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## Ability Options on the Frontline of the COVID-19 Vaccine

On Sunday, 21 February, Australia had its first rollout of the newly approved Pfizer COVID-19 vaccination at Castle Hill Medical Centre, with frontline workers being the first in line.

Ability Options is proud to be amongst the first disability service providers to be rolling out the vaccine. Our own Disability Support Worker, Mila Thomas, was the 7th person in Australia to receive the vaccine. The livestreamed event was shown across the country, with the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, Chief Medical Officer, Paul Kelly, and Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, all present. Mila did a fantastic job representing us, explaining that she wants to keep herself, our participants, and the rest of the community safe. She hopes that everyone will "get vaccinated, for their own safety and for the health of participants whom we're supporting."

People living in group homes and other disability accommodation are part of the first priority group known as Phase 1a, together with other recipients of the vaccine, including healthcare workers, aged care residents and workers, the Australian Border Force, and military and navy personnel. As of Monday, 22 February, our participants will be offered the vaccination, starting in two group homes in Sydney. Other group homes, Casuarina Grove, and respite houses will be notified about the vaccine offer once we receive more information.

Currently, getting the vaccine is voluntary. Both participants and their families will be notified about the vaccine offer and, if they wish, will be given the opportunity to consent. Those who consent will have their names put on a list, followed by

*continues on page 7*



# A Message from our CEO

**Welcome to the first edition of TheVoice Newsletter for 2021. Our new Editor/Columnist, Rafael, and the team, have done a great job of packing this edition full of news, information, and interesting stories. Rafael and the team would love to receive feedback about what we can do better and what you like about the Newsletter.**

I wrote in last year's edition about our work to improve services, focusing on choice, control, and advocacy, including our management of events like the bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic. We have continued with this work and we have continued to receive support and love from our participants and their families. Since the last edition, we have been busy making sure that all our services are operational, supporting people who need our assistance to meet

their aspirations and feel included in the community. This is our Mission. The more we hear about peoples' ideas, wishes, and aspirations, the more we can work to fulfil our Mission.

***Our approach to inclusion needs to focus on choice, control, listening to our participants and their families, and acting on what we hear.***

We understand that this isn't always easy. Developing partnerships with organisations like the Council for Intellectual Disability helps us to organise ourselves in ways which enable us to walk our talk. Most importantly, we are working to find ways to ensure that our participants and their families have their say and direct our work. Some concrete examples of this include the design and location of the new group homes we are building, in partnership with Casa Capace, and our work in seeking informed consent for participants to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. We have also done a considerable amount of work in practice reviews and in reducing the use of restrictive practices.

Our updated inclusion strategy within Ability Options was launched in January, together with our



updated Reconciliation Action Plan. We have a new committee of participants to advise us in our work in providing disability services throughout the community. Plans for a new survey of all our customers and participants are being worked on. As an employer, we have had some recent successes in making sure that roles within our organisation are both safe and accessible to applicants from diverse backgrounds, but we can do much better.

***It's not enough to have 'Inclusion' in our Mission and Values; we have to act on our words and live by those values every day.***

Inclusion is at the heart of our services and we are proud to be thinking very broadly about

If you have any views, ideas, or feedback on how we can do better, please let me or our Editor know.

Julia Squire: ***Julia.Squire@abilityoptions.org.au***

Rafael Sanchez-Bayo: ***Rafael.SanchezBayo@abilityoptions.org.au***



inclusion. We try to be an inclusive employer. We try to listen and act on the choices our participants make. We also try to ensure that there is a real Voice for participants in our services, as well as in the sector as a whole. Words are important, but only if we act upon them. When my daughter was little, she didn't want to do what I asked, whenever I called her.

***She used to say, "mummy! I can hear you, but I'm just not listening."***

Whenever we hear about inclusion, we often think that hearing opinions, aspirations, and values is enough to fulfil it. In reality, listening first, and then acting on those messages is much more meaningful. What I do know though, is that, no matter how long it takes for us to be a truly inclusive workplace and service provider, we all want to achieve the same goal of becoming an inclusive community. That's a great start.

Best wishes,  
**Julia Squire**

# Introducing TheVoice's New Editor, Rafael

Hello! My name is Rafael Sanchez-Bayo. I'm the new content writer at Ability Options, working as part of the Marketing and Communications team. I will be managing the organisation's seasonal newsletter, *TheVoice*.



Prior to joining Ability Options, I studied and graduated with a Bachelor of Communication, majoring in Journalism, from Western Sydney University. I also hold a Certificate IV and a Diploma in Screen and Media (Journalism) from TAFE NSW.

I have a passion for storytelling, a skill which I developed an interest in, ever since graduating from high school. Writing stories opens doors to new perspectives, exploring new environments, meeting new people, and navigating new situations. It has taught me to be more open minded and embrace differences in cultures, beliefs, and worldviews.

It is a great honour and privilege to be a part of the Ability Options community. I look forward to utilising my skill and knowledge sets to deliver a newsletter which aims to advocate for inclusion, giving a voice to every member of our community.

## PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION 2021

***Are you passionate about photography?  
Do you want to practise your skills? This is your chance to showcase your talent to the Ability Options Community.***



Email us a photo of a place that interests you with a brief 100 word description for your chance to win a **\$100 Gift Card**, and have your work featured on both our Instagram page and this newsletter.

So, what are you waiting for? Pick up your camera, get inspired, and send your entry to [marketingteam@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:marketingteam@abilityoptions.org.au)

We are excited to see your passion thrive.



# Quality Practice & Outcomes



## PROMOTE VOICE

**The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability have recommenced their work for 2021 and resumed hearings on the 16th of February.**

The Royal Commission has released its schedule of hearings for the year, and the hearing themes include:

- The experiences of people with cognitive disability in the criminal justice system
- Health care professionals – education and training (additional hearing days)
- NDIS and service providers
- First Nations and out-of-home care
- Restraints in education
- The health and safety of women and girls with disability
- Employment
- Disability support workforce issues

So far, for the month of February, the Commission has been focusing on the indefinite detention of people living with disability. The panel has heard from witnesses, guardians, and professionals, regarding extended seclusion of people living with disability upon entering the justice system, the process of transitioning back into the community, and the difficulties of securing accommodation, SIL funding, and engaging with service providers who are proficient in supporting individuals with complex requirements. This hearing was completed on the 25th of February 2021.

Ability Options continues to support the work of the Royal Commission and can provide you with advice about making a submission or assist with any questions you may have. Feel free to contact a member of the Quality, Practice & Outcomes team regarding anything about the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability by emailing [royalcommission@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:royalcommission@abilityoptions.org.au)

If you would like to contact the Commission directly, the link is: [disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story](https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story)



## TAKE ACTION

**In the last newsletter edition of The Voice, you were introduced to Perfect Ward.**

**As you know, Perfect Ward is an addition to Ability Options practice to ensure staff are engaging in quality and transparent supports to assist you in meeting your goals.**

The roll out has begun! So far, Perfect Ward has been released to Sydney, Central Coast, and Mid North Coast, with the Hunter Region to be utilising the program in the coming months. Currently, we are in the trial phase of the implementation, so you may observe a number of our staff using phones and/or iPads during their shifts to complete these assurance tasks.



## DEVELOP PEOPLE

**Our Quality, Practice & Outcomes team continues to evolve.**

We now have a team of Practice Support coordinators and consultants coaching and mentoring our employees across Ability Options. This team focuses on best practice and quality service outcomes to ensure that Ability Options staff who provide a range of supports to our participants, have the skills and professional development required to help you meet your goals.



## FEEDBACK

**Our team also have dedicated resources to take innovative action based on feedback, best practice, quality outcomes, and service excellence.**

Currently, we are engaging with a participant focus group, regarding current supports and services, which has provided feedback that has prompted Ability Options to offer all participants to engage in a service-wide survey. For more information on the upcoming survey, please email [qualitypracticeandoutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:qualitypracticeandoutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au)

## ABILITY OPTIONS PARTICIPANT COMMITTEE

The Quality, Practice & Outcomes team are establishing a participant committee in 2021, which will be held quarterly. The participant committee is a group of people (participants, employees, board members etc.) who share a passion for achieving the best outcomes for people with disability and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. The first meeting will kick off in mid-March. If you are interested in learning more or potentially becoming involved, email Quality, Practice & Outcomes at [QualityPracticeandOutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:QualityPracticeandOutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au) or Phone Rebecca on **8884 9270**.

# Ability Options Adopts Perfect Ward:

## A New Health-Tech App to Support Staff in Driving Quality Outcomes for Our Participants

### About Perfect Ward

At Perfect Ward, we apply the best mobile technology to solve one of healthcare's most important challenges; how to continuously improve quality, safety, and patient experience. Our aim is to bring the mobile user experience that people love on their own smartphones to an industry that has been long underserved by technology, and still relies on legacy systems and manual, paper-based processes. We started with an app that allows clinicians to do their quality inspections, previously done on paper and using massive spreadsheets, to crunch data. Perfect Ward frees up time to care for our customers. We work with leading healthcare organisations in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. To discover more, visit [www.perfectward.com](http://www.perfectward.com)



**In 2020, Ability Options turned to Perfect Ward to simplify inspections and engage staff, empowering them to own quality improvements. Following a successful pilot, Ability Options is now rolling out Perfect Ward across the group as discussed in the Quality, Practice, & Outcomes update in this edition.**

Perfect Ward is a digital app that increases the time spent with participants, by allowing employees to complete lengthy administrative tasks, such as quality inspections and checklists, in a fraction of the time, whilst providing more extensive and instantaneous data, ensuring that the people our staff support are done so in a safe, efficient, and empowering environment.

Additionally, staff can monitor their own performance, alongside their manager and see how they are performing. They can actively contribute to the quality agenda, promoting a greater sense of involvement and increased accountability, which creates better outcomes for the people we support.

### Ability Options participants benefit from staff using Perfect Ward by:

- Saving time on administrative tasks, offering more time to support participants.
- Focusing on accessibility for all.
- Employees feel empowered to own quality improvements to achieve timely and quality outcomes for Ability Options participants.

“The best mobile technology to solve one of healthcare's most important challenges.”

# WeConnect:

## A New Platform to Help us Connect you to Even Better Supports

**This year, Ability Options is rolling out a 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.**

The rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) over the last few years, meant that disability service providers had to adapt quickly to new ways of providing services, how we document our engagement, and how we manage organisational finances. It wasn't always easy, but, as an organisation, even if our systems weren't perfect, we put our focus on making sure we provided quality services. Over the last few years, we've been investigating different products in the market that can help us in a few different ways:

- Improve the way we engage with participants before they start services.
- Consolidate the many forms we use to collect information and ensure there is consistency.
- Document how we engage with participants.
- Improve the way we match staff with participant requirements.
- Connect participant engagement with NDIS goals.
- More efficient management of participants' funds, so that we can quickly and easily provide information on available funds.

We are working with a company that has experience in developing participant information platforms in the Australian Disability Service Provider space. They are working together with experts at Ability Options to design and deliver the new system. We have already begun piloting the product for some of our services in the Hunter Region. So far, we have had excellent feedback from our teams.

**Within Ability Options, we have called the platform, WeConnect, as the ultimate goal is to connect people to great supports.**

The rollout of WeConnect may not have an obvious immediate impact if you use Ability Options' services. However, over time, you may notice some differences, e.g., invoices with improved details on the services you have been using, better understanding of how the supports you have received from Ability Options have helped you work towards your NDIS goals (this is really good if you're going for a plan review), quicker response from Ability Options' team members about how much funding you have left, and other key information, and for some services, you will no longer have to sign-off on shifts.

The full rollout of WeConnect will be done over a period of time to ensure staff are well trained and supported. We aim to complete the project by October of this year.

The logo for WeConnect, featuring the word 'we' in a stylized green font with two dots above the 'e', followed by 'Connect' in a grey sans-serif font.

## Ability Options on the Frontline of the COVID-19 Vaccine – continued from page 1

preparations and support before, during, and after vaccination day. Ability Options staff will be rostered throughout the day, and will receive the appropriate preparation and training to ensure that participants receive the right support. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including masks, will be provided for both staff and participants on the day.

Ability Options supports the COVID-19 vaccination rollout. It is committed in making sure that both participants

and staff are safe in the community. By keeping everyone safe, we can meet the needs and aspirations of all our participants.

More information about COVID-19 can be viewed on NSW Health's Easy Read page.

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-vaccination-easy-read-resources>



## ABILITY OPTIONS PARTICIPANTS AND FRONTLINE STAFF ARE BEING OFFERED THE COVID-19 VACCINE!

Here's a link to access some easy read information about the Covid-19 Vaccine.

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-vaccination-easy-read-resources>

For more information or if you have any questions, please feel free to speak to your Ability Options Team Leader or call **1300 422 454**.





# CID Supported Decision Making Project



1

**CID has a new project about supported decision making.**



2

**Supported decision making is about people with disability having the right support to make choices and decisions for their life.**



3

**These decisions may be small like**

- What to wear
- What to eat

**They may be big decisions like**

- Where to live
- How to spend money



4

**In this project CID will work with people who live in group homes.**





5

**We will support people to**

- Build their self confidence
- Understand their rights
- Speak up about what they want
- Make more choices and decisions in life



6

**We will work with**

- people with a disability
- support workers
- family and friends



7

**I would like to ask you some questions about**

- ideas for this project
- your experience with making decisions in your life
- supports that help you



Thanks

8

**Please let us know if you are happy to talk with Rhiannon on the phone or on a zoom meeting.**

For more information email [QualityPracticeandOutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:QualityPracticeandOutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au)

# WorkReady Participants Cook with Celebrity Chef, Kylie Kwong



**On Friday, 19 February, a group of five participants from Ability Options' Work Ready program, travelled to OzHarvest in Alexandria, to participate in the newly relaunched Nutrition Education and Skills Training (NEST) Program.**

The six-week program aims to educate people about nutrition and healthy eating habits, as well as encourage social connection and develop life skills in a fun and interactive environment.

The event was hosted by NEST Ambassador, renowned chef and restaurateur, Kylie Kwong, who led the participants in a cooking demonstration, cooking Shakshuka Eggs. In attendance, alongside the participants, were OzHarvest CEO, Ronni Kahn, Ability Options' CEO, Julia Squire, employees of Ability Options, and a team from Channel Ten's Studio 10, who livestreamed the event on television.

Throughout the event, the participants, under the guidance of Ms. Kwong, practised basic cooking skills and techniques, while also learning about the value of healthy eating on a budget. The demonstration was followed by everyone coming together to share the meal they cooked, providing the opportunity to socialise and celebrate everyone's achievements.

The event overall, was both an enjoyable and memorable experience. The participants enjoyed learning how to cook alongside Kylie Kwong, whom one participant said, she is "a massive fan of."

Julia Squire said that Ability Options "are delighted to be able to work with OzHarvest and include NEST as part of our Work Ready Service, as a fun and interactive way to provide nutrition education and cooking skills, which leads to becoming self-confident and gaining independence."

***The NEST Program aims to prepare and inspire its participants in becoming more independent and self-confident, through cooking. Ms. Kwong believes that cooking is a skill that "comes from the heart".***

Work Ready is a service under Disability Services, that prepares and equips people with the basic skills, knowledge, and experience to enter or re-enter the workforce with confidence. Funding for WorkReady is available through SLES or Finding and Keeping a Job under the NDIS. To find out more about Work Ready, follow the link below. [abilityoptions.org.au/employment-options/work-ready](https://abilityoptions.org.au/employment-options/work-ready)

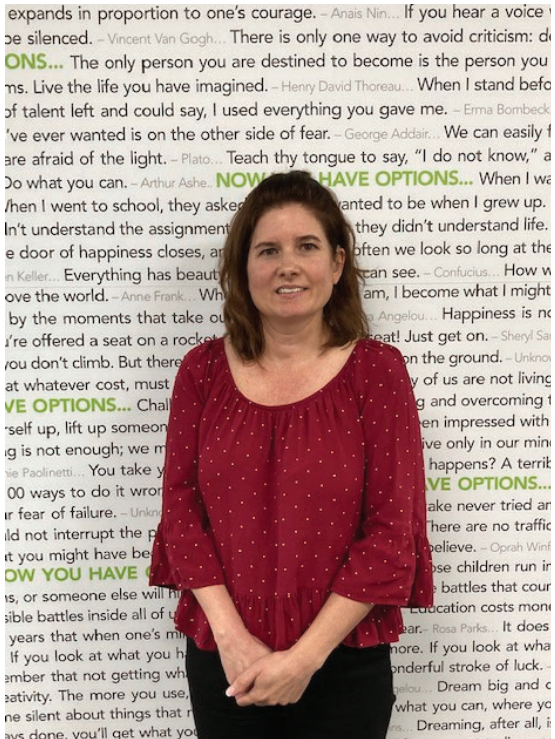








# A Conversation about World Hearing Day with Renell



World Hearing Day is a day that celebrates people with a hearing impairment and their achievements. I sat down with Renell, an Administration Assistant, working as part of the Claims Team at Ability Options. Having a cochlear implant has given Renell the opportunity to explore her passions and aspirations, while juggling her responsibilities as both an employee and a parent of two teenagers.

## 1 So, Renell, what are some things that you have noticed after having received your cochlear implant compared to before? Could you give me some examples?

"First of all, I have worn hearing aids for 47 years, then a cochlear for 2 years in April. It's very different to hearing aids, 10 times better than hearing aids.

It was difficult at first, as your brain needs to learn how to hear, all over again. It took some time to get used to it. I heard high pitched sounds I had never heard before. It's like putting a puzzle together, whenever I hear certain conversations."

## 2a. How has your cochlear implant made a difference to your everyday life in a positive way?

"It has improved for 2 years. My speech has improved, particularly when pronouncing the S's. My family have noticed how much I have improved with my speech. My mother has an Irish accent, and I had never heard the difference before receiving my cochlear implant. I now sometimes speak with an Irish accent."

## 2b. What are some of the challenges with your implant, and what are some strategies you have taken in order to overcome these challenges?

"I have an app called I-Angel Sound. Without the hearing aid, you have to listen from your cochlear. I did tests on the app to learn and identify certain words. It's like talking into a fan and the voices change, so I had to learn to recognise certain words. I used lists for more complex words. Both the hearing aid and cochlear need to talk to each other in order for me to hear more clearly. I had to adapt to a new hearing aid, as well as the cochlear."

## 3a. Having secured your current role as a former Disability Employment Services participant, tell me a little bit about your role?

"My role is in administration. I do purchase orders for Parents Next, Disability Employment Service, and jobactive. I do validations for claims, and manage and monitor the divisional administration inbox for compliance reasons. I also manage the company's log books for vehicle usage, and other jobs as well."



### 3b. What steps did you take to get to where you are now, and how did Ability Options help you achieve your employment goal?

*"I left school in year 10, and went straight into work. I did mailing and photocopying in a law firm for one year. I then decided to try something else, so I did factory work, working in their admin for four years. I decided to study a Diploma in Childcare. While I was doing the course, the teacher would never consider my hearing impairment and wouldn't even look at me when she spoke to me, which made it very difficult for me to communicate with her. When I went for a job in childcare, the organisation asked me to be a room leader and supervisor. I had worked for 12 years in a variety of centres. I also completed a teacher's aid course as I wanted to work with people with disability, and demonstrate to those with disability that you can achieve anything whilst having barriers.*

*Ability Options assisted me with developing my motivation and building my confidence for job interviews. They also assisted in improving my resume. Unfortunately, I didn't get a lot of the jobs I interviewed for, but both Ability Options and I never gave up. They knew that I was an asset to another company. So much so, they gave me a job themselves, and in May, 2021, I will have been here for three years. I am determined to succeed. At the end of 2019, I got the 'Star of the Month' award for dedication, passion, and hard work. Throughout my journey, I never gave up on finding a job I would love. I love my job with Ability Options."*

*“Both the hearing aid and cochlear need to talk to each other in order for me to hear more clearly.”*

### 4 What reasonable adjustments or special equipment have you received since commencing your role?

*"I have a left-hand number keyboard, as I have mild cerebral palsy in my right hand and struggle to type. I also have a Roger Link, which links with Bluetooth and assists with my cochlear and hearing aids. I use it whenever I have meetings, as it assists with my hearing at an easier level. Ability Options went through Job Access to gain this special equipment, which has helped me significantly. I am very grateful that Ability Options did this for me. They even provided me with a job support consultant to keep an eye on me and assist with post-employment support. At first, they spent every minute with me on the job, ensuring that things ran smoothly and then afterwards, they gradually tapered off."*

### 5 What are some tips and advice that you could give to a jobseeker with a hearing impairment?

*"My advice would be to be motivated. Don't give up. I know we have our up-and-down moments, but please be strong. I have some quotes that I would like to share:*

**Disability:** Take out the 'DIS,' and we have Ability. People need to be aware that we have the ability to do anything.

*Don't let your disability affect what you can do.*

*If you do the hard work, and don't give up, you will be rewarded in the long run.*

*Don't give up, always be strong, and believe in yourself.*

*If I can do it, you can do it."*



# Inclusion: Different and Together

by Rafael Sanchez-Bayo

*Rachel is an active young person, moving through life in her wheelchair. Nothing ever stops her. One day, Rachel had to go to Newcastle for work. The trip to get there required a train ride. Being such an independent person, she thought that it was going to be such an easy journey. Then, at the station, Rachel found herself unable to buy a train ticket. Rachel's wheelchair couldn't get through the barriers at a ticketing booth. She felt so deflated.*

Everyone with disability may be able to relate to Rachel's story. A single barrier could spoil what could be a very easy job. Luckily, City Rail agreed to remove those barriers. The problem was solved so easily. Rachel cannot give up her wheelchair, but she is able to do many things, if society uses a little bit of imagination to change its ways. In this case, by removing metal frames.

Society needs to have the ability to remove barriers, and accommodate more people with all kinds of differences. This is the key philosophy of inclusion. Inclusion asks for society's power to change its ways, rather than trying to change people. This is very different from the old rehabilitation model, where people with disability worked to fit

into the way society was set up. We all want to enjoy valued roles in society. Inclusion wants to make sure that everyone enjoys the rights as valued citizens.

Back in the 1980s, an American scholar, Professor Wolf Wolfensberger, felt that people with disabilities were invisible. Many people with disability did not go out very often, and this made them unable to make friends, do shopping, or catch trains and buses. They could not enjoy 'the good things in life,' such as, being a friend, a shopper, or a passenger. This worried Professor Wolfensberger. He thought very deeply into how to change this. He wrote many articles to educate society to improve the lives of people with disability. Professor

Wolfensberger's work is known as the *Social Role Valorisation Theory*.

Later, in 2006, Professor Wolfensberger added another important point to his theory. He said that people with a disability must become a participant, not a recipient. This means people with disability ought to know what they want in life, and be able to make their own choices. This idea of choice became a cornerstone of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. It says: "Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons." Australia signed and supported the Convention that same year. This was the beginning of the current inclusion journey in Australia. One of them was the



**"Society needs to have the ability to remove barriers, and accommodate more people with all kinds of differences."**

introduction of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)*.

In order to help people with disability participate in society and make their own choices, Professor Wolfensberger said that we must do three things. Let's explore these points one at a time.

First of all, people with disability take part in training to improve their skills to be job ready. A blind person, who wants to become a writer, may want to learn how to use screen reader programs, such as *JAWS*. *JAWS* is short for *Job Access With Speech*, and what is on the computer screen is read out to the person, so that she can get all the information without being able to see.

The second point is very important.

We need to make our society barrier-free. This idea is called accessibility. Accessibility requires a fresh mindset of 'what is blocking the person from doing their very best?' For a person in a wheelchair, a barrier may be a staircase, or narrow space. For a blind person, a barrier may be not having audio announcements. Let's build a lift, or, create a talking timetable. Barriers removed.

The third point, is improving the social image of people with disabilities. If we see people with disabilities everywhere, such as your workplace, films, television, or school, then people will begin to know that society is really made up of differences.

Disability doesn't define who we are.

It is part of the person. It is about time for us to say, matter-of-factly, "*X is a remarkable lawyer. It's great to work with him. He uses an audio device. By the way, he is blind.*"

It is up to all of us to make this happen. Our work and presence in the community are the building blocks of the big picture called inclusion. Let's keep moving on.

You can find more information from the following sources:

*SRV Theory – Social Role Valorization*

*SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia* | Department of Social Services, Australian Government ([dss.gov.au](http://dss.gov.au))

*conciliated cases: transport* | Australian Human Rights Commission

## Motivated to find work, but need extra support to find your ideal job?

**You're not alone.** If you can't seem to find the job that's right for you, we can help.

We offer employment services across the Sydney, Central Coast, Macarthur, Hunter and Illawarra regions.

Your employment consultant will continue to support you to achieve your employment aspirations.

To arrange a meeting with your employment consultant call us on **1300 422 454** or email [jobseeker@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:jobseeker@abilityoptions.org.au)



A member of the Ability Options Community



# Community Activities on the Move

Day and group activity programs in Newcastle, Taree, Nambucca, and the Hunter region, recently moved out of their previously operating spaces to new improved locations in each town after the old facilities were no longer suitable to meet participants' needs. The Hunter programs relocated to a respite property, while Taree moved to our Wynter Street office location.

Renovations have been completed in Newcastle, Nambucca, and Taree, which aim to improve our service delivery to meet the needs and aspirations of the people we support.

Some of the completed works include a new kitchen, new accessible bathroom facilities, a sensory room fitted with new equipment, and a craft room. Participants in Newcastle are very happy with the large outdoor yard area, and are excited to work in the vegetable gardens.

These have been very positive moves for both our staff and participants. We hope to share some before and after images of our Taree day programs in the next issue.

Thank you to all of our teams for their support in making this happen so smoothly.





# Casuarina Grove Annual Art Exhibition

Casuarina Grove is the first purpose-built village for people with intellectual disabilities or complex needs associated with ageing. Every year, an Art Exhibition is held displaying the amazing work of residents. Each resident produced paintings on canvas, colouring-in, and stellar photography.

Three sections of work were displayed. Section A had works of art completed with no support or assistance. Sections B and C represented semi and fully supported works of art, made alongside the welcoming staff. An important part of Specialist Supported Living is allowing people's time to be woven into creative practices and fun-filled activities.

In competitive spirit, the Art Show aimed to find the best three works in each section or art field. This competition was judged by Ability Options CEO Julia Squire, and Hunter and Central Coast General Manager Julie Melehan.



## Ability Options Teams Up with the SES to Keep the Community Safe

**During the middle of summer, Taree's SES Unit needed some volunteers to help out in preparation for flood weather on the Mid-North Coast.**

John and Isaac, two participants from the Taree Day Program, run by Ability Options Kempsey, put their hands up to assist our local Unit.

John and Isaac, together with other volunteers, helped the team prepare for the floods, filling up gravel and sandbags. By the end of the day, they managed to fill a total of 951 bags, which will be distributed to the community.

John and Isaac had a great time, working hard towards a goal, while meeting some amazing people. Following his

experience, John is keen to sign up and volunteer with the SES in the future. They are proud to have been given the opportunity to give back to our local community.



# Uncovering Some of the **Myths** and **Misconceptions** of **Asperger's Syndrome**

**Asperger's Syndrome is a developmental disability, that is part of a wider group of disabilities known as Autism Spectrum. It affects how people see the world differently, as well as how they communicate with other people.**

People with Asperger's are often characterised as having poor communication and motor skills, fixated interests, having above average intelligence, and high sensitivity to loud sounds and bright lights. The question is, is this 100% true? Does everyone with Asperger's behave the same?

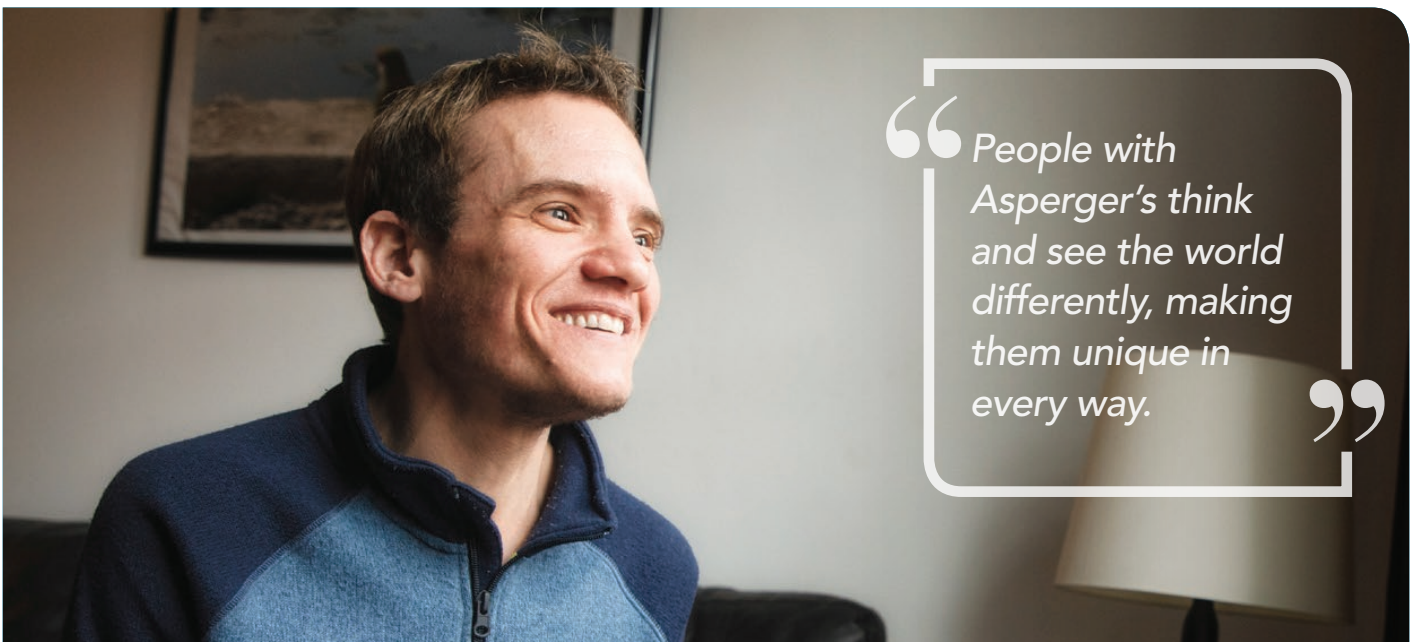
Our limited understanding and awareness have often led to people with Asperger's being misunderstood by the rest of society. There is not enough information that can allow us to become more aware of the condition's diverse traits. The truth is, not all people with Asperger's are the same. Some are highly brilliant, others are not. Some struggle with communication, others do not. The fact is, people with Asperger's think and see the world differently, making them unique in every way.

Because many of us have a narrow understanding of Asperger's, it is very easy for us to make assumptions, which often lead to confusion. Ana Nikibin, a psychologist from Therapy Services, wants everyone to understand that

the characteristics surrounding the condition are "varied and diverse," contrary to popular belief, meaning that there is no clear definition of Asperger's, as it is now classed as an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

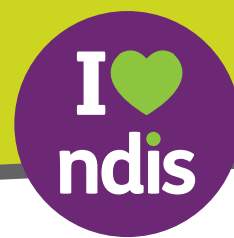
Film and television have helped us gain an understanding into life with Asperger's, however, the same stereotypical image of a person with the condition is feeding an inaccurate portrayal to audiences. Chloe Davis, a speech pathologist from Therapy Services, says that although the entertainment media is doing a good job in raising awareness to the community, "the stereotypical nature of it can lead to its own challenges." Ms. Nikibin believes that having more diversity in how people with Asperger's are portrayed "would be really beneficial," in creating a more authentic and accurate image of people with Asperger's.

Today, Asperger's Syndrome is seen by many with it as an identity, rather than a disorder. It's more than just poor social skills or high intelligence. People with Asperger's can bring many contributions to society's different settings, whether it's the workplace, cultural life, or education. Both Ms. Davis and Ms. Nikibin strongly believe that in order for "the social model of inclusion" to become widespread, we, as a society, must "enhance our knowledge and education around the condition, and understand that it's not a one-size-fits-all approach."





We are one of the largest Disability Services organisations in NSW and are driven by our Values of: **Trust, Respect, Courage, Inclusion** and **Leadership**.



Our work is also underpinned by our Vision to create opportunity and services for people to participate fully in society.

### We offer

Short, medium, or long-term Respite Services that are available under NDIS Funding for people with disability. These services are available in the Northern Beaches, Hunter Region and Mid-North Coast.

### Our houses allow you to

- Relax in a comfortable and safe environment
- Explore somewhere new
- Meet and socialise with people of similar interests
- Participate in new activities or fun opportunities

## We are looking for people who want to make a difference

If you enjoy making a difference in people's lives, advocate for inclusion and seek rewarding experiences, you are the perfect applicant to work for Ability Options. Our respite units are re-opening, and we are looking for people like you to help us support people with disability.

### Why work with us?

- Skills and Training
- Career Development
- Employee Assistance Program
- Wellbeing and Fitness
- Salary Packaging



We are  
**Hiring**



For more information phone **1300 422 454** or visit our website **[employment.abilityoptions.org.au/respite](http://employment.abilityoptions.org.au/respite)**



# Valentine's Day Collage

In the days leading up to Valentine's Day, we asked participants to tell us what they think love is and what Valentine's Day means to them. Here's what some of them had to say.



## COMPETITION WINNERS

The following people entered the competition to name our newsletter and have been sent a \$50 gift voucher.

- Valerie White
- Sarah Alwan
- Jan Cox
- Craig Davey
- Susan Evans
- Suzanne Climan
- Donna Fernando
- Wendy Steele
- Monique van de Voorde
- Andrew Agius
- Sharyn Willis
- Barbara Kidd

## ► Contact Us

Suite 1.14 | 29-31 Lexington Drive | Bella Vista, NSW 2153 | Ph: 1300 422 454 | [abilityoptions.org.au](http://abilityoptions.org.au)  
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