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## Brad's surprise celebrity encounter



**Brad, a participant supported by Ability Options, recently had the privilege of meeting Deb and Andy, his favourite celebrity TV couple from his favourite TV show, The Block, after a surprise visit was organised.**

Brad has been a fan of the show for a long time. For him, meeting his favourite celebrity couple has been a dream he has always wanted to achieve, and it is something that meant a lot to him.

With the help of his Support Worker, Oliver and Support Coordinator, Lauren, Brad wrote a letter saying that he is a huge fan of *The Block* and how much he

enjoys watching it. Towards the end of the letter, Brad also wrote down his wish; that one day, he hoped to meet his two favourite celebrities in person.

Brad's wish was granted when Deb and Andy replied to him asking if they could meet up. Brad was thrilled and immediately shared the good news with Lauren. Knowing how much this would mean to Brad, Lauren, in secret, contacted the couple and organised a meet and greet event for him.

Brad's wish became a reality when he received a surprise visit from Deb and Andy. Brad couldn't believe his

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# How resilience can help you build strategies for success

by Rafael Sanchez-Bayo

**It can be society's view that disability is a one-size-fits-all label that defines a person's lifestyle.**

However, not all disabilities are the same, nor are they all visible. As someone who has lived with a disability my whole life, I see disability as a characteristic which forms part of a person's identity and personality. I believe people with disability can achieve anything and lead happy and meaningful lives. What really defines a person is **how** they choose to live their life.

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like giving up? I have. A few weeks before graduating from high school, I had my eyes set on my own independence. I had a list of things I wanted to do to reach that goal, one of which was getting a job.

At first, I didn't think I could achieve this goal. I didn't know a lot about who I was and what I was capable of, which made it hard for me to imagine what my future would look like in the workplace. Throughout my journey to employment, there were many events that led me to question my place in society. I was rejected a few times, which knocked my confidence. But no matter how many times I was rejected, I was determined to reach the end of the line no matter what. Things began to make more sense after I discovered during a

conversation with my mum that I have a disability known as Cerebral Vision Impairment (CVI) – a brain-based vision impairment that affects how I see the world.

From that moment, everything about me made sense.

Knowing I have CVI has been a revelation. The funny thing is, I only found out a few months before I accepted my role as Editor of this newsletter. Since then, I have embraced my disability and have a much better understanding of who I am, which has made it easier for me to navigate everyday life. All I had to do to win a job offer was reach out to the right people who could support me, develop a set of strategies to help me overcome obstacles along the way and the rest was pretty straight forward. Thanks to that, my motivation grew stronger, eventually leading me to finally achieving the goal I had worked so hard for; an achievement I am proud of. Not only am I proud, but the experience I have gained has given me the confidence to continue achieving future goals using those same strategies.

For most of us, having a goal to work towards is important. In my case, that is certainly true. It has given me a sense of purpose and something exciting to look forward to. For all of us, whatever goal we set our minds on, we must know ourselves and understand our limits.



For me, knowing who I am as a person helps me decide how I want to succeed, and determine the type of support I may require from my support network.

In the past, I used to get lost and easily lose my way everywhere I went. The more I became aware of my disability and how to overcome the associated challenges, the more confident I became in completing simple tasks, such as getting to and from work or finding something to buy at the shops.

**Having a disability may present extra challenges, but that should not stop you from following your dreams.** The good news is, there is always a way. Because I have CVI, many of the challenges I face revolve around finding visual objects, such as a bookstore or train station. That is why I always plan my daily activities in advance, so that I don't feel overwhelmed. Digital technology has opened the door to new and more creative ways to empower people with disability to be in control of their lives. For me, it plays a key role in helping me get around different places on my own. Before I go to an unfamiliar place, I use Google Maps to help me plan and trace my routes from start to finish.

Since I find reading a map to be challenging, I also use the application's satellite imaging feature to preview my journey and get to know the environment I will be travelling through.

Thanks to these strategies, I can now manage my life more independently. In fact, I recently just returned from my first solo trip to Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

To be well prepared for my trip, I used Google Maps to craft an itinerary that suited my needs and interests. This included understanding Dubai's city structure, pinpointing any attractions I wanted to visit, and planning my journey to each place using both the app's satellite imaging feature and Dubai's public metro system website. Doing this removed a lot of stress from my shoulders and made my holiday more enjoyable. Thanks to all the hard work I did, I had a map in my mind the moment I arrived at my destination. I knew exactly where to go for each day and how to get there without getting lost.

Going on this milestone trip is by far, one of the most empowering moments in my life. It taught me that travelling the world alone with a disability is possible. It all comes down to exploring your interests and finding a destination with services that meet your needs. The experiences I gained whilst in Dubai not only sharpened my confidence but changed my overall outlook on life as a person with disability.

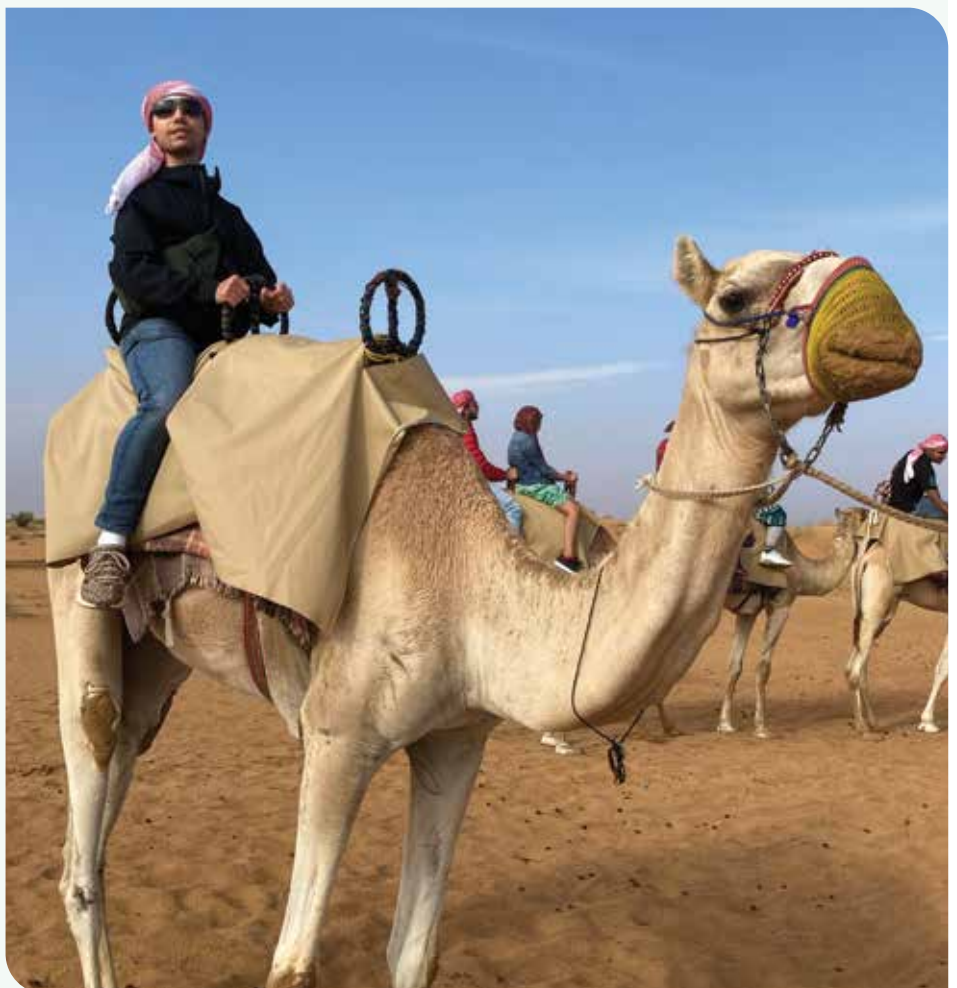
For people with disability, I want you to know that **everybody is different** and that we all have our own unique talents and limitations.

Living with a disability doesn't mean you can't live a normal life. It just means that you may do certain things differently and need extra support to get to where you want to be. As difficult as they may seem, every situation we come across in our journey turn into experiences that teach us valuable life lessons that cannot be taught in a classroom. These experiences allow us to create a long-term action plan to help us find a solution that will bring us closer towards achieving our potential. Through each experience, we grow into resilient and independent individuals. In my case, that has meant I am working in a job where I use my skills to advocate for people with disability, I am travelling the world on my own

(with plenty more trips on the horizon) and am working to grow and expand my network through the people I meet in every step of my journey.

Life is not supposed to be an easy road. Every decision we make comes with consequences, both good and bad. Failure is a part of life, and there are more times when we fail than succeed. Every time we fall, we only get stronger and closer towards achieving victory. That is resilience. It is about accepting who we are and redefining expectations through our achievements.

If we believe in ourselves and are prepared for the unexpected, anything is possible. If I could turn my dreams into reality, so can you.





# A Message from our CEO



Dear readers,

Welcome to the Autumn 2023 edition of TheVoice. It's been a while since I wrote my CEO letter for last year's Christmas edition. So much has happened over the past few months. Apart from spending Christmas and New Year with my family, I recently had the opportunity to visit relatives in the United Kingdom, whom I had not seen for a long time. I hope you all got to spend quality time with loved ones and look forward to hearing about what you've been up to.

In this edition, we will be focusing on a new theme: **Resilience**.

Resilience can be a tricky one to talk about. Depending on who you talk to, resilience has different meanings and is shown in many ways. It is probably a bit overused, as an answer to all of today's problems "if only they were resilient." In schools, the curriculum talks about building resilient school leavers. Whilst the definitions are many and varied, mine would be simple – ensuring

that we can cope with, make the most of and adapt to the unpredictable aspects of life. In our organisation, it means ensuring our employees are trained, supported, and equipped to support participants to get the outcomes they want and be fully included in the community.

For me, resilience is about meeting our mission, about supporting participants to self-advocate and to be a voice in our sector; regardless, we do the right thing.

I recently attended a conference hosted by National Disability Services in Sydney, where I listened to a series of talks which focused on issues related to the disability sector. One speaker who stood out to me most was Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Dr. Ben Gauntlett, who is passionate about advocating for increased access to meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability and strengthening the legal framework to protect disability rights. What really struck me was one question he asked the audience towards the end of his speech: *"Is the purpose of disability policy to ensure people with disability have a dignified life?"*

Listening to Dr. Gauntlett's speech was a timely reminder about how far we still have to go to meet our

mission for inclusion in a tangible way. And listening to evidence at the Disability Royal Commission hearings reinforces the need for a clear-sighted focus on the rights of people with disability to be safe, to have safe access to services, jobs, and communities, and to determine their own futures.

Our vision is "to inspire and lead communities, creating opportunity and services for people to participate fully in society." This vision demands resilience; however, we define it. It points to creating an inclusive world. It accompanies our mission which is "to support people who need assistance to achieve their aspirations and inclusion in the community." These two statements point to the kind of society we want and will work to achieve and our role in our sector towards inclusion. Both need the strength of purpose and character to remain on task despite what else is thrown our way.

As I see it, it is up to us as a society to overcome our attitudes towards disability to ensure the needs and wishes of people with disability are not only accommodated, but, more importantly, are fully understood and acted on.

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

***“Ensuring that we can cope with, make the most of and adapt to the unpredictable aspects of life.”***

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)

# Introducing Ability Options' Clinical Governance Committee

**In the Summer 2022 edition of TheVoice, there was an update on the outcomes from the NDIS/ACIS external mid-term surveillance audit. It was identified that Ability Options' clinical governance was that of quality and supports healthcare outcomes for the people we support, in addition to having a governance structure that provides opportunities for people with disability to contribute to the organisation's management.**

To continue building on an already sophisticated clinical support model, Ability Options has developed a Clinical Governance Committee.

Members of the Clinical Governance Committee include:

- Senior Manager, Clinical Services (Chair)
- Clinical Nurse Educator
- Manager, Outcomes and Practice
- Senior Officer, Audit and Investigations

- Senior Manager, Regulatory Compliance
- Manager, Therapy Services
- Person with lived experience

By having this committee, Ability Options can continue promoting the vision, values and culture of clinical governance, quality improvement, participant safety, and clinical standards. This includes promoting a culture of safety, best practice, and continuous improvement in the delivery of clinical services.

The committee will be guided by case studies developed from reports, audits, frontline supports, and participant feedback, and will result in action that promotes best practice and reflects Ability Options' Mission, Vision, and Values.

If you have any questions or would like to provide feedback on any of the information above, please email [clinicalservicesteam@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:clinicalservicesteam@abilityoptions.org.au)

## Ability Options is a Child-Safe Organisation

Ability Options is committed to providing a child-safe environment where children and young people feel safe and their voices are heard in decisions that affect their lives.

The protection of children and young people is a cornerstone in safeguarding and improving the lives of children and young people with disability.

Ability Options would like to share our Child Safe Commitment Statement, supported by the Child Safe Policy, aligned to the NSW Government's Office of the Children's Guardian, Child Safe Standards.

If you would like to view the Child Safe Commitment Statement or Child Safe Standards Handbook, please visit the below websites.

**Ability Options Child Safe Commitment Statement**

**NSW Child Safe Standards Handbook**

If you have any questions, please contact [qualityassurance@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:qualityassurance@abilityoptions.org.au)



## projectUPskill now complete

Last July, the Quality, Practice & Assurance team rolled out projectUPskill, a comprehensive learning and development opportunity for our frontline Disability Services workforce, which covered many key learning areas that improved the capability of our employees and has achieved greater outcomes for the people we support.

Over the initial six months of projectUPskill, the Quality, Practice & Assurance team attended meetings to deliver further training, including Mental Health First Aid training, to minimise the time required away from regular responsibilities.

The training program delivered as part of this project focused on healthcare supports, person-centred practices, communication, documentation, duty of care, and risk.

With the project coming to an end, we reflected on a great success and the effort by all involved, resulting in 88% completion rate for permanent staff and an overall completion rate of 79% by Ability Options Disability Services frontline staff. Those staff who are yet to complete this training are working on completing the interactive online learning courses.

## Ability Options expands employment services on the Central Coast

Ability Options recently opened its new employment office in Toukley to better support participants following an increase in demand for services on the Central Coast.

Staff and participants attended the new office's opening day, which was officially welcomed to the community through a traditional smoking ceremony performed by Senior Education and Tourism Officer, Kevin Duncan.

Ability Options has a long history of supporting participants through our employment services on the Central Coast, and while Toukley is a relatively new location, the growing number of people using our services in the region has opened the door to further expand our programs to meet the current demand. Workforce Australia Manager, Jessica hopes the newly refurbished office will give Ability Options the capacity to grow its Workforce Australia and ParentsNext programs to continue our mission in supporting people in the community to achieve their aspirations and goals.

*"At Ability Options, our people provide an individualised, person-*

*centred approach to the services we offer to participants. Our services put choice and control back in the hands of participants, so they can choose their goals and work towards them in a supported way."*

To find out more about our employment services and how we can support you, visit our website.



# Catfishing attempts on participants leads to increased cybersafety concerns

**Hacking and catfishing issues are becoming an increasing concern for people living with disability trying to seek a community or friendships online.**

Recently, two Ability Options participants were the unfortunate victims of malicious online catfishing attempts aimed at trying to get hold of their personal information and login details.

Catfishing is where a person creates a fake identity on social media, like Facebook or Instagram, to target a specific victim for financial gain or to compromise them in some way, like getting access to online account logins.

In the recent case, the two participants were targeted by two different scams. One participant told Ability Options staff they were worried about the security of their myGov account after conversations with someone online, while another told staff they were on the way to meet a woman they had met online.

Ability Options Disability Services Manager Melissa said she was alerted to the catfishing scam by support staff who detected the issue.

"It's dreadful to see some of our most vulnerable people in society being taken advantage of like this. Goodness knows how much of this goes undetected," she said.

"I would encourage Ability Options staff to have open conversations with participants about staying safe online and reassure them that they

should report anything suspicious to staff so we can help."

Cyberattacks like these are unfortunately common these days, from spam texts asking you to click suspicious links to spam pop-ups or emails claiming you won a prize, trying to gain confidence through deception. Research by Dr Darren Chadwick from the University of Wolverhampton shows people with intellectual disability are often at higher risk of being targeted online.

Online offenders have easy access to take advantage of people with disability, often with complete anonymity and few restrictions or limitations.

**The Australian Cyber Security Centre has published resources to help identify and reduce risks online. Based on that guidance, there are a few things you can do to keep your information and your accounts cybersafe:**

- Never give your password to anyone. Remember, no one at Ability Options will ever ask you for your passwords.
- Create different passwords for multiple accounts.
- Make them hard to guess. Use a combination of letters, numbers, and special characters.
- Turn on two-factor authentication.
- Change or update your passwords regularly.
- If you think your passwords are at risk, change them immediately.



## What to look out for:

If you think you may have been catfished or someone is trying to take advantage of you online, here are a few signs to look out for:

- The person you are talking to avoids showing their face.
- The person won't talk to you over the phone.
- They are using someone else's photos/videos.
- They avoid trying to meet you in real life, or repeatedly cancel after making plans.
- They avoid answering questions about themselves.
- Their online accounts don't have many friends, posts, likes or interactions.
- Their story seems too good to be true.
- They ask you for personal information, money, or pictures of yourself, but keep things about their own life vague.
- They are extremely romantic from the beginning of your interactions.
- Something feels off.

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# Sony's drive for accessibility a game changer for people with disability

**Sony, the company behind PlayStation, is helping to make gaming a more accessible space for people living with disability with their latest announcement of Project Leonardo at this year's Consumer Electronics Show (CES).**

CES has been around since 1967, bringing new heights to consumer electronics. Think mobile phones, gaming technology, cameras, accessories, and electric vehicles (EV). Project Leonardo is Sony's latest attempt into making gaming a more accessible and inclusive space for people with disability.

At CES, Sony announced it will be releasing a highly customisable and modular gaming controller for the PlayStation 5 console. The goal is to help remove the barriers that some people with disability encounter when it comes to playing their favourite games.

The controller, which Sony says will work "out of the box," has been designed and developed in collaboration with key contributions from accessibility experts, community members, and game developers. It also works with other devices and accessibility accessories.

Sony joins a suite of other gaming companies and developers like Microsoft aiming to create a more inclusive gaming environment for the industry's community.

Accessibility is an important aspect of inclusion in the disability sector. While some see it as a 'buzz word,' many see it as a goal. Whether it's equal building access or bringing in people of all abilities into their hobby of choice, accessibility is key. This is no different in the gaming industry.

Accessible controllers aren't a new invention, but to date, they haven't been made by many popular developers, and they are, for the most part, custom solutions.

For Sony, Project Leonardo aims to remove many of the barriers that people with disability may face when it comes to dexterity and accessibility in gaming.

Paul Phillips, a person living with disability and working as an Accessibility Consultant on the project, said the release of a fully customisable controller like this is a big leap forward for inclusion of people with disability to play their favourite games.

*"If there wasn't accessibility in gaming, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for people like myself to play," he said.*

Zoe, diagnosed with Ewing Sarcoma in 2011 - a rare type of cancer that occurs in bones or in the soft tissue around the bones, has been gaming since 2009 when the first Borderlands game launched.

As part of her treatment, Zoe had part of her left hand amputated and subsequently lost a finger and some surrounding bone tissue, which has left her with phantom pain sensations and neuropathy resulting from the formation of **neuromas**.<sup>[1]</sup>

*"Due to the cancer treatment, the loss of part of my hand, and the subsequent neuropathy, it is often harder for me to do certain things and perform certain movements," she said.*

*"The shape of traditional PlayStation controllers often causes undue pressure and pain in the palm of my hand, so I have to grip the controller in an often non-standard and unnatural way to be as comfortable as I can make it."*

She said there are some games she "simply can't play," due to limitations with hardware or in-game keybind mapping support, but the announcement of Project Leonardo brings her some hope for the future of the gaming industry's drive for inclusion of people with disability.

*"Even though my experiences could be considered fairly minor in comparison to other amputees, it is still something that affects my day-to-day, and gaming is meant to be a break from that," she said.*





*"By taking the initiative to make a fully modular controller, people living with disability, chronic pain, or other uncomfortable and often debilitating conditions can tailor their experience to be exactly what they need it to be."*

Zoe noted that Sony's attempt into making gaming more accessible may prompt a movement for other companies to start producing inclusive hardware peripherals for other gaming platforms like PC.

*"I'm hoping the demand for accessible peripherals will make the gaming world something everyone can take part in," she said.*

*"By driving demand for things such as Project Leonardo, I'm hopeful that other gaming companies will notice and take the initiative to design non-normative peripherals with advice from disability communities to make gaming something that is inclusive to everybody."*

Sony Interactive Entertainment president and CEO Jim Ryan told WIRED the company's mission is to use

technology and innovation to make gaming "more accessible for everyone."

*"We're working towards a future where players of all abilities can share in the joy of gaming. Whether through in-game accessibility settings, platform UI features, or new products like Project Leonardo, our hope is that the gaming industry will become even more inclusive," said Ryan.*

At the time of writing, PlayStation has not yet announced a release date or price for Project Leonardo.

Find out more about Project Leonardo on PlayStation's YouTube channel.

Image credit: ©2023 Sony Interactive Entertainment Inc.

**[1] A neuroma is a disorganised growth of nerve cells at the site of a nerve injury. A neuroma occurs after a nerve is partially or completely disrupted.**

**Catfishing attempts** on participants leads to increased cybersafety concerns *continued from page 7*

**If you think someone you know is at risk of being taken advantage of online, here are some things you can do or look out for to support them:**

- Search the person online. If they are difficult to find or their profiles seem off, they may be a scammer.
- The person you think is being taken advantage of avoids telling you about the person they are talking to or dismisses your questions.
- The person asks you to help them give something like personal information or money to someone else.
- The person you know has more unfamiliar guest visits.
- Suggest the person you know puts their social media accounts on private to prevent unknown users attempting to contact them in the future.
- They tell you the person is very romantic towards them very early on.
- Does something feel off?

If you ever feel unsure about the person you are talking to, or what they are asking of you, please reach out to your support network. You can also contact the Ability Options Information and Communications Technology (ICT) team to report suspicious online activity or behaviour or use the below links to learn more about staying safe online.

## Tips for staying cybersafe

<https://www.esafety.gov.au>

## Report online harm

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/report>

<https://www.cyber.gov.au/acsc/report>

Ability Options ICT team:

[ictservicedesk@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:ictservicedesk@abilityoptions.org.au)



# Your Support:

## Vanessa, ParentsNext Consultant

**At Ability Options, putting the people we support first is at the heart of everything we do. We are here to help you reach your goals and realise your potential. This Q&A is the first in a new series where we will take you behind the scenes to see how our people work to support you. In this issue of TheVoice, we speak with Vanessa, who is following her dream working as a ParentsNext Consultant to support parents in finding their feet in the workforce.**

Vanessa works in our Wyong office and joined Ability Options to support parents who have taken time out of the workforce to raise a family, navigate their employment goals.

### **When did you join Ability Options?**

I joined Ability Options as a Disability Employment Consultant in 2018. Soon after, I realised I wanted to transfer into ParentsNext to fulfil my dream in supporting parents to get into the workforce and achieve their employment goals.

### **What is it like to work as a ParentsNext Consultant?**

My role is all about helping parents with their goals whether they want to seek education, employment, or just need help figuring out what they want to do as a career.

I'm passionate about this work because I get to help parents build their future and get to know them and their goals closely. I get to support people to gain education or work and help in other aspects of their lives if they are struggling and can refer them onto other programs or community services.

I am extremely dedicated to helping parents to develop, grow and achieve their goals.

### **Tell me about your day-to-day and your approach to supporting participants?**

The participants I work with have a wide variety of different needs when it comes to employment support services. I tailor my service to each person.

A participant could be needing help with getting into a course, so I would speak to them about what courses interest them the most, and then I would help them navigate those courses and the application process.

My participants and I regularly schedule catch ups to discuss goals and building blocks to achieve what they want in the ParentsNext program. We also chat about their progress and work through any challenges that may arise together.

Another participant could be seeking valuable employment, so I would sit down and chat about what sort of position

they are looking to find, what vacancies we have available at the time, and research opportunities through job sites. I also support them in learning how to effectively use sites such as Seek and Indeed.

Regardless of Centrelink requirements and compliance, I always place the individuals' needs as the highest priority.

### **What have been some of yours and your participants' highlights from 2022?**

Quite a few of my participants have grown their confidence and reached many employment milestones; some achieved and sustained employment. One participant spoke about a job she landed and thanked me for the support she received through our program.

*"I could only have done this thanks to the support and guidance Vanessa gave me,"* the participant said.

I wanted to see her succeed through the proper support she needed at the time. She will be great at whatever she sets her mind to.

### **What are the key things you go through when supporting a new participant for the first time?**

Helping them navigate their future and focus on what they want to work towards. Goal setting and creating action plans are also key milestones to ensure there is value in each appointment.

### **Tell me about your experience with ParentsNext. How do you think it benefits participants?**

I like the ParentsNext program because it allows participants to develop meaningful skills, and prepare them for a working future. This program is helping to break generational unemployment gaps and empowers parents of future generations.

### **How would you recommend the program to other parents looking for support to enter, or re-enter, the workforce?**

I would highly recommend ParentsNext as it is dedicated to supporting parents who have specific needs. They will get step-by-step support to gaining skills and qualifications that will help them achieve their goals and build their future.

To find out more about our ParentsNext program and how we can support you in achieving your goals, visit our website.



**Brad's surprise celebrity encounter** *continued from page 1*

eyes and his face beamed with joy; he was finally meeting his favourite celebrities.

Brad had a great time chatting and getting to know the couple, as well as having some photos taken together. Lauren is very proud of Brad's accomplishment and is happy to have been able to help make his dream come true.

*"Watching Brad meet and interact with Deb and Andy was one of my favourite moments as his Support Coordinator. He was over the moon, knowing that his goal has been fulfilled. I'm so glad I could help him with his wishes."*

Brad felt surprised, yet excited to have met the couple. He thanked Deb and Andy for replying to his letter and for making his day very memorable. Brad says that this encounter is something he will remember forever.

*"I couldn't believe it was happening. It just didn't feel real. All I did was write a simple letter and then, the next thing*

*that happens, I am standing right in front of my favourite TV stars in real life. Meeting Deb and Andy in person not only made my day, but this encounter will live through my memory forever."*

Support Coordination, also known as Coordination of Supports (CoS), is a service offered to participants by Ability Options which aims to support you in navigating your NDIS plan and achieve your chosen goals, by connecting you to the right service providers in the community. At Ability Options, we have more than 40 Support Coordinators, who have extensive experience working in the disability sector and are passionate about supporting participants in making the most out of their NDIS plan.

To find out more about Support Coordination, visit our website.

## R&R Care welcomed into the Ability Options family

Mid-North Coast disability services provider R&R Care recently joined the Ability Options family as part of expanding our services in the region.

R&R Care provides a wide range of social and recreational activities and support services to encourage people with disability to get involved in the community, as well as strengthen their ability to live independently. Although most of R&R Care's activities are group-based, they also provide individually tailored therapy and support services to participants.

Last year in November, Ability Options CEO Julia Squire travelled north to visit R&R Care, where she received a warm welcome from staff, participants, and leaders. Now that R&R Care have officially become members of the Ability Options family, Julia hopes this partnership will help expand our services in the region to continue our work in providing high-quality support services to people with disability.

*"Both Ability Options and R&R Care share the same values. The staff and participants I met were awesome*

*and both organisations can learn from each other. Together, we are going to be a fabulous team, offering great services for participants and carers, and rewarding career opportunities for staff,"* Julia said.

R&R Care Senior Manager Daniela Shaw expressed her delight in joining the Ability Options community and is optimistic about what this will mean for the future of the people the organisation supports.

*"Ability Options is a leader in our sector, and I am delighted we will be able to continue to deliver the same high standard of support we have been providing to participants in the region as part of the Ability Options family,"* she said.

To find out more about R&R Care, visit their website.





# Lynda finds new path to independence through her love of motorcycles



**Ability Options recently supported participant Lynda move into her new home after spending six years living in a nursing home, and along the way she was able to reinvigorate a long-held joy of riding motorcycles.**

Lynda had been wanting to move out of the nursing home for a long time. She was not happy living there and felt she had completely lost her independence. Lynda, whose son lives in Port Macquarie, wanted to return to the Mid-North Coast town, so that she can live closer to him.

She connected with our Accommodation team who supported her in finding a property that met her needs. When a vacancy in one of our group homes became available, Lynda, with Ability Options' support, secured her spot and gathered all her belongings to prepare for the big move. When Lynda arrived at her new home, Ability Options staff assisted her in settling into her new environment.

Since moving in, Lynda's confidence has improved significantly and is enjoying gaining her independence and life back. She visits her son regularly and often participates in activities she hasn't been able to do whilst living in the nursing home, such as cooking and doing her own laundry. Her son is happy to hear she is enjoying her new lifestyle and hopes Ability Options will take good care of her.

*"Ever since my mum moved back to Port Macquarie, I have noticed a huge difference in her overall wellbeing. She is always cheerful whenever she visits me and can talk for hours in our conversations. The most important thing for me is to see my mum happy. I do have faith in Ability Options and hope she will continue to live a happy and meaningful life under their care."*

Lynda is blessed to have her Support Worker, Dean, as part of her life, who plans and engages her in activities she may enjoy. One activity Lynda enjoys most is riding motorcycles. She told Dean she used to ride motorcycles

in the past and how much she enjoyed it. After learning about her favourite hobby, Dean searched around locally for a tour company that takes people on motorcycle rides. He came across Heff from Epic Rides and Tours, and organised a tour for Lynda, much to her excitement.

Lynda went on her first tour around the Mid-North Coast's coastline, where she enjoyed riding on the motorcycle while admiring the beautiful scenery. She also enjoyed a brief stopover at a café in Lighthouse Beach and braved the rain on the way back home.

Lynda thoroughly enjoyed the tour and thanked Heff for providing a memorable experience. She is enjoying her new life in Port Macquarie and cannot wait to take part in more fun activities.

*"Moving back to Port Mac was the best decision I made. I feel very independent again and am having lots of fun trying out new activities, as well as revisiting old hobbies. Riding the motorcycle with Heff was lots of fun and I cannot wait to see what else my new neighbourhood has to offer."*

Dean is glad to see that Lynda has settled in well. He is happy to see she had a great time on the tour and looks forward to continuing to support her in achieving her goals.

*"I feel very privileged in supporting Lynda as her Support Worker. Being a part of her life has allowed me to get to know her as a person, as well as learn about her interests. Watching her riding on the motorcycle and seeing the smile on her face brought lots of joy to my heart and I'm glad I was able to be a part of helping her achieve her goal. I and the rest of the team are very lucky to have Lynda as a resident in our home and cannot wait to continue to support her in achieving her goals and providing her with a fun and enjoyable life on the Mid-North Coast."*

As one of the largest disability service providers in New South Wales, Ability Options understands how important it is to have the freedom to make decisions about your quality of life. We offer a range of accommodation services in Sydney, the Hunter region, and the Mid-North Coast, that are delivered by our experienced support workers, nursing staff, and property managers, including Supported Independent Living (SIL) and Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA).

To find out more about our accommodation services and how we can support you, visit our website.

# Art without limits: Participants create inspiring mosaic masterpieces

**A Support Worker on the Mid-North Coast has been supporting participants to grow their creative spark "beautifying" the outdoor area of an Ability Options office in Taree with mosaics.**

Gaye, a passionate Support Worker and budding creative herself, noticed there was ample opportunity to spruce up the wall of an outdoor toilet block at the Taree office as it "needed some tender loving care."

*"We decided to create a wall of mosaics on an outdoor toilet block in our courtyard area to spruce it up, so I took the idea under my wing and ran with it," she said.*

*"It's a nice area we have in Taree, but it needed some tender loving care. I cut out some different shapes of wood to get the creative inspiration flowing and some of the participants crafted some beautiful work."*

*"I'm so proud of them. They don't realise how creative and talented they are."*

Gaye's idea sparked a creative wave in Taree and managed to get participants and other staff involved in the project, which she said was lots of fun.

*"I got some of the support workers involved as they have done some amazing creations in the past," she said.*

*"The participants had lots of fun breaking up plates in pillowcases for their mosaics. They also used shells, beads and coloured sand to make their own patterns and pictures."*

Participants Lisa and Suzie, who have both contributed to the project said they enjoyed getting creative.

*"I enjoyed doing something different art-wise and being able to do it with my friends," Lisa said.*

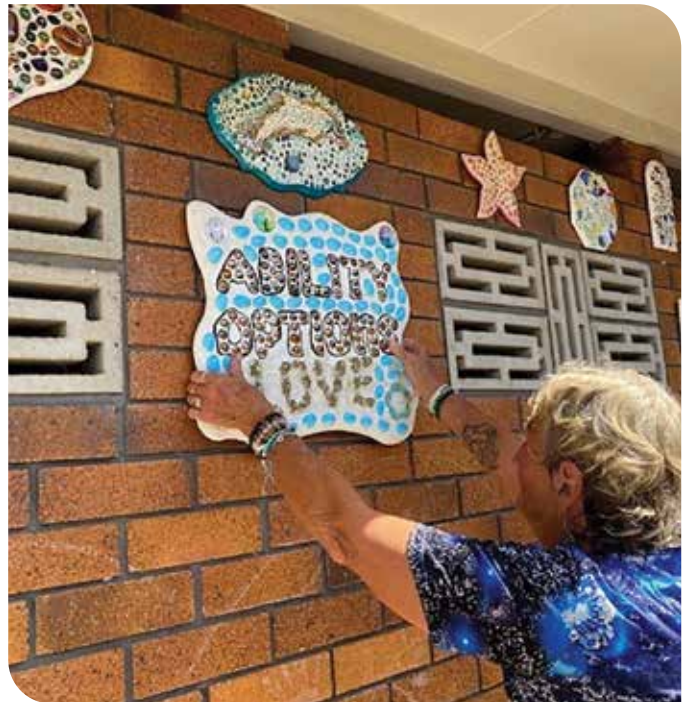
*"I absolutely loved it and loved how Gaye helped us with it," Suzie said.*

Many of the mosaics have been finished and are already up on the wall, but Gaye said the area still needs a few extra upgrades.

*"We are still working on a few parts to really finish off the wall," she said.*

*"We have planned on adding a rainbow serpent and a tree of life mosaic which we are yet to do. The participants and staff are eager to put their sections of the work together."*

*"It's going to look awesome and brighten the area up beautifully."*



The mosaic wall and outdoor seating area have been accompanied by the planting of a vegetable garden, which Gaye said participants have already begun to see the fruits of their labours.

*"We are going to purchase some outdoor furniture, so people have a space to appreciate the hard work of our people. There is also discussion on painting the bricks as well which I'll make happen," Gaye said.*

*"We are also establishing a small vegetable garden in planter boxes out there too. Participants are growing some vegetables to use in their cooking programs, and we have already had an abundance of tomatoes and some very large cucumbers."*

Karen, a Support Coordinator at Ability Options' Taree office, has commended Gaye on her drive to get everyone involved and have some fun being creative.

*"We have wanted to beautify the area outside for some time and Gaye has just taken this in her stride, getting everyone involved and doing so much of it in her own time. She really is a superstar," Karen said.*

*"Gaye has really inspired and motivated everyone to get involved; the participants have some hidden talents."*

Gaye said the project is still underway and is keen to share an update on the finished result soon.



# William and Leeanne find a safe haven **with Ability Options**

**Ability Options recently supported participants William and Leeanne move into their brand-new home. They are enjoying their new neighbourhood and can't wait to make the most out of their new lifestyle.**

Prior to moving into their new home, William and Leeanne lived in NSW public housing. They were unhappy with the area they lived in and were hoping to find a home where they would feel more comfortable.

William and Leeanne turned to their Ability Options Support Coordinator, Sara, telling her about their living situation and that they wanted to move into a new home. Sara supported the couple in getting in touch with a real estate agent who could assist in finding a safe, yet suitable private home that met their needs.

William and Leeanne worked tirelessly in looking for a home that met their criteria. When they stumbled across a recently built one bedroom granny flat, they shared the news with Sara, who organised a property inspection for them. They did an inspection of the home, then the couple, with Sara's support, submitted all the essential paperwork to the real estate agent for their application. Soon enough, their application was approved, and the house became theirs.

When the day finally came for the big move, Sara met with William and Leeanne and supported them in gathering and moving all their belongings into their new home.

They have settled into their new home and are loving life in their new neighbourhood. They thanked Sara for supporting them throughout their journey saying they can now go about their daily lives normally.

*"William and I feel very safe in our new house and environment. For the first time in over 12 months, we have been able to get a good night's sleep. We have plans to visit*

*the local park and are looking forward to meeting our new neighbours," Leeanne said.*

Sara is glad that the couple have settled in well and are happy with their new home. She hopes that the new environment will provide a lifestyle full of opportunities.

*"I'm so happy to hear that William and Leeanne love their new home. What fills my heart with joy is knowing that they are living in a safe place and environment where they can live their lives independently and make use of every given opportunity. I cannot wait to hear what they have been up to lately."*





# Hristo proudly marches at Sydney WorldPride 2023

**From 17 February to 5 March, Sydney WorldPride 2023 brought thousands of people from all over the world to come together and celebrate LGBTQIA+ identity and culture.**

Hristo, an Ability Options participant, was one of many who attended and took part in the festivities. Hristo's day was jam-packed from start to finish, he marched down Oxford Street in the parade, caught live music performances from people like Carla Wehbe and The Buoys, who headlined the event, all while soaking up the event's atmosphere. We are glad that Hristo had a great time and look forward to seeing what other fun activities he has planned next.

*Ability Options is committed in providing and facilitating social groups for people with disability who identify as LGBTQIA+ to help them connect, socialise, and participate in fun activities with other like-minded people in the community. We run two social groups in the Northern Beaches, GLAMrUS for people aged 18-25 and GLAM Plus for those aged 12-17, where the focus is to support people in building their social confidence through a wide range of activities provided in an age appropriate, safe, and supportive environment.*

To find out more about our GLAM social programs, visit our website.



## Accessing your Ability Options records

As per Australia's Privacy Laws, you have the right to access your personal information. This includes your health information.

There are times when the people we support require access to their personal information records, which we will give you access to upon request, except where the law says we cannot.

If you want to access your records, please speak to your Ability Options representative.

Where possible, we ask that you put your request in writing and include:

- Your name.
- Contact details.
- The personal information you're requesting access to.
- How you would like to receive the record (such as email or post).
- If you authorise another person or organisation to access the record on your behalf.

There may be charges associated with this request that may include:

- Staff costs in searching for, locating, and retrieving the requested personal information, and deciding which personal information to provide to the individual,
- Staff costs in reproducing and sending the personal information,
- Costs of postage or materials involved in giving access, or
- Costs associated with using an intermediary.

Once the request to access your Ability Options record has been received, we will be in contact with you within five business days to let you know if we will release the information and any associated costs.

The agreed Ability Options record information will be released within 30 days in line with Australian Privacy Laws.

# What does love mean at Ability Options?



On Valentine's Day, we reflected on the meaning of love in our daily lives and what it means at Ability Options.

## Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is a day of giving and exchanging greetings amongst family, friends and loved ones. It also gives us the opportunity to reflect on the importance of love and friendship in the community.

## Defining love

In the modern world, one definition of love might not be the same as someone else's. It could be the unconditional love felt and acted on between friends, families, and loved ones, or a romantic connection between partners.

## What does love mean to us?

In February, we asked our staff the question, 'What does love mean?' One answer stood out as particularly honest and representative of our values. The heartfelt answer came from Employment Consultant, Anita from our Seven Hills and Blacktown combined DES team.

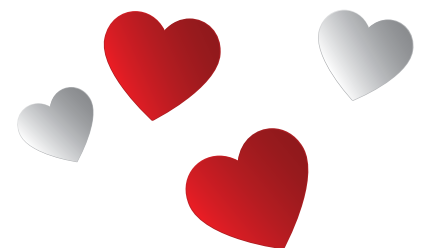
*"Love means to love someone unconditionally, with no terms or conditions. To love, is to be there when times get tough, to stand by that person, and to love them for all their flaws, because truth be told, people can come with flaws, and that's what comes with loving them."*

Anita's touching words ring true for every one of our over 1,000 employees who continually embody Ability Options' values daily.

## Ability Options' Services

As a not-for-profit Employment and Disability services provider, we pride ourselves on delivering services that meet our Mission, Vision, and Values. We highlight everyone's right to opportunity, choice, and self-determination, empowering people to achieve their aspirations and goals. We all want to support the people in our lives as individuals, and as an organisation, we strive to continue providing quality services in a loving way each day.

To find out more about our services and how we can support you, visit our website.



## ► Contact Us

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