better at providing social and networking opportunities, whilst the DLU is better at assisting students with extensions on essays and alternative exam arrangements, for example. Having multiple points of contact for students to go to if they need help with a particular issue is also good practise given the fact that no one wants students to miss out if funding for one particular service or organisation is cut.
Sixth Year: Abuse & Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Uni! Awesome! Making new friends, sharing ideas! Well, yeah, that’s how it’s supposed to be. For some of us, it doesn’t work out that way. I’m about to start my sixth year of an undergraduate degree, and I want to tell you a bit about why it took me almost four years to find my feet.

For my first two years of uni, I was in an abusive relationship. I’m not going to give you an All Access Pass into what that looked like; not because I don’t want you to know, but because the details probably aren’t helpful. Instead, I want to talk about how that affected me while I was trying to find my way into Melbourne University.

First of all, it was really lonely. My abusive partner isolated me from my pre-existing friends, as abusers often do. I thought that I would make new friends at University, because I’d been great at making friends before, but that wasn’t the case. During the abusive relationship, it was really hard for me to make friends for a few reasons. First, because I wasn’t allowed to spend a lot of time away from my abusive partner - there was hell to pay if I didn’t have a good explanation for being out, and “making friends” wasn’t an excuse that he was okay with. Second, because I felt there was nobody I was meeting in my classes that I could relate to. And third, because I had already lived my teen years feeling too anxious to think that anyone would like me.

In addition to being lonely, I struggled academically, because a lot of the time, going to lectures and tutorials was not even on my radar. Studying was very low on the priority list at the time - I was more concerned with issues such as “don’t wanna make him any angrier today” and “shit, hope he doesn’t take all my money again cause I really wanna eat this week”.

After I got out of the abusive relationship, things didn’t get easier straight away. I was still lonely, and I blamed myself for what had happened to me. It took me about two years to realise that what had happened wasn’t my fault. But over time, things did start to get better. Not all at once. Sometimes it felt like one step forward, three steps back - but progress did happen - and now I want to talk about that.

I didn’t make friends until, by chance, a guy named Sam asked me to join his group project. It turns out he did it because the other members were giving him the shits and I looked lonely. Sam turned out to be pretty cool, and he introduced me to his friend, Frida. We all ended up having a class together and getting pretty chummy. I finally felt that I had found people that wouldn’t think I was a piece of shit for what I’d gone through. It took me a long time even after this, but I started to open up - just a little bit. My new friends were supportive, funny and actually relatable. I felt so much less lonely.

Through these people, I met somebody who I thought was worth trying to have an intimate relationship with - even though I had been super fucked over before (and that was three years earlier and I still wasn’t okay about it). I was terrified, but I had something behind me which I had never had in life before - good friends who do their very best to understand and support one another.

Something nobody tells you about an abusive relationship is how terrifying it is to get into a healthy relationship afterwards. There’s plenty of talk about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (which I have; flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety and depression, all that jazz) but something I wasn’t prepared for was to be with somebody and actually enjoy it. To tell someone what happened to you and...
have them say, “You didn’t deserve that” and “I’m not going to try to fix you but I will be there for you and listen to you” and all kinds of nice things.

Anyway, my academic record is shit, I’m almost six years into a Bachelors’ degree, I still have anxiety and depression and flashbacks and I’m still scared and confused about life, but today I have supportive and kind friends, I’m in a relationship that isn’t abusive, and with the help of good friends I’m going to seek out professional help for the issues I still struggle with. Life is scary, but it’s looking up.

If there’s any advice I can give to somebody starting Uni, it would be this: the best friends you will make might not be in your classes. They might not be studying your degree. They might not be in the first club you join, or the second, but they do go to this University. Try to find them. It will be hard, and at times it will be scary and lonely, but once you do, this place will be a different place for you. When I first came here, it was frightening and lonely. Now it’s like home - and not just because I’ve been here for so long. If you feel lonely here, or if you feel like you can’t relate to anyone you’ve met, that’s just because there’s somebody else who hasn’t met you yet. And I’m pretty sure they wish they had.

If you’re in an abusive relationship or if you’re struggling with mental health issues, please consider seeing the counsellors here. It’s confidential and free.

Fourth Year: Finding A Path

I fell into first year uni without any idea that I could or should get help with what was turning into a pretty unsustainable mental health situation. I’d been coasting for a while already; by the end of high school the expectations of high achievement parents and teachers had held had already slipped to just hoping I’d do well enough to get by. I didn’t know and didn’t want to know anything about the structure of the degree I’d enrolled in. For most of first and second year my study plan was mostly copied.

Up until then, various people had put in a pretty decent effort to convince me that I couldn’t possibly have mental health problems. I still have to fight with the idea most days. At the time I was looking at however many years of staying silent it would take for things to pass on their own or for me to burn out. I can’t say I was getting ready for it - I was already pretty close to burned out - mostly I tried to push it to the back of my mind, feel as little about it as possible.

I got really lucky. Somewhere, my fall back into a rhythm of necessities and empty time got interrupted by new friends. In all honesty, I don’t remember things too well past the last few years, or in general. Uni has still been hard. Ninety percent of the tiny amounts of time I set aside to study has been spent staring blankly at books and nothing else. I think about half of my semesters have been punctuated at some point by a month where I didn’t out of bed earlier than two or three pm if at all. My sleep problems got bad enough for long enough that the people in the offices by the food co-op were used to me sleeping there nigh-on every day.

Through all that, for the first time, I felt supported. I had places and times that I felt safe and comfortable. More importantly, I interacted regularly with people that knew more than I did about mental health - people that were willing to put in the effort to convince me that I shouldn’t accept being worried and sad nearly all of the time. I’m so, so grateful for the time they’ve given me. Last year I figured out how my degree works and what I need to do to graduate. It’s taking longer than it could have, but I know where I’m going now. A lot of people have had to come to terms with the fact that by their old standards I’ve already messed up bad. It’s been a process.

I managed to work around being terrified at hypotheticals (like the doctor shouting me out for pretending), and get a mental health plan to start receiving treatment at Headspace. I still have a ways to go - a lot to do and a lot that I don’t yet know to do. By the time I get through everything I should I’ll probably have been around for four years, and that’s not time that everyone has. I was very, very close to drifting through. There’s a lot at university - people, communities, services that exist to try and make your life better - and I’m sure you’re worth the good that would come to you.
Disability Liaison Unit - 8344 0836
http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability

Disability Liaison provides a wide range of support services to students with a documented medical condition, including conditions relating to mental health, are eligible to register for support. Typical adjustments include making recommendations for alternative examination arrangements, the conversion of course reading material into accessible formats, equipment loans and information and referral. Recommendations for support are made following review of your medical documentation and with consideration to the inherent requirements of your course. Disability Liaison can create an Impact Statement if you would like information about your health condition to be formally documented, enabling you to liaise with University staff and access particular services. The Impact Statement can contain information including your particular health condition, how it impacts on your study and suggested recommendations for support. You may seek the support of either a Student Equity Officer within your faculty, or a Disability Liaison Officer from Disability Liaison to complete an Impact Statement. For more information on their services, or to make an appointment, visit the website.

University of Melbourne Counselling Service - 8344 6927
http://services.unimelb.edu.au/counsel

‘Counselling through this service is not intended to be on a long term basis. Given the high demand for counselling, we provide short to medium term assistance, often with appointments spaced apart to give you the chance to try out changes.’

Usually this means a maximum of ten sessions a year. After that point, request a Mental Health Plan from a GP at the Health Service (book a double appointment). If you are disappointed with the service from one counsellor, request a different counsellor the next time. If you are afraid of confronting the counsellor personally, go through reception. They have half hour emergency appointments each day; call to confirm. The website also has a lot of resources you may find useful.

University of Melbourne Health Service – 8344 6904
http://services.unimelb.edu.au/health

In addition to GPs who bulk bill for students, there are several bulk billing psychiatrists on staff. Your GP may require you to get a blood test after the initial consultation, before writing a referral letter. If you are disappointed or dissatisfied with your GP, seek a different one next time. It is rarely a patient’s fault that a session didn’t go well. There are also two daily emergency clinics, at 9:00am and 2:00pm. The doctors list their special interests on the ‘contact us’ page of the website, and it will be worth your choosing your GP to one that specialises in your needs.

Financial Aid - 8344 5624 and for emergencies 8344 6901
http://services.unimelb.edu.au/finaid

Financial Aid provides interest free short and long term loans to help you through university. This is an exceptional service, and for local students, loans of up to $5,000 are available. If getting a bond together, surprise bills or other matters are causing you a lot of stress that is inhibiting your time at university, please consider one of these loans. Financial Aid can also provide you with relevant information about grants, bursaries and scholarships that might apply to you. You can book an appointment through the numbers or link above.

Student Union Legal Service - 8344 8687, legal@union.unimelb.edu.au
http://union.unimelb.edu.au/legal

The Student Union Legal Service provides confidential legal advice and assistance to all students at the University of Melbourne. The service encourages and supports students in solving their own legal and related problems. As we aim to provide advice to as many students as possible, ongoing legal assistance in individual cases is not normally available. The assistance provided by the service is different from legal aid, which is dispensed under the guidelines of the Legal Aid Commission.

Student Union Advocacy Service - 8344 6546
http://union.unimelb.edu.au/advocacy

The Student Union Advocacy Service (SUAS) is provided for all students and can help you navigate the rules, regulations and procedures that the University has in place in the areas of misconduct, appeals, unsatisfactory progress, bullying and sexual harassment, intellectual property, supervision disputes and more. It is funded from the Student Services and Amenities Fee and provides independent advocacy services to all students.
The First Tutorial

First tutorials, whether your first ever, or simply the first of your fourth or fifth year (yes! You, too, can stretch out your undergrad degree indefinitely!) have the potential to be horrifically nerve-wracking and soul-destroying. The only way to get through this ordeal (other than staying home, scowling and smoking cigarettes out of your bedroom window, which is a solid approach too) is through preparation and teeth-gritted steely nerves. I am here to hold your hand through this living nightmare. Draw closer, wee firsties.

One: Dress.
This is crucial. First impression are powerful, and you need to broadcast the right one to your peers and your teacher alike. Don’t waste time the morning before your class trying out different outfits and grimacing in the mirror - do this all the day (or week, for those of you even more severely nervous than yours truly) before.

I don’t know you and your personal style, but the key factor here is an air of effortless stylishness. You must not look as though you have put much thought into your ensemble, which, of course, requires hours of careful thought.

Consider practicalities, as well. Will you need a backpack for your laptop and lab coat? Bike shorts under your dress for the cycle home? Forethought is indispensable.

Two: Research. Obviously, you should have scrutinised your new subject’s LMS, Portal, and Handbook entries, as well as the University pages, twitter feeds, and facebook profiles of all the staff associated with your class. If you have the fortuitous good luck to know someone who has gone through the course in a previous year, grip their wrist tightly with the strength only the truly anxious can summon, and refuse to release them til they have sated your desire to know as much as you can. Not about the tedium of coursework, exams, and academic rigour, but the dreaded torture of getting-to-know-you sessions.

And at the last minute before you meet your fate, as the previous class streams into the corridor, use your anxiety-grip on their wrists, too. Demand information; your widely-stretched eyes, sweat-beaded upper lip, and trembling limbs will let them know you need it.

Now, take a moment to slow your breath, blot your sweaty face, and adopt the sneer of coolly self-assured confidence you rehearsed in the mirror this morning, and turn the door handle.

Three: Entrance.
Try not to be among the very last to enter the classroom, as it ensures that everyone will turn to look at you (ugh!). Upon facing the room, my failsafe technique for years has been to identify the most attractive person in the cohort, and depending on the size and fullness of the room, either sit next to them or two seats away. Make brief eye contact (<1 second) and give them a small, tight-lipped but genuine smile, then resume gazing at either the door or your smartphone. Wait at least until the tutor enters to unpack your books, as doing so any earlier shows an embarrassing level of caring about things.

Four: The Class Itself.
Look at you! You’re the best-dressed, most self-assured, calmest person in the world, sitting in class and ready to whip out your superbly witty response to whatever ice-breaking question the tutor throws at you. When you deliver it, make sure to make eye contact with them, ideally with one eyebrow slightly raised. (If ever asked a question you cannot answer, raise both brows slightly, and give a careless shrug). Make sure they know you are smarter than them. If it is a long class, and you are offered a break, do take it. Return with a small smirk, as though you have completed top-secret and possible sexy business.

You’ve got this. Go get ‘em.
PLACES ON CAMPUS TO CRY
(Or Hide, Chill Out, Or Generally Feel Safe)

*Sarina Murray, Disabilities Office Bearer 2014*

When Jess and I were handed the keys to the Disabilities Department Office last year, my most simultaneously settling and exciting discovery was that I now had a private desk to cry under. When I spoke about how psyched I was, the tales from mates of how often they need to cry, or chill out after an anxiety attack, came thick and fast.

1. **Elizabeth Murdoch Courtyard and Tower**, which few people know about and give you full view of a faux Greek statue. Few people know about it, but if you go through the doors to the theatre near Castro’s, you’ll get there easy.

2. **System Gardens**. Hidden behind the Botany building in the north west corner of campus, there’s even a private rocket of solitude that fuels itself on tears. No other place was more mentioned more when I surveyed my cohort.

3. **Stairwells** can be gems. On both sides of John Medley, right near the sliding doors, there are narrow staircases that only go as far as the first floor. But in most tall buildings, you can ride an elevator to the top, find the staircase’s highest turning points, and rest assured everyone else is getting the lift (though, be careful around class changeover time).

4. **Toilet cubicles** are always sort of okay, but they also smell a lot like toilets, and you will have the great privilege of hearing other people going to the toilet. The bottom floor of Union House has the best toilet option as they are dark and many.

5. If you want to be comforted in your pain, or are just looking to chill out, try the **Wom*n’s or Queer spaces in Union House** (although check the times of their regular events if you don’t want to be in a room full of queer discussion or people eating).

6. Many places in the **Rowden White Library** can offer a bit of solace. The back room, with old copies of magazines, the rows of comfortable seats with headphones that let you pretend you’re feeling intense about some music, or, in an emergency, ask for access to the Archive Room.

7. You may want to **walk particular routes** as you navigate the campus. Strategies that you develop to cope over your years at uni will go beyond the physical space to your own possessions; some people prefer to carry a magic bag of everything that might help them when panic sets in, but of course this differs for everyone.

8. Or, as one mate said ‘anywhere crowded. I like an audience.’ Why the heck not? And feel free to tell people to stop bothering you if the point is for them to see, not help. For help on campus, refer yourself to the University of Melbourne Counseling Service and call 8344 6927.

*Above: System Gardens, Right: Old Quad. Images: Louisa Billeter*
ACSO (Australian Community Support Organisation)
Any person with a disability, including those diagnosed with mental illnesses, can call and arrange an appointment and be matched with a case worker who believes in the empowerment of work and goals. However, to seek assistance from ACSO, you must not be studying full time.
www.solutions.acso.org.au
(03) 8416 8300 or (03) 8379 3000

Amaze
Although mainly focussing on children rather than adults, Amaze offers resources and links to assist supporters in understanding the Autism spectrum.
www.amaze.org.au

AQA
Provides support for people affected by spinal cord injury, helping them to achieve independence, and can provide attendant support workers as well as link people in with other useful resources, groups, or organisations via its peer support program.
www.aqavic.org.au
1800 999 128

Austin Health
A hospital in Melbourne that is particularly disability friendly.
www.austin.org.au
Austin Hospital: (03) 9496 5000
Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre: (03) 9490 7500

Beyond Blue
Probably Australia’s most prolific mental health advocacy organisation, Beyond Blue provides a variety of resources relating to support for people with mental health conditions, as well as for their friends, family, and supporters.
www.beyondblue.org.au
1300 22 4636
Webchats are also available.

Blind Citizens Australia
Providing extensive advocacy for blind and visually impaired people, Blind Citizens Australia also has a library of podcasts and publications suitable for members, supporters, and for raising awareness.
www.bca.org.au
(03) 9654 1400 or 1800 033 660

Cerebral Palsy Support Network
Provides the means for people to personally employ attendant support workers and can also link people in with other relevant and helpful services.
www.cpsn.org.au
(03) 9478 1001 or 1300 277 600

Deaf Australia Inc.
Aside from acting as an advocate for Deaf Australians, this organisation also offers courses and workshops on Auslan and Deaf culture.
www.deafaustralia.org.au

Disability Discrimination Legal Service
The DDLS is an organisation offering free legal advice in a wide range of topics related to disability. In partnership with the Victorian Anti-Discrimination Legal Service, it also provides phone advice on discrimination legislation.
www.communitylaw.org.au/ddls
1300 882 872

First Peoples Disability Network
Helping to advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and their families, and bring recognition to the unique challenges they face.
www.fpdn.org.au

Headspace
Australia’s National Youth Mental Health Foundation.
www.headspace.org.au
(03) 9027 0100

Omni-Care
One of many organisations in Australia who help to provide attendant support workers.
www.omni-care.com.au
(03) 9484 8102

QLife
Statistically, people from Queer and LGBTI backgrounds are far more likely to suffer from mental illnesses than the general population. QLife is a nation-wide counselling and referral service that aims to assist people achieve better health outcomes.
www.qlife.org.au
1800 184 527
Webchats are also available.

Solve Disability Solutions
A not-for-profit organisation that focusses on creating cool, custom-made assistive gadgets.
www.solve.org.au
(03) 9853 8655 or 1300 663 243

Technical Solutions Australia
A company that sells a wide range of Electronic assistive devices.
www.tecsol.com.au
(03) 9737 9000

Vision Australia
Australia’s largest vision impairment advocacy organisation.
www.visionaustralia.org
1300 84 74 66

YDAS (Youth Disability Advocacy Service)
A state wide service which exists specifically to work on issues of concern to young people with disabilities.
www.ydas.org.au

This list is in no way a complete listing of potential resources. The Disabilities Department also has a large collection of brochures relating to a wide variety of disabilities and disorders - please drop by our office for a copy.
Bureaucracy: it’s shit at the best of times. Even when you’re floating on air, it only takes fifteen minutes stuck on hold to your electricity company to make even the most mild-mannered of us fly into a frothing, light jazz-induced rage. Nowhere is that more apparent than Centrelink, the organisation responsible for handling welfare payments in Australia, and allegedly stealing candy from small children. While it would be completely improper of me to walk you through precisely how to receive a payment and a health care card, as everyone’s situation is very different, I can give you a few tips on how to approach Centrelink, drawn from my own experience.

- If you need to physically head into an office, be prepared for a long wait - quite often standing in a queue. It’s a wait you’ll want to avoid, particularly if you have difficulty standing for long periods. To avoid the wait, I recommend going to a Centrelink office when it first opens in the morning, or if possible, going to an office in a wealthier (and thus quieter) suburb.

- Before you leave, be sure to use the toilet (they sure won’t let you use theirs), and be sure to take a distraction or two - an iPod and something to keep your hands busy will not only kill boredom, but any anxiety that might come from the experience.

- Your local Centrelink Customer Support Officer is a strange being, but remember that they are only human. Sometimes these people have come directly from the unemployment line themselves, and are usually poorly equipped - sometimes even completely unequipped - to deal with your questions and queries. Even when they do have an answer, they are often hamstrung by the horrendously rigid and often counter-intuitive way in which they are taught to deal with people. The whole system may seem ridiculous, but remember, this is also an office that has hidden panic switches on almost every surface. Whilst I’ve never witnessed an assault, I’ve seen people verbal abusing and threatening Customer Support Officers - and each other - on multiple occasions. These bureaucratic rules are there for a reason - cut the staff a break and play their game. You wouldn’t want to be in their position, that’s for sure.

- If the bureaucracy of dealing with Centrelink is simply too difficult for one reason or another, it’s relatively easy to nominate someone to act on your behalf. Nominees can sign forms, make enquiries and correspond with Centrelink for you, can attend appointments with you and under some circumstances can even attend appointments on your behalf. I would thoroughly recommend asking a family member or very close, empathetic friend to be your nominee, for security and peace-of-mind if nothing else.

- There can be a lot of guilt associated with accepting a Centrelink payment, particularly if you are suffering depression or low self-esteem as part of your illness or disability. Try to re-imagine your welfare payment as an investment in your future. No-one really wants to be on welfare, but hey, you’re studying too, and through your education, you’re also equipping yourself to be the most well-rounded and independent person you can be. You’ll pay that debt back to society one day, and not just in tax dollars, but until then, don’t be ashamed of accepting the help you need. Good luck!

A BRIEF GUIDE TO WELFARE PAYMENTS

**Disability Support Pension:** Financial support for people who have a physical, intellectual, or psychiatric condition that stops them from working or who are permanently blind.

**Youth Disability Supplement:** Additional financial support to young people with a physical, intellectual or psychiatric disability who receive certain income-support payments.

**Sickness Allowance:** A payment for people aged 22 years or older but under Age Pension age who temporarily cannot work or study because of an injury or illness.

**Mobility Allowance:** Help for people with disability, illness or injury who cannot use public transport without substantial assistance and participate in approved activities.

Of course, this list is by no means comprehensive, nor is it necessarily relevant to your personal circumstances. For further information, please consult www.humanservices.gov.au.