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Michelle goes to the Show



Michelle, who receives one-on-one behaviour support, has always dreamed of attending the local show in Kempsey.

She has been wanting to go to the show for a long time and would often ask the staff when it will be coming back to town.

When the staff informed her that the show was returning to town this year, Michelle became very excited and, for three weeks, would not stop

talking about how she was looking forward to attending the event.

When the day finally came, Michelle went to the show with support workers, Bailey and Jacob, who supported her throughout the day. When she arrived at the showground, Michelle rubbed her hands with excitement and was overwhelmed with happiness as she went through the event's gates.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

You are your own leader

by *Rafael Sanchez-Bayo*

Living with a disability has taught me many things about myself, some I have only recently discovered.

When I was younger, my teachers didn't think I would be able to navigate the real world, let alone graduate, because I did not represent their definitions and views of what a 'normal' student looks like. When I finished school, I decided to make a change in my life. I found a career path to pursue, excelled in my university studies, and have now established myself professionally. My disability didn't stop me from leading an independent life, it has made me become more aware of my strengths and able to accept my limitations, making it easier for me to shape my life.

We are often taught about the importance of leadership and the role it plays in making a difference to the world. Leadership is not only about directing businesses, managing a team, or becoming a politician. There are many ways we can become leaders of our own lives. Being a leader doesn't mean being the top student in our class or the CEO of a company. For people with disability, working towards independence and sharing our journeys with others creates a network of people who not only support each other, but also find new ways to advocate and improve the lives of people with disability. This is true leadership, aspiring to lift others in their care.

One of the most common disability myths I often hear is that people with disability rely on others to be led. This is not true. People with disability have the capability and responsibility to represent the community just like everyone else. All they need is

appropriate accessibility, so that their potential can shine. Leadership is mutual; the community works together to create accessibility, so that people with disability can fully and equally participate and achieve their full potential. For example, by installing a wheelchair ramp or investing in adjustments to the workplace, an organisation is demonstrating leadership and will lift people's lives. In this case, crucial barriers to success are removed, and people with disability can demonstrate their potential and become a role model for the community and other people with disability. They are leading the way. Leadership can be as small as visiting the local café to have a coffee and chat with the staff and fellow customers. That person has already led the way to alter the perception on disability in the community.

In my case, working as the Editor of this newsletter has opened my mind to new perspectives and helped me to realise and demonstrate my passion for writing. Getting to know my role was not easy at first. For the first few months, I worked hard and stayed focused on building my career and getting my first newsletter published. When I opened up to Ability Options about my disability, they went above and beyond to support me in my career development and made sure that I am happy in my role and that my contributions are valued. Thanks to the support of both my team and other colleagues, I am thriving in my role and continue to advocate for people with disability and have their voices heard through my writing.

Working in my role at Ability Options has opened the door to different



opportunities which have allowed me to carve the beginning of my career in media. One of those opportunities was a chance to work with the ABC in telling my own disability story. I was able to share my experiences as a person living with disability, as I wanted people to have a better understanding of who I am. Telling my story has been a big step forward for me not only in my career, but also in how I communicate my needs with others. Today, I am not afraid to talk about my disability and share my experiences with other people in the community.

Leadership is for everyone. It is important to remember that people with disability are the leaders of their own lives. They choose where they want to live, what career they want to pursue, and how they want to spend their leisure time. Living independently is both an important and empowering step in any person's life. While it is important that you learn how to navigate through each step by yourself, it is good to know that there are people and services to turn to who are ready to support you. The role of a disability service provider is to support and guide individuals towards achieving their chosen goals, but it is up to the person receiving that support to decide how they reach their goal. At the end of the day, it is your life, and success leads and enriches you, the people who supported you, and the community as a whole.

**You are your own leader.
Leadership is mutual.**

Michelle goes to the show *continued from page 1*

When she entered the showground, she could not believe her eyes; she was attending the Kempsey Show!

During her time at the showground, Michelle spent the day exploring the show's agricultural exhibits, food stalls and entertainment where she tried out a number of different activities. Some of the things she tried were playing games to win prizes, watching horse competitions, and what visit would be complete without grabbing a few show bags? Michelle even got to eat some fairy floss and a corn dog.

Michelle was thrilled to be there, enjoying every moment at the showground, especially its lively atmosphere. Bailey and Jacob were honoured to be able to support her in achieving her goal and see the joy the show brought to her, saying "you couldn't keep the smile off her face all day." Michelle hopes that the Kempsey Show will return, and she can attend again in the future.



As a leading provider of disability services for over 45 years, Ability Options offers a range of accommodation and direct supports options, which aim to support you to build your confidence in managing everyday tasks, such as learning how to cook or catching public transport, so that you can live your best life. Our team are passionate about helping people, who will provide you with the support you need to be independent and live the life you want. To find out more about our accommodation and direct supports services, visit the following links below.

Accommodation: <https://abilityoptions.org.au/disability-services/accommodation-and-supported-living/>

Direct Supports: <https://abilityoptions.org.au/disability-services/support-at-home-and-in-the-community/>

Introducing Practice Reviews



Commencing in 22 May the Quality, Practice & Assurance Team began completing practice reviews. Over the next few months, Ability Options may be paying a visit to your home to meet the people we support and ensure they are happy in their homes.

What is a Practice Review?

A practice review is a reflection process that examines our engagement with the people we support. It gives ideas for improvement and allows Ability Options to reflect on how it drives best practice initiatives and increase overall service experience.

What we seek to achieve from the Practice Review process

By engaging with participants and their families, the Quality, Practice & Assurance team will be able to identify improvement opportunities regarding participants' support needs, and create environments

where participants can achieve positive, person-centred outcomes.

Practice reviews allow for management teams to improve service standards and workplace culture, reduce and eliminate risk, and support the development of Ability Options staff to ensure they are provided with the skills and knowledge to support our participants proactively, safely, and with best practices.

What is expected from you?

As part of the practice review process, Ability Options will seek feedback from participants, their families and carers.

If you have any questions, please email qualitypracticeandoutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au

We are looking forward to meeting you, having a chat, maybe a cuppa, and hearing about how things are going.

A Message from our CEO

Welcome to the second edition of TheVoice for 2022. In this issue, I am thrilled TheVoice is focusing on the theme of Leadership.

Leadership is one of our key values and is incredibly important to us as an organisation. As one of the largest disability and employment service providers in NSW, Ability Options strives to be a leader in our sector, where, through the work we do, we not only advocate and amplify the voices of the people we support, but also lead by example in living by our vision to inspire and lead communities, by creating opportunities and services for people to participate fully in society. We pride ourselves on delivering services that meet our vision, mission, and values, which aim to guide and empower people to achieve their aspirations and goals, so they can live the life they want.

People are at the centre of what we do at Ability Options. Our mission points us to support people to be the leaders of their own choices and lives.

People who choose Ability Options for their support, and their families and guardians, know what they want to achieve in life.

It is our job to do the best work possible to support them to achieve their aspirations. As a service provider, we get to know each individual and understand their story. Then, we work with them to build the life they want to live. Our role is not to decide what's best for a person's future, but to ensure each individual leads the way for themselves.

Since Ability Options was founded in 1976, we have grown to become a courageous sector leader and a strong advocate for participants and their support circles. We have always pushed for participants' right to be in control over the life they choose. We have been

challenging common myths and perceptions surrounding disability long before the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was established. Our contributions and involvement in the Disability Royal Commission, and the campaign to ensure that election campaigns secured all party support for the NDIS, are examples of our courageous leadership. We are looking forward to holding the new Federal Government to their promises including:



Full funding for the NDIS

The NDIS has changed the lives of many people with disabilities and their families, but that won't be possible without the funding it needs. With the NDIS fully funded, Ability Options and other service providers across Australia can continue to support people with disability, and advocate for them to have choice and control over how they want to live and lead their lives.



Fair and independent pricing

With pricing that is fair and sustainable, we can ensure that participants and their families have equal access to our services and have choice and control over how they want to use the support they receive from us.



Improved employment outcomes for people with disability

With Government support, we can continue our work to create and maintain more partnerships with employers across NSW, so people with disability are given equal access to employment opportunities and are fully supported in their roles.

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



Increase disability workforce

The NDIS plays an important role in contributing to both the Australian economy and society. Having the right workforce means service providers like Ability Options can provide the right support and care to people with disability. We would like to see improvements made in recruitment and maintaining more disability and aged care workers in one strong workforce so both sectors can plan for having the right workforce paid properly.

These are promises that will make a real difference to people's lives and will positively change the way we, as an organisation and sector, operate. I look forward to seeing what the future holds for Ability Options and the disability sector, and I hope the new Government will consider and take onboard their promises in creating a better Australia.

Best wishes,

Julia Squire

julia.squire@abilityoptions.org.au

Leadership goes hand in hand with an organisation's culture.

We invest in leadership right through our services to ensure that employees can contribute positively to the outcomes for participants, deliver great services, be courageous, and take opportunities to develop their skills and careers. Our values underpin our culture and who we are as an organisation. We know that when people feel happy and empowered in their roles, they do a great job in delivering the best quality services and ensure the voice of our participants and sector is heard throughout their communities.



We pride ourselves on delivering services that meet our vision, mission, and values, which aim to guide and empower people to achieve their aspirations and goals, so that they can live the life they want.

WorkReady Explore Sydney Zoo



In late March, WorkReady participants from our Seven Hills, Parramatta, Hornsby and Penrith sites, had the opportunity to attend Sydney Zoo for an industry day and tour. Their host began the day by talking about employment opportunities at the zoo. The participants were excited to see their favourite animals and learn about the different types of jobs available.

Participants first met with Kayla from the visitor experience team. She talked about the different roles in visitor experience, the skills that are needed, and provided insight on the application process. Kayla encouraged them to ask as many questions as they wanted, and she was asked about the animals and the specifics of working as part of the team. Kayla then introduced the group to her colleague, Louie, who gave the participants information about other roles, including zookeepers, veterinarians, nutritionists, and event coordinators.

Louie, a zookeeper, then talked about different pathways

to getting a role like his and provided insights into what a day-in-the-life looks like. Louie took the group through other types of jobs around the zoo, such as food preparation and educating visitors about conservation and the animals. He then brought out a Shingleback Lizard for the participants to learn about, touch, and ask questions. Many of them were surprised by how the Shingleback Lizard felt. The next animal Louie showed was a Carpet Python. The participants were excited about seeing the snake and eager to touch it.

After hearing from Louie, the participants were encouraged to explore the zoo during lunch. They were very excited to see animals they hadn't seen before, and to see their favourite animals again.

While one of the highlights of the day was seeing two of the elephants trying to push each other into the water, the participants got a great inside look at all the incredible work opportunities available at Sydney Zoo.

Alex Drives Towards Independence

Alex is an Ability Options participant who uses the WorkReady service at our Hornsby office. Recently, Alex has achieved one of his biggest life goals, getting his provisional P1 driver's licence. Alex has been wanting to get his P1 licence for a long time and will now be able to drive on his own, meaning he can get around without relying on his family, giving him extra independence.

Since he began learning to drive, Alex has dedicated many of his professional lessons to improving his driving skills and gaining confidence behind the steering wheel. He has also persevered and worked hard to complete 120 hours of driving time, which is the required number of hours needed to get a P1 licence.

Once he felt ready and confident to do the test, Alex worked with his WorkReady Consultant, Regan, who supported him in finding an available timeslot to book a driving test. This proved to be a difficult task, as there were delays in securing a booking, due to post-COVID wait times. With Regan's support and encouragement, Alex did not give up and checked the booking website regularly until there was an available slot to do the test. After a long wait, he finally found a timeslot in Bathurst and immediately booked his spot. He travelled to Bathurst, where he did his driving test and successfully passed.

Thanks to his hard work, dedication, and commitment, along with Regan's support, Alex is now able to use his new-found independence to explore new opportunities in other areas of life, including employment. One of Alex's long-term goals is to secure meaningful employment. He currently has a casual job but hopes to get a permanent part-time job and says having his licence will open the door to different opportunities to achieve this goal.

WorkReady is a service 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 WorkReady, visit the link below.

<https://abilityoptions.org.au/funding-programs/ndis-employment-assistance/>



Hunter Day Program Visit the Aquarium

In late April, a group of participants from our Hunter Day Program went on an excursion to Sea Life Sydney Aquarium. This was an exciting opportunity for the participants, who were keen to get out and about to see their favourite sea animals and enjoy each other's company.

The group spent the day exploring a wide variety of sea life experiences and exhibits, each showcasing different types of marine animals, from the colourful clownfish to

the hovering stingray. Everyone in the group was thrilled and amazed to see each exhibit and meet all of the aquarium's marine residents, with the sharks and penguins being the two favourites. The group also had the opportunity to interact with each exhibit's special effects, including the sensory wall, which was a fantastic encounter. Towards the end of the day, the participants purchased a souvenir at the gift shop before leaving the aquarium.

Overall, the day was an enjoyable experience. Everybody in the group said they had a great time and are looking forward to visiting the aquarium again in the future.

Our Community and Social Activity programs aim to provide people with the opportunity to make new friends and get involved in the community. We organise a variety of fun activities throughout NSW, including bowling, BBQs, social gatherings, and weekend trips. To find out more about our Day Programs, visit the following link below.

<https://abilityoptions.org.au/disability-services/community-and-social-activities/>



Tammy's Road to a Bright Future

ParentsNext is an Australian Government employment program which aims to support parents with young children in developing the skills and confidence needed to plan and prepare for their return to work or further study. Our team of consultants work with eligible parents to help set short and long-term study and work goals and develop a pathway towards achieving their goals. Finding the right balance between work, study, and parenting is hard, but the right support and guidance in managing those responsibilities and commitments can make a big difference.



Tammy is one of many parents who has participated in the ParentsNext program. She recently achieved her goal of securing employment and is now working towards creating a bright future for her and her child.

When Tammy first joined the ParentsNext program back in 2018, she was in a dark place and not sure how to manage her situation. After meeting with her ParentsNext Consultant, Gail, and discussing and opening up about her living situation, Tammy explored different study options that would help her create a pathway to finding employment. She didn't own a car or use public transport, so she looked at various online courses that gave her the flexibility to study from home. After finding a Certificate I in Information, Digital Media and Technology course at TAFE that met her needs, Tammy, with Gail's support, enrolled in the course.

Since starting the course, Tammy's self-esteem began to improve. She worked hard on her coursework and was finding the learning material to be very useful. Tammy's participation and performance in her ParentsNext appointments also improved. She told Gail how much she was enjoying studying at TAFE and was soon eager to get a job and start working.

After completing the course, Tammy enrolled in a new TAFE course in basic computers. She continued to excel in her studies and volunteers by assisting other students. Tammy's participation and performance at her ParentsNext appointments continued to improve. She showed Gail her completed coursework at one of her appointments and expressed how proud she was of her accomplishments.

"I was really proud of Tammy's commitment and motivation to her studies at TAFE. It has been so good to see how far she has come since she first joined the program. It is clear she cares deeply for her child's wellbeing and development and wants to ensure he has a bright future ahead of him," said Gail.

In 2020, Tammy started a new computing course at TAFE, where she continued to excel in her studies and stayed motivated in working towards finding employment. At the time, Tammy was experiencing problems in her family life and did not know if she could keep going with her studies. Gail made sure that she received all the support she needed to manage the situation and get back on track with her coursework. Once her son turned six, Tammy completed the program that same year.

Today, Tammy's future is blossoming. She is currently working and completing more courses to further her education and develop her career. Gail, who recently spoke with her on the phone, remembers the first time she met Tammy and how she supported her in her journey during both good and bad times.

"I remember vividly the first time I met her, due to the fact that she told me she didn't like me much to begin with. Whilst initially reluctant to participate in the ParentsNext program, Tammy set to work on addressing vocational and significant non-vocational barriers and achieved the primary goal of ParentsNext of being employment ready when her child turned six. What impacted me most as a ParentsNext Consultant was Tammy's commitment to ensure that her child does not become welfare dependent in the future by providing guidance and positive role-modelling. It's amazing how far we have come since then," said Gail.

Tammy thanked Gail for supporting her in achieving her goal and was grateful for all she had done to help her reach her goal.

"I didn't like anybody at first, but Gail pushed me when I needed it and helped me through my struggles. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be where I am today," said Tammy.

To find out more about our ParentsNext service and how we can support you, visit the following link below.

<https://abilityoptions.org.au/funding-programs/what-is-parentsnext/>

Fiona Finds Her Light at the End of The Tunnel

YOU ARE STRONGER THAN YOU THINK.

When Fiona began attending counselling sessions back in February, she felt lost and was unsure of where she stood in the world. She was referred to our Vocational Counsellor, Stephanie, and now has a safe space to talk about her challenges with someone and find some solutions.

During her first session with Stephanie, Fiona, who spent many years as a successful dental nurse, talked about the challenges in dealing with anxiety, grief, and trauma and how they affected her day-to-day life. Stephanie wanted to get to know Fiona and have a better understanding of what she was going through. During their sessions together, Stephanie asked Fiona questions about the causes of her anxiety and used varied treatment methods to help her overcome these challenges. This allowed Fiona to reflect on herself and stay motivated in finding something to do to keep her mind active.

Fiona soon secured a volunteer role as a Support Visitor at HammondCare, which began to improve her life and mental wellbeing as soon as she started working in the role. She said she had found a purpose through helping other people through their own challenges and added the supportive work environment helped her develop strategies to face and overcome her own challenges. Shortly after she started her role, Fiona finished her therapy sessions with Stephanie.

Fiona's wellbeing has improved, and she continues to contribute to her community through her role as a volunteer. Thanks to Stephanie's support throughout her therapy sessions, Fiona said she is moving towards a brighter future thanks to her hard work overcoming her challenges using the support she received. Fiona said she is grateful to Stephanie for listening to her story and supporting her in navigating through her life journey to get to where she is now.

"Because of Stephanie, I now feel stronger mentally as I step into my new role as a volunteer Support Visitor at HammondCare, Erina. Stephanie is an outstanding mental health counsellor, one who possesses excellent skills in listening, personal guidance, and understanding her clients' individual needs."

Stephanie is happy Fiona has found meaningful work that has given her a new direction in life and is pleased she was able to support her journey. She believes that having a conversation with someone and being listened to can make a big difference to a person's life during a difficult time, no matter what stage they are at in their lives.

"I think the main reason Fiona felt satisfied with the counselling was not because of anything I did, nor was it the techniques or procedures I performed, but the fact that someone listened and was present. I really think that was it. I feel like we underestimate the value of someone listening to us and how much power that holds. You can never replace human connection when it comes to growth and healing. Nothing magic was done here at all."

At Ability Options, we offer a wide range of comprehensive therapy services across both Sydney and the Hunter regions, that are designed to help you get the most out of your life. Our therapy services are suited to people of all ages, abilities, and aspirations, and can be accessed through NDIS funding, Medicare, our Employment service, and Fee for Service. Our therapy team provide these services to individuals through both face-to-face and online (telehealth) every day of the week and will work to support you in identifying your goals and work towards achieving them. To find out more about our therapy services and how we can support you, visit the following link below.

<https://abilityoptions.org.au/disability-services/therapy-services/>

Ability Options Celebrates Penrith Open Day

Ability Options recently hosted a successful Open Day at our Penrith office, giving community members and participants the opportunity to explore our services and the important work we do to support people to achieve their aspirations and inclusion in the community.

The event was a huge success with many local community members coming along to meet our teams and learn more about our services. Our wonderful Sydney support coordinators were excited to meet and network with local service providers, who shared a passion for supporting people and were interested in forming long-lasting partnerships with us. The team from Casa Capace came along to present their amazing Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) properties, where the importance of independent living for people with disability was highlighted.

Participants who attended the event had their voices amplified as they shared their experiences and achievements and what they love about being an Ability Options participant. During the event, we ran a fun and interactive workshop for participants, where they planted succulent plants and painted a rock to take home.

We were privileged to host Penrith's Mayor, Tricia Hitchen, who came to the Open Day as our guest of honour. She spoke about the work Penrith Council is doing and the wonderful improvements it is making to community services that will better support and accommodate people with disability. A highlight of the day for everyone however was when she cut our delicious Ability Options cake.

We would like to thank everyone who attended our Open Day and look forward to hosting more events like this in the future.



Autumn Fun Steals the Show

TheVoice received a fantastic set of photos from our Sydney Accommodation Team, who took residents out to do some fun Autumn activities. During the Easter season, the group attended the Sydney Royal Easter Show, where they got to play with and feed some of their favourite farm animals and learn about how the agriculture industry works.

Two residents, Joel and Chris, had an additional day out to the Wollongong Science Space Centre, where they got to test their science knowledge and do some experiments with the museum's exhibits. Looks like they are having fun playing with the museum's special features and learning about things they didn't know about before.

TheVoice would like to thank the team for sending in these great photos. We look forward to seeing more of the amazing things participants have been up to in the next issue.



Do you want to have **some Fun?**



Do you want to meet new people and make new friends?

Dancing, footy games, movies, coffee catch ups, speedway, BBQ days, car shows, weekends away, animal programs, bowling, day trips, fishing, discos and many more fabulous activities.

Monday, Wednesday and Friday – 9am-3pm program
Friday night program – (various start and finish times)
Saturday program – (both day and evening activities)

WE LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING YOU

For more information contact
melissa.angelevski@abilityoptions.org.au or phone **0408 366 806**

► **Contact Us**

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