

IN THIS Issue

From WorkReady to DES:
Michael's transition to employment

We are all advocates for social
change

Nola Buck awarded Order of
Australia Medal

A message from our CEO

Matt Levy, OAM: 2021 Sport NSW
Athlete of the Year with Disability

Join the campaign to build a
stronger NDIS

Disability Inclusion Action Plans

Working towards a simpler NDIS

The complaints process

Thank you, Grant!

Sharing your story in a private
session

Disability Royal Commission –
Registrations for private sessions

Introducing the new
Ability Options website

Phoebe trains her way to success

Nicholas serves up a storm

From the People, For the People!

Expression of interest

Anna publishes her first book

Getting back into the social scene

Yes, they can! Challenging the
myths surrounding disability and
relationships

Sisters reunited after years apart!

Staying connected

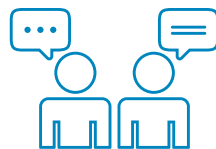
Come and have your say

Contact us

From WorkReady to DES: Michael's transition to employment

Two years ago, Michael joined Ability Options' WorkReady service. His goal was to develop the skills to prepare for the workforce. Two years on, he is now employed by V.I.P. Home Services, and is enjoying contributing to his community. This is the story of his journey.

1 Michael joins Ability Options' WorkReady service.



2 Michael, who has a background in landscaping, works with WorkReady Consultant, Matthew, in building his career path and identifying his strengths and employment goals.



3 Once he felt ready and motivated to move onto the next step in finding work, Michael is referred to our Community Engagement Team, who work with our Disability Employment Services (DES) Team to support him in transitioning to the DES program.

4 Alicia, our Community Engagement Consultant, arranges a meet and greet appointment with Michael, where she discusses how the program works and supports Michael in gathering all the necessary documentation, to make a smooth transition at his first appointment.



5 After transitioning to the program and starting at our Hornsby DES office, Michael works with his Employment Consultant, Logan, who supports him to find the right role that meets his needs, passion, and skillset.



"At first, Michael needed the support of others to help with certain aspects of life. Through the encouragement, guidance, and support of the Ability Options team and his Support Worker, Alex, Michael is learning to be independent in applying for jobs." – Logan



8 Logan and Alex then work together in negotiating Michael's working arrangements with the employer to make sure that his workload meets his needs and suits his capabilities.

6 A position as a Landscaping Labourer at V.I.P. Home Services is advertised. Logan supports Michael in applying for the position. She also provides guidance and advice on how to do well in the job interview,

including helping him in practising his job interview skills.



7 Michael practises for the interview with Logan's advice and successfully passes the interview. Michael gets the job!



continues on page 3

We are *all* advocates for social change

by Rafael Sanchez-Bayo



I have a disability. When I was growing up, I had a hard time figuring out where I stood in the world. I know that everyone is born different, but the question I often kept asking myself was, 'how different am I from everyone else?' Being different as a child and a teenager is not easy, as being the same really matters in these early years of one's life.

After I graduated from high school, things began to change... for the better. My family encouraged me to pursue writing as I had always been good at it. That led me to study journalism at university. Thanks to the support of my family, teachers, and colleagues, I have finally got to where I am today.

Disability advocacy is when an individual or group of people stand up for the rights and dignity of people with disability. Advocacy is built on the belief that people with disability are active participants in society,

rather than passive recipients. Advocacy acknowledges choice and control of people with disability and supports them to find out how to best access the community. This includes education, healthcare, and professional and social opportunities. People with disability themselves are the advocates of their own goals.

People who support people with disability are like companions sharing a journey. They can be family, friends, co-workers, and support workers. They trust and support people with disability to reach their goals. People with disability are the same as any other person in our community. Advocacy plays an important role in making sure that people with disability can access and participate in the community.

I want society to know that people with disability can achieve their dreams and goals, and that

there are ways that we can navigate through different challenges and achieve our full potential, sometimes with additional support. This is the spirit of advocacy.

A circle of support, both formal and informal, is one of the most important things a person with disability needs. The role of an advocate should not be limited to support workers or family members. We can all be advocates for disability inclusion. Whether you are a teacher at a school or the coach of a sports team, we can be part of the change we want to see and let people with disability shine. All we have to do is look beyond the disability label with an open mind and support and encourage people to focus on their strengths and work towards achieving their goals. Together, we can all make a difference.



From WorkReady to DES: Michael's transition to employment continued from page 1

Michael now has a job as a landscape labourer, thanks to the support, commitment, and hard work from everyone involved, including our teams and his broader circle of support. He is doing well in his role and is grateful to Logan and the many teams who have supported him in achieving his goal. We are all proud of Michael for his wonderful achievement and can't wait to see him shine!

Nola Buck awarded Order of Australia Medal

On Australia Day, Mrs. Nola Buck, one of Ability Options' longest-serving Board Directors, was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for her service to people with disability and to the community. Mrs. Buck was nominated for the award by Ability Options and was presented to her by the Governor-General of Australia, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd).

Mrs. Buck, who was diagnosed with polio at the age of two, has dedicated her life to supporting and advocating for people with disability. Having served as an Ability Options Board Director for 16 years, Nola supported the organisation's growth and consistently advocated for participants throughout Ability Options' evolution over the years. Alongside her career with Ability Options, Nola has hosted international conferences, is a life member of Polio NSW, and has juggled her responsibilities as a parent to four children.

"I am deeply honoured for the recognition. I hope it helps to shine a light on the importance of speaking up and supporting vulnerable people."

As a person with disability, Nola did not allow her disability to stop her from participating in community activities and follow her dreams and passions. Instead, Nola's experience with polio intensified her sense of empathy and created a deeper understanding of not only herself, but other people with similar experiences. Becoming a strong advocate and voice for people with disability was a natural part of that progression.

Nola's work and dedication has left a legacy in the Disability Sector, which highlights the importance of educating the community about disability and finding different ways to improve the lives of people with disability. Through her

work, she has also advocated for accessibility in buildings and at events, and better representation of people with disability in society. Nola strongly believes that "people with disability need to be as independent as possible, regardless of the type of disability," and wants society to know and understand the power and "impact your voice will have" in making a difference to the lives of people with disability.



A message from our CEO



Dear Readers,

In this edition of TheVoice, we are focusing on Advocacy as one of our key themes. Interestingly, it is reflected in the name of our newsletter. The editor has asked that my welcome message for this issue concentrate on Advocacy.

If I look up the definition of Advocacy on Google, it is often described as:

1. "Public support for a particular cause or policy," or
2. "any action that speaks in favour of, argues, or supports and defends for a cause on behalf of others."

This brings me to the Ability Options Strategic Plan – Towards 2030.

In each of our 5 Strategic Directions, there is a connection with the definition of Advocacy. **Therefore, I'd like to share some examples of our approach:**



Courageous Leadership

Engaging with policy makers, peak bodies, and other providers to achieve a stronger NDIS.



Amplifying Voice

We have established a Human Rights Committee and are contributing to the Disability Royal Commission.



Innovation

Implementing new service models to meet people's needs, especially during the pandemic.



Partnership

We have already developed almost 40 important community partnerships to ensure our participants can achieve their aspirations and inclusion in their community.



Sustainable Growth

We are growing our services every year.

There are many examples of individual advocacy at Ability Options every day, where we are supporting participants to be visible, valued, and included. Here are some examples:

- Ensuring that older residents in our community homes are correctly funded for their needs

in a new government funding mechanism.

- Enabling a young person to raise concerns with the Police in a dangerous situation for them and supporting them to safety.
- Making sure that participants who transition into work using our

services have access to post-placement support and are valued and supported by their employers.

- Supporting two sisters to reunite after losing contact for many years!
- Read the story on page 17.**
- Supporting participants in hospital to make sure their needs are

understood and met, as well as supporting healthcare practitioners in making good decisions.

- Making sure that dreams can come true, whether it means having a pet, flying on a plane on holiday, fishing, or seeing the footy live.

Big and small, our teams work in partnership with participants, families, and guardians to ensure they achieve their goals.

As we progress towards another Federal Election, Ability Options is playing its part in the push by our peak body – National Disability Services, to secure agreements from all candidates and all parties to build a stronger NDIS. The campaign is called Teamwork Works. Find out more:

<https://teamwork.org.au>

Every Australian really does count and we are richer as individuals and as a community because of that. Let's get our candidates and their parties



**“To our federal politicians,
We need you to deliver a strong NDIS...”**

Sign the open letter:
teamwork.org.au/open-letter

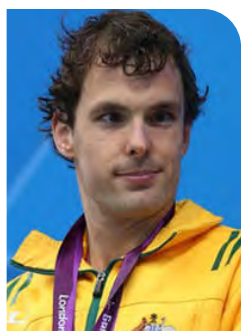
Teamwork works

committed towards building a strong NDIS. Together, Australia will be stronger.

Best wishes,
Julia Squire
julia.squire@abilityoptions.org.au

I really hope you enjoy reading TheVoice. We are always open to suggestions, comments, and feedback of any kind to Suite 1.14, 29-31 Lexington Drive, Bella Vista, NSW, 2153 or marketingteam@abilityoptions.org.au

Matt Levy, OAM: 2021 Sport NSW Athlete of the Year with Disability



Congratulations to our Board Director, Matt Levy, OAM on winning the 2021 Sport NSW Athlete of the Year with Disability Award!

Having recently competed in the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games, bringing home a bronze and gold medal, Matt continues to push through boundaries and balance his time between the swimming pool and the workplace, making him a role model for all people. Through his work as a director, ambassador, and mentor, Matt is a strong advocate in promoting inclusion for people with disability and hopes to inspire people to follow their dreams and work towards achieving their goals.

Congratulations, Matt! Keep up the good work. We are incredibly proud of you.

Join the campaign to build a **stronger NDIS**

Ability Options is playing its part to ensure that the National Disability Insurance Scheme is a top priority for ALL political parties as we move towards another Federal Election. Together with the National Disability Services, the peak body for disability services in Australia, we are working together with leaders in the sector to ensure that people with disability continue to be supported by the teams they have built to live their best lives. The campaign is called Teamwork Works.

Since 2013, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has been a great social reform that has been driven by people with disability, advocacy groups, and providers like us. The NDIS has allowed people with disability to plan the right support and stay visible, valued, and included in the community.

Unfortunately, the NDIS is now under threat. There are pushes to reduce access and funding levels.

The NDIS gives people with disability the ability to build a team and get the right support. If the Government reduces access, funding, and support, the team will stop working. When the funding is reduced, people can't access the services they need to live the life they want. That's why the NDIS needs you!

We are joining the NDS' call to Federal Parliament for:

- **Proper Planning:** Allowing people living with disability to have the resources they need to build the right team.

- **Fair and Independent Pricing:** Letting providers deliver the services people with disability need.
- **Real Partnerships:** Commitment from the Federal Government to work with participants and providers to build a scheme delivering long-term support.

Now is our time to act! **Sign the open letter and support the Teamwork Works campaign**
<https://teamwork.org.au>

We need to commit to the integrity of the NDIS. We need to put the pressure on all sides of Government to stop undervaluing the NDIS, its participants, and their circles of support.



270,000

Australians are directly employed by the NDIS.

450,000

Australians with disability access the NDIS to build a team of support.



Disability Inclusion **Action Plans**

Members of the Human Rights Committee have been reviewing a number of local council Disability Inclusion Action Plans (DIAPs) in preparation for consultation and feedback. For those who may not be familiar with DIAPs, they are strategic public documents which set out activities that a Council will undertake to improve inclusion for people with disability in their Local Government Area.

Some of our team members and service users who live in the Northern Beaches Council area took part in focus groups and completed surveys asking for their feedback on what they thought needed improvements in their area.

We have also provided the opportunity for people in other council areas to give their feedback via online surveys.

All the information collected during the reviews will be used to inform the development of the new and improved Disability Inclusion Action Plans.

Thank you to those who have put in time and effort to read through the current council DIAPs.

If you are interested in being part of this ongoing process, please email rebecca.collins@abilityoptions.org.au

Working towards a simpler NDIS



Over the past three years, Ability Options has participated in the Annual Pricing Review, which was established by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)

Board. This review is used by the NDIA Board to examine whether the Scheme's existing price control framework continues to be appropriate for participants, providers, and the community, or should be modified.

Ability Options had the opportunity to provide feedback and commentary to advocate for:

- A simpler NDIS price control framework to better support participants to exercise choice and control.
- To reduce, as far as possible, the regulatory burden that the current pricing arrangements impose on participants and providers.
- Appropriate pricing arrangements and price limits for core supports.
- Appropriate pricing arrangements that apply to supports delivered in both regional and remote areas,

to ensure continued access to appropriate supports for participants living in those areas.

In addition to submitting a consultation paper, Ability Options has participated in the Regional and Remote Working Group. This working group provides feedback and advice to the NDIA to examine the costs and arrangements of delivering supports in regional and remote areas, to ensure access to supports for participants living in those areas. We used our experience in supporting participants on the Mid-North Coast to contribute to this working group and submission.

Ability Options is committed to supporting participants to advocate for the support they need to achieve their aspirations and inclusion in the community. We also work in partnership with participants, families, and advocates in gathering and presenting all relevant supporting documentation to members within the National Disability Insurance Agency.

The complaints process

Ability Options is dedicated to continuous improvement. Every complaint is investigated to determine the root cause. This is not to lay blame, but to determine if our current systems and processes are appropriate to avoid this happening again. If our systems and processes fall short, we will always look to find out what improvements can be made.

With the launch of the new website, we have now made it easier to lodge a complaint online with Ability Options. This option will now allow complainants to lodge their own concerns without needing an Ability Options

employee to complete our current complaints process on their behalf.

We will continue to support participants and their families/carers to lodge complaints through our internal reporting system if they choose to report using this process.

Your voice is important to the continuous improvement of Ability Options!

Lodge feedback and complaints online: <https://abilityoptions.org.au/contact-us/feedback-and-complaints/>

Thank you, Grant!

We would like to say a big Thank You to Grant!

Grant is an integral part of the work Ability Options is doing in building on our inclusive governance, peer support, and support decision-making frameworks, as well as ensuring these are upheld in everyday practice. We thank Grant for his ongoing support and contributions to the Human Rights Committee.





Sharing your story in a private session



Who can apply for a private session?

Anyone with a disability, and their families, carers and supporters, wanting to share their experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in person with a Commissioner.

How do I apply?



Email at
DRCenquiries
@royalcommission.gov.au



Telephone

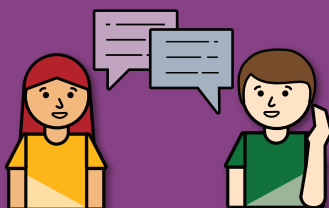
1800 517 199 or 07 3734 1900
from 9:00am to 6:00pm Monday to Friday AEDT

Post at

GPO Box 1422, Brisbane Qld, 4001

What happens next?

Our private sessions team will be in touch to arrange a date for your private session and ask you for information including whether you have a preference for a Commissioner.



What happens at a private session?



At your private session, you will be able to share your experiences in person with a Commissioner.



You should plan for your private session to go for 1 hour. You are welcome to bring notes to your session.



A counsellor will be available to support you after the session and will follow up with you a week later.

What next?

For most people, your private session will be the end of your involvement with the Royal Commission.

Your identity and the information you share in a private session is confidential.

However, with your consent, we may publish aspects of your experience on our website or in our reports and publications in a way that does not identify you or anyone else.

We will put you in touch with a range of services to best meet your circumstances. These may include counselling and legal services.



For more information on Private sessions visit
www.disability.royalcommission.gov.au/shareyourstory



Disability Royal Commission

Registrations for Private Sessions close on the 30th of June 2022.

The very important work of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability continues. Ability Options would like to remind you that you can and are encouraged to share your story with the Royal Commission. If you'd like support to do that, we will provide it. We will also support any carer or family member who wants to engage with the Royal Commission.

Please be aware that registrations for private sessions close on the **30th of June 2022.**

Private sessions allow you to share your experiences with a Royal Commissioner in a confidential setting.

If you need more information, please email Rebecca Collins at

rebecca.collins@abilityoptions.org.au or call her via our Customer Service number on **1300 422 454**.

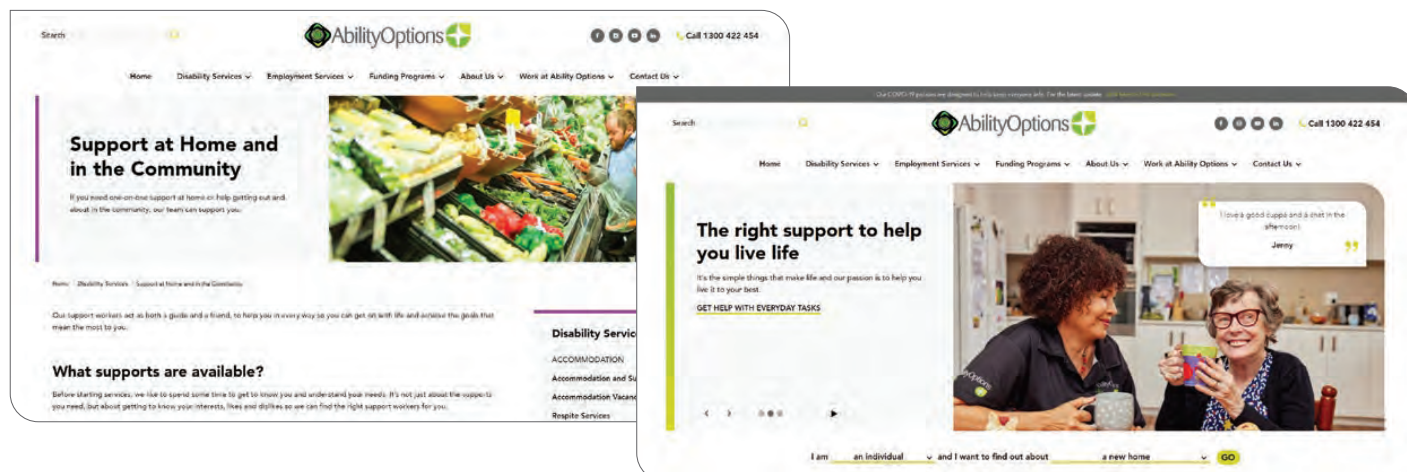
Introducing the new Ability Options website

We are excited to announce the launch of our brand-new website! Our new website comes with a new look, featuring a more user-friendly experience to help you find and learn more about the services we offer and how we can support you. Here are some of the key features to look out for:

Contemporary design: Through participant feedback and consultation, we have created a website that is easy to use and convenient, providing you with a smooth website experience.

Accessibility: We understand that everyone has different needs and are committed to making sure that visitors to our website can all easily access and understand information. Accessibility is a part of the design as opposed to being an after-thought. We look forward to continuing to work with participants to ensure that we are meeting their needs through our website.

To visit our new website and explore its features, visit **abilityoptions.org.au**



Phoebe trains her way to success

Phoebe's dream is to work with dogs. Recently, she was given an exciting role as a volunteer dog handler at Nepean Therapy Dogs in Penrith, as she was looking to gain some practical experience since completing her Animal Studies course at TAFE last year.

Phoebe, who was already managing a busy schedule, combining part-time work with her studies, was determined to take the next step in achieving her goal. With the support and encouragement of her WorkReady Consultant, Sharron, Phoebe did not give up and was able to work through everything and balance her schedule. She also attended a few one-on-one sessions with Sharron, who supported her in developing the confidence needed to be prepared to sit her TAFE exams. After 'Phoebe passed her course with flying colours,' Sharron also supported her in applying for the role and completing all the necessary steps, including the required onboard training.

Phoebe will be teaming up with Joanne, an experienced dog handler, and Rags, a therapy dog, to assist them in

going out into the community, visiting aged care facilities, universities, and organisations that support people with disabilities. For the first two visits, Phoebe has been invited to accompany Joanne and Rags on their fortnightly visit to Flourish, a mental health support service provider. During these visits, Phoebe will be observing how the visits work, as well as use the opportunity to get to know some of the members. Rags has been connecting very well with the people at Flourish, bringing them joy and companionship, and 'is currently the topic of conversation.'

Phoebe is excited about making the most out of her ongoing role as a volunteer dog handler, which will assist her in pursuing her dream of combining her passion with paid employment. Joanne and the rest of the team at Nepean Therapy Dogs are excited to welcome Phoebe and look forward to working with her. Sharron is very proud of Phoebe's progress in her journey and can't wait to see her 'kick this goal for her future.'

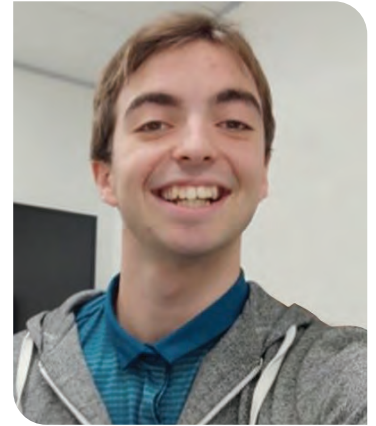


Nicholas serves up a storm

Nicholas has always been interested in working in the hospitality industry. Late last year, Nicholas started doing work experience as a barista and waiter at Café at Lewers, a local café and restaurant in the Penrith and Blue Mountains area. Under the supervision of his manager, Steve, Nicholas has been doing a wide range of different jobs, including serving food, hosting customers, and taking orders.

Steve, the owner and manager of Café at Lewers, recently began providing work experience for Penrith Ability Options participants like Nicholas. His positive can-do approach to assisting people in the community has allowed him to be a leader in promoting and supporting inclusion for people with disability in the workforce.

Since Nicholas joined the team at Café at Lewers, Sharron, Nicholas' WorkReady Consultant, has seen a huge improvement in his self-esteem. Nicholas has found Steve to be an amazing mentor and has learned a lot from him about how a business in the hospitality industry operates. Steve is thankful to the WorkReady team for 'introducing him to such a wonderful human.'



"I'm really proud of Nicholas' progress and commitment. He has been an absolute pleasure to work with."

Steve has also been teaching Nicholas the art of making coffee, including the correct method of serving coffee from table to table.

Nicholas is loving his time working at Café at Lewers! He is currently studying Hospitality at TAFE and hopes to have a long-lasting career in the industry. We can't wait to see Nicholas' future shine and look forward to continuing to partner with Steve in providing work experience to Ability Options participants.

From the People, **For the People!**

The 'From the People, For the People Committee' was recently brought about to address the need for participants to have a voice in the services we provide and more importantly, that their voices are heard.

The committee is run by participants, who run their own meetings once a month on a Thursday and set their own rules of conduct. During these meetings, the committee



measure our service quality, provide feedback, share ideas, and recognise and celebrate participant achievements. In their most recent meeting, the participants shared what activities they wanted to do in 2022, with most wanting to go on more trips to the city and see more shows.

Everyone is encouraged to attend the meetings, which run for 30-45 minutes. The Committee also invite visitors to attend and participate from time to time. Once all participants agree, the meeting's notes are then shared with Ability Options. Any actions, ideas, and/or feedback is then collected and presented to team meetings for further discussion and action, prior to returning to the Committee with any outcomes they can discuss in the next meeting.

It is exceptionally important that participants have a voice in choosing their services. At the same time, it is equally important to ensure that their role as valued members of the committee, social groups, Ability Options, and the wider community is not just seen, but activated and promoted.



EXPRESSION OF INTEREST



**You are invited to join the
Ability Options Community of
Practice on Human Rights**



We are looking for people with disability who are supported by Ability Options to **join** our new **Community of Practice on Human Rights**.



The Human Rights Community of Practice will meet once every two months. We meet **face-to-face** and by **video conference**.



We will **review** and **discuss** Ability Options' customer survey results, policies and procedures, issues of informed consent, supported decision-making and complaints and their resolution.



All members will receive **training and peer support** as part of their involvement.



We will **promote** and **protect** the **human rights of all people** who use Ability Options' services and will report regularly to the Ability Options Board.



If you are interested, please contact **Rebecca Collins** to talk more about your involvement:

Email: rebecca.collins@abilityoptions.org.au

Phone: **0404 433 070**

Anna publishes her first book

Last year in December, Anna, a participant from WorkReady Seven Hills, achieved her dream goal of publishing her first novel called Cupid's Kiss.

Anna is a passionate writer who always dreamed of writing a novel. Living in Sydney with her beloved dog, Patchy, Anna has spent many years building a career in science and software development. She is now pursuing her dream of being a writer and sharing her unique stories.

"I don't know where a story is going to go until I start writing. It's satisfying and surprising."

After spending hours writing and editing the book for loved ones to read and provide feedback, Anna was finally ready to take the next step of getting her book published through "A Whim Away," making her dream a reality.

"I was thrilled to be able to share my published works with family and friends, and now the whole world."

When she was introduced to our WorkReady program, Anna believed that the program was 'the right match for her needs,' and was confident that it will help to 'increase the number of opportunities available to her.'

Anna has been working with her WorkReady Consultant, Matthew, in building her pathway to employment, from enhancing her resume and cover letter to finding training courses that would support her to achieve her goal. Matthew has also been supporting Anna in finding different ways to balance her busy schedule, encouraging her to continue her passion for writing.

"There were times where Anna was doubtful about continuing with the book. It was so important in those moments to remind her of the people who wanted her to succeed and that by persisting, she would be able



to achieve her dream. It was a real privilege to be a part of that process." – Matthew.

Since first publishing the novel, Matthew has seen Anna's confidence skyrocket. Anna is now looking towards building a business around her writing. With some careful consideration of the opportunities presented to her, Matthew has been working with Anna in looking at possible work opportunities, which she has been willing to do with enthusiasm and an open mind.

Below is a short summary of Anna's novel.

The story is about Cupid, a 35-year-old scientist, who is unlucky in love, but successful in his career.

When the CEO of a multinational perfume corporation asks him to develop an aphrodisiac using his trained mosquitoes, Cupid jumps at the chance.

At the same time, the woman he's been chatting with on an online dating app has finally agreed to meet up. What Cupid doesn't know is that he's about to go from bitten to smitten.

Congratulations, Anna on your incredible milestone! To order a copy and support Anna with her venture into writing books, visit the following link below.

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Anna-Ceguerra/e/B09NS1NM1T>



Getting back into the social scene

WorkReady participants in the Hunter region recently started organising a weekly social event called Friday Funday in the park. With COVID-19 restrictions easing, this event invites Hunter participants to take the opportunity to get together and enjoy their favourite activities in a COVID-safe outdoor setting. Participants from different sites in the region came together on one Friday, where they joined in football and other fun outdoor activities, while also taking in the beautiful scenery of the Hunter River. Everyone had an enjoyable day and are keen to return the next Friday, weather permitting.



Yes, they can! Challenging the myths surrounding disability and relationships

by *Rafael Sanchez-Bayo*

Relationships are one of the most important things in life. For many people, good relationships of any kind need three things to blossom: honesty, trust, and respect. These values promote a sense of security, belonging, and companionship, making us feel happy, safe, and valued. Whether it is with our family, friends, or co-workers, relationships help us to grow and learn more about ourselves as individuals, while also allowing us to enjoy spending time and create lifelong memories with the people in our lives.

At some stage in our lives, we will start to form a romantic relationship with a person whom we like. It could be someone we met through a party, event, or a sports team. Starting a romantic relationship with someone may make us feel nervous at first, but over time, it will turn into something marvellous!

People with disability are no different to anyone else when it comes to finding love. They, too, want to find that special someone to share and spend the rest of their life with. While there is no doubt that finding love is hard for most people, the road to romance for people with disability can be twice as challenging.

The disability world is full of romance myths, misconceptions, and negative stereotypes, many of which are often portrayed in films and television. Although these myths are not true, society promotes these incorrect perceptions due to fear, lack of understanding, and/or prejudice. This creates further barriers for people with disability and in many ways jeopardising their ability to build healthy relationships. Some of the most common myths include:

- People with disability can't go on 'normal' dates.
- Dating someone with disability is awkward.
- People with disabilities can only date other people with disabilities.

These myths and stereotypes are a far cry from the truth, painting a picture on society's image of what 'normal' looks like in a relationship.

One question I keep asking myself as a person with disability is, can people with disability be in a relationship?

The answer is, yes! People with disability can have the same healthy relationships with anyone they choose. It doesn't matter if they have a disability. If society thinks that people with disability can't be in a relationship, that is "society's"

issue. People with disability enjoy spending time with other people and deserve the same level of love and companionship as everybody else. Disability does not make any difference to how a relationship is going to turn out.

It is important that we break and challenge these stereotypes and attitudinal barriers. By doing this, we are not only educating, but also encouraging society to see what dating a person with disability really looks like and know that it is not as awkward as they think.

Kerri-Anne, a resident at an Ability Options community home, first met her boyfriend, Chris five years ago at touch football. They have been together ever since. She has shared with us some of her experiences in her romantic journey and what plans she and Chris have for the future.

"Some of the things we like to do together is going to the movies, dinner dates, football games, going to Manly beach,



swimming at Ripples, and the Easter show. We also love spending time together on the weekends and I go to my boyfriends' family's house for special occasions. They have welcomed me into their family. When I was 18-years-old, my boyfriend asked me to be his girlfriend. Our plan is to get married in the future."

Being in a relationship is possible for everyone. Disability doesn't define a person for who they are. Rather, it is an identity, which forms as part of an individual's unique character. **If you happen to find yourself in a relationship with a person with disability, try to get to know that person for who they are... like you would in any relationship. They will do the same for you, too.**

Kerri-Anne and Chris are living proof that relationships can and do work for people with disability. If they can do it, anyone can.

Sisters reunited after years apart!



Beverley and Carol are two sisters who recently reunited after having lost contact more than ten years ago. Bev and Carol are both supported by Ability Options.

Ever since they became separated, Carol had been wondering where Bev could have been and was worried about the thought of losing her. When our Sydney Accommodation Team learned about Carol wanting to find her sister, Tamara, one of our team leaders, offered her team's support in finding Bev.

For many weeks and months, Tamara and her team had collected and checked multiple phone numbers and addresses, hoping that one could lead to Bev. With the team not having much luck in finding out her exact location, Tamara organised a team meeting and suggested to search for Bev's name using WeConnect, our participant database. After searching for Carol by her last name and stumbling across Bev's profile by chance, Elsa, one of our support workers, noticed that another participant had the same unique last name and looked very much like Carol. Elsa then informed Tamara about her discovery, insisting that she had found Carol's sister.

Following the meeting, Tamara compared Bev's profile photo to Carol's on WeConnect and found that both ladies had very similar faces and were wearing purple shirts. Based on the information, Bev was living in Casuarina Grove, a facility that Ability Options had started supporting in the last two years. Tamara contacted Sharon, one of the team leaders at Casuarina Grove, and showed her Bev's photo, asking if she could help her team in finding Bev. When they compared the photo to one of the residents, they both realised that this was the Beverley they had been looking for and they had finally found her!

After having found Bev, Tamara went to share the good news with Carol. She pulled out Bev's photo and asked her, 'do you know who this is?' Carol first thought that the person in the photo was another resident. When Tamara asked her to have a closer look at the photo, Carol smiled with joy and said, 'that's my sister!' Tamara then asked her how she would feel if she arranged for Bev to come and visit her. Carol was very excited about the idea and started showing her some memorable photos of her and Bev together.

With Christmas fast approaching, Tamara worked tirelessly with the Casuarina Grove team to arrange the sisters' reunion. She also went to the shops to do some last-minute Christmas shopping for the ladies. When the day finally came, just before Christmas, the team at Casuarina Grove brought Bev to meet Carol at her home. The sisters couldn't believe their eyes, they were finally reunited after many years! They then spent the day exchanging gifts and remembering old memories over an early Christmas lunch.

Following their reunion, Bev wanted to move and live closer to Carol. The Ability Options teams supported her in getting ready for the big move, knowing that bringing the sisters closer together was the right thing to do. Once Bev packed her bags and was ready to move out, the staff organised a farewell morning tea for Bev, where she said goodbye to her fellow house mates for the last time. Carol came with Tamara to Casuarina Grove to support her sister in the transition, holding onto her hand as she followed her outside.

Thanks to the power of technology, and the persistence and dedication of our staff, Carol and Bev's reunion was made possible. The sisters now live next door to each other and regularly spend time together. Since moving in, Bev has been getting to know her new friends over a warm cup of coffee.

Staying Connected

TheVoice were delighted to receive some great Australia Day/Invasion Day/Survival Day photos from our Seven Hills Day Program and Bonville Respite, where participants enjoyed a variety of Aussie-themed activities, including a sausage sizzle barbeque, creating flag poles, and a basketball hoops competition game, along with plenty of "Aussie Aussie Aussie Oi Oi Oi" and Aussie tunes. Looks like they had a great time and are living the Aussie Spirit.





Come and have your say!

Come and join the From the People, For the People Committee

This is an opportunity for participants to have their say about what is happening and what you would like to see happen in Ability Options' Social & Community Groups in 2022/23

Ability Options Office · 7-11 Rowley Street, Seven Hills · 2.00 – 2.30 pm
See dates below

The Committee meets once a month on a Thursday. If you are unable to make it and have a suggestion, idea, or some feedback, please share this with Melissa Angelevski at **Melissa.Angelevski@abilityoptions.org.au**

From the People, For the People Committee Schedule 2022

January 13th	April 14th	July 14th	October 13th
February 10th	May 12th	August 11th	November 10th
March 10th	June 16th	September 15th	December – No meeting



Contact us

Suite 1.14, 29-31 Lexington Drive, Bella Vista, NSW 2153 | Phone 1300 422 454 | abilityoptions.org.au
Connect with us **Facebook**, **LinkedIn** and **Instagram**