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## Gardening Grows Wellbeing Across Western Sydney

by Sam Squire

Having a concrete sense of belonging is something almost anybody would tell you is important to them. People find their sense of belonging in many ways.

Ability Options strives to support each participant through its services, to find their sense of belonging in whichever way they wish to. This goes beyond the day-to-day. We are always

looking for ways to foster a greater sense of overall wellbeing.

Vegepod's GrowAbility program is an initiative being introduced to Ability Options' sites for people with disability to create and maintain a garden at their community home.

Gardening is one of the many activities that can get people outside

*continues on page 3*



## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# Making the Right Decisions to Make a Difference

by *Rafael Sanchez-Bayo*

Integrity is the practice of being honest and following strong moral values. It is an important human quality that is all about doing the right thing. Integrity plays a central role in my life; as a journalist, it is my job and responsibility to tell true and factual stories about people and events. Telling the truth is important, as it builds trust and strong relationships.

I was first introduced to the word "integrity" during my high school years where the Principal would often discuss the meaning behind integrity and what it means to be a good person at school assemblies. At that time, I had very little knowledge and understanding about why it was important. As the years went by and I got older, I began to recognise and develop a better understanding of the important role integrity plays in creating and maintaining a fair and equal society. I have especially done this in my role as Editor of TheVoice for Ability Options.

Since I started working at Ability Options, I have been making good use of my journalistic skillset and knowledge to write and tell stories about people from all walks of life. Apart from developing my professional personality, working here has introduced me to the disability

community. As a person with disability myself, working within the Ability Options community has allowed me to explore what it means to live with a disability and, as a result, my passion to unite the community through storytelling has flourished. The work I do has deepened my understanding of integrity and the role it plays in supporting people with disability.

As a society, we have an important role to play in providing care and support for people with disability. Caring for a person with disability is not an easy job. It requires trust, respect, patience, and commitment. The decisions we make can affect the person's wellbeing and future – that's an enormous responsibility.

People caring for someone with disability must have a keen interest in a person's overall physical and mental development and believe their work will make a difference in the lives of others. They are willing to go out of their way to support that person navigate all areas of life.

On the other side of the coin, for people with disability, having someone by their side means a lot to them. Whether it is a family member, friend, or a support worker, people with disability feel supported, happy, and safe when they have someone who



looks out for them, spends quality time with them, and whom they can turn to for support and advice. They know their carers have a genuine interest in their potential.

Integrity is central in developing trust-based relationships between people with disability, their families, and service providers. Choosing a service provider to support a person with disability is a big decision for any parent or carer. Finding the right provider is not an easy task.

There are many things to think about and consider before committing to using its services. People with disability and their support circle have a right to know what service options are available, who is providing them, and how these services will benefit them. To meet the needs and goals of people with disability, it is the responsibility of service providers to provide honest, accessible, and accurate information about their services, and that people with disability receive these services in a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment.

This will allow people with disability to better understand the information and services they are receiving and make informed decisions about their future.

With integrity, people want to do the right thing. Having a good understanding of integrity can guide and inspire us to achieve something meaningful and work towards making a difference in society.





## Gardening Grows Wellbeing Across Western Sydney *continued from page 1*

for some fresh air, providing an opportunity to learn about plants and growing them. For people with disability, getting out into the garden can provide a range of health benefits.

The program offers participants the opportunity to develop their social connections, boost confidence and learn about nutrition. The Vegepods program gives participants a boost to their overall wellbeing, mental health and reduces stress levels.

The GrowAbility program was born from the belief that people with disability can benefit from time spent actively gardening, providing good opportunities for social interaction with others.

The program's main goal is to increase the capacity of people with disability to create and maintain an accessible garden and improve wellbeing in their day-to-day lives.

*"We believe doing so has a positive impact in developing life skills, improving wellbeing and sense of belonging, reducing social isolation and boredom, and increasing community and social interactions. It also provides a way to contribute to the environment,"* Vegepod said.

Kerry, Ability Options' Senior Manager for Property and Assets, said Vegepods (pods) have recently been installed at three of Ability Options' sites.

*"Our teams have been working with Simon and Leia Holloway from Vegepod over the last nine months to kickstart the GrowAbility program at our sites. So far, we have installed two large Vegepods at our Casuarina Grove, Marayong, and The Ponds sites, meaning over*



*50 participants across these sites will have ready access to use these gardens on a daily basis,"* she said.

The pods are built at an accessible height for people of all abilities to have easy access to them.

Participants can grow all kinds of plants and vegetables, including beans, beetroot, strawberries, peas, lettuce and more.

Kerry said that the GrowAbility Vegepods program will help people with disability grow their sense of belonging in their communities.

*"Gardening provides a great way to promote our wellbeing and gives us a good sense of belonging to our community. It helps form social relationships and reduces isolation. It's so great that we can provide this experience to participants,"* she said.



# A Message from our CEO

Hi everyone,

Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of The Voice. In this issue, I am really delighted we will be focusing on a very important theme: **Integrity**.

**Integrity** is one of our key values here at Ability Options, and it plays an important role in influencing the decisions we make as an organisation and service provider. Our values are all interconnected, and at their heart, have similar things in common – **trust, respect, integrity, courage, and to lead**.

**People put their trust in us** at Ability Options to support them to meet their aspirations and inclusion in their communities, whether supporting them in their daily lives or in searching for employment; they trust us as an employer or as a supplier, to pay them on time for goods and services. These things are true. What's also true is that the people we support look to us to be courageous – to advocate for them, and to enable them to advocate for themselves.

**Integrity, I think, is different from trust.** It represents a deep commitment by every single one of us, individually and together, to always believe, say, and do the right thing. Of course, no one is perfect, but without the commitment to the value of integrity, we certainly won't get close to meeting it. **Integrity can be a hard thing to embed for people.** It is important because by working to have consistent integrity, we build a culture which is reliably open, listening, learning, welcoming, and inclusive.

Growing up, it was instilled in me that, regardless of how hard it is, knowing what is right (or at least knowing what isn't right), and acting upon it, is the only choice. As I grew into my career, I came to realise that knowing what isn't right is often easier than knowing what is right in everyday decisions.

Saying things like, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it," does help us ease our conscience. It also acts as an acknowledgement of a wrong to the person affected. **Changing our thinking and behaviour, acknowledging a mistake or challenging a wrong, and learning from it, I'd say, shows integrity.** Integrity can go hand in hand with courage too.

At Ability Options, I receive all incident reports that involve or could involve harm to a participant or an employee. There are great processes to investigate, understand, and act on outcomes. If all I did to understand our services was to read incident reports, I'd have a distorted picture. Instead, I get out there, ensuring I catch up with staff,

participants, and families. It has been harder to do that during COVID, and I've had to be a bit more imaginative. Now I'm back, out and about, and able to visit services, carefully, of course. It's great to see how things look outside of reports. Sometimes, I go announced. At other times, I just pop in. Sometimes, participants choose for me not to go that day and that is fine, too. I don't always feel like having visitors at home either.

Last year, I saw some reports made by a new staff member, who was worried about some things they saw in their first few weeks. Some turned out to be correct, while others were because they had not understood participant needs and needed more training. Being new and raising concerns requires courage. However, having a team which supports the process and accepts that some aspects needed more training, improvement, and action, requires integrity.

**Working together to do better requires integrity.** And the team concerned showed integrity.

What I see colleagues doing at Ability Options is incredible. **I see great active support and care, professionalism from staff, and people enjoying themselves.** However, to ensure we develop as an organisation with integrity, we have processes which make it easier for people to do the right thing. Every year, we send out satisfaction surveys to participants and families, which encourage and provide them with the opportunity to have their say on our services and provide feedback. We have family forums, house meetings and more. Our Directors and leaders make visits. We find many ways to listen to employees and there will be more on this as we go. **We are also working on making improvements to the way our teams work, so that they are well equipped with the skills and training needed to provide support services that meet participants' needs and goals.**

Building integrity in our community is a constant work in progress, but we are progressing and I'm proud that we are.

Best wishes,  
**Julia Squire**  
[julia.squire@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto: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 [communications@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:communications@abilityoptions.org.au)



# Myra Attends the Australian Services Union Conference

Recently, one of our Support Workers, Myra Tito was invited to attend the Australian Services Union (ASU) conference, representing Ability Options.

As one of the largest trade unions in Australia, the ASU is a strong advocate for the rights of working people and is committed to making the NDIS the best it can be for people with disability, workers, and society.



The two-day conference saw frontline disability workers come together for their first face-to-face conference in three years. Disability delegates led a discussion about portable entitlements, such as long service leave, and how it will help grow the NDIS workforce.

Myra had a great experience at the conference, saying:

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***"It was a privilege and [an] honour to be there. I enjoyed listening to different talks and participating in discussions at the conference. I also loved meeting and sharing my thoughts with other passionate people working in the disability sector."***

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During the conference, Myra also had the privilege of meeting Bill Shorten MP, who is currently serving as Minister for the NDIS and Minister for Government Services.

## Introducing the Extended Care Paramedic Program

**Ambulance NSW has introduced the Extended Care Paramedic program to their services, increasing the availability of clinical and specialist Paramedics in an effort to provide timely treatment to low acuity patients and reduce the number of presentations to hospital emergency departments.**

Extended Care Paramedics (ECP) have extensive backgrounds as Registered Nurses, Intensive Care Paramedics, and undergo intensive training to deliver health support in:

- The replacement of catheters in emergency situations;
- Initial wound assessment and care (dressings/sutures);
- The replacement of percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy tubes;
- Fall risk screening and assessment for referral purposes; and
- The commencement of pharmacotherapy administration.

Extended Care Paramedics are available throughout NSW in the Sydney, Hunter, Central Coast and Mid-North Coast regions. ECP services can be accessed by contacting Triple Zero (000). ECPs will be dispatched based on answers provided to the Emergency Line Operator and availability.

For more information about the ECP program and how this service can support you, visit the below website:

<https://bit.ly/3RLqcx4>



**NSW Ambulance**

# Voice Survey Result Update

Participants, parents and carers in our Accommodation, Respite, Community Programs, and Individualised Support Services were asked to complete a survey in July 2021.

Ability Options achieved an overall satisfaction rating of

# 84%

with overwhelming gratitude for the work our frontline teams do for participants and in the community.

Despite this positive satisfaction outcome, the survey highlighted there was work for us to do to continue the journey of improvement. Ability Options committed to a number of actions to achieve greater outcomes for the people we support. Unfortunately, COVID-19 and its associated restrictions impacted the organisation's ability to implement some of the actions. However, we are committed to getting these tasks back on track.

## Some of the actions we have achieved:

- Ability Options' Human Rights Committee has been active for the past 18 months. The Committee has worked in partnership with the Council for Intellectual Disability to provide learning opportunities relating to supported decision-making, rights and advocacy.
- Social events have been implemented across the broader community. Ability Options hosts an all ability disco on a regular basis. GLAM is a social program being delivered for anyone identifying as LGBTQIA+ and is coordinated in partnership with the local council. We are currently replicating this in Taree.

- Designated Complaints Coordinator roles have been introduced to ensure one person supports a complainant whilst investigations are undertaken.
- Surveyed families and participants through our Practice Review processes, ensuring their voice is amplified when reviewing best practice initiatives.

## Some of the actions we are committed to working through over the coming months are:

- Providing further opportunities for the people we support to upskill in areas that they identify as areas of interest, such as, understanding human rights, self-advocacy and empowerment;
- Updating house meeting agendas and planning meetings to include additional information and discussion regarding living arrangements, celebration of success, self-advocacy and goal achievement;
- Coordinating consultation groups with individuals and groups, arranging regular social events to enable participants to meet and interact with others, foster friendships and improve community engagement;
- Developing further communication opportunities between Ability Options, the people we support and their circles of support across a range of mediums, including forums, newsletters and annual events; and
- Sharing news about strategy, progress and results, and seek further advice, feedback and commentary around these results, actions and progresses.

If you would like further information or to provide feedback, please contact the Quality Practice & Assurance Team via email:

**[qualitypracticeandoutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:qualitypracticeandoutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au)**

# Royal Commission Update

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability will wrap up hearings in December before the final Commissioner's Report is handed down in September 2023.

Since commencing in April 2019, Ability Options has closely followed the work of the Royal Commission and continues to act through our internal Royal Commission Action Plan. Ability Options provides regular updates to our Board and employees, and has consulted with the people we support and their families as we prepared an organisational submission, responding to the Issues Papers on their behalf.

Between now and the final hearings in December, Ability Options' Quality Practice & Assurance Team will prepare to present the Ability Options Royal Commission Action Plan to the Quality and Outcomes Committee and Board members, suggesting continuous improvements to policy, process and practice across the organisation.

## Have a story to tell?

Registrations for private sessions to share your story with the Royal Commission have closed but you may still make a submission to the Royal Commission in writing, over the phone, or in a video or audio recording up until **31 December 2022**.

For more information on how to do this, visit the Royal Commission website here:

**<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story/make-your-submission>**

Alternatively, you can contact a member of the Quality Practice & Assurance Team through **[royalcommission@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:royalcommission@abilityoptions.org.au)** for support.

## Human Rights Committee

**Members of the Ability Options Human Rights Committee have been working with the Council for Intellectual Disability on a co-design project to improve the consultation process and involvement of people with disability and their families in the development of positive behaviour support plans.**

We look forward to being able to pilot the person-centred tools to support this important work across the sector.

The Human Rights Committee also has several exciting opportunities to share with you which may be of interest:

### **Your Service, Your Rights Workshops (run by the Council for Intellectual Disability)**

These workshops, which can be run anywhere, will consist of four sessions and cover important topics, such as rights and services, the NDIS Commission, Code of Conduct and complaints, speaking up and supports, and being involved.

### **Learn to Lead**

The group meets monthly on a Thursday afternoon in the Council of Intellectual Disability's Surry Hills office. This group is about building leadership skills. In these meetings, they will talk about values, being a responsible member of a group, goals for the future, disability issues, and more.

There is still an opportunity for **YOU** to become a member of the Human Rights Committee. If you would like to know more about any of the opportunities above, please contact the Quality Practice & Assurance Team via email:

**[qualitypracticeandoutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:qualitypracticeandoutcomes@abilityoptions.org.au)**

# Thomas Makes Independent Move thanks to WorkReady

**Meet Thomas, an Ability Options participant who joined the WorkReady program with the goal of learning new skills to find and keep a job.**

Thomas has been working with his WorkReady Consultant, Robert, to identify and develop key job skills, including resumé and cover letter writing as well as job-seeking and interview skills. Thomas has also been supported by Robert to create a step-by-step plan to boost his confidence to make use of the skills he has learned to find and secure employment.

Thomas says his experience in Ability Options' WorkReady program has really helped him feel motivated to find work, and support from his WorkReady Consultant, Robert, has been instrumental in helping him work towards his goals.



He says he really appreciates the support he receives from Ability Options. Throughout his time working with the WorkReady service, he has enhanced his current skillset to open the door to more work opportunities.

*"Robert is very nice and understanding," Thomas said. "I feel like he is helping me achieve my goals as he helps me learn new skills for work."*

With Robert's support and encouragement, Thomas kept working hard towards his goals and made sure to keep practicing his newly learned skills. His hard work eventually paid off after he secured his first job as an all-rounder Team Member at Impulse Purchase Specialists.

*"Having a job means a lot to me. One day, I would like to work for Sydney Trains or maybe become a dog walker," he said.*

Thomas has been working in this job for two years and says it is his biggest accomplishment in his employment journey, thanks to the valuable support from Ability Options and says he feels proud to be able to support himself with the money he earns. Since achieving this milestone, Thomas is embracing his independence and is working towards his next goal of living independently. He says, in the future, he wants to live in his own home and pursue additional job opportunities.

*"I am now saving the money I earn through my job to one day buy a house so I can live independently."*

Thanks to the hard work and dedication Thomas has put in to achieve his employment goals through Ability Options' services, and thanks to his support circle, Thomas says he is living his best life and continues to aim high.

*"I feel motivated in moving forward and unlocking the next steps in my life," he said.*

For others embarking on this journey, he has some advice.

***"Don't give up. Keep trying. You will eventually get there."***



# Seth Leaps Towards Employment through WorkReady



*"I enjoyed working with the friendly team at the café. One day, I would like to learn how to make coffee and utilise my physical strength by helping with the store deliveries at the dock," he said.*

The positive and supportive environment at the Dangar Island Depot café, combined with his eagerness to learn on the job and through his skills training with WorkReady, led Seth to receive a job offer for paid employment.

With the assistance of the Ability Options Community Engagement team (CEC), Seth officially commenced with Disability Employment Services (DES) and was placed in his new paid role at Dangar Island Depot in June. With the combined support of WorkReady, CEC, and DES, in conjunction with Seth's supportive employer, Seth continues to grow and thrive in his new position. Seth continues to receive ongoing support from DES and has already started carrying out additional duties. His eagerness to help and willingness to learn new things has been a testament to his commitment and work ethic.

Seth said he was determined to not let his disability hold him back from his commitments, having learned quickly to navigate a ferry and a long train trip to travel independently to and from his sessions.

Seth was keen to attend weekly workshops and was a regular on most Industry Days, showing great commitment to his development. Learning and growing these skills gave him the confidence to take that first step of gaining work experience in a local café.

Seth enrolled in the program and quickly showed his eagerness to learn and work towards his employment goals. His drive to become more independent had paid off, when his employment offer came through from the café.

After just two months with Ability Options' WorkReady program, participant Seth got to put his newly learned skills into practice when he landed his first paid role in the workforce, after completing a work experience placement at a café.

In early 2022, Seth joined Ability Options' WorkReady program at Hornsby with the goal of securing paid employment to reach his goal of becoming more independent.

Supported by his WorkReady Consultant, Leanne, Seth quickly learned to navigate his own independence through public transport, and learned key communication skills, active listening, budgeting, and motivation and initiative training.

When he started his first work experience placement at Dangar Island Depot café and general store, Seth says he enjoyed learning valuable work skills through the various tasks given to him at his placement. He says the tasks he undertook, including working as a kitchenhand, learning how to use unfamiliar appliances, improving his organisational skills, and building his confidence and communication skills through conversing with the customers, really helped him understand more about working in the hospitality sector and develop his social skills.

*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/>**

# Club All In Hits Dancefloors in Western Sydney and Taree



**Club All In has continued its streak of success after its discos in the Northern Beaches prompted Western Sydney and the Mid-North Coast to put on their very own fiesta, hosting more than 73 people across both events.**

*"Participants, family members and carers attended the Club All In disco for a boogie with overwhelmingly positive feedback," Event Organiser Melissa said.*

Melissa said the discos provide people with disability and their support circle, the opportunity to connect and form friendships.

*"I am always happy to see carers talking and exchanging numbers on the night. It is also wonderful to see repeat attendees and more new faces with every disco we deliver. Families and carers are amazed at how we manage to meet everyone's needs and have come up to me during an event to thank me for providing the opportunity for their son, daughter, or grandchild," she said.*

Club All In started on the Northern Beaches in collaboration with the local council, with the idea to create an inclusive platform for people with disability, their families, and

carers to have some much-needed fun in a safe and supportive environment.

Feedback from participants, families, and carers was so overwhelmingly positive that a decision was made to hold a themed disco every two months.

*"The Club All In discos bring lots of smiles and excitement to everyone who attends," Melissa said.*

During the evening, there is food, music, and lots of dancing. Staff move throughout the dance floor encouraging everyone, including family and carers to 'bust a move' and be part of the action. Melissa said she is amazed at how successful the events have been, and adds her team are always coming up with new ideas of what to do for future events.



*"As people are leaving at the end of the night, we are already discussing 'the next one.' I don't think we can ask for a better outcome," she said.*

Recently, Taree became the first site on the Mid-North Coast to hold its first successful





Club All In Over 18s Disco. Many families, carers and participants turned out to have a boogie and enjoy the event – the dance floor was full all night long.

Everyone enjoyed partying the night away and had a great time meeting and socialising with new people over some food and drinks. The team at Taree is very happy with the outcome and is ready to host the next boogie.

Open to anyone who identifies as living with a disability, Club All In encourages people in the community to come along and meet new friends and have fun together. Offering both under 18s and over 18s discos meant that there was a disco for everyone.

The purpose of Club All In is to create a community that enriches the social lives of people with disability, their families, and carers. The organisation, preparation, and delivery of the discos would not be possible without the dedication and hard work of our teams.

Melissa says Ability Options has organised and delivered discos for nearly a year, all thanks to the staff who volunteer their time to make these events happen. She said the discos create a memorable night for participants and their families.

*"Discos are not a profit exercise," Melissa said. "We rely heavily on volunteers, donations, and collaborations from*



*other organisations, such as One Meal on the Northern Beaches, which provides take-home bags at the end of every event and has provided BBQs on the evening."*

*"For me, the discos mean more than just a DJ and dinner. It's an overwhelming satisfaction to provide such a fabulous event, meet new people, and walk away knowing that everyone there, from the volunteers to the participants and their families were part of something special, where people felt valued, included, and welcome."*



# High Tea Brings Warm Smiles on a Cold Day

**TheVoice was excited to receive some fantastic photos of Nareeda, a resident in our Rossmore home, enjoying high tea at Brookfield Tea House.**

Nareeda was treated to an outing to the tea house, where she enjoyed a warm cup of tea and indulged in an assortment of traditional English-style sweets and savoury snacks, including scones, cakes, and sandwiches. Looks like she had a great time feeling pampered throughout the day.

The Editorial Team at TheVoice would like to thank the Sydney Accommodation Team for sending in these wonderful photos. We look forward to seeing what activities participants have been up to lately in the next issue.

*Our Direct Support Service aims to support participants in managing everyday tasks at home and getting out and about in the community with confidence. Our passionate support workers act as both a guide and a friend, who are fully trained in supporting people from a wide range of backgrounds with different needs and interests to achieve their goals and live their best life. To help you gain confidence in building and maintaining everyday life skills, we can assist you with things such as catching public transport, cooking and cleaning at home, and going shopping or attending medical appointments.*

*To find out more about our Direct Support Service and how we can support you, search "support at home and in the community" on our website or visit the below link.*

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



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