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## VIDEO: "I didn't want to be my disability"

22 Jul 2015

By Yasmin Noone

Dorothy Docherty was 49 years-old when she had a hysterectomy and came home after the surgery with a headache. She went to bed to rest and did not wake up for three weeks.

When she awoke, she had an acquired brain injury.

Ms Docherty was told to move into an aged care facility to receive care but flatly refused. Doctors predicted she would not walk, talk or see again. They were wrong.

Not only did she learn to walk and talk, she went on to use her voice to advocate for those less able to speak up for themselves.

"Instead of living in a nursing home, I [now] visit nursing homes," Ms Docherty says.

"...I didn't want to be my disability. I didn't want to be referred to as what was wrong with me".

She was encouraged by her case manager at Care Connect to join its Consumer Voice Committee. Ms Docherty is now the chairperson.

"My drive was not to have other people being treated the way I was treated.

"At first I was determined to make a difference, one person at a time and then I discovered that if you actually talk to the right people, you are making a difference for everybody."



Dorothy Docherty

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It's been nine years since Ms Docherty was diagnosed. She volunteers more than 20 hours each week and is a member of Guide Dogs Victoria's Consumer Advisory Council (since 2005) with **Maroondah City Council**. She has up to seven speaking engagements each month.

Ms Docherty was presented with the Volunteer Award at the Victorian Disability Sector Awards held at ZINC, Federation Square, earlier this week.

The awards celebrate the achievements of individuals, teams, organisations and businesses assisting people with a disability to achieve their personal goals.

It recognises Ms Docherty's exceptional leadership and vision in ensuring the voice of consumers is heard by home care provider, Care Connect as well as the sector, now and into the future.

"It was this intense, confusing and life-altering experience that had me decide to dedicate the rest of my life to educating both the health system and the broader community about what is possible for people who suffer from brain injury or who have a disability," Ms Docherty says.

CEO of Care Connect Group, Paul Ostrowski, says that in his five years as the organisation's leader, he developed an enormous respect for Ms Docherty.

"Her passion for consumer needs, her commitment to the sector, her determination to ensure that Care Connect and other organisations are genuinely placing consumers first," Mr Ostrowski said.

"Dorothy has a unique energy for her role, quietly but tirelessly guiding us in the right direction. By having the courage to volunteer in a very public leadership role, Dorothy has shown how volunteers can impact not only individuals, but organisations, government and the wider community. I cannot think of anyone more deserving of this award.

"The whole organisation congratulates Dorothy and thanks National Disability Services and the Department of Health and Human Services for acknowledging her inspirational leadership and vision."

The awards are a joint initiative between National Disability Services and the Department of Health and Human Services.