







2021

Annual Report

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"In our 45-year history, we've had 100,000 participants and 30,000 employees; all have uniquely contributed to Ability Options. Greg McIntyre OAM's vision from 45 years ago is alive and well."

- Julia Squire, CEO

Cover **Story**



How Ability Options Led the Way with COVID-19 Vaccines

Since the vaccination roll-out started in Australia, our organisation has led the way in supporting our community to access vaccines.

It all started with our disability support worker Mila Thomas, the 7th person in Australia to receive the Pfizer vaccine back in February.

We are so proud of Mila for demonstrating our vision, mission and values by being among the first to get the vaccine.

Ability Options prioritised the vaccination effort, advocated publicly with the relevant agencies, and regularly provided information to our community. We also ensured that our accommodation residents were forefront in the minds of lead agencies. We ensured lead agencies brought vaccinations to our residents' homes. We also opened our own hubs, which delivered ovevr 2,000 doses of the vaccine.

Our CEO, Julia Squire, advocated very strongly for priority access for participants and employees, as had been arranged for the vaccine roll out. She made strong representations to ensure that people who had been scheduled to receive the vaccine in the Phase 1A priority list, had the vaccine delivered as planned.

Following the NSW Government's mandate requiring those working in disability services to be fully vaccinated, we updated our policy to ensure our colleagues complied with this mandate.

We're proud of our vaccinated staff and participants who have made a real difference in making our community COVID-safe.

"We would like to thank Mila for all her hard work, she is a trailblazer!"

About Us

Ability Options has a proud 45-year history of supporting people with disabilities to achieve their goals and live inclusively in the community. Through personalised and responsive services, we support individuals to build their self-esteem and independence. Putting people first has been, and always will be, at the heart of what we do.



With 1,200 passionate and dedicated staff, our disability and employment services span 94 sites in New South Wales, including Metropolitan Sydney, Greater Sydney, the Central Coast, Hunter, Mid North Coast, Illawarra, and Northern Beaches.

We pride ourselves on:

- supporting people to live in their own homes;
- providing meaningful opportunities for inclusion in the local community;
- offering work experience and employment opportunities; and
- connecting people to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services.

Our vision, mission and values remain as strong as ever, and we're committed to improving our organisation to better support participants. We do this by amplifying the voices of vulnerable people and seeking innovative ways to support them. For many years to come, we will continue to partner with others who share our values of trust, inclusion, respect, courage and leadership.

Ability Options respectfully acknowledges the traditional custodians of the Country on which we live and work together and is committed to building relations, respect and opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Patron's **Message**



This year marks the 45th anniversary of Ability Options' foundation, initially called the Assistance and Accommodation of Intellectually and Socially Handicapped Persons (AAISH), before becoming incorporated as a registered charity. The registration was a joint venture with the Rotary Club of Guildford and the New South Wales Health Commission. Its initial purpose was to support the de-institutionalisation of people with intellectual disability who were living in Rydalmere and later Cumberland Hospitals.

Greg McIntyre OAM, an eminent psychologist and the then program Director at Rydalmere Hospital, was the driving force behind this initiative, being a founding Director of the organisation until he died in 2012. I met Greg soon after its establishment when he asked me to evaluate the progress of the original group homes and the semi-independent living arrangements of a small group of ex-residents of Cumberland Hospital.

In 1979, we collaborated as the joint program chairs of the Second Joint National Conference of the Association for the Mentally Retarded (Now Inclusion Australia) and the Australian Association for the Scientific Study of Mental Deficiency (now ASID) and co-editing the Proceedings in the book, *Preparation for Life*.

Growing from its very modest beginnings, Ability Options has seen many changes in the way people with disabilities have been supported. It was before its time in supporting one of the first de-institutionalisation efforts, well before the 1983 Richmond Report. Its extension into supporting employment programs for people with

Throughout its 45 years, Ability Options has continued to embody the drive and commitment to the highest quality support service standards.

disabilities and other disadvantaged people has been outstanding, despite the vicarious nature of government funding. Its business enterprises, such as the nursery, were highly innovative, but financial pressures were responded to appropriately by careful Board leadership.

Throughout its 45 years, Ability Options has continued to embody the drive and commitment to the highest quality support service standards exemplified by the 2021 STAR Awards Ceremony. As a special mention, I congratulate the Seven Hills Day Program Team, which I judged for the 2021 STAR Employee of the Year Award. In this award, I made special mention of the Team's creative and innovative problem solving when faced with COVID-19 restrictions, for instance, "thinking outside the square."

However, these characteristics were quite evident across the whole field of Ability Options' endeavours and are truly a testament to the way in which all staff have responded in so many remarkable ways to the challenges of this past year. Much credit must also go to the leadership team and the Ability Options Board members.

The current deliberations of the Royal Commission Inquiry into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability has sadly highlighted that we have not moved far, in some respects, from the horrendous injustices people with disabilities suffered in some of our country's former institutions.

We must be ever vigilant to ensure that the basic human dignity of every person is always respected.

Trevor R Parmenter AM

Chair's **Report**

The last financial year, July 2020 to June 2021, was another successful year for Ability Options. Despite ongoing challenges with COVID-19 and weather events, the organisation continued to meet its strategic plan *Towards 2030*, published in 2020.



The Board continued its leadership and oversight throughout the year, and the Committees had busy agendas and some additional meetings.

In March 2021, the Board reviewed the delivery of the first year of *Towards 2030* and approved the ongoing strategy with a few small changes to adapt to our changing world.

We have made good progress on our five strategic directions, and we have endorsed them again:

- Courageous leadership
- Amplify voice
- Innovation
- Partnership
- Sustainable growth

Key achievements have included:

- Our work to engage effectively with employees and customers for the provision of high quality and safe services while also providing high quality, safe, and meaningful employment opportunities
- Our focus on advocacy for participants, staff, sector, and organisation
- Our work to ensure our services are personcentred and emphasise human rights, choice, and control
- Growth in attracting new services and customers to Ability Options
- Digital innovation, using new platforms for services, communications, systems, and processes
- Improving governance, direction, risk management, and compliance
- Increasing our partnerships with like-minded organisations who share our values and add expertise and resources

We agreed to include the following key considerations for FY22 in our budget and operational plans with these in mind. To:

- Continue to drive quality, efficiency, and engagement with staff and customers
- Continue our focus on workforce recruitment, retention, and planning
- Invest in our future in a structured way, building capacity, capability, and services
- Improve our market position growth to meet our mission

During the year, the Board strengthened its membership by welcoming our new Director, Matt Levy OAM, one of Australia's most successful Paralympian swimmers and a strong advocate for disability and inclusion.

Born and raised in NSW, Matt also has a successful career as an author, a motivational speaker, and a senior role in change management and analytics for Westpac.

Having completed his graduation from the Australian Institute of Company Directors, we were delighted to welcome Matt as one of our Directors. Since then, he has fully engaged with staff and participants.

Matt launched our inclusion strategy and hosted a fireside chat from hotel quarantine on his return from a super successful Paralympics. He added more gold and bronze to his impressive medal tally. Everyone who joined the "watch parties" felt uplifted by Matt's performance and that of all our Paralympians.

The Board's Committees have all worked hard this year, and their achievements are significant. These include:

- Quality, Practice & Outcomes oversight of our engagement, case studies, quality and safety incidents, our human rights work and outcomes, the work to contribute to the Disability Royal Commission. It also includes oversight of our work to improve our services in both Disability and Employment.
- Remuneration and Nominations approval and oversight of our remuneration strategy, which has provided incentives and reward opportunities to all employees plus tools for management to attract and retain the best people.
- Audit, Risk and Compliance oversight of our comp liance audits, the first end of year audit by our new audit partner, business continuity, plus emergency plans and a risk framework.

Despite ongoing challenges with COVID-19 and weather events, the organisation continued to meet its strategic plan Towards 2030.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the Board has focused on strategy and performance; and retained the direct oversight of employee engagement, recruitment, retention, and work health and safety. These key programs are at the heart of the Board's work. While there is more to do, much has been achieved.

The Board could not do its work without the support of our CEO and Executive Team and, most importantly, the hard work and commitment in achieving our mission and values from our employees.

Together, we make a good team. Therefore, I would like to thank and recognise the contribution of our employees, directors, and senior leaders in achieving a good outcome in our 45th year of operation.



Dr Robert Lang Chair

CEO's **Report**



I'm so excited to be writing my fourth annual report introduction in our 45th year. In my presentation at the 2021 Ability Options STAR Employee Awards, I referred to standing on the shoulders of our predecessors. Throughout our 45-year history, we have supported over 100,000 participants and employed more than 30,000 colleagues.

Every single one has contributed to the organisation that Ability Options is today and its future. Greg McIntyre OAM's vision from 45 years ago is alive, well, and continuing. I thank our predecessors and my 1,200 colleagues for their support in delivering additional and improved services during the past 12 months, despite the challenges. We are an awesome team, and I'm proud to work alongside every one of them.

The last financial year and, of course, the most recent few months since Sydney's long lockdown began have been both successful and challenging. I'm grateful for the support and contribution from participants, families, employees, the senior leadership team, directors and our partners in Health, and partners and suppliers in the forpurpose and commercial sectors.

Without the huge team of multi-disciplinary colleagues and supports, we wouldn't be in this great position to continue to meet our mission – to support those who need assistance to meet their aspirations and inclusion in the community. They say it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it takes many more to sustain a mission that is focused, values-driven, and not for profit in today's fast-paced and changing environment.

I'd say that our "village" of participants, families, guardians, employees, and supportive partners, has enabled our services to learn, improve, grow, innovate, be resilient, and have a strong sense of purpose and human rights to meet our mission. Everyone has supported each other, and we are stronger and more sustainable because of our shared mission, vision, and values.

We delivered our operational plan in the last financial year, again, and by doing this, we met the Board's approved strategy, moving us closer to our vision for 2030. In addition, we managed and responded to the continuing pandemic requirements and serious weather events. Bushfires were less extreme than the previous year, but we saw some participants, staff, and services impacted by floods. These are challenging events that, even after the clean-up, scar communities and people for many years to come. Employees provided support to those who needed it, often even though their own homes or families were impacted. To say thank you seems too little – but thank you anyway.

The same approach has been offered at every stage of the pandemic. Putting people first is so important, and this has always been at the centre of what we do. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to everyone in our Ability Options community.

Our operational plan included some big projects last year, as well as our day-to-day work to support participants and their families. Implementation of a new range of systems and processes is complete, and we are now embedding them. These upgrades will improve our services, increasing effectiveness and efficiency. We now have systems to support training and development for employees, enabling them to develop their careers.

New systems now support service provision, easily identify, and use policies and processes, manage our human resources, and enable deeper relationships with participants and their families. We also have a new intranet, and a new website is in progress for next year. We invested in rewarding and training our people and improving the services' environments' which benefit participants, their families, and our colleagues.

In the same year, we grew a range of services and welcomed new participants and colleagues. We transitioned further services from the NSW Government, welcoming residents, and colleagues from Casuarina Grove. Residents have been able to engage in their communities through activities and holidays and obtain more personalised services and a homely model of care. These are huge achievements, and we are proud of them.

"We are one of NSW's long-standing and largest providers. We are proud to be trusted with providing services to those who need us."

Latterly and throughout last year, we have focused on advocacy, keeping everyone safe in the face of the pandemic, and engaging employees, participants, and their families. We publicly advocated for participants with policymakers, politicians, and government agencies for the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out. We also engaged with the Disability Royal Commission and were consulted regarding the future of disability and employment services.

We have much to look forward to as we approach our 46th year. We are one of NSW's long-standing and largest providers and are proud to be trusted with offering services to those who need us. The inclusion agenda is very real today. We will be introducing new services to those needing employment and contemporary services in disability, and these will be chosen, trusted, and valued by the participants.

I look forward to the new challenges impacting our services, secure in the knowledge that our mission and values drive and sustain us, and that the incredible support of employees, participants, their families, and partners continues.



Lastly, I'd like to thank our Board for their stewardship of our mission, values, and organisation and the executive team, who are consistently diligent and courageous in their leadership.

Julia Squire

18,604 People supported through Employment Services 2,205 2020/2021 Highlights **Active Disability Ability Options** Service Community participants sites and Hubs 1,187 **Group Home Employees Participants** Homes & Respite **Group Homes** Sydney **Group Homes** Hunter Valley Respite Units Hunter Valley **Group Homes** Mid North Coast Respite units

Mid North Coast

Our **Vision**

"To inspire and lead communities, creating opportunity and services for people to participate fully in society"

Our **Mission**

"To support people who need assistance to achieve their aspirations and inclusion in the community"

Our **Values**

Our values are critical to our Vision and Mission, they embody our common purpose, and they encourage behaviours which enable us to meet our goals.



Trust we deliver on our promises, encourage feedback and work with honesty and openness



Inclusion we embrace, encourage and support diversity in everything we do



Respect we treat our participants, their families, communities, partners and each other with dignity, appreciation and recognition



Leadership we are a sector and service leader by innovating, improving and partnering with others



Courage we act on our values ensuring they are central to everything we do

Board of **Directors**



Dr Robert Lang Chair, Board of Directors Chair, Remuneration and Nomination Committee

During a 35-year career in state and local government, Dr Lang has gained experience in change management, community engagement, strategic urban planning, urban development, transport infrastructure, place management, arts, tourism, and energy.

Dr Lang has been the CEO of Parramatta City Council, Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority and Pacific Power and served on 18 Boards for not-for-profit organisations, private companies, and government statutory authorities. He has a longstanding interest in liveable cities, affordable housing, social inclusion, and the arts. He is also a Fellow of the Australia Institute of Company Directors and a Fellow of the Institute of Engineers Australia.



Heather Scheibenstock Deputy Chair, Board of **Directors** Remuneration and Nomination, Quality and **Outcomes Committees**

Heather spent 20 years as a Senior Executive in the hospitality industry. She is a firm believer in learning and development and has

continued her post-graduate studies in business, leadership, and corporate governance.

With experience as a non-executive director across a range of industries, Heather has a wealth of knowledge in leadership, strategy implementation and development, community, and stakeholder engagement.



Patricia Biszewski

Director Chair of Audit Risk and Finance Committee Remuneration and Nomination Committee

Patricia has had an extensive executive career in the maritime and logistics industry, driving and enabling business growth and organisational

transformation through strategy, finance, information technology and human resources practices.

She has worked as a non-executive director, developing programs that empower socially marginalised women, children and communities to become sustainably independent. Patricia has lived experience of disability in close family.

Board Director	Joined
Michael Maxwell	2014
Heather Scheibenstock	2017
Patricia Biszewski	2017
Dr Robert Lang	2019
Claire Cavanaugh	2019
Owen Gilbert	2019
Matt Levy OAM	2020



Michael Maxwell
Director,
Quality and Outcomes Committee

Michael has combined a career in the public and community services sectors with post-graduate qualifications in adult education, urban planning and social science. He uses his experience to create social and financial inclusion, enhance liveability and wellbeing, and support individuals and communities facing disadvantage to live to their full potential in safe, secure and empowering environments.

Michael is currently a social planner, sessional academic and Fellow of the School for Social Entrepreneurs. He serves on national and international boards of organisations committed to creating liveable communities. Michael has lived experience as the father of Joshua, who has a disability.



Claire CavanaughDirector,
Audit Risk and Finance Committee

Claire has a broad range of business experience, through senior finance roles at Oracle Australia and Readers Digest, and more recently in running her family's medical practice.

She also has lived experience and a keen interest in the disability sector; as the mother of 20-year-old Eddie, who has epilepsy and severe intellectual disability.

Claire cares for Eddie, manages his NDIS plan and advocates for his inclusion and proper care in school and leisure activities.



Owen GilbertDirector,
Audit Risk and Finance Committee

Owen has extensive experience driving effectiveness and efficiency in businesses, in Australia and around the world.

In addition to holding functional roles including CFO, CEO, COO and director, Owen's experience includes business transformation, stakeholder management, strategy, business case development and implementation, organisational review and change, investment management, business startups, and new system implementation, in a range of industries.

As a non-executive, executive director, and audit committee member of listed, private, and joint venture companies, in Australia and overseas.



Matthew Levy OAMDirector,
Quality and Outcomes Committee

Matthew is an inspirational leader and someone who is passionate about inclusion for people with disability.

Matt's career successes are many and varied; including working as a change analyst at Westpac, inspirational speaker, and author. He has competed at five consecutive Paralympic Games, winning three gold, one silver and five bronze medals.

He has competed in five World Championships, won 22 international medals, held four World Records and have been awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM).

He is an Ambassador for Australia Day, Westpac International Disability Day, Life's Little Treasures, Athlete Leader Swimming Australia, Telstra Paralympic Education Program and Vision Australia Speaking Program.

Committees **2020/2021**

Ability Options has three committees to support the work of the Board in governing the organisation. Each committee has oversight to specific parts of the business, reporting and making recommendations to the Board.

Audit Risk and Finance - 2020

Patricia Biszewski (Chair) Owen Gilbert Claire Cavanaugh (seconded during David Bamford's leave of absence)

Quality and Outcomes – 2020

Heather Scheibenstock (Chair) Sue Healy Michael Maxwell Claire Cavanaugh (seconded during David Bamford's leave of absence)

Remuneration and Nomination – 2020

Rob Lang (Chair) Sue Healy (Deputy Chair) Heather Scheibenstock

Audit Risk and Finance - 2021

Patricia Biszewski (Chair) Owen Gilbert Claire Cavanaugh

Oversight responsibilities include:

- External audit
- Risk management and internal control
- Internal audit and controls
- Annual financial statements
- Compliance
- Financial strategy

Quality and Outcomes – 2021

Heather Scheibenstock (Chair) Michael Maxwell Matt Levy

Oversight responsibilities include:

- Evaluating service quality and safety for improvement
- Participant and customer choice and control and outcomes
- Reviewing feedback from customers
- Oversight and recommendations on quality-related policies, processes, and incident management

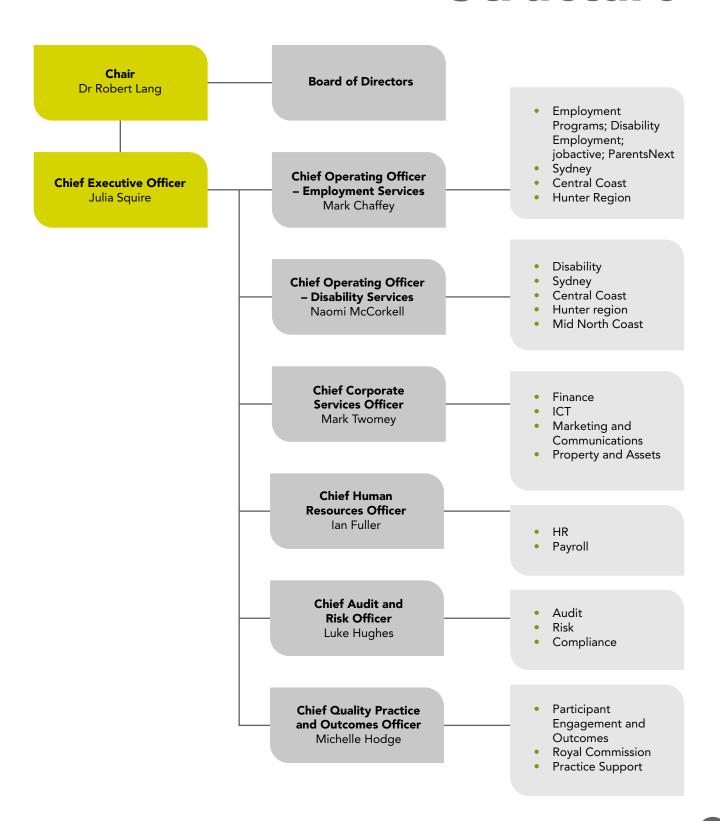
Remuneration and Nomination – 2021

Rob Lang (Chair) Heather Scheibenstock Patricia Biszewski

Oversight responsibilities include:

- Board nominations, induction, education, and succession plans
- Board, committees, and directors' performance
- Performance management and remuneration policies
- Performance, remuneration and succession planning of the executive team and non-award staff

Our **Structure**



Diversity **Profile**



Culture

Percentage of employees who have identified themselves as of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.



Disability

Percentage of employees who have identified themselves as living with disability.



27.8%

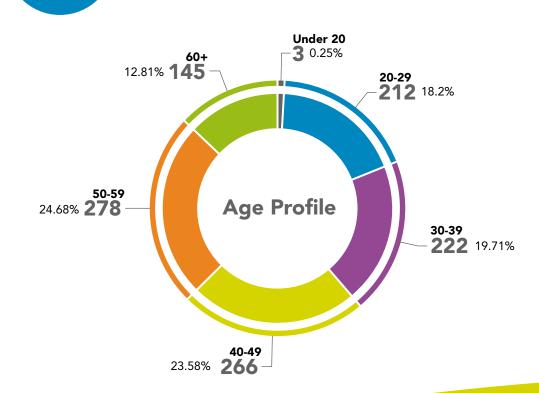
Gender

Females - 812





Males - 314



STAR EMPLOYEE Awards

Our annual STAR Employee Awards Ceremony recognises the wonderful work our colleagues are doing to achieve our mission.

Leadership Award Winner:	Ainslie Rommell	
Respect Award Winner:	Abigail Gomez	
Trust Award Winner:	Racheal Huta	
Courage Award Winner:	Sue Carmichael	
Inclusion Award Joint Winners:	Melissa Angelevski and Tenzin Legden	
Safety Award Winner:	Sylvia Sullivan	
Team Award Joint Winners:	WorkReady team and Employer Engagement team	
STAR Employee of the Year:	Seven Hills Day Program	

Thanks to our broadcast partners, Synergy Events, the awards ceremony was held online on Friday, 22 October and was akin to watching a live television show.

For the first time, participants in group homes could view the ceremony live on their TVs.

We want to give a special thank you to sponsors Squeeky Group and Buildingwise Construction, Interleasing, Perfect Ward, Casa Capace, and MOQdigital.

Thank you to our Deputy Chair, Heather Scheibenstock, for her prize donation for our runners up.



Leadership Award WinnerAinslie Rommell
Support Coordinator



Respect Award Winner Abigail Gomez DES Employment Consultant



Trust Award WinnerRacheal Huta
Manager – Quality Practice and
Outcomes



Courage Award Winner Sue Carmichael Manager – Business Support



Inclusion Award Winner
Melissa Angelevski
Manager – Disability Services



Inclusion Award Winner
Tenzin Legden
Claims & Compliance Officer



Safety Award Winner Slyvia Sullivan Registered Nurse Group Homes



Team Award Winner
WorkReady
Emma Murphy



Team Award Winner
Employer Account
Management Team
Julie Cox



STAR Employee of the Year Award Winner Seven Hills Day Program Melissa Angelevski

Congratulations to all our Finalists and Award Winners.

Services Snapshot

DISABILITY SERVICES

The Ability Options Community supports people from more than 94 sites, homes, and community hubs across Metropolitan Sydney, Greater Sydney, Illawarra, the Central Coast, Hunter, Mid North Coast, and Northern Beaches.



Accommodation & Independant Supported Living

Accommodation and Supported living choices for people with disability.



Respite Services

Quality, flexible support for children and adults with disability and their families in North West Sydney, Hunter, Mid North Coast and Northern Beaches.



Co-ordination of Supports

Supporting people with disability to find the right providers to meet their NDIS goals.



Community Activities

Offers a wide selection of activities and skills for life programs, support and training to assist people to learn new skills as well as make new friends and connect with the community.



Work Ready

WorkReady is a service that equips people with the skills, knowledge and experience to enter or re-enter the world of further training or work with confidence.





Therapy Services

The team of Psychologists and Therapists works with Accommodation & Supported living residents, NDIS participants, people in Work Ready and provides vocational counselling within Olympus Solutions.

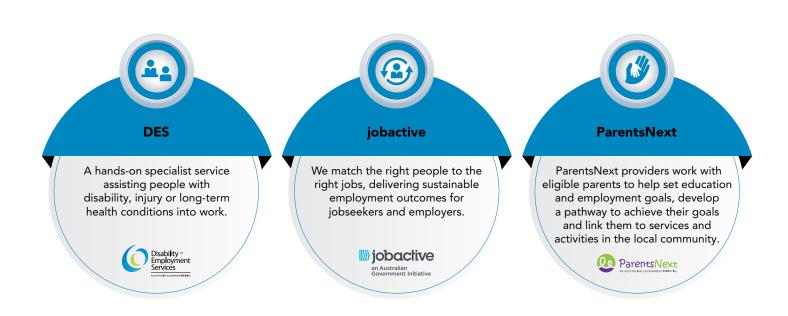


Front Up: Arts and Cultural Program

Front Up is a disability-led Arts and Cultural program offering participants access to multi-layered professional arts and cultural education.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Ability Options provides employment services to participants in Metropolitan Sydney, Greater Sydney, the Central Coast, Hunter, Illawarra, and the Northern Beaches.



Disability **Services**

Naomi McCorkell

Chief Operating Officer, Disability Services.

This year, our teams have demonstrated their resilience. Despite the enormous challenges thrown at us, we focused on participants always. I'm so proud of how our teams supported each other and participants throughout the bushfires and other weather events, COVID-19 and managed to design and implement a brand-new participant information system - weConnect. What an incredible achievement.

We designed and implemented a band new participant information platform for our teams in Disability Services so they can better document their day to day supports with participants and provide a more wholistic and connected service.

Although this project was enormous, adoption has been successful, particularly for those using technology for the first time. Investment in this new system will ensure our focus and energy remains on the people we support achieving their goals and aspirations in the community.

weConnect has improved the way we engage with participants before they start services, consolidated many forms we use to collect information and ensured there is consistency, improves the way we match staff with participants and ultimately connects the support we provide to participants with their individual NDIS goals.

During 2021, we used the learnings from the first NSW lockdown to prepare ourselves to keep everyone safe and provide innovative services. Our focus was always to ensure participants remained safe and connected to their family, their friends and to their community.

We were quickly able to switch face-to-face support to online. Our WorkReady Program were nominated as finalists in the Zero Project Award for their innovation in transitioning to virtual supports seamlessly. The Zero Project encourages innovation, scalability and replication of disability inclusion approaches around the world. The Zero Project is a program aimed at supporting the internationalisation of innovative disability solutions for a barrier-free world. Our virtual WorkReady program enabled young people with disability to remain connected and to continue to develop their preparedness for employment.



I'm so proud of how our teams supported each other and participants throughout the weather events and COVID-19



This year we also welcomed participants and staff from Casuarina Grove into the Ability Options community. The transfer of previously managed State government services took place following a successful bid. We have been working closely with our new team members to adopt the Ability Options inclusive and community focused philosophy and services based on our mission and values, choice and control.

Our partnership with Casa Capace continued across the year, as we work to replace our old housing stock with brand new accessible state-of-the-art housing options for existing and prospective participants. The first new home as part of this partnership will be completed in the coming months and participants are gearing up to move into their brand-new home of their choice.

This past year has proved that we have a team of people committed to ensuring that participants remain connected to their communities, and at the heart of all our operational decisions. "Participants learned a lot and empowered themselves about healthy eating habits and seasonal foods and are looking forward to doing the same in the summer."



Keen Kempsey Hub Clubbers Grow Cucumbers and Other Veggies

Participants from The Hub Club in Kempsey wanted to build their skills in the kitchen and the garden. So in May, they set out to improve The Hub's group space by working on a vegetable garden.

The group discussed what foods they wanted to grow and use in the kitchen. They researched vegetables and the best times to plant and grow them. Then, our keen Kempsey participants got to work planting seeds and undertaking weekly maintenance in the garden. Our gardeners made sure their well-tended plants had plenty of water and sun.

Participants got creative and built a compost system using food scraps and old, used paper. They reasoned that compost would prevent snails and other pests from eating their vegetables. Once the veggies were ready for harvesting, the gardening group picked and gathered the crops and brought them to the kitchen to be cooked.

Using their freshly grown vegetables to make salads, wraps, soups, and coleslaw, the vegetables weren't the only ones to grow. The keen Kempsey Hub Clubbers loved growing, cooking, and preparing their meals.

Our gardeners learned a lot about growing food. They were empowered by their achievements and adopted healthy eating habits while learning the benefits of seasonal foods. Our keen gardeners are looking forward to repeating their feats (or is that feasts?) in the summer.

Good News **Stories**

How Technology Helps Donna Improve Her Independent Living Skills

After becoming legally blind, Donna's goal was to improve her independent living skills. She is well on her way to achieving this through the support of Ability Options Therapy and COS teams.

Donna feels more confident in her home due to modifications to everyday household items. She has access to voice technology through her iPad (Siri) and smart speaker (Alexa). These voice command assistants allow Donna to connect with family, organise appointments and use social media. She has also developed skills to identify where food is on a plate and spread butter on bread. Donna has learned to navigate the community with her cane. Donna has chosen hot pink instead of the traditional white cane to signal that she is visually impaired.

After linking with an NDIS-registered builder, Donna had a rail installed in her backyard. She can spend time outside with her dog and feels more confident navigating her home.

Donna has been connected with the supports to enable her to live more independently. Her next goals are to write and deliver a speech for her son's wedding. Donna also wants to use assistive technology to teach her grandchildren how to bake.



"Each and every day, our team support people who need assistance to achieve their aspirations and inclusion in the community. Donna's story is a great example of how the right goals, supports, modifications, equipment, and technology combined can support someone to live life their way. I am so proud of our teams." - Naomi McCorkell, Chief Operating Officer, Disability



WorkReady Participants Have Their Say

Some 7.5% of the Australian population are young people with disabilities. We invited a few of them to share their lived experiences so that we could support them to achieve their goals.



Jack, WorkReady participant

I've used Ability Options WorkReady services since early 2021. They helped me get a job as a maintenance assistant with Arcare Warriewood. I work three days a week. I enjoy it and have learnt a lot.

How has this past year been for you?

As lockdowns became stricter, I was disappointed. Christmas was hard and I couldn't enjoy social outings.

What was one highlight of your year?

Getting my first job and P plates.

What was the biggest challenge you've faced this year?

Adapting to COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

What do you think was the biggest challenge for young people this year?

Being isolated from friends and family and home-schooling.

What is one important thing you've learned through COVID-19 restrictions over 2020 and 2021?

To stay safe and be connected through online technology.

Have you felt supported this year? Who supports you the most?

My family, friends, and Ability Options supported memy family is my biggest support.

How do you feel about the Ability Options services supporting you?

Ability Options has helped me build skills. Work experience with OzHarvest led to my job with Arcare.

What have you learned through Ability Options services?

You have to prepare yourself for the workforce. You need interviews skills, a resume, good presentation, and employment checks such as working with children and a police checks.

Do you have any advice for other young people?

Ability Options is a great place to get work experience and learn skills. They care and are interested in you.



Minh, WorkReady participant

I contacted Ability Options after I high school in 2019.

How has this past year been for you?

The first half of the year was enjoyable. The second half of the

year was difficult and not as fun.

What was one highlight of your year?

I finished my Certificate IV at TAFE and am studying for a diploma.

What was the biggest challenge you've faced this year?

Being alone through the lockdowns and restrictions. It's been difficult to see friends, and I was lonely.

What do you think was the biggest challenge for young people this year?

Not seeing friends and not going out has felt isolating.

What is one important thing you've learned through COVID-19?

Enjoy and embrace life because we don't know when we could be in lockdown again.

Have you felt supported this year? Who supports you the most?

I needed a lot of support this year. My family really supported me, even though we had our issues.

How do you feel about the Ability Options services supporting you?

They have been a massive aid for me this year, with work skills and experience, and my mental health in helping me with a routine.

What have you learned through Ability Options services?

I've learnt a lot about keeping motivated and having the right mindset.

Do you have any advice for other young people out there?

Follow your passion. Don't quit; no matter how dark the path, there's light at the end of the tunnel. You need to keep going.



Nicholas, WorkReady participant

I started with Ability Options in 2020 and began the SLES program in 2021.

How has this past year been for you?

I've enjoyed the year. The consultants are lovely and take time to listen.

What was one highlight of this year?

I can get the bus from home to the office by myself.

What was the biggest challenge you've faced this year?

Coping with a lack of social group at SLES.

What do you think was the biggest challenge for young people this year?

Maintaining social contact with friends and family.

What is one important thing you've learned through the various restrictions?

I've learned technology skills. I didn't cope with online learning in 2020 but am doing better this year, with support from Ability Options.

Have you felt supported this year? Who supports you the most?

I have been supported by my family, Ability Options, and Johnny H support workers.

How do you feel about the Ability Options services supporting you?

I've had a lot of fun at Ability Options. They provided access to vaccination, and training such as Workplace Skills, RSA and RCG courses. I enjoyed the Friday social days. My consultants always answer my questions.

What have you learned through Ability Options services?

I've know more about workplaces and I've developed my skills in understanding emotions.

Do you have any advice for other young people out there?

Don't doubt yourself. Trust your WorkReady consultants. There's somebody to help you if you ask.

Quality, Practice and Outcomes



Michelle Hodge

Chief Quality, Practice and Outcomes Officer

In this challenging year, the investment in our Quality Practice and Outcomes Team is really paying off. We have seen improvement in the skills and support for front line employees in both Disability and Employment. We have also enhanced careers, engaged with participants, focused on outcomes and established our Human Rights committee.

The team has ensured all our current staff have completed the new induction training. We rolled this out to new starters and our existing staff who hadn't had the same level of training. We delivered a 90% success rate of those staff, including casuals.

Another highlight was myJourney, the performance process for frontline staff underpinned by the Disability Career Planner and Capability Framework from National Disability Services. Some 600 staff completed their performance discussions and annual performance reviews. It was a new process for many of us, and it has helped set expectations, clarify roles, and responsibilities.

Our practice support coordinator team, who go out and deliver face-to-face training to support the online component, was a new delivery. We've engaged clinical nurse educators to cover health training - well above and beyond what we're funded to deliver. Now people can get out of hospital quicker, and we're able to provide them with better care.

"We ended up with a 90% induction training success rate for all new and existing staff, including casuals"

We did some early work on The Voice Project survey. Through consultation with the general management team, we worked through the questions with our parent carers and participants. We discussed how to action the answers. To make it more engaging, we changed some of the language used by Voice to easy-to-read English.

Another innovation we implemented was Perfect Ward. This is a quality assurance application for staff phones and iPads in homes. It allowed us to monitor medication administration, medication received, and some shift duties. It also enabled us to do file reviews with new participant surveys.

Perfect Ward showed us how we were progressing and that we needed to do surveys on a bigger scale and consult more broadly with participants. This is why we embarked on The Voice Project survey.



Over the past 12 months, we've been attending (where possible) the Royal Commission face-to-face hearings. We've had members of the team attend from a learning perspective to understand better what the Commission is looking for. By being proactive before the final report is released, we're keeping ahead of the sector and ensuring that we've got the best outcomes for the people we're supporting.

We finalised our draft Royal Commission submission for Ability Options. It covers all the items we want the Commission to focus on and provides relevant and key case studies. We also communicated the Commission's work to staff, participants, and their families. We've done this through a regular feature in our monthly newsletter, explaining how participants can access the Commission.

The Royal Commission is cementing several things that we have been implementing over time. One of those is having more than 50% representation from people with disability or family members of people with disability on

the Human Rights Committee. Once, we couldn't get people interested, whereas this year, we have a very passionate staff who want to get the ball rolling.

The committee looked at all the local council areas where we provide services. It consulted with the people living in those areas to provide feedback to the Councils. The committee will continue to evolve, and we hope the representation will continue to grow.

Finally, we've been focusing on reducing and eliminating restrictive practices. We've done a great job of navigating all of the changes over the past 12 months. Together, we've worked to bring all the staff teams up to speed on the new portals and have them understand the expectations of all the different reporting requirements.

Employment **Services**

Mark Chaffey

Chief Operating Officer, Employment Services

When we look back on this year, it has presented a number of challenges for the employment sector. At the beginning of the year, we had the impact of COVID. Towards the back end of the year, we had an uptick in services as people started to go back to work. Right at the end of June 2021, we again saw the impact of a COVID lockdown. As a result, it was an uncertain year for our jobseekers and the future of our division.

The jobactive and Disability Employment Service (DES) programs continued to work on reviewing our services to streamline and improve the customer experience and outcomes, while providing extra support, learning and terms and conditions for front line staff. The teams worked to embed the changes introduced at the end of the 2020 lockdown. They also supported the significant numbers of jobseekers who flowed into our services as a result off those first lockdowns. The teams always strived to meet our mission, and find good jobs for as many jobseekers as possible to support our ultimate goal for participants - to have a more inclusive life.

The pandemic has had a significant and lasting impact on employment services because many businesses had to close. Even for businesses that continued to operate throughout the lockdowns, for example, pick and pack and warehousing, the delays in overseas deliveries meant that they could not operate at capacity. This, in turn, limited the number of opportunities for our job seekers.

Meanwhile, the ParentsNext contract was renewed for two years, which meant we could continue developing and growing this program assisting parents with young children. As the year came to an end, we rolled out the changes to the program, and we are looking forward to a successful future for ParentsNext.

Throughout the pandemic, we maintained our connections with our large employers wherever possible, and if they had needs, we did our best to fill them. The Employer Account Management team did a great job keeping those connections solid through a period of uncertainty.



Since joining the team in February 2021, I have focused on providing a higher standard of service for all our clients, ensuring they are all given the best opportunities. To assist with this, we introduced a range of tools, including dashboards, for managers that allow greater scrutiny of their caseloads. The dashboard highlights the key characteristics and needs of each client. This allows our team to focus on our engagement with the client and how we can assist them individually.

We are now focused on improving performance for today's customers whilst planning our future service offers and growth.

"The employer account management team did a great job of keeping connections solid through a period of uncertainty"

"Cindy's success in her new job is a step towards closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians."

Good News Stories



How Cindy Faced Challenges and Secured a New Job

When Cindy first joined Ability Options, she was finding it hard to get a job. But in July 2020, she successfully secured a job with Aussie Gardening and Cleaning.

Unfortunately, it was still some time before Cindy could begin working. Her car didn't work too well, and she had to save up to buy a new one. Once she did, Cindy had to wait to register her car. To make sure the position was still available for Cindy by the time she got her car up and running, Ability Options kept in touch with Aussie Gardening and Cleaning.

In March 2021, Cindy was finally able to begin her new job. At first, she had trouble figuring out her hours and was arriving late to work. Thanks to the incredible support provided by Aussie Gardening and Cleaning, Cindy overcame those challenges.

Cindy is enjoying work and is succeeding in her role. She has been praised for her efforts by upper management and is now applying for a team leader role.

Cindy is among many Indigenous Australians who have faced challenges with balancing family and employment responsibilities. But her success in her new job is a step towards closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

"Although job hunting may be daunting, the key to success is to keep trying and never give up". - Alise, Jobseeker with Disability

Alise Kickstarts Her Dream Career at Vision Australia

Alise has dreamed of becoming a graphic designer ever since she completed her Bachelor's degree in 2019. She became passionate about working in the not-for-profit sector and wanted to work for Vision Australia. She met with our Employment Consultant, Jake, to make her dreams a reality.

Jake showed Alise an opportunity to join Vision Australia as part of its Career Start Program. Alice was very excited to apply and listened to Jake's tips on job interviewing, resume and cover letter writing. Alise applied for the role and was successful in securing her place in the program.

Alise is now living her dream as both a graphic designer and an employee at Vision Australia. She is developing her skills and growing her professional experience. She has also become more confident in searching and applying for jobs in the future.

Alise wants other job seekers with disabilities to know that although job hunting may be daunting, the key to success is to keep trying and never give up. She also recommends sharpening your skills by connecting with a consultant, as she did.

Congratulations, Alise! We can't wait to see your career thrive.



Audit Risk and Compliance

Luke Hughes

Chief Audit and Risk Officer

In a year of highlights for the Audit, Risk and Compliance (ARC) team, the rollout of *myLibrary* – our new quality management system – will arguably deliver the most impactful long-term benefits to our staff and participants. *myLibrary* contains the policies and processes that guide our organisation. In developing *myLibrary*, we reduced the documents that govern what we do from around 700 to over 200. With so much of our workforce being remote, *myLibrary* has provided clarity in an easily digestible and accessible format, available online to our staff when and wherever they undertake their day-to-day jobs.

This year, Ability Options also took an early and strong advocacy stance to support the national COVID-19 vaccination rollout. In February, we engaged with the Commonwealth Department of Health and participated as a trial provider for Phase 1a of the national inoculation program. We facilitated the administration of the vaccine to participants and to those who support them. The vaccine was made accessible to us through two pathways. First were the in-reach vaccinations, where the vaccine provider went into disability accommodation settings and vaccinated our NDIS participants. The other pathway was via 'hubs', where the provider established vaccination sites at community venues, for which we volunteered a number of our office locations. We ultimately ran hubs on 45 days across Sydney, the Central Coast, Hunter, and Mid North Coast. In total, over 2000 jabs were delivered.

We also supported the wider community through our endeavours to not waste a single drop of the vaccine. Where a surplus of vaccines arose, we ended up vaccinating people in adjacent offices and even people off the street on occasion. So, while most vaccinations were administered to participants and staff, our efforts to vaccinate others contributed to keeping everyone in our communities safe.

We rolled out a work health and safety framework this year, including establishing a Work Health and Safety (WHS) Committee. The WHS Committee met for the first time in June and is now working collaboratively to improve workplace safety for our staff and the people we support. Eight Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) covering our various business units and geographies volunteered to take a leadership role in the business and completed a five-day HSR training program in WHS legislation and practices. These people are now qualified HSRs, and also sit as elected worker representatives on the WHS Committee.



Although COVID-19 has been an enormous challenge, it has undeniably led to substantial improvements in how we operate. We were able to come together on a screen in a way that we've never been able to previously, which has been significant for ARC, because our work cuts across the whole organisation. The WHS Committee is a good example of this benefit because we can work with the HSRs and come together virtually despite being separated by considerable distances. We wouldn't have been able to do that effectively before the pandemic.

As the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission and the Department of Education, Skills and Employment continued to evolve regulatory compliance activities, we demonstrated the agility to redesign and repurpose our resources to meet increasing compliance demands. This year we also formalised our continuous improvement processes. Continuous improvement was also a core theme of our external audits, which is an area we've had considerable success. We are increasingly being recognised through independent analysis as a best-practice provider. In this way, our activities this year have demonstrated how the work of ARC ultimately leads to better outcomes for the people we support.

This year has shown how the activities of the audit, risk and compliance team ultimately produce better outcomes for the people we support. High-level compliance means higher quality services.

Corporate **Services**

Mark Twomey

Chief Corporate Services Officer

We have continued our policy of improving our workspaces and homes this year. We've been upgrading some residential facilities and relocating a number of offices. We continued improving our workspaces and homes through property improvements, new furniture and fittings. We undertook planned and preventative maintenance across a large number of areas with spending totalling more than \$1.6 million. This work will continue in the new financial year.

The marketing and communications team rolled out a new intranet platform, ourPlace, launched in April 2021. The intranet offers the opportunity to share stories and achievements of the people we support and connects and informs our staff. The intranet is now the lead digital channel to engage our staff to quickly and easily find information and links to help them do their roles.

This year also saw the roll-out of Office 365, upgrades to our computer hardware to increase our capacity and usage of Office 365 products. As part of our continual improvement process, we reviewed our operational procedures in ICT and achieved ISO 27001 accreditation. Following the end of the financial year, we achieved accreditation with the federal government around Right Fit for Risk, allowing us to continue providing top-level service to those we support. We also welcomed a new IT support team through MOQ. They have worked seamlessly with us in the accreditation process and ensure staff have efficient responses to any IT issues we may encounter.



The Corporate Services team is continually reviewing and working with the Services to improve our processes and systems for finance. We improved our budgeting and reporting and introduced business analysts to our team. Our analysts will continue to develop service line management reporting, which will give management and staff timely and relevant information. They will also look at the business structure, how we report, and how we can provide data to team leaders and frontline staff, so they remain informed.

"Our mantra in corporate services is: how do we make it easier for our frontline staff to do their job? We treat them as our customers"

Human **Resources**

Ian Fuller

Chief Human Resources Office

Our staff engagement results remained good in 2021 with an overall 76 per cent score, only slightly down from 2020. We think, that given the impact of COVID-19, this is a great result.

Our staff tell us that they are engaged in the work that they do and that they believe in the purpose and values of Ability Options. They agree that we are making great progress in delivery of our services and support to people with disabilities and that we treat people with dignity and respect.

They told us that priorities for us to work on are recruiting the right people in a timely manner, to work with staff on career development and improve our leadership capabilities. These are key areas of action for us over the next year or so.

Our working group has continued to meet every other month and a new chair was appointed in October 2021. The working group has agreed a plan to work towards becoming a disability confident employer by 2022, which includes awareness training for managers and staff. We have run a pilot of this program through Australian Network on Disability (AND).

Ability Options is also participating in 'Stepping into internship' (an internship scheme that matches talented university students with disability) with AND.

The Reconciliation Action Plan working group has continued to meet despite COVID-19, but the number of activities have been limited in 2020/21 due to the inability to visit our 100 sites, meet physically, or to hold events. However a key action has been the roll out of a fantastic six-module program to build awareness and understanding by all staff about Aboriginal culture and nearly 75 per cent of our staff have completed this giving great feedback.



We rolled out mySpace, our new HR system. This online portal is as handy as self-service banking, making many things smoother and easier for our employees. Employees can now go in to change their bank details, apply for leave online, and much more. Already, some 97 per cent of our staff have accessed it. We are really looking forward to using the capabilities of this system.

Our Covid 19 vaccination compliance was largely been completed post the end of the financial year. Some 81.8 per cent of our staff are fully vaccinated with 7.2 per cent having had their first does. We have 11 per cent unvaccinated at this stage.

We have run vaccination incentives including having weekly random prize winners over a 20-week period and a competition for five \$1000 gift cards.

"Employee survey results showed a 76% staff engagement."



Ability Options Celebrates 45 Years

This year, Ability Options is celebrating 45 years as an organisation that has been living up to its vision, mission, and values in supporting people with disability to achieve their aspirations and inclusion in the community. To celebrate this special year, here is a brief history of our organisation.

Founded in 1976 by the late Greg McIntyre OAM, Ability Options, formerly known as the Association for the Assistance of Intellectually and Socially Handicapped Persons (AAISH), began as a joint partnership between the Rotary Club of Guildford and the NSW Health Commission. Its primary purpose was to help people with intellectual disabilities to move out of large institutions and live independently in their own homes.

In 1986, AAISH became a registered company and began providing support and accommodation services for people with disability. Greg was a Director of the company at the time until his passing in 2012. He was heavily involved in promoting and delivering advocacy services to people with disability and played a key role in the planning and management of delivering TAFE educational opportunities for students with disability. In its 1987-88 Annual Report, AAISH's original mission says that the organisation aims to 'promote the independence, worth, and dignity of intellectually and socially handicapped people' and 'to encourage and promote citizen and self-advocacy for intellectually and socially handicapped people.' Today, our current mission aims 'to support people who need assistance to achieve their aspirations and inclusion in the community,' something we continue to work towards as an organisation.

Part of Greg's mission was to ensure that people with disability develop the skills needed to find and secure employment. In 1982, Work Inc, an AAISH-run farm located in Rooty Hill, was established to provide work experience and employment support for people with disability. Since then, Ability Options has remained committed to supporting people looking for employment to reach their potential and achieve their employment goals. Over the years, Ability Options' employment services have grown and expanded to include Disability Employment, jobactive, ParentsNext and WorkReady. We have formed partnerships with employers to maintain its commitment to providing employment opportunities and support for people with disability.

November 1995 was a key moment in our history when AAISH changed its name to Ability Options to reflect the abilities of all people with disability. Between 2000-2002, Ability Options became an accredited provider of disability support and care by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care and the NSW Department of Family and Community Services. In the years following its accreditation, Ability Options began to expand and improve its services, extending to additional locations in NSW, stretching as far as Illawarra and Coffs Harbour. In July 2013, Ability Options began rolling out the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for Disability Services, starting with the Hunter Region.

In the past five years, Ability Options has grown very quickly and extended services by absorbing and integrating eight other services or oganisations. In the past five years, Ability Options has grown very quickly and extended services by absorbing and integrating eight other services or oganisations.

In 2011, Honorary Professor Trevor R Parmenter AM was appointed as Ability Options' Patron. A former schoolteacher, Trevor first met Greg shortly after Ability Options was founded at a meeting hosted by a research association that sponsored research in disability. During their meeting, Greg asked Trevor to 'evaluate the progress' of Ability Options' mission. As part of his evaluation, Trevor made regular visits to both group and one-bedroom homes run by Ability Options to see how they were managed. Trevor also talked to the homes' residents to find out what life was like in each living situation. Years later, Greg asked Trevor if he could nominate him to be the Patron. Trevor gladly accepted the role, as he felt very inspired by Greg's passion and determination in supporting people with disability to lead more independent and inclusive lives. Before his passing, Greg asked Trevor to continue the work he started in advocating for people with disability and reminded him always to maintain the organisation's mission, values, and integrity.

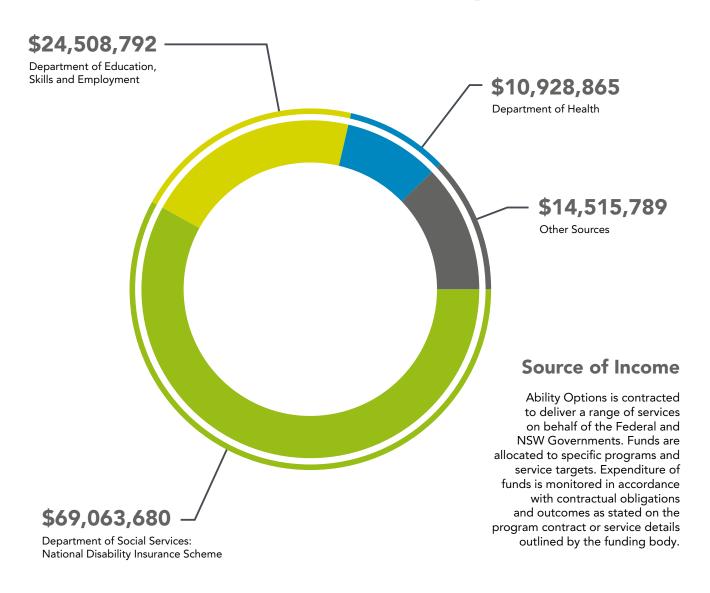
Forty-five years is a long time, and so much has happened since its founding. Today, Ability Options has 1,200 employees working to support and make a difference in the lives of the people we support. We are now the largest provider of disability services in NSW, with a network of 94 offices providing disability and employment services to over 20,000 people registered with us throughout the state. Still, thanks to the hard work and commitment of our former and current employees, we have been able to continue to provide high-quality support and services to the people who

need us, keeping Greg's legacy alive through our vision, mission, and values.



Greg McIntyre OAM

Government and other Funding





Financial **Snapshot**

Particular	2020	2021
Operating Income	99,628,560	109,878,970
Other income	7,822,632	9,138,156
Expenses	95,571,473	105,723,045
Surplus	11,879,719	13,294,081
Total Assets	70,159,706	82,580,794
Total Liabilities	41,941,060	41,102,166
Total Funds	28,218,646	41,478,628

"Our overall surplus for the financial year was \$13.3m, improving from the 2020 result of \$11.9m."



Summary

The Financial year saw a growth in operating revenue of 10.3%, largely from Disability Services that won a government contract to manage operations to run a special facility for NDIS participants. Employee costs make up the majority of our expenses, and they increased by 9.5%. The organisation's Financial Position is sound with total funds of \$41.5 million as of 30 June 2021.

For a copy of our full audited financial statement, please get in touch with marketingteam@abilityoptions.org.au



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