

Laura and Jordan O'Reilly win \$544,000 funding for company Fighting Chance

Northern beaches siblings Laura and Jordan O'Reilly were outraged to see their brother could not get a job because of his disability. Despite his unexpected death, they have come up with a clever solution to get people like him into the workforce.

Julie Cross, Manly Daily, Thursday October 30, 2019



An innovative northern beaches organisation set up by two siblings who saw how hard it was for their disabled but talented brother to get work after he left school, will receive more than \$540,000 of government money to help others like him.

Laura and Jordan O'Reilly founded not-for-profit Fighting Chance in 2011, a social enterprise which looks at problems disabled people face in getting into the workforce and then creates social businesses to overcome them.

Last year \$5.5m in revenue was generated by their social businesses.



Siblings Jordan O'Reilly and Laura O'Reilly who founded Fighting Chance, a social enterprise not-for-profit organisation that helps people with disability. Picture: Supplied.

The money from federal government will go to Jigsaw, one of those businesses, which provides disabled people with digital training and computer skills, then short-term paid employment so that they have enough experience to apply for jobs in the mainstream workforce.

It serves 100 clients including Northern Beaches Council and IMEI.

The O'Reilly's who grew up in Forestville, say their brother Shane who had profound cerebral palsy and a moderate intellectual disability, is their inspiration.

Tragically, not long after the launch of Fighting Chance, he died unexpectedly in his sleep aged 21.



The O'Reilly family from left to right: Laura, Shane, dad David, and Jordan. Picture: Supplied.

Ms O'Reilly, 33, who studied law at university, said their parents brought them all up to be the same and Shane was expected to do everything they did.

So, when he left Arranounbai School in Frenchs Forest, it was a shock to realise there were no work options for him.

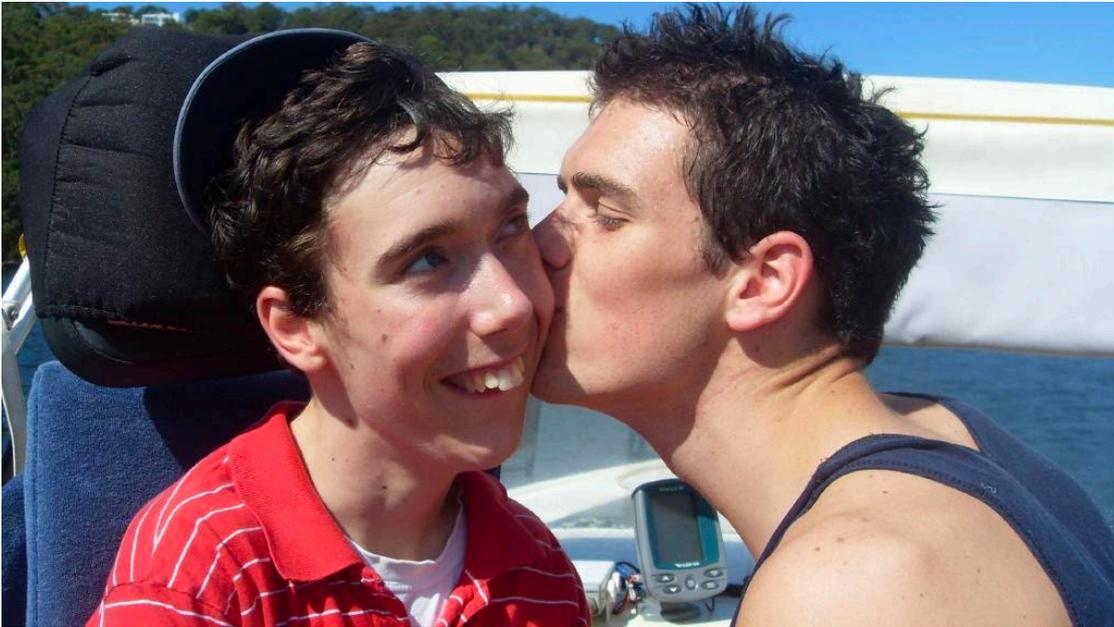
"It was a very dark time," she said. "Shane was 19. He didn't have a job and there was no possibility of a job.

"Society really judged him, particularly on his physical disability. He was in a wheelchair."

Ms O'Reilly said her brother was an amazing person.

"He was a complex, interesting, funny person," she said.

"He loved computers and was very technical."



Shane O'Reilly, with brother Jordan. Picture: Supplied.

When he realised job opportunities were closed off to him, he set up his own computer business, offering antivirus software.

Ms O'Reilly said Shane was entrepreneurial and "trying to fill the gap himself".

"It is very important that disabled people have work opportunities where they can contribute to society and to know you are valued for something," she said.

The \$544,000 funding win will go to Jigsaw, which currently supports 80 trainees and 40 paid staff, with 35 already successfully gaining jobs with mainstream employers. It will help support those transitioning into jobs.

The business is also about to expand into Brisbane.

"I am proud to see this excellent project receive funding through this program," Mr Falinski said of Fighting Chance.

While Ms O'Reilly is the CEO of Jigsaw, her brother Jordan, 31, is the CEO of Hireup, a separate profit for purpose online disability service that allows people to choose care workers by looking at their profiles and experience, rather than being assigned a care worker without having a say.

It already has 75,000 users.

"Shane is still the inspiration behind everything we do," Ms O'Reilly said.

"This is the legacy of his life."