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Vanessa Comes Home

Vanessa had been living in a nursing home since being hospitalised, after she developed a long term illness. This illness resulted in Vanessa becoming completely blind and needing to use a wheelchair for mobility. Prior to her diagnosis, Vanessa had lived independently while running her own hairdressing business.

Vanessa wanted to change her living arrangements. After receiving a supported assessment, she connected with our Support Coordinator Karmen, who worked with Vanessa to plan for a move to Supported Independent Living.

After an extensive search to find a property that meets all of Vanessa's wishes, Karmen organised for them to visit a brand new Supported Independent Living property, which Vanessa loved. Ten days later, the new home was Vanessa's.

Karmen and Vanessa's Support Worker Eve met Vanessa at her new property in the Newcastle area and helped her move her items in and get settled. Following the move, Vanessa expressed how much she was enjoying her new found independent freedom, gaining choice and control of her life.

Vanessa is very optimistic about her future. She looks forward to getting out-and-about on a regular basis, as well as improving her physical abilities. Vanessa is particularly looking forward to a pamper session in a salon and getting back to hydrotherapy.



A Word from the CEO

I hope you really enjoy the varied content we have put together in this bumper edition of TheVoice. As we approach the end of 2020, we can all be a bit reflective. What a year! We managed to deliver almost everything we had planned for 2020 and we also managed to keep everyone safe and supported during the bushfires and COVID-19 so far. Participants, employees and families have given us a huge amount of support, love and trust and we hope we have repaid that.

We have grown our services and continued to improve them. We have streamlined a lot of systems and processes to make life a little easier for everyone and these will be fully implemented during 2021. We have expanded and reviewed our services, invested in training, remuneration, recognition, and support for employees and started work with partners including the Council for Intellectual Disability to ensure that our participants have an active say moving forward. We have always listened as an organisation but we are working proactively with participants and partners to

ensure that we can provide evidence that we operate to the principles of Choice, Control and Advocacy that we hold so dear. Our service models are becoming more flexible and we are studying carefully the early findings of the Disability Royal Commission and other national and international work in providing choice, control and a voice.

Next year there will be more developments in services, growth, quality, safety, choice, control and advocacy. We will be working to improve our response rates to queries and offer new group homes with contemporary service offers and more flexibility. We'll continue to press our Policy makers and the NDIA to meet the promises and the philosophy of the NDIS.

We have more to do but we've made a good start and also faced the 2020 challenges together, keeping everyone safe, retaining our workforce when many did not, and found ingenious ways to provide services. Employees in therapy, WorkReady, group homes, direct supports and



employment, to name just a few, found incredibly innovative ways to provide services, stay entertained, safe and happy and contribute to our Mission. Families and participants supported us without exception and I couldn't be more grateful to everyone.

We are all looking forward to a break over the holiday period. I acknowledge and thank employees who will be working and their families for sharing them with us at a time when families need to reunite more than ever.

All of our services intend to be fully functioning in 2021.

All of us here at Ability Options wish participants, families and friends a very happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy new year.

Best wishes,

Julia Squire

Julia.squire@abilityoptions.org.au



A Big Thank You

Thank you everyone who entered the competition to name our Newsletter. We received some very thoughtful and creative entries. We have carefully looked at every entry and have chosen a name that best represents the many ideas you offered us.

We recognise that different views and ideas add to the community nature of our Newsletter. It provides much more than just news and relevant information.

Our Newsletter shares good news stories, people achieving their goals, and provides a true voice for everyone who uses our services.

In the process of many ideas coming together, it was an easy decision for our CEO to name the Newsletter 'TheVoice', as it represents everyone equally.

We would like to offer everyone who submitted an entry a \$50 gift voucher, which will be posted out in January 2021.

Wheelchair Conversions Complete!

This year, the Assets team have coordinated the upgrade of 13 commercial vans with wheelchair conversions. In total, the Ability Options fleet now has 38 converted vans.

The conversions involve a collaboration between the Asset and Operational teams, including a process of mapping out wheelchair capacity numbers, seating configurations, handrail requirements and storage options.

The vans are used for community access, day programs and accommodation sites. The feedback received from our teams and participants on the snazzy new vans has been wonderful!



Casuarina Grove



Communities
& Justice

The NSW Government has selected Ability Options to operate Casuarina Grove on the Central Coast. Casuarina Grove is the first purpose-built village for people with intellectual disabilities and complex needs associated with ageing.

The facility was completed in 2011 and houses 57 people offering regular nursing amenities, along with specialised direct care services delivered by nursing staff trained in disability and aged care standards. There are six homes in the village we will be managing,

each with its own outdoor entertaining area and bathroom with spa bath. The village also has a sensory room, activity room and outdoor recreational spaces. The transfer to Ability Options took place on October 29, 2020.



Quality Practice & Outcomes **Michelle Hodge**

Chief Quality Practice & Outcomes Officer – Accommodation & Supported Living

Royal Commission update

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of people with disability has recommenced their work again after some delays occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In August, the commission held hearings in Sydney relating to the experiences of people with disability during the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic. Currently, the Commission is focusing attention on psychotropic medication, behaviour support and behaviours of concern. There are also reviews that occurred in October, that looked into barriers experienced by students with disability in accessing and obtaining a safe, quality, and inclusive school education.

Ability Options continues to support the work of the Commission and can provide you with advice about making a submission. Feel free to contact a member of the Quality, Practice & Outcomes team if you wish to understand more about the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of people with Disability.

royalcommission@abilityoptions.org.au

Supported Decision Making & My Rights

Ability Options has partnered with the Council for Intellectual Disability to provide workshops for people to gain more knowledge and skills in the area of supported decision making. We are looking to form a committee including people from all over NSW to make decisions about changes in practice, provide advice

around accessibility and inform our training modules to ensure we are keeping people with disability at the centre of our decision making.

If you are interested in learning more please contact:

practice&outcomes@abilityoptions.org.au

Perfect Ward

You would have heard a little bit about Perfect Ward earlier in the newsletter. We used this application to complete a survey for participants in Sydney as part of the pilot. The survey asked people living in our accommodation services a bunch of questions to work out if they were

“Ability Options continues to support the work of the commission and can provide you with advice if you wish to make a submission.”

happy living where they were living and if there was anything more Ability Options could do to support them. Through this survey lots of people told us they didn't have many opportunities to learn new things, so we focused on this over the past few months.

We took lots of photos and videos of people learning new things, many people learned how to keep themselves safe during COVID-19, while others learned new recipes.



People attended TAFE and received certificates; others sought new crafts. It was wonderful to see so many people trying new things within this initiative.

We look forward to having Perfect Ward used across the entire business.

Restrictive Practices

A restrictive practice is any practice or action that takes away rights, or limits the freedom of movement of a person with disability.

Restrictive practices are regulated. These include: seclusion, chemical restraint, mechanical restraint, physical restraint and environmental restraint.

Ability Options is committed to the reduction and elimination of the use of restrictive practices. Our focus is on positive behaviour supports which will help to prevent the use of restrictive practices.

We are looking to form a group that will include people across NSW to talk about restrictive practices. If you are interested in learning more please contact:

practice&outcomes@abilityoptions.org.au

VACANCIES AVAILABLE NOW

Supported Accommodation for Independent Living

We have available vacancies in our group homes. If you know anyone who is interested to learn more about supported **independent living options**, please get in touch today!

We have vacancies in **Sydney's Innerwest, Northwest and Southwest, as well as Regional Hunter Valley and Port Macquarie.**

For enquiries, please contact Anna De Leon at Anna.DeLeon@abilityoptions.org.au or **0429 893 701.**

**If you're ready to make the move, you will need to have Supported Independent Living (SIL) funding included in your NDIS package.*



A New Way to Live

We have entered into a partnership with Casa Capace, to build three new Specialist Disability Accommodation properties in Sydney and the Central Coast.

These innovative, multi-dwelling homes for people with a disability are the first of their kind in Australia. They provide a community for NDIS participants with high physical support needs who wish to live independently, in fully accessible modern homes.

Some of the features of these homes include: oversized doors and corridors, open plan kitchens, grand dining and living areas, large spaces to allow for mobility devices, single level living inside and out, innovative home automation, large format windows, designer appliances and quality finishes.

Casa Capace is a registered NDIS Provider and the first disability housing provider to offer an end-to-end Apple HomeKit solution as an option to occupants. This means residents can open and close doors, switch on lights, air-conditioning, blinds and entertainment with a voice command.

We are very excited to be working with Casa Capace on the new dwellings and will keep you all up to date with the new homes as we progress.

Feel free to take a look at one of the homes:

<https://www.casacapacewelcomhome.com/>



KRS Awards Community Funding

Kempsey Regional Support on the Mid North Coast was recently nominated for the voting stage of the Essential Energy Community Choice program with the chance to win funding of up to \$2500!

Catrina Lucock (Support Manager Groups MNC) lead the charge to get the word out and the Ability Options family answered the call! Recently, we were notified that we had received \$600 in funding!

Thanks to everyone who voted and shared. The next step is to work on spending the funds with the plan being to upgrade the Kempsey Community Hub.

We look forward to seeing the results!



Introducing... Perfect Ward

In the next few months we will be introducing the use of Perfect Ward. Perfect Ward is a digital solution that empowers front line staff to create lasting quality and safety improvements with participants in our accommodation and supported independent living services.

This means staff can monitor, check and survey participants on meeting their goals. This will assist in reducing administration time for support workers and team leaders so they can spend more time supporting participants.

This app will offer clear, transparent reporting along with standardisation across the board. This will help us in maintaining and improving the high level of quality care we are so proud of.

The Perfect Ward app started its phased rollout in October 2020.



Employment Webinars

Our Employment Team recently ran a three part webinar series. The webinars were designed to assist people on their journey to employment in the current job market.

We took participants through three 30 minute webinars designed to build their skills with expert advice and information, allowing them to stand-out in the current job market. Each session was followed by a Q&A.

Topics covered in the webinars included

- Impacts of COVID19
- Who is hiring and where to find them
- Training opportunities
- How to stand out from the crowd
- Resumes that get noticed
- Healthy habits for job applications
- The way to marketing yourself
- Tips to succeed.

The sessions were recorded and are available now. To access the files and resources, please see the following:

<https://olympus.org.au/webinar/your-journey-to-employment/>

Your Journey to Employment Webinar Series

Contact us on 1300 422 454 for more information or email jobseeker@abilityoptions.org.au



A member of the Ability Options Community



Hosted by **Simon Fairall**
General Manager,
Business Improvement & Growth

OLYMPUS
SOLUTIONS



We're always searching for amazing people to join our team! Take a look at our current job vacancies.



<https://careers.abilityoptions.org.au/job-board/>



Natalie Finds Her Feet in Fashion

Natalie's journey to find her ideal job started nearly two years ago. After months of navigating the employment market with a different provider, Natalie's clinicians at Karrikin Youth Mental Health Service referred her to Olympus Solutions, the employment service of Ability Options.

"At the time, I was linked to a different Disability Employment Provider. They didn't really help me. I had limited work experience and I didn't even have a proper resume" said Natalie.

Natalie was motivated, passionate about fashion, and was keen on finding a job in the retail industry. Natalie worked closely with her Employment Consultant, Kate, to build her confidence and to get herself job-ready with a new resume and interview training. With support from the Chatswood team, Natalie

secured the position of a Retail Assistant at H&M on a casual basis. A year on, with post-placement support, Natalie is not only a fulltime employee with H&M but has also been promoted to a Cashier. She has newfound confidence, loves her job, and is delighted that she has a position in fashion.

"Ability Options was extremely helpful in finding me the job that

suit my interests. The team was always understanding, patient, and made me feel welcome and supported in ways I had never experienced before," said Natalie.

We would like to acknowledge our partnership with Karrikin Youth Mental Health Service for working closely with our Chatswood team to support Natalie into a job she loves!



New Online Chat

Our new online live chat service has launched on our website! Live chat will allow the community to communicate with our Customer Service Team in real time. Joanne from our Customer Service Centre is running our online chat service and is waiting to answer your questions. Chat now!

abilityoptions.org.au



NBI – Kids Corner



NBI School holiday program activities are resuming slowly in accordance with the current Government COVID Safe framework. It is great to see the children and adult groups enjoying the company of friends that they have not been able to see for some time. We are ready to roll out the new day program, which will span Monday to Thursday for adults who want to make new social connections and enjoy skill building in alignment with their NDIS goals. To find out more, email **nbiservice@abilityoptions.org.au**



Seven Hills Back to Full Service!



Seven Hills returned to full service with activities being delivered both in-centre and in the community (with COVID Safe plans implemented). Everyone was super excited to be back and able to connect with their friends. We are very proud to say that all participants and staff have easily adapted to the new COVIDSafe practices.

The participants recently created Aboriginal themed artwork which looks amazing on the wall upstairs at Seven Hills. They also did a spot of cooking with a pancake

Masterclass, with Dale whipping up some yummy pancakes! The group also did a fabulous job during a Key Sign class when they learned to sign Somewhere Over the Rainbow. See the below link for a video of the group with Michelle in the background cheering them on while watching her favourite after lunch show – Kath and Kim!

📺 <https://youtu.be/LJO5FXXRbMY>

Jigsaw Puzzle

The team at Blacktown have been doing their best to de-stress and keep energised during the current COVID pandemic. They decided a giant jigsaw puzzle would be a good way to take a break and work as a team! The puzzle was 6000 pieces and took 3 months to complete!



Customer Service Excellence from Chris

Chris came to us very motivated and keen to work, although he needed some support building his confidence.

As a jobseeker, Chris was very studious in attending all appointments and interviews. He had a keen eye for IT and computers, which he has qualifications for. This industry was the focus of supporting Chris in his job search.

With support from the Ability Options Employment Service, Olympus Solutions and management at Harvey Norman, Chris successfully gained employment and commenced a position as Computer Technician/Customer Service team member in the Tech Bay at Harvey Norman, Castle Hill.

A customer recently went out of their way to formally acknowledge the great customer service provided by Chris. "Chris is professional in his manner, totally unflustered by repeated demands upon his technical skills. Chris was respectful, patient and certainly deserving of management commendation".

Congratulations Chris!

To connect with our employment team to find a job that is right for you, email jobseeker@abilityoptions.org.au



Alison's New Wheelchair Arrives



Following an amputation last year, Alison started working with Ability Options Occupational Therapist Anne O' Neill to improve her mobility. After completing the required assessment for a wheelchair, Anne engaged with a wheelchair supplier so Alison could try different models. Once they found the right fit, an order was placed and a wheelchair was hired for interim use. While Alison's new wheelchair was delivered to her Occupational Therapist in March, they were unable to hand it over to her until COVID-19 restrictions eased.

Alison recently received her new wheelchair, and it was a perfect fit. Alison's Support Coordinator, Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist worked together to deliver the wheelchair with all safety measures in place. Alison is thrilled about her new wheelchair – it is easy to manoeuvre, comfortable, and she loves the colour she picked. The wheelchair will not only facilitate her mobility and independence but will also improve her quality of life. "She is now able to self-propel much quicker than before, can turn on the spot, and flip back her armrests to allow her to sit close into tables when she goes out to local cafes," said Anne. Today you can't wipe the smile off Alison's face.

To connect with our Therapy team email NDIS@abilityoptions.org.au

Kmart's New Quiet Space Initiative

Our partners at Kmart are committed to providing a store environment that is accessible, inclusive and welcoming for every person entering their doors. They piloted a new initiative called 'Quiet Space' a few months ago and we are excited to announce that this initiative will now be permanently implemented.

Every Wednesday from 3:30pm-5:30pm, Kmart will be providing a low-sensory shopping experience to help customers who are, or have family members on, the autism spectrum...or for those who find it challenging to shop in a high-sensory environment. During this time, you may notice a few changes to their in-store environment. This means:

- Store lighting will be dimmed
- Kmart radio will be turned down
- Register and scanner volumes will be reduced to the lowest level
- Trolley collections will be limited
- There will be minimal cages on the shop floor
- No PA announcements will be made, unless there is an emergency
- Team members will be available to support customers

We understand that retail stores are high-sensory environments, and we hope 'Quiet Space' will give Kmart customers and communities, time, and space to calm their sensory systems in a low-stress environment.



Sensory maps are available online at www.kmart.com.au/quietspace to help customers plan their Kmart visit and to help create awareness around areas of the store which may have increased sensory stimuli. These maps should be used as a guide only, as layouts may vary store to store.

Annual General Meeting 2020

Our Annual General Meeting was held on Friday 20 November. This COVID-Safe meeting was hosted on Zoom, sticking to government guidelines. Life members and other meeting members heard from Chair Robert Lang, who acknowledged how 2020 has changed the way we work, live, and communicate.

He recognised our customers, employees, and partners as examples of working well through a

global pandemic. Lang celebrated our leaders and management teams, as well as employee engagement results of this year.

CEO Julia Squire outlined the importance of safety, wellbeing, support, learning and career opportunities for employees and others. She presented how our plan was delivered, and how we managed throughout COVID-19 and the past bushfire season. Employee turnover

was reduced, we invested in systems, people, and processes, and we grew and improved our services. The 2020 AGM reflected on a great year and sets a foundation for a better 2021. We will continue to listen to customers, engage with the Disability Royal Commission and support workforce and partnership opportunities.



Winning Disability Service of the Year



The Blacktown City Disability Awards Ceremony and Talent Showcase was held in early December. One day after International Day of People with a Disability, this ceremony and showcase highlighted many important people, organisations and programs.

We are so proud of the Ability Options team! Not only for winning Organisation of the Year for our Social Program but also to our Seven Hills Day Program for participating in the Talent Showcase.

The Seven Hills Day Program fosters a high standard of programs to all participants. Support, training and mentoring, is accompanied by a wide range of fun, interactive times including visiting entertainment venues, having social gatherings and promoting wellbeing.



Greenwood Gets Creative

Ability Options Greenwood hosts wonderful fortnightly art therapy classes for all participants to partake in. Pictured to the right are Desmond, Elijah and Lois attending a class. Their creative artworks are facilitated by support and guidance from their talented art teacher Michele. Desmond, Elijah and Lois love every moment of their one-on-one time with Michele. They constantly learn and create new works with new techniques.



Hero's Day at Cromer



Hosted at the Cromer Community Centre in Sydney, Hero's Day was a welcoming, informational, and successful day. Although Hero's Day was scorching hot, everyone had fun. The day combined education with recreation in a safe, friendly environment for children with disabilities, families, carers and local Emergency Services. All participants were taught important drills, safety information and ethical practices.

The children got to explore an ambulance, watch a kitchen fire safety demonstration, and use a firehose's stream to push a ball. Not only did the kids interact with the expensive gadgets of the ambulances and see the bright-flashing lights of the fire trucks and police cars, but they also saw the welcoming arms and smiling faces of those who protect their community.

The day involved education for the children and an important interaction for the Emergency Services. Throughout the day, the Service teams showed great compassion and generosity, identifying the wider needs of the community and spending time with everyone involved.

These kinds of hands-on experiences promoting full participation should happen more often, as the day fostered important values and was a stepping stone for building strong community relationships. A truly unique opportunity was presented to everyone involved as our values of respect and inclusion were very relevant.

We hope it can happen again in the future, we look forward to running more events that build relationships between participants and their local communities.



Preliminary Report Piece on the **Royal Commission**

Reflecting on the Disability Royal Commission's Interim Report.

Looking back on late-October's Interim Report of the Disability Royal Commission, we can realise that inspecting Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation is a layered process with many themes, issues and underlying causes. The 560 page document is a daunting read, detailing the experiences of people with a disability, listing many statistics, while setting out what the Commission has achieved in its first 15 months. This report is a great milestone towards making great changes for people with a disability in Australia.

To provide a positive future, it is best we fully support this Royal Commission with advice, support, and direct submissions. The Interim Report outlined the Commission's extension request of one year, a much needed timeframe to gather information and overcome the immense boundaries faced by people with a disability. Disability Royal Commission's Chair Ronald Sackville commented that the Commission is a "sprint, not a race." For good reason, this Commission has the widest terms

and details of any Commission of the 21st Century.

Accordingly, the Commission needs to hear from all Australians about their experiences. This is truly the most personal but important element of us reflecting on this report. When finalised, this Commission will change laws, policies and practices impacting society, to remove many hurdles for people with a disability in Australia. Ability Options is positive about submitting and reminding people to engage with the Royal Commission. The detailing of widespread abuse in this Interim Report is a stark reminder to spread awareness, stay updated and support this vital work towards human rights.

If you would like to make a submission to the Royal Commission, you can do so here: <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story>

You can also sign-up to the bi-monthly Connect newsletter here: <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/news-and-media/connect-newsletter>

Information Line: **1800 517 199**

Brookvale Opening

In July we opened our new Employment & Disability Hub at Brookvale! We are so excited to welcome our colleagues at NBI who will be sitting alongside the employment team in the wonderful new space at 696 Pittwater Rd Brookvale.



Staying Connected

Some fabulous images of our group home residents at Valley Views enjoying some themed events including Pirate Day and Mexican Day!





Christmas Closure Times

Seasons Greetings



Our offices will close from 12:30pm Christmas Eve
and will reopen 9am 4 January 2021

► Contact Us

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