

A N N U A L R E P O R T





NSW Location Map











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Our mission guides us to support people with disability in achieving their life and employment goals.

About Us

Who we are, our values and our mission

At Ability Options, we pride ourselves on the work we do to support our communities. As a leader in the Employment and Disability sectors, our mission guides us to support people to achieve their life and employment goals.

We have more than 1,100 passionate and dedicated employees driven to support people who need assistance to meet their aspirations at 95 sites and in communities across New South Wales, including Greater Sydney, the Central Coast, Hunter, Mid North Coast, Illawarra, and Northern Beaches.

Our aim is to:

- Support people to live the lives they choose;
- Provide active support for the activities people choose;
- Offer meaningful opportunities for inclusion in local communities;
- Offer work experience and employment opportunities; and
- Connect people to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services.

Our vision, mission and values remain as strong as ever. Supporting people with disability to achieve their goals has been a part of our story since Ability Options opened its doors more than 45 years ago.

From the start, Ability Options has been a courageous sector leader and a strong advocate for participants and their families. We have always challenged perceptions and assumptions well before the conception of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

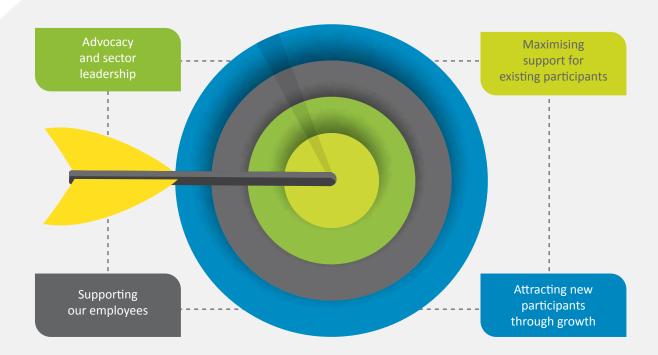
We strive for participants to have choice and control over their lives and to live as they choose, underpinning our long-held and heartfelt mission to support people who need assistance to achieve their aspirations and inclusion in their communities. We enable participants to advocate for themselves and make the choices they determine will best support them.

Over the past 12 months, we have continued to amplify the voices of vulnerable people and seek innovative ways to support them and their choices. It is our fundamental mission to continue to partner with others who share our values of trust, inclusion, respect, courage and to lead. We live and breathe the fundamental belief that everyone has the right to opportunity, choice, and self-determination, and it is our role to empower people to achieve their aspirations and goals.



Towards 2030: Our strategic focus

Our strategic goals in 2022-23



Employment:

Providing and growing successful employment services.

Accommodation:

Providing accommodation models in disability which attract new and retain existing participants.

Employees:

Continuing to employ the best people who are well trained, safe and engaged to provide great services that people choose to use

Advocacy:

Advocating for participants and upskilling them to self-advocate for the outcomes they want, be a sector leader, be credible with funders and partner with others confidently.

Effectiveness:

Providing efficient services which meet the aspirations of participants, employees, partners and funders.

Growth:

Identifying and implementing opportunities to grow through organic growth, tenders and acquisition.

In reflecting on the year behind us, we also look to the future and how our strategic priorities have guided our work, and will continue to in the year ahead.

Our Strategic Plan, 'Towards 2030', was developed as a 10-year vision to build a clear plan for our future, and tangible key actions for how we deliver our services. Towards 2030 is reviewed and updated every year if necessary.

Its goal is to ensure we keep participants, stakeholders and employees at the heart of everything we do and also build on our strengths as an organisation.







A message from our Patron

TREVOR R. PARMENTER AM

I have the pleasure of highlighting the impressive contributions Ability Options has made to enhancing quality outcomes for the people living with disabilities it has supported over the past year, particularly as the effects of the COVID pandemic are still being felt.

As this year's Annual Report theme is 'Leadership', I would like to observe what leadership means to me and how it is reflected throughout Ability Options.

The essential characteristics of leadership which I have tried to faithfully follow throughout my career include trust, integrity, respect, honesty, active listening, empowering others and providing visionary inspiration.

So often when we read about leadership we find its links with management, as shown by numerous professional courses in leadership and management that exist today. It is thought those terms relate only to a Management Board's stated values, vision, mission and objectives leading to their implementation by a leadership team.

I believe these terms, while quite different, can be linked with an astute understanding that leadership can be demonstrated at all levels within an organisation, and particularly a disability services organisation. Good management fosters leadership from the bottom up.

One of Ability Options' strengths is the way its Board and Leadership Team foster a spirit of leadership

through all levels of the organisation, which is demonstrated by the STAR Employee of the Month nominations and the Annual Star Employee Awards.

All awardees have demonstrated many of the leadership qualities I have listed as being important. They have been chosen as leaders by their peers who have recognised them as inspirational role models. It is on this principle I selected the Seven Hills Day Program Team for the Patron's Star of the Year Award in 2021 and highlighted its creative and innovative problem solving when faced by COVID-19 restrictions.

Ability Options has a proven leadership record in its Employment division and, since 2019, has achieved successful results in its employment initiatives in partnership with Crown Casino. Several employees with disabilities have advanced into positions of responsibility, such as kitchen supervisors, VIP hosts, staff wardrobe supervisors, and table games dealers.

Another example of how Ability Options demonstrating leadership in the sector has been the way it has assisted several residents from the Casuarina Grove aged care facility (having previously been residents of Peat Island Institution) to find new homes living in the community for the first time since they were children.

One especially lovely story is the finding of one resident's sister who happened to be in the Sydney service already and now they live next door to each other after having lost touch for quite some time — what a great example of visionary inspiration by Ability Options staff.



You are your own Leader

RAFAEL SANCHEZ-BAYO

EDITOR, THEVOICE

The term leadership is often thought to be interchangeable with management, however, this isn't always the case. Rafael Sanchez-Bayo, the Editor of Ability Options' quarterly newsletter TheVoice, penned his thoughts on the importance of leadership and the role it plays in making a difference to the world in the 2022 Winter Edition of the newsletter.

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

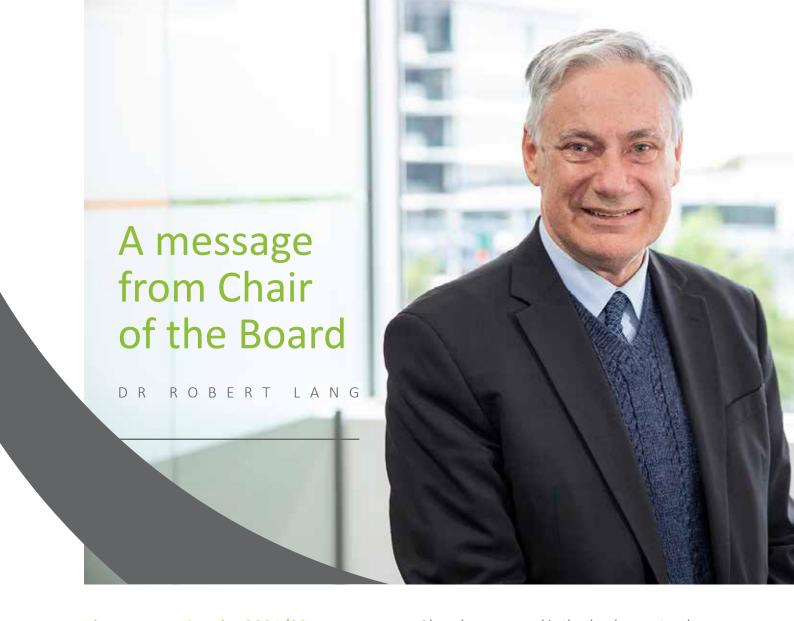


is appropriate accessibility, so that their potential can shine. Leadership is mutual; the community works together to create accessibility, so that people with disability can fully and equally participate and achieve their full potential. For example, by installing a wheelchair ramp or investing in 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 The Voice 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.



I hope you enjoy the 2021/22 Annual Report.

Our theme this year is 'Leadership'. We have much to be proud of, despite the difficulties faced by many teams in Ability Options during these challenging times. While the CEO's foreword will highlight the achievements within our services, I would like to share with you the importance Ability Options' Board ascribes to leadership.

Our teams have demonstrated leadership through the most trying of environments in the last year, and in the context of our long-term direction to ensure Ability Options is seen as a sector leader, I would also like to shed light on the fabulous work our 1100 plus colleagues do, day in and day out. I have been engaged in the development and support of leadership for many years and I know that the key to success – for participants, employees, stakeholders and our organisation – is great leadership at all levels, both inside the organisation we work and in the sectors we operate in. Great leadership is about enabling others to understand the challenges we face, to be equipped with the right tools to tackle those challenges, and to have the support you need to deliver successful results. That enabling starts with leadership from the Board to our services on the ground.

The Board has invested in leadership over the last few years and now we have our most comprehensive Leadership Program underway, which started in October 2021. Before that, at Board-level and with the Executive and Senior Teams, we reviewed our vision and mission and the Board recommitted to both. Our vision, "to inspire and lead communities, creating opportunity and services for people to participate fully in society", is a community and society scale leadership task.

Our mission, "to support people who need assistance to achieve their aspirations and inclusion in the community", talks to participants present and future in all our services.

Our Leadership Program intends to identify the great leaders we already have, develop others and create the kind of culture and environment that employs and retains an engaged, committed and skilled workforce, now and for the very long term.

Ability Options has been a respected service provider since 1976 and we want to improve this further for current and future generations of participants and employees.

We know that leadership is key. Whether the task at hand is to ensure that our government, at all levels, focusses on policy to enable Ability Options to meet our mission and contribute to creating the kind of society to be proud of, or to make sure participants have an excellent experience to help them achieve their chosen goals. Exceptional leaders, whatever their role is within the organisation:

- Have integrity;
- Hold the trust of the people they work with and serve;
- Are approachable;
- Collaborate;
- Are authentic;
- Are transparent; and
- Have high standards for themselves, their people and their services.

At all levels, we look to develop skills, including:

- Initiative;
- Problem Solving;
- Knowledge;
- Courage;
- Fortitude; and
- Responsiveness.

There is no doubt that "great Leaders search for the right path, not the easy one" (Shane Snow).

As a large not-for-profit organisation, we focus on doing the right thing. An organisation's character, values and culture are placed under the spotlight most during challenging times, and 2021/22 was certainly a challenge!

The Delta lockdown began at the end of June 2021, just before the start of the FY22 financial year, and rolled more or less into the Omicron wave, which isn't finished at the time of writing. Through this time, there has been little in the way of financial support to our sectors.

We used our resources to keep participants safe and engaged and to support our employees to lead us through those tough times, and to plan for a different world post-COVID.

Keeping our services operating as far as possible within the rules, leading our organisation through the vaccine and other compliance requirements, winning contracts for Workforce Australia - which has replaced jobactive - and keeping plans for new services, new homes and retaining all staff are huge leadership achievements.

In this period, we also reviewed and updated our Strategic Plan called "Towards 2030". We have solidified our commitment to being a trusted provider, a great employer and a credible partner in our sectors. To ensure we deliver these intentions, we have four key strategies:

- Advocacy and sector leadership;
- Maximising support for existing participants including reviewing our operating portfolio to ensure it is effective and efficient;
- Supporting our Employees including developing capability, leadership and engagement; and
- Attracting new participants including through organic growth, tenders, mergers and acquisitions.

The next period for our employees, participants and organisation is exciting. Underpinned by our commitment to our vision, mission, values and leadership, we expect and plan for high quality services that people choose to use and careers that people enjoy and develop with us for the long term. To do this, we are committed to invest in our people and culture so we can work together to deliver these results.



Nola Buck: A Champion for People with Disability

Nola Buck, a life member of Ability Options and long-serving Board Director, was awarded the prestigious Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in January 2022 for her incredible service to people with disability and to the community.

"In my lifetime I've seen many people dedicate their life to advocating for people with disability and those that need a voice in our community, and my contribution does not feel as significant," she said, "But 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."

Nola has spent her life advocating for people with disability, both independently and with Ability Options, as a Board Director — a position she held for 16 years until 2018.

At the age of two, Nola was diagnosed with Polio, or poliomyelitis, which is a disabling and lifethreatening disease that can cause paralysis.

Nola's experience living with disability formed a distinct level of empathy and understanding for others. She has been steadfast as a prominent voice for people with disability and improving their experience with Polio NSW, People with Disability Australia, and Ability Options.

In her work in the Disability Sector, Nola built a legacy of educating and uplifting people, constantly looking for ways to improve people's lives.

"It can't be said enough; people with disability need to be as independent as possible," Nola said, "Regardless of the type of disability, we want what any other human being wants".

"We've come a long way as a society in my time. There's far better acceptance of people with disability and greater understanding, but it does feel like there's a long way to go."

Nola's service on Ability Options' Board for 16 years saw her continue her passion of advocating for people living with disability, leading to the growth of Ability Options as one of the largest Disability and Employment services providers in New South Wales.

Ability Options CEO Julia Squire shared her delight on the significance of Nola's achievement and service to the community in January.

"Nola never allowed her disability to hinder her activities or commitment. As a Director, Nola always put the person first," Julia said, "She took every opportunity to educate the public around the challenges and opportunities of living with disability".

"Nola's advocacy in the sector has been continuous, consistent and effective. Her advice and advocacy were second to none and her ability to translate a big picture to meaningful improvements for individuals and their communities has helped steer Ability Options to where it is today – a trusted and valued service provider.

"It has been a privilege to have her support as a Board Director of Ability Options and our honour to nominate her for the award."



A message from our CEO

JULIA SQUIRE

I have to admit, writing this foreword for the Annual Report is both a source of huge pride and relief. The 2021-22 year was really tough for our participants, employees, communities and leaders.

I can't think of a better theme for this Annual Report than leadership. I hope you enjoy reading about how Ability Options has demonstrated its leadership at every level and in every service in the last year.

I am indescribably proud of our people. In partnership with our participants, in both Disability and Employment, they led us safely through the year and continued to show leadership in our wider community. I am also relieved the year that was FY22 is done. As I get older, I tend to wish time would slow down a bit, but where FY22 is concerned, I'm prepared to make an exception.

We started the year in July at the beginning of the long Delta lockdown and, just as it was slowing down, Omicron appeared. In between those lockdowns, many of our communities have experienced floods and other significant weather events.

Throughout the year, our leadership and commitment to Ability Options' vision, mission and values has been unwavering.

We provided vaccine clinics to participants and staff but also to other service providers, their staff and participants. Employees stood up and complied with the public health requirements, extra training and found good things to do during lockdowns. All of this is leadership. We walked our talk and did so alongside each other every step of the way.

We showed compassion, fortitude and stuck to the values we had committed to. We showed adaptability in the face of changing and often unclear public health orders, we supported colleagues who lived in the most restricted areas of our State, in South West Sydney when they were impacted by restrictive lockdown conditions, we worked in different roles, did extra training, extra shifts, and we made sure everyone was supported and safe.

Many colleagues came back early from holidays during peaks in the pandemic to support their colleagues. We took tests, did extra compliance reporting and washed our hands until they were sore and washed them again. Employees in the Employment division of the organisation volunteered to be trained to support colleagues in the Disability division, and our partners and contractors did their bit too. Leadership - joined up.

As a sector leader, we advocated strongly to politicians, their clinical advisors, and other policymakers.

We kept our services going where we could, and we changed them responding to the needs and wishes of our participants. When needed, we are still wearing masks, checking in and being uncomfortable in many of our services. We are striving to be leaders in our communities and the sector. At the time of writing, we are still in a pandemic, and we are still enduring the added pressures it brings. Our people have been, and continue to be, leaders.

When we had the inevitable outbreaks of Omicron as the world opened up, our employees showed enormous leadership in supporting participants, families and each other through it. The HR Team stood up and checked in with colleagues with COVID and provided a wide range of support from providing nappies, to groceries, or someone to talk to. Staff members worked in unfamiliar accommodation settings. Day program employees moved to accommodation. Employment Consultants found new ways to check in with participants and employers, and everyone had watch parties during the Paralympics!

Our colleagues in NSW Health were impressed with our emergency planning and the way we got on with responding, which is a real source of pride and satisfaction for me.

Our Board couldn't have been more supportive during this time, deciding to retain and pay all our staff throughout, knowing that great people are hard to come by and investing in our values, not knowing how long it would last. The Board showed their commitment in leading and stewarding our organisation. They stayed close and supportive, reviewing risks continuously and providing the necessary resources, governance and support to the Executive. We are lucky to have them.

Beyond that, we delivered our operational plans, which help us progress to meeting our Strategy – "Towards 2030". Our key priorities were to invest in our future by:

- Improving our market position through providing high-quality services that people choose and growing these to deliver our mission;
- Ensuring we attract and retain the right workforce; and
- Ensuring we are efficient in our use of all the resources we have.

Underpinned by our vision, mission and values, our teams worked to:

- Amplify Voice.
- Lead Courageously.
- Innovate.
- Develop Partnerships.
- Grow in a sustainable way.

Achievements from the year are many and this Annual Report will reflect on others. I would like to share a few examples with you.

We amplified voice by listening carefully to our participants and are acting on the outcome of this by developing our Human Rights Committee and advocating with peak bodies and in public for the policies which help us meet our Mission.

We led courageously by investing in leadership development, advocating for our sector's workforce and recognising and rewarding our people for their efforts.

We innovated by switching service models to suit the changing times, by investing in new systems and processes and implementing real time site audits using a phone-based app which is used by staff and participants.

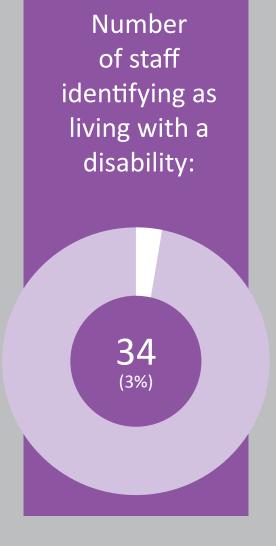
We invested time in partnerships with suppliers, other organisations and peak bodies and we grew our services carefully, winning contracts with Workforce Australia through our partnership with CoAct. This provided services in accommodation which more new participants have accessed than at any time in the last four or five years, and grew services like ParentsNext, Coordination of Support and WorkReady.

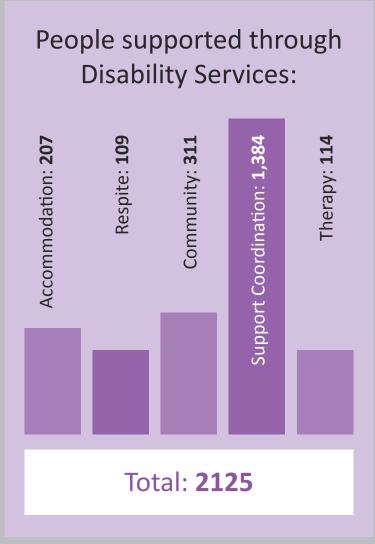
In between all of that, our new website was codesigned with staff and participants, we have improved our digital and social media presence and implemented a whole package of new benefits for employees including learning and development, new salary packaging and Employee Assistance offers, as well as individual rewards for staff.

The progress towards delivering our Strategic Plan, "Towards 2030", is great to see because Ability Options is a long-standing and trusted provider, employer and partner. This progress, in the face of such challenging times, epitomises leadership at every level. While we can always do better and learn more, I am immensely proud of what we have achieved together.

Our 2021-22 Highlights

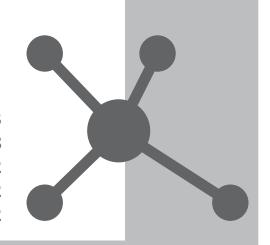






Total number of Ability Options Community Sites and Hubs including residential care facilities as follows:

Sydney Group Homes: 13
Hunter and Central Coast Group Homes: 18
Mid-North Coast Group Homes: 12
Mid-North Coast Respite Homes: 2
Hunter and Central Coast Respite Homes: 2



People supported through Employment Services:

DES: **3,610**

Jobactive: 3,471 (now Workforce Australia)

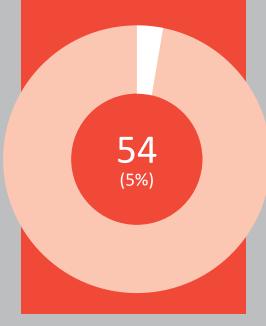
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ParentsNext: 3,582

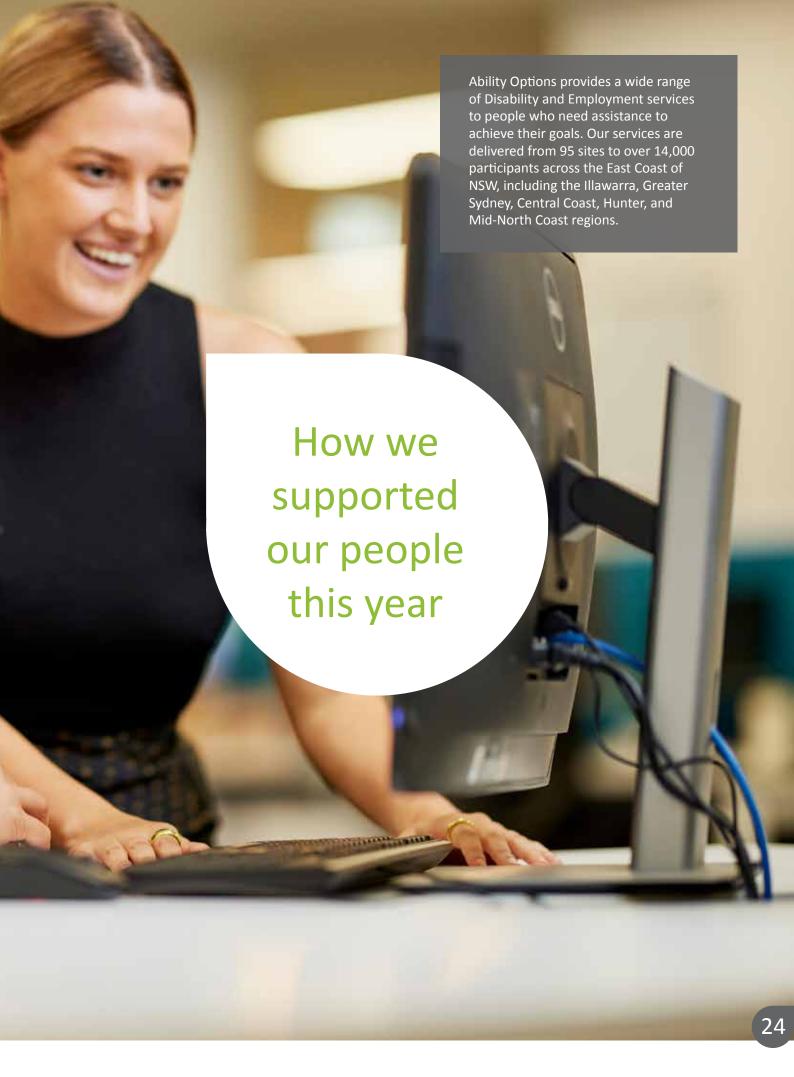
WorkReady: 269

Total: **10,932**

Number of employees identifying as First Nations:







Disability Services Overview

Ability Options supports participants from more than 95 sites, homes, offices and community hubs across Greater Sydney, Illawarra, the Northern Beaches, the Central Coast, Hunter, and Mid-North Coast.

Accommodation and Supported Independent Living: Accommodation and supported living choices for people with disability.

Respite Services: Quality, flexible support for children and adults with disability and their families in North-West Sydney, Hunter, Mid-North Coast and Northern Beaches.

Co-ordination of Supports: Supporting people with disability to find the right providers to meet their NDIS goals.

Community Activities: Offers a wide selection of activities and skills for life programs, support, and training to assist people to learn new skills, as well as make new friends and connect with the community.

WorkReady: This service equips people with the skills, knowledge, and experience to enter or re-enter the world of further training or work with confidence.

Therapy Services: Our team of Psychologists and Therapists work with Accommodation and Supported Living residents, NDIS participants, and people using WorkReady. We also provide vocational counselling within Employment Services.

Front Up (Arts and Cultural Program): Front Up is a disability-led arts and cultural program offering participants access to multi-layered professional arts and cultural education.

Disability Services Report

Disability Services within Ability Options had a year that while challenging, is one everyone can be proud of. The year showed off our enormous leadership talent across our organisation as everyone worked to meet our mission and values. When it mattered, we came together as one and worked tirelessly, side by side.

We faced the pandemic and adverse weather events which impacted participants, our people, the communities we serve and our services. The Delta lockdown in NSW began towards the end of June and, with very little relief, developed through the year with the Omicron waves. We decided early on in 2020 that our priorities would be keeping everyone safe through consistent and clear leadership and keeping our people in their jobs.

Despite many of our services being unable to operate as they usually do, with slow and reduced demand, we stuck to those priorities. The teams responded really well, and we are very thankful for their support. Almost everyone working at Ability Options took up the COVID vaccinations, supported by the clinics we set up and the arrangements we made as well as using those offered elsewhere. We supported participants and colleagues who contracted COVID and provided a range of different



activities and supports to keep people well in every way.

In between all those things, we continued our sector leadership in advocating for our sector with State and Federal Governments and contributing to the Disability Royal Commission.

Services changed their models to respond to lockdowns and restrictions and supported each other.

Our accommodation services continued to operate with our property partner to plan and build new houses designed for the needs of existing and participants, the first couple of which will be ready in late 2022. A number of participants from Casuarina Grove chose to move into supported independent living homes in the community for the first time and enjoyed events in between lockdowns including holidays, fishing and going to the football. We were even able to reunite two sisters who had been separated for some time and they now live next door to each other, which was a fabulous achievement. During lockdowns, accommodation services staff and participants truly developed and exhibited their skills and imaginations having video parties, undertaking crafts and fancy dress and umpteen other ways to stay happy, healthy and active.

Direct support services and day programs found unique ways to operate remotely and also, when allowed in socially distanced and outdoor settings. Like the rest of us, growing things, cooking and getting pets turned out to be great activities - of course Netflix got a good work out! Exercising became a competition too.

Disability staff worked wherever they were needed. They did flexible shifts, worked over and when we had a COVID outbreaks during Omicron, staff worked in teams to support participants so they could remain safely at home. When staff caught COVID our wonderful HR Team checked in with them and got adept at cups of tea online and finding shops to deliver things they needed.

Beyond all those things, the Disability Division made good progress towards our Strategy we:

- Grew our services;
- Transitioned 13 participants, at their request, into new homes, more than in previous years;
- Continued to improve our systems and processes;
- Ensured Disability staff were provided with up-to-date training and career development opportunities;
- Developed digital service offers and new updated service models including on the Mid North Coast:
- Achieved all necessary accreditations; and
- Advocated for and supported participants who needed vaccinations, or were admitted to hospital, we developed our relationships with local health networks and invested in clinical education and practice.

When we could, we opened all services. Lastly, we supported staff who looked after each other, not just through COVID but also through a number of flood events and other challenges which led to hardship.



Gardening Grows Independence Across Western Sydney

Having a concrete sense of belonging is something 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 some of Ability Options' sites and community homes for people with disability to create and maintain a garden.

Gardening is one of the many activities that can get people outside 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 will 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 give them more independence 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 our participants," she said.



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.

As a participant, 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.

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

Our Leadership Team



Chief Executive Officer
Julia Squire



Chief Operating Officer
- Employment & Marketing
Mark Chaffey



Chief Operating Officer
- Disability Services
Naomi McCorkell



Chief Corporate Services Officer Mark Twomey

- Employment Programs; Disability
 Employment; jobactive; ParentsNext
- Marketing
- Central Coast
- Hunter Region

- Finance
- ICT
- Property and Assets
- Communications
- Business Analytics

- Disability
- Sydney
- Central Coast
- Hunter Region
- Mid North Coast





ChairDr Robert Lang

Board of Directors



Chief Human Resources Officer Ian Fuller

- Human Resources
- Payroll



Chief Quality Practice & Assurance Officer Michelle Hodge

- Participant Engagement and Outcomes
- Royal Commission
- Practice Support
- Audit
- Risk
- Compliance



Employment Services Overview

Ability Options provides
Disability Employment Services to
participants in Greater Sydney, the
Central Coast, Hunter, Illawarra,
and the Northern Beaches.

Disability Employment Services: A hands-on specialist service supporting people with disability, injury, or long-term health conditions into finding work.

ParentsNext: ParentsNext Consultants work with eligible parents to help set education and employment goals, develop a pathway to achieve their goals, and link them to services and activities in the local community.

jobactive (now Workforce Australia): We support people in all stages of life in developing the skills to get job-ready and find the right job. We also provide support for employers in finding and training the right people that meet their business needs.

Employment Services and Marketing Report

MARK CHAFFEY



CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER - EMPLOYMENT AND MARKETING

The last 12 months have been a time of significant change for Employment Services at Ability Options.

We again started the year facing an uncertain future with the pandemic continuing to significantly reduce our ability to deliver face-to-face services and assistance to the participants of all programs. I am very proud of the effort shown by all Ability Options staff adapting to the ever-changing circumstances, arranging interviews and training via Zoom, organising meetings via telephone and doing whatever was necessary to ensure our participants had every opportunity to secure employment.

At the very beginning of the year, our ParentsNext program started delivering services under a new contract. The team focused on engaging with the large number of parents seeking assistance and the caseload has grown by more than 400% over the first year of the new contract.

jobactive, the major program delivering assistance to unemployed Australians was scheduled to come to an end on 30 June 2022 and was replaced by Workforce Australia. At Ability Options, we decided our participants would be given the best opportunities as part of a larger organisation, so we joined CoAct for the delivery of this program. The preparation and submission of a proposal for the delivery of a program such as Workforce Australia is a huge undertaking and I would like to acknowledge the hard work and considerable effort put in by all the staff that worked on the submission, but especially Joshua Grant, Julie Cox and Shane Brooks.

CoAct is a collaborative partnership model serving as a network manager to provide leadership in the delivery of consistent, quality services and value beyond the contract. At a national level, CoAct works alongside Ability Options to improve services, share knowledge, provide best-practice guidance,

and design innovative solutions for our employers and participants. Since early April, when the tender results were announced, Ability Options has been working closely with CoAct to ensure its sites are operational and delivering high quality services to all participants.

Our Disability Employment Services (DES) program has continued to improve the quality and quantity of outcomes it is achieving for registered participants. Unfortunately, our service had been underperforming and it has taken a lot of hard work and dedication from the whole team to get to where we are. I would like to say thanks to Karen Newman for taking on the daily leadership of this team through the past eight months, while maintaining all her other responsibilities. The team has worked very hard under Karen's leadership to improve performance and reduce the risks of contract losses under the performance regime which are expected to be announced in FY23 with, until June a reduction of contracts at risk from 11 when Karen took on the role.

At the end of 2021, Ability Options was also successful in our bid for the Walter and Eliza Hall Trust Memorial Grant. The Trust has been helping Australians with physical disability since 1912 and the grant has supported the development and implementation of a tailored employment service for people with physical disability.

While people with disability represent an underutilised and exceptional talent pool, only 48% of people with disability of working age are employed. For people with physical disability, this number halves to 24%. We are grateful to be able to better address inequality in labour force representation through this grant.

We would like to thank the Walter and Eliza Hall Trust for their generosity and understanding of the need to close the gap in employment and the





importance of our services. Since commencing servicing in April, the program has supported more than 42 participants, nine of which have been supported to gain and maintain employment.

At the end of June 2022, our programs were directly assisting more than 10,000 vulnerable people move towards employment and living a more inclusive life.

Towards the end of 2021, we made a strategic decision to split the Marketing and Communications functions within Ability Options with Marketing moving into my portfolio of management and Communications into Corporate Services. Since the split, we have undertaken a thorough review of the Marketing function within Ability Options. Part of that review saw the recruitment of two new roles - a Digital Marketing Manager and a Graphic Designer - allowing us to retain more of our activities in-house. At the same time, we started to refresh and revitalise all marketing collateral, such as program and house brochures. Finally, we have increased both the number of events the Marketing Team is involved in as well as the overall level of participation.

In March this year, I took on oversight of Therapy Services, Specialist Supports, WorkReady, Business Supports, and the WeConnect project.

Similarly to our Employment programs, our Therapy Services have also suffered a sizeable downturn as a result of the pandemic. Health-imposed restrictions severely limited our ability to deliver services face-to-face. We did, however, take advantage of the opportunity to grow our resources and provide support and feedback with many internal moves taking place with the assistance, guidance and support of our Clinical Team's expertise.

The Support Coordination Team has continued to grow this past year, and we are recognised as a provider of choice for Coordination of Supports by many organisations including the NDIA, Department of Justice, and many mental health organisations. The Coordination Team led the way with the roll out of our new CRM WeConnect, embracing the system early on.

WorkReady continues to grow with participant numbers now exceeding 270. Many of these clients connect with Ability Options straight from school. Our team works closely with them to set achievable milestones during the life of the program with the ultimate aim of securing employment or further educational opportunities.

Our Intake Team is pivotal in the success of Ability Options and always strives to ensure that our potential participants have a great initial experience with us. The whole Business Support Team (Claims, Intake and Rostering) are extremely efficient and are constantly searching for ways to improve both the participant experience and our internal processes.

WeConnect is an amazing system that has the power to change the way we support our participants to help them achieve their goals. As we continue to adopt the system, it creates an increasing level of efficiency within teams and across the organisation. It allows us to provide continually improving service to the participants through both efficiency and through a better understanding of our participants' requirements. Ultimately, WeConnect allows us to fulfil our mission.

Corporate Services Report

MARK TWOMEY



CHIEF CORPORATE SERVICES OFFICER

It's been another bumper year for our team. Like everyone, we have certainly had our challenges, but also triumphs across our business. We pride ourselves in Corporate Services on making things easier for those working on the frontline, and I believe this year we were able to deliver on that mission.

The Corporate Services Team, encompassing Property and Assets, ICT, Communications, Business Analytics and Finance, supported the broader Ability Options business in a number of ways to achieve its strategic objectives over the past 12 months.

Some of our key highlights were managing the build and launch for the new Ability Options' website, continuing upgrades and maintenance across our properties, development and implementation of improved financial reporting and savings on renewal of contracts for regular services such as telephony and ICT.

We have continued to streamline and focus our support functions and, after review, made the decision towards the end of 2021 to split the Marketing and Communications functions, with Communications continuing to fall under my management.

This led to a review of how we manage our Communications and Marketing channels, including the launch of a new website. This platform has been instrumental in telling the stories of our people and participants, while also connecting people with the information they need about Ability Options in a more intuitive manner.

ourPlace, our internal intranet platform has continued to build as a crucial staff engagement tool, serving as a central library for important information for staff, while also sharing stories of how we continue to help our participants reach their aspirations and goals.

The Communications Team is excited to continue their people-centred focus on content in the year ahead. Expect to be hearing more about our people and their achievements in the year to come as the team continue working on sharing important news about the Disability sector, and achievements of our people and participants achieving their NDIS goals.

The Property and Assets Team have never been busier. In some of my recent visits, it has been incredible to see the rapport the team have with our properties and the manner in which any issues are resolved quickly. There is a high level of trust there.

The team have achieved so much over the year, including:

- Opened five new commercial office premises for Employment and Specialist Support Services;
- Relocated and renovated the day program at Taree;
- Actioned over 4000 work orders for property repairs and maintenance;
- Refreshed branding and signage

- throughout our Mid North Coast sites;
- managed the procurement and inventory of PPE stock for the organisation through challenging times of stock shortages;
- Arranged and helped install Vegepods throughout Sydney, Central Coast and the Mid North Coast which have been thoroughly enjoyed by our participants;
- Implemented a new lease management system;
- Lead the transition and implementation of the new partnership with Woolworths at Work; and
- Continuing to manage, review and retender different contracted services to meet the needs of the organisation.

Our Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Team has continued to streamline, safeguard, strengthen and shape our whole of business infrastructure over the past 12 months, ensuring all our essential accreditations are maintained and built on.

The team managed the build and launch for the new Ability Options website, continued upgrades and maintenance across our properties, development and implementation of improved financial reporting, savings on renewal of contracts for regular services such as telephony and streamlining the onboarding and offboarding of staff into all systems.

Beyond the day to day of ensuring our systems run smoothly, the team has built and tested disaster plans, simulated various cyber-attacks and bedded down the new ICT Support and Service provider.

Finance is the backbone of our organisation in many ways and, while it has been a challenging 12 months as an organisation, the team has ensured we continue to manage our resources to great effectiveness. This function was also subject to review over the year and resulted in a split between our financial reporting and management accounting through the creation of two teams: one to focus on financial reporting and the other to provide management reporting and business analytics reports for front-line management.



Quality, Practice & Assurance Report

MICHELLE HODGE



CHIEF QUALITY, PRACTICE & ASSURANCE OFFICER

In June this year, we merged the Audit and Compliance business stream from the former Audit, Risk & Compliance team with the Quality, Practice & Outcomes Team, and are now known as Quality, Practice & Assurance (QPA).

QPA had a vast number of collective goals and aspirations for the FY22 period. While our team was continuing to grow and evolve, we were heavily focussed on embedding a human rights-based approach where people we are supporting are valued, engaged and are contributing in whatever capacity they are able. It was an incredibly busy year that was impacted by floods and the pandemic. Despite this, it was a year where we were able to achieve many of the goals we aspired to.

QPA is very proud of the work undertaken to develop and deliver Ability Options' organisational submission to the Disability Royal Commission (DRC) into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability. We concentrated our submission to cover four key recommendations:

- The DRC adopts a strategic approach to the recognition, supply, training, and funding of the Behaviour Support profession to help keep people safe.
- There be a focus on improved training and awareness for health care professionals to ensure equal opportunity for improved health outcomes.
- The DRC review current accommodation models, funding, and eligibility requirements to ensure all people living with disability are afforded the right to choose where and who they live with.

 There be a specific focus on the protection of people with a disability who utilise unregulated, unregistered, or informal support who disclose allegations of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

We contributed to several Disability Royal Commission issues papers, including response to Omicron and supported employees to make submissions, particularly relating to vaccine accessibility in the early days of the Delta variant of COVID-19 in 2021.

We continued our work establishing the Ability Options Human Rights Committee and this is delivering well with great potential. We have contributed to council Disability Inclusion Action Plans and provided opportunity for members to complete training and contribute to focus groups facilitated by Council for Intellectual Disability (CID). The committee has also been working to ensure its internal documentation is accessible and available in an easy-to-read format. Consultation groups have been formed to test some of this work and to ensure a co-design approach. We have further progress to make in terms of regional representation of people with disability on the committee and will continue to promote the group in the months ahead.

The QPA Team continued its focus on developing our people throughout the year. Policy and process training was designed and delivered to complement the rollout of processes in myLibrary, Ability Options' internal policy and process hub. Our Practice Support Team has been incredibly busy providing face-to-face training to frontline teams. They have adapted to the changing needs presented by the pandemic and our workforce is now well-equipped to complete training in a virtual world.

projectUPskill is now building momentum, ensures a streamlined induction and onboarding process, and ensures a minimum skill level for our frontline teams to ensure best-practice service provision.

We progressed our work in clinical education and integrated a hospital admissions review process to ensure positive health outcomes. We have engaged in National Disability Services (NDS) focus groups and showcased the role of our Clinical Services Team in supporting staff with health training and competency assessment in line with NDIS skills descriptors and practice alerts. From these meetings, it was clear that we are paving the way for ground-breaking best-practice in our industry.

Our processes continue to develop to match worker skill to participant needs. Having a Clinical Team that can consult on health plans, have a sound process in transition of care and provide training to internal staff so that health information shared is accurate and relevant to site specific group homes and direct supports has provided huge benefit to people being supported.

QPA has centralised key support functions such as Community Visitor Reporting and Restrictive Practice submission processes which have resulted in significant improvements from a reporting perspective, as well as providing necessary support for operational teams. We have received incredible feedback from many independent practitioners regarding our inclusive approach at Authorisation Panels. We are proud that people are involved in discussions and are always aware of the decisions being made about their support.

Participant surveys were completed throughout the year with pleasing results from both engagement and satisfaction perspectives. We continue to action the results of these surveys and provide regular communications through TheVoice, Ability Options' participant newsletter. We have made a lot of

progress aligning policy, process and practice. This will be a feature of our business plan for FY23.

We have made significant progress throughout the year, all of which we should be very proud. We have reflected along the way and whilst incredibly happy with the results, we know how much work lays ahead to ensure we are delivering best practice in every way.

Since the merge of the Audit and Compliance parts of the business with our team, we have committed to continue the great work completed under former Chief Audit & Risk Officer Luke Hughes.

The ARC Team have achieved many things over the course of the year under Luke Hughes, including:

- The development and roll out of myReporting, a system allowing better recording and oversight of incident management across the organisation.
- Maintaining external certifications and delivering an internal audit schedule including ISO9001:2015, NSDS, an Icare monitoring visit, and ISO27001/RFFR.
- Continued refinement of myLibrary, ensuring our policies and processes are reviewed, updated and reflective of practices across the organisation.
- Completing the recertification audits for ISO9001:2015 and NSDS with no nonconformities, allowing Ability Options to continue with certification against these standards.

The ARC Team, much like all other areas of the business, performed well under COVID regulations, helping us do our best to keep participants and staff safe. The team also was instrumental in helping coordinate vaccination hubs.

The team have strengthened our relationships with the NDIS Q&S Commission and have been responding to increasing compliance requirements from many of our regulators.

Human Resources Report

IAN FULLER



CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER

Leadership and our People

One of our key achievements over the last 12 months has been to establish a three-year leadership strategy, focussed on building a culture which will support our vision to be a leading inclusion and community services organisation.

Working with the Dattner Group — our leadership partner — we have established the foundations of the strategy. Key pieces of work have been the development of an Ability Options Leadership Framework, a review of its values and agreeing a culture map which will help embed key processes around leadership capability, embedding Ability Options' values and ensuring everyone is engaged in, and understands, the strategy.

Planning is in place for the rollout of leadership development for the next level of leaders and aspiring leaders, and we have recently piloted the 360 Feedback and Coaching Program for 20 Disability Team Leaders.

Over the last few months, a review of our values to see if they are the right fit for Ability Options in 2022 has been undertaken as part of our leadership and culture development program.

Around 100 staff were consulted through meetings and focus groups, where current values were discussed and evaluated, and examples of supporting behaviours and un-supporting behaviours have been developed.

The only major change to our values was to change the fifth value to 'lead' replacing 'leadership'. This was identified as a recommendation from consultation. Generally, it was felt that all of us can 'lead' in our roles whereas leadership described the role and behaviour of people in more senior or leadership roles.

Each value is now set out with three supporting behaviours which will support the value and would demonstrate that people are committed to, and work by, that value. Un-supporting behaviours provide examples of how people might behave or act if they are not supporting Ability Options' values.

Diversity and our People

During 2021/22, our Inclusion and Diversity Group continued to meet. Progress has been made on accessibility issues over the last 12 months, with all office locations (except one) being fully accessible for people with physical disabilities. Mapping against the disability confident recruitment standards was also undertaken, and this remains a key objective for 2022/23. The Reconciliation Action Plan for our Aboriginal and First Nations strategies has commenced, but it was unfortunate we were unable to complete it during the year. A new Aboriginal Engagement Advisor was appointed in July 2022, who will refresh and lead this important work.

Engagement and our People

Recognising that both 2021 and 2022 held a range of challenges in the management of COVID 19, some of our normal approaches to staff engagement had to be halted and more work needed to be done virtually. The staff survey from early-2021 had three key organisation-wide plans:

- Improve key aspects of recruitment and retention;
- Ensure access to career support; and
- Work on the value of respect.

As a result, we have appointed a new talent acquisition lead, are utilising new recruitment/ talent-sourcing techniques and we are creating new candidate pools and have made improvements to our assessment centres and developed new partnerships with trainee providers. Overall, we have reduced our time to fill vacancies by 20% and stabilised turnover. During 2021/22, we have mapped all our roles to our online competency and appraisal systems and trained our Disability and Employment Team Leaders to have development and career conversations. A review of our values has led to the creation of suggested supportive and unsupportive behaviours which will help embed our values into everything that we do.

Most regions and services also put in place plans to improve engagement during the year and were successful in achieving outcomes despite the disruption to normality. Some key outcomes were:

- Improved engagement with Disability Team
 Leaders in all services to ensure great input into decisions and effective outcomes;
- Increase in the number of staff completing appraisals and having a career conversation.
- Embedding a zero-tolerance approach to disrespect in the workplace;
- Improving managers' skills in managing grievances;
- Review of caseloads and different ways of working in Coordination of Support (COS);
- Rolling out changes to work practices with a focus on improving participant outcomes and working lives for staff, and replicating the practices and models that worked well in other teams;
- Improving cross unit collaboration across employment teams and with disability services teams in shared offices; and
- Coaching Employment Managers to improve leadership and management ability.

We decided to conduct our staff survey during July 2022 this year and look forward to receiving our results towards the end of the year.

Wellbeing and our People

Clearly, 2021/22 was a challenging year with the impact of COVID 19, particularly the lockdowns in Sydney and later in the Hunter. The HR Team have played a pivotal role in ensuring, as far as possible, we have kept staff safe and provided wellbeing support. We have worked hard as an organisation to ensure we have the policies and practices in place to support participants while safeguarding our staff. Training and revised ways of working, including use of protective equipment, have been vital.

We also offered some additional paid leave during the time of the first variant of COVID-19 to support staff who had to isolate and later transitioned to making sure we keep in touch with people affected by COVID. We also procured a new Employee Assistance Provider (EAP), Veretis, which is an EAP provider focussed on wellbeing. Veretis has been a great addition to our HR service offerings to staff, as the service provider works well with our values and mission. We are working on a three-year partnership with Veretis.

Payroll Services

The Payroll Team ensures all staff, including our casual workforce, are paid accurately and on time. Over the year, we process over 30,000 pays, work closely with the Australian Tax Office, deal with multiple superannuation providers and work in partnership with our salary packaging provider to make sure that our staff can maximise their take-home pay. During 2021/22, we changed salary packaging providers to the Maxxia Group to ensure our staff receive the best possible services and have established a new three-year partnership with the Group.







Our Board of Directors

Dr Robert Lang

- Chair, Board of Directors
- Chair, Remuneration and Nomination Committee

During a 35-year career in state and local government, Robert has gained experience in change management, community engagement, strategic urban planning, urban development, transport infrastructure, place management, arts, tourism, and energy. He has been the CEO of Parramatta City Council, Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority and Pacific Power and served on 21 Boards for not-forprofit organisations, private companies, and government statutory authorities. He has a longstanding interest in liveable cities, affordable housing, social inclusion, and the arts. He is also a Fellow of the Australia Institute of Company Directors and a Fellow of the Institute of Engineers Australia.

Heather Scheibenstock

- Deputy Chair,
- Chair Quality and Outcomes Committee
- Remuneration and Nominations Committee,

Heather spent 20 years as a senior executive in the hospitality industry. She is a firm believer in learning and development and has continued her postgraduate studies in business, leadership, and corporate governance. With experience as a non-executive director across a range of industries, Heather has a wealth of knowledge in leadership, strategy implementation and development, community, and stakeholder engagement. Heather is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Directors and a Fellow of the Governance Institute of Australia.

Patricia Biszewski

- Director and Chair of Audit Risk and Finance Committee – to September 2021
- Remuneration and Nominations Committee
- Audit Risk and Finance Committee

Patricia has had an extensive international leadership career in the maritime and logistics industry, driving and enabling business growth and organisational transformation through strategy, risk management, information technology and human resources practices. She has served on Boards for both not-for-profit organisations and for-profit commercial companies. Patricia has a longstanding interest in improving the living conditions, reducing poverty, and increasing the mobility, visibility, and sustainable independence of marginalised and vulnerable groups. Patricia has lived experience of disability in close family.

Michael Maxwell

- Director.
- Quality and Outcomes Committee

Michael has combined a career in the public and community services sectors with postgraduate qualifications in adult education, urban planning and social science. He uses his experience to create social and financial inclusion, enhance liveability and wellbeing, and support individuals and communities facing disadvantage to live to their full potential in safe, secure and empowering environments. Michael is currently a social planner, sessional academic and Fellow of the School for Social Entrepreneurs. He serves on national and international boards of organisations committed to creating liveable communities. Michael has lived experience as the father of Joshua, who has a disability.

Claire Cavanaugh

- Director,
- Audit Risk and Finance Committee

Claire has a broad range of business experience, through senior finance roles at Oracle Australia and Readers Digest, and then in running her family's medical practice.

She retired from the medical practice in August this year.

She also has lived experience and a keen interest in the disability sector; as the mother of Eddie, who has epilepsy and

severe intellectual disability. Claire cares for Eddie, manages his NDIS plan and advocates for his inclusion and proper care in his day program and leisure activities. Her next challenge is to get Eddie settled successfully into either a SIL or an ILO.

Owen Gilbert

- Director,
- Audit Risk and Finance Committee
- Chair Audit Risk and Finance Committee (from Sept 2021-present)

Owen has extensive experience driving effectiveness and efficiency in businesses. in Australia and around the world. In addition to holding functional roles including CFO, CEO, COO and director, Owen's experience includes business transformation, stakeholder management, strategy, business case development and implementation, organisational review and change, investment management, business start-ups, and new system implementation, in a range of industries. As a non-executive, executive director, and audit committee member of listed. private, and joint venture companies, in Australia and overseas.

Matthew Levy OAM

- Director,
- Quality and Outcomes Committee

Matthew is an inspirational leader and someone who is passionate about inclusion for people with disability. Matt's career successes are many and varied; including working as a change analyst at Westpac, inspirational speaker, and author. He has competed at five consecutive Paralympic Games, winning three gold, one silver and five bronze medals. He has competed in five World Championships, won 22 international medals, held four World Records and awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM). He is an Ambassador for Australia Day, Westpac International Disability Day, Life's Little Treasures, Athlete Leader Swimming Australia, Telstra Paralympic Education Program and Vision Australia Speaking Program.

Committees 2021/22

Audit Risk and Finance

Members:

- Owen Gilbert (Chair 2021-present)
- Patricia Biszewski (Chair 2020-2021)
- Claire Cavanaugh

Responsibilities:

- External audit
- Risk management and internal control
- Internal audit and controls
- Annual financial statements
- Compliance
- Financial strategy
- Investment policy

2022 Key Achievements:

In September, the Committee welcomed new Chair, Owen Gilbert, and recognised and thanked Patricia Biszewski for her leadership in the preceding years. Committee highlights included:

- Routine reviews of Ability Options key risks
- Deep dives into particular issues, for example supported independent living, business continuity planning
- The internal audit program, results and follow up actions
- External audits
- Annual financial statements and statutory audit
- Reviewed the Whistle Blower Policy
- Reviewed the three-year capital plan
- Reviewed the Investment Policy and recommended changes which were approved by the Board
- Work commissioned by the Board including work health and safety

Remuneration and Nomination

Members:

- Dr Rob Lang (Chair)
- Heather Scheibenstock
- Patricia Biszewski

Responsibilities:

- Board nominations, induction, skills and education, and succession plans
- Board, committees, and performance
- Performance management and remuneration policies
- Performance, remuneration and succession planning of the executive team and non-award staff

2022 Key Achievements:

The Remuneration and Nominations Committee oversights remuneration, Board appointments and other aspects of governance. Highlights included:

- The Annual Remuneration Strategy with recommendations accepted by the Board
- Benchmarking and pay reviews for non-Award and above Award employees, Executives and the CEO
- Board and Director recruitment, performance and skills reviews
- Aspects of learning and good governance for Directors including attendance at external events for example the AICD Governance Conference, pay strategy and Environment Social Governance webinars



Quality and Outcomes

Members:

- Heather Scheibenstock (Chair)
- Michael Maxwell
- Matt Levy

Responsibilities:

- Oversight of service quality and safety for improvement
- Participant choice and control and outcomes
- Reviewing feedback from participants
- Oversight and recommendations on quality-related policies, processes, and incident management

2022 Key Achievements:

The Quality and Outcomes Committee had a clear focus on participants and learning. The Committee structured its meetings on four key aims to:

- 1. Develop People
- 2. Promote Voice
- 3. Listen to Understand
- 4. Take Action

The Human Rights Committee is active and comprises of participants who generously give their time.

The partnership with the Council for Intellectual Disability has proved beneficial in ensuring we demonstrate our passion for human rights in all that we do and promote voice. We discuss our sector advocacy, and (2) Promote Voice by supporting participants to self-advocate. It's agendas and minutes are discussed at every Quality and Outcomes meeting and reported to the Board.

In (1) Develop People, we oversight the multimillion-dollar investment made by the Board in learning, career development and projectUPskill, which aims to ensure our people are consistently highly skilled.

In (2) Listen to Understand, we have engaged with participants directly and acted on the information they and their families and guardians have given us, we have routine reports from community visitors and action the outcomes. We have established a process for practice reviews, which look deeply into services supported by all of those involved to encourage reflective learning and practice improvement.

Lastly, we (4) Take Action and, in addition to the actions taken in respect of Develop People, Promote Voice and Listen to Understand, we have actioned work towards becoming a disability confident workplace. We have been improving the accessibility of our workplaces, supporting our Reconciliation Action Plan work, improving the resolution of complaints, and undertaking on-site inspections using the Tendable tool.

Financial Snapshot

Summary

Operating income has remained consistent across the 2021-22 financial year.

Due to public health orders and lockdowns, opportunities for expansion within respite and community services were limited – many participants weren't able to seek out these services due to the associated COVID-19 isolation periods.

Other income has decreased following changes to government support across the financial year. Employee costs make up the majority of our expenses, which increased by 7.4%. Retain all staff was important for the organisation, even with reduced demand for our services.

As of 30 June 2022, the organisation's financial position remains sound with total funds of \$45.1 million.

Funding: Government and other

Department of Social Services: National Disability Insurance Scheme	65,300,760
Department of Education, Skills and Employment	24,132,616
Department of Health	14,892,718
Other Sources	12,115,422
Total	116,441,516

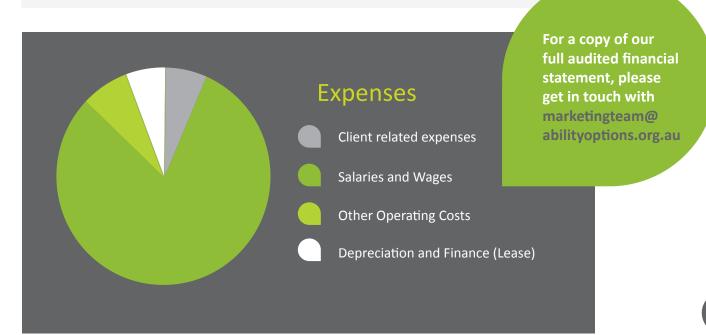
Our overall surplus in 2022 was \$1.2 million, compared to \$13.3 million in 2021.

Many services were suspended due to public health orders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Revenue was also lower due to a decrease in funding support from the government during COVID.

Ability Options received \$1.2 million in JobSaver payments in 2022, compared to \$8.9 million in Jobkeeper payments in 2021. Additionally, Ability Options is also eligible for additional \$2.1 million from NDIS to reimbursement of additional costs related to COVID. Employee costs make up the majority of expenses of the organisation. The organisation's financial position is sound with total funds of \$45.1 million as of 30 June 2022.

Total funds:

Particular	2021	2022
Operating Income	109,878,970	111,741,319
Other income	9,138,156	4,700,197
Expenses	105,723,045	115,209,858
Surplus	13,294,081	1,231,658
Total Assets	82,580,794	80,288,340
Total Liabilities	41,102,166	35,226,541
Total Funds	41,478,628	45,061,799



From Participant to Employment: Lauren lands dream role through ParentsNext

Becoming a parent for the first time can be a daunting, frightening and exciting time.

The experience of raising another human being for the first time is a lot to experience and can lead you down the path of also wondering how your parents managed it.

For Lauren, she became a single parent only months into having her son.

She had been a hairdresser for 20 years, but as her life changed with a new baby, she realised she was ready for a career change too.

"I was a new mum. I was new to the world of being a parent," she said, "I became a single mum when my son was just five months old and, at the time, I was receiving payments from Centrelink".

"I am a hairdresser of 20 plus years by trade, but when my son was born, I decided I needed a change. So, I utilised the time I had with my baby, and enrolled to study Human Resources when he was about seven months old."

Lauren enrolled at TAFE to study HR and extend her working knowledge to broaden her career possibilities.

That's when she discovered Ability Options and its ParentsNext program.



"Not long after I enrolled in TAFE, I got a letter in the mail from Centrelink with a notice that I was eligible for the ParentsNext program at Ability Options," she said.

"I didn't want to participate initially. I thought, 'Why do I have to do this? I have a new baby and I'm studying, I'm in no way ready to re-join the workforce'."

Even so, Lauren attended her appointment with her ParentsNext Consultant Vicki and questioned why she needed to be there.

"Vicky was so patient and kind," Lauren said,
"She explained the ParentsNext process and
made me feel I was in no way pressured to get
back into the workforce and made sure to inform me
I was supported on my journey while parenting and
studying".

ParentsNext is a service which helps parents with young children prepare for returning to work, by equipping them with the skills, confidence and support needed to prepare for - and find - employment or study options that suit them.

So, from 2018 to 2021 while also navigating being a new mum, Lauren kept going with ParentsNext and TAFE.

"I completed my course in December 2019. I was ready to go and get back into the workforce," she said. "I was ready to start putting my new skills to use, but then COVID-19 hit. It was impossible to find work in HR when business was closing. No-one was hiring."

When the pandemic hit, business ground to a halt for some, made others homebound, and finding employment was a challenge for many.

"I was enjoying being a new mum," she said, "But I definitely was focused on completing my studies, and the plan for when it was finished was to be ready to get into work".

After the COVID lockdown in 2020 had ended, Lauren was eager to start searching for a position in HR.

"I was having a hard time finding employment in HR," she said, "The market was still quite limited and presumably very competitive".

On her job hunt, Lauren came across an apprenticeship at a plant nursery. She went for the position but was offered instead a casual position.

"My passion for plants was about to reach a new height," she said.

Unfortunately, when her son became unwell, she took time off to care for him. On her return to work at the plant nursery, she was let go. However, that didn't stop Lauren from working towards her goal of working in Human Resources.

"I had to have time off with my son when he was sick over the Easter break in 2021. When I returned the following week, I had some bad news."

Lauren had an appointment with Vicki a week or so later, told her what had happened, and she suggested Lauren should apply for a position with Ability Options - they were looking for jobactive Employment Consultants, and she said Lauren would be perfect for the role.

"Vicki assisted with tailoring my resumé and referred me to her manager. I got a pre-screen call, an interview and a week or so later got the call from my new manager Jess that I got the position as a Job Active Employment Consultant at The Entrance! I was so excited; it was one step closer to getting me into the world of HR."

Stepping back into the workforce did present a challenge as a new mum, but Lauren's drive and patience helped make the transition smooth.

"It was a smooth transition, though. He started going to day care two days per week care when I was studying, and then gradually built his days up in preparation for me to start working full time," she said.

Lauren was excited about the prospect of entering a whole new career path, what she would learn and what opportunities would come with it.

"I knew Ability Options (AO) from being a participant and did my research before the job interview. I was aware of the career progression that AO supported," she continued.

"When I started the role, I had one week in the office then the 2021 COVID-19 lockdown came into effect, so I spent the first 4 months of my job working from home, in training ILT's, completing the modules, shadowing and then taking over the caseload.

"I loved being an Employment Consultant, it was so incredibly rewarding. I got to know my caseload and build a strong rapport with majority of them, I assisted so many participants in overcoming barriers and gaining sustainable employment.

"It was an eye-opening experience, and I learned a lot about how vulnerable our participants were during that time. I also placed 21 participants into employment during that lockdown period."

Having the experience from being a participant of AO to then being an Employment Consultant helped Lauren understand her new role "as I had a relative understanding of the process and requirements," she said.

"As soon as I saw the open position as an HR Advisor, I jumped at the chance with the full support from my incredible manager Jess. I knew the company structure, policies, and the procedures, which allowed me to jump straight into the role and commence training with my new, super supportive team.

"My favourite part of being with AO is the work family I have gained. My team from jobactive, especially The Entrance, will be lifetime friends and I am so grateful to have had the pleasure of working with them every day."

With that, Lauren says, for anyone considering entering the ParentsNext program: "participate, take on the support and trust the process. Your Employment Consultant has your back, especially if its Vicki from Bateau".





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