

The Voice

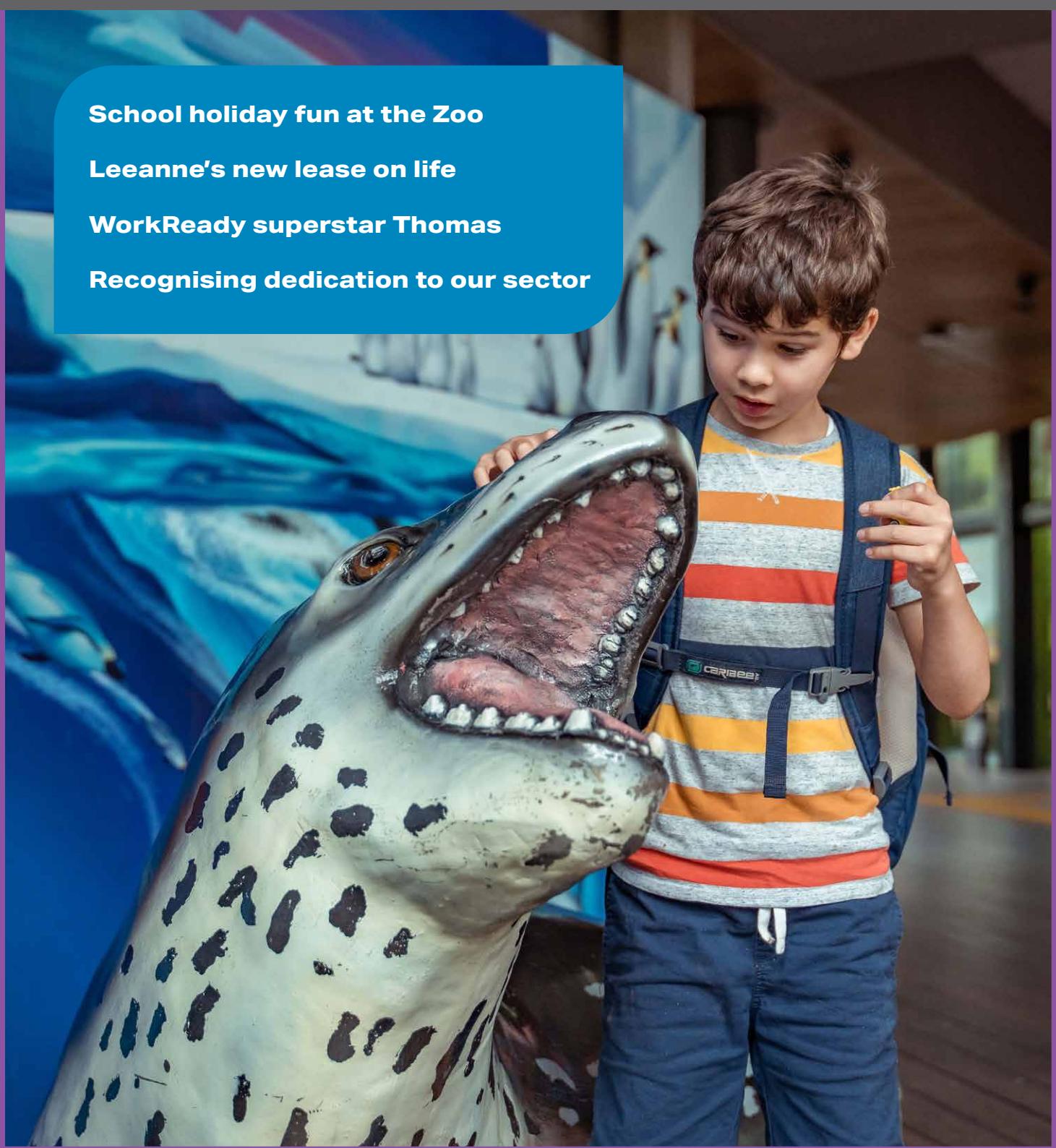
Issue 12 - **WINTER 2023**

School holiday fun at the Zoo

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Recognising dedication to our sector



AbilityOptions



Letter from the Editor



Since 2020, TheVoice has provided you with insight into Ability Options' services, with stories about participants' successes and key updates from our organisation.

A few months ago, we began looking at how we deliver TheVoice to you. We wanted to hear your feedback which has helped us improve the newsletter, making sure it meets the needs of everyone who reads it.

In April, you shared your thoughts in an online survey where you told us about your reading experience and how we could improve it. While many of you said that you enjoy reading the stories and information published in each edition, we heard that you would also like to hear more about the disability sector, read more stories about our staff, and have access to easy-read versions of the contents we publish.

As the Editor, it brings me joy to have heard so much positive feedback and see that many of you enjoy the stories you read, learning about the services we offer, and reading about our success stories.

Your feedback has played a central role in our review of TheVoice and has helped us understand how you engage with the newsletter's content and identify areas of improvement.

You will have noticed TheVoice has a new look, which we hope will give readers an engaging and interactive reading experience. Into the future, we plan to have more stories that give you the latest updates on the disability sector, as well as include easy-read sections in the newsletter. We will keep telling the wonderful stories about Ability Options' people and participants.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who took the time to give us their feedback. It helps us continue to keep you informed about what goes on in both Ability Options and the sector.

Although our official review is now complete, please consider reaching out to us so we know what you want to hear more of. Please reach out to me at anytime.

Rafael Sanchez-Bayo
Editor, TheVoice

Get in touch and provide us with your feedback on TheVoice

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Ability Options participants spend school holiday fun at Taronga Zoo

A bustling school holiday program, run by Ability Options on the Northern Beaches, saw a group of school students take a trip to Taronga Zoo.

The program, which supports young people in the community between the ages of six and 17 years, has proven to be hugely popular and offered plenty of opportunities for the students to adapt in different social environments.

Support Workers Melissa and Kyle, who accompanied the group on the day, said Ability Options' school holiday programs provide so many benefits and opportunities for young people to grow and build their social skills, in an exciting and enjoyable environment.

"What I love most about my job is watching the kids' faces light up when they are out and about trying new things," Melissa said.

"I enjoy seeing the excitement on participants' faces as they get to experience opportunities they have never tried before," Kyle said.

The trip to Taronga Zoo was full of excitement and learning, with a few standout experiences

throughout the day, including the seal and bird shows, where the students were offered the best seats in the house to watch all the action. They were also given the opportunity to get up close and personal with many of their favourite animals, which saw smiles all around.

While the trip was great fun, it also gave participants the opportunity to develop important life skills. Kyle said he loved seeing one participant in particular showcase great leadership skills amongst his peers.

"One participant was so thrilled to visit the zoo that he became the leader for the day and guided everyone to all the exhibits listed on the map. Watching the kids build skills without them knowing is a joy to be part of," he said.

Kyle and Melissa said that while everyone had a great day, they feel so proud of how these programs build participants' skills for independence.

"It was a great day. All the participants enjoyed the different shows and experiences," Kyle said.

"I absolutely loved the seal and bird shows and how interactive they were for participants," Melissa said.

A message from our CEO

Welcome to TheVoice's Winter edition. In this edition, you will have noticed the newsletter has been given a new look. Our Editor, Rafael and the team have worked hard in making sure the stories and information reflect your feedback. We would like to continue receiving your feedback about TheVoice, so that we can continue improving it.

I'm sure many of you watched May's Federal Budget, which highlighted some important issues affecting Australia, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme. For those of you who didn't, you can **read more about what Ability Options had to say on our website**.

The NDIS didn't get lots of airspace on Budget night. In the lead up, though, Minister for the NDIS Bill Shorten MP said the Government is committed to improving the Scheme, including reducing fraud and improving how the NDIS works. This is welcome news. However, the NDIS' affordability was the biggest focus of what airspace the NDIS was given in the Budget and the Minister had previously announced a cap on the Scheme's expected growth.

While we welcome the Government's commitment to improving the NDIS, it is important we understand the risks of their plan. We are calling on the Government to make sure these decisions do not adversely affect people with disability.

The biggest risk of the Government's announced 8 per cent growth cap is that it could mean people who need the Scheme in future may not have access to it and people who currently use it could continue to see



their plans reduced. I am worried that reducing costs could mean less choice and lower quality services are offered to participants.

The cap comes into effect by 2026, so we are focused on supporting the Minister to ensure he sees the savings he needs to make sure that, as he says, "every dollar goes to support people with disability."

The NDIS Review and the Disability Royal Commission, both due to publish their reports, will no doubt provide additional advice to the Minister moving forward and we are contributing to those too.

At Ability Options, it is in our Vision, Mission, and Values as an organisation to support and empower participants to have choice and control over their lives.

One example of this is Supported Independent Living, one of the key services we offer, that allows people with disability to manage everyday life in a home that is uniquely theirs.

We currently have accommodation vacancies available across Sydney, the Hunter and Central Coast region, and the Mid-North Coast which aim to provide participants with the tools and support needed to live independently. If you need more information, I invite you to visit our website and get in touch with our experienced support team on **1300 422 454**.

Best wishes,
Julia Squire
Chief Executive Officer

julia.squire@abilityoptions.org.au

Ability Options builds new lease on life for Leeanne

Ability Options recently supported participant Leeanne to transition into her new home after spending more than ten years living in a nursing home.

Following her diagnosis of long-term illness, Leeanne had lived at home, supported by her husband, Jeff. Around 10 years ago, Leeanne had moved into a nursing home.

Following his own recent move into a retirement village, Jeff contacted Ability Options' Support Coordination team, and was put in touch with Support Coordinator, Melanie, so she could help Jeff organise for Leeanne to come and visit him. She worked with Jeff and Leeanne's multidisciplinary team of allied health professionals from Recovery Stations and Better Rehab to make it happen.

Once the visits became more regular, Melanie talked to Jeff about exploring Specialist Disability Accommodation for his wife to live closer to him. Leeanne agreed to pursue NDIS supported accommodation.

Melanie worked with disability accommodation providers, Everhomes and Trusted Home Disability in finding a property that met Leeanne's needs and would be located close by to Jeff. After finding a house that ticked all the boxes, Melanie coordinated with the providers and allied health team to ensure a smooth transition for Leeanne, and a few weeks later, she moved in.

Melanie continues to work alongside Leeanne's support circle to ensure she is well supported at home and Jeff is now able to visit Leeanne regularly. They are thrilled to be spending more time together.

"It brings me joy knowing Leeanne is in a safe place. I can't wait to start having regular coffee outings and go to the zoo together," Jeff said.

Melanie is happy with the outcome and grateful to Recovery Stations and Better Rehab in supporting Leeanne throughout the transition.

"I'm grateful for everything this team have done. Thanks to them, we could ensure Leeanne safely transitioned from aged care into her new home. I look forward to continuing working with them in supporting her," she said.

To find out more about Support Coordination, visit our website or call us on 1300 422 454.

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



WorkReady superstar Thomas achieves employment goals through food

Since leaving school in 2018, Ability Options participant Thomas has been working hard towards achieving his employment goals. Through our WorkReady program, he has gained a range of real-world experience in the culinary industry and says he's fortunate enough to have worked in many places.

Thomas has been employed far-and-wide, from the Magpies Leagues Club in Waitara to earning his stripes at Love Fish in Barangaroo.

Long before exploring his career options, Thomas always had a strong enthusiasm for cooking.

"I've always had a deep passion for food, whether this being at family gatherings or giving mum or my great grandmother assistance in the kitchen," said Thomas.

Cooking is not only a passion-turned-career for Thomas, it also holds meaning close to his heart.

"After losing my parents at a young age, I decided to keep on cooking. It served as a distraction, and I enjoyed making progress on my hobbies."

Through Thomas' culinary journey, he learned that food can be a shared passion. During the 2021 Sydney lockdown, Thomas started sharing his recipes amongst fellow participants through hosting fortnightly cooking workshops.

"I was blessed to see everyone asking questions. Getting involved reminded me a lot of myself as a young boy," said Thomas.

These workshops empowered fellow aspiring chefs to share their love of food, expand their growing cooking skills, and work on new ideas collaboratively. This opportunity gave Thomas another purpose, which saw him grow in both his cooking skills and overall confidence.

After feeling like he needed something to focus on post-lockdown, Thomas started working as a kitchen hand at Love Fish, a high-end restaurant in Barangaroo. As Thomas showed promise and began to achieve more

"I aim to motivate people who have dealt with adversity to get out there and make themselves feel proud."



in his role, Love Fish recognised his passion and asked him to stay on as an apprentice chef.

As well as working in Barangaroo, Thomas has enjoyed giving back to the community through food. This was especially true during his time at Our Big Kitchen (OBK) in Bondi. OBK is a not-for-profit, community-run kitchen, that serves 250,000 meals each year to thousands of disadvantaged people across Australia.

In any young person's working life, it's crucial to gain a range of work experience to reach your employment goals, but more importantly, to find a purpose in your career. Working anywhere that is for-purpose, brings a feeling that is unmatched by any other.

"Hopefully, my story can encourage others to pursue their own dreams in life," said Thomas.

Congratulations, Thomas! The WorkReady team is incredibly proud of how far you've progressed in your career. It's only onwards and upwards from here.

Has Thomas' story inspired you? Are you looking to achieve your employment goals too?

Our WorkReady team equips you with the skills, knowledge, and real-world experience to enter/re-enter the workforce or gain further training with confidence. Find out more by visiting our website or call us on 1300 422 454.

<https://abilityoptions.org.au/disability-services/preparing-for-work-ndisemployment/>



Striving to achieve best practice and outcomes for people with disability

Melanie, Senior Manager, Clinical Services

The Quality, Practice & Assurance (QPA) division is made up of several teams that are responsible for achieving best practice and outcomes for participants using Ability Options' services, while advocating for the rights of people with disability.

One of those is the clinical services team, which was established to provide health supports to disability services participants.

Melanie has many years of experience as a Registered Nurse and Clinical Nurse Educator. She joined the QPA team in mid-2021, and was appointed to the Senior Manager - Clinical Services role. The role of her team is to ensure the best healthcare services are provided to participants. Her passion for improving participants' health has allowed her team to support the organisation in many areas, including developing health policies and training frontline workers in providing clinical support.

"I am privileged to have the opportunity to lead a team of passionate Practice Support Coordinators and Clinical Nurse Educators, who coach and mentor Practice Managers in achieving best practice," said Melanie.

"I assist the organisation in improving daily living outcomes for participants so they continue to receive excellent service."

Melanie spends lots of time in her role working directly with participants and their support circle and enjoys getting to know them. "Working closely with participants towards achieving positive health goals in

a dignified and person-centred manner is why I love my job," she said.

Being responsible for someone's health can be challenging. For Melanie, working in her role has made her stronger in dealing with the challenges this field brings. Recently, her team has introduced a service delivery model for participants requiring palliative care. This experience has driven Melanie to continue pushing for industry-wide change that addresses the need for palliative care support for people with disability.

Melanie's experience has led to many great outcomes within the organisation. Her involvement as a member of several academic and industry panels has ignited her passion in advocating for the rights of people with disability. One example is the establishment of the Clinical Governance Committee, which came after receiving praise from a NDIS/ACIS audit for the quality of our clinical outcomes for participants. As the Chair of the Committee, Melanie says it is "one of her greatest accomplishments".

"Working with Ability Options allows me to amplify the voice of people with disability, while ensuring Ability Options swiftly implements disability-led recommendations into its policies," she said.



Enhancing participant wellbeing: Ability Options partners with LaTrobe University for active support and practice leadership training

Since 2019, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability has continuously commented on the benefits of Active Support and Practice Leadership and will likely make recommendations to mandate this in their final report due in September.

Ability Options has always been committed to a human rights-based approach when supporting participants. To further strengthen our practices, the Quality, Practice & Assurance team are launching our new Practice Framework, which focuses on participant engagement and wellbeing by applying trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and customer-centred supports.

To achieve this, we have partnered with LaTrobe University to train our staff in active support and practice leadership and have committed to further development with the rollout of trauma-informed support training delivered by the Blue Knot Foundation.

With the goal of achieving quality of life outcomes for people with disability, we will

be providing active support and practice leadership training for our frontline disability staff over the coming months, so they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to continue providing quality support to participants.

What is Active Support?

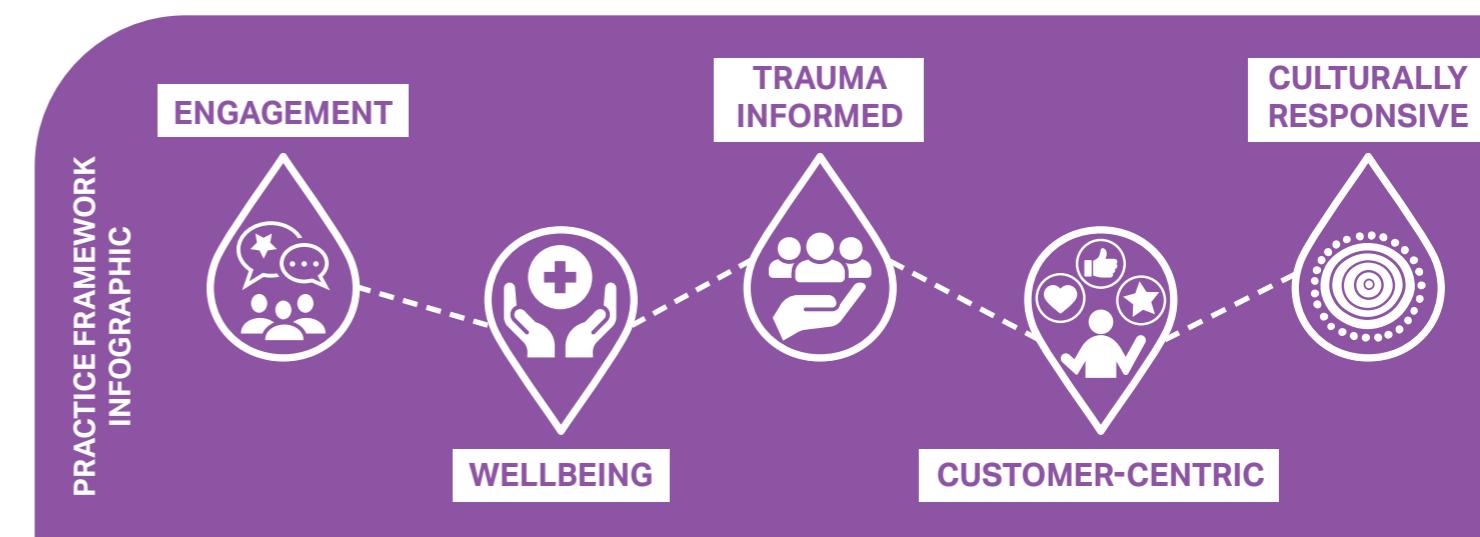
Active Support assists people with disability to participate in meaningful activities of their choice that aims to enhance their quality of life and boost job satisfaction for disability support staff.

What is Practice Leadership?

Practice Leaders are trained in delivering active support to participants. They use real-life scenarios, provide detailed feedback, and promote regular group discussions to ensure effective support.

What is Trauma-Informed Support?

Trauma-Informed Support is a service delivery approach that focuses on understanding and responding to the impact of trauma. This approach prioritises the safety of both providers and survivors, creating opportunities for participants to regain a sense of control and empowerment.



Recognising dedication to our sector: Tracey, STAR 2022 Employee of the Year

ParentsNext Manager Tracey was our deserving winner of STAR Employee of the Year, recognised by our colleagues for her extraordinary efforts in 2022.

The leadership Tracey demonstrated throughout the year is something to aspire to. She's built a strong team who strive to exceed participants' goals. She leads by example, taking on all challenges involved with new ways of working.

Starting with us in 2011, her 12 years of dedication to the organisation has taken her this far.

"I didn't think I'd stick around this long, but I really resonated with the mission and values of our organisation," she said.



"I'm amazed every day at what my team achieve. We've created a culture of support; I love coming to work every day to watch ParentsNext grow."

Like others who work to support people, Tracey is very modest.

"It was overwhelming to be recognised. I know there were many others who all do their absolute best and are deserving of this award," she said.

Nominations for the 2023 STAR Awards are open throughout July.

"To be recognised for something that I love to do is so special. I love that about Ability Options. We're a supportive group of people, all here to do the same thing."

Reducing and eliminating restrictive practices

Ability Options is committed to eliminating restrictive practices.

Although we recognise that restrictive practices may be used with the purpose of protecting participants from harm, our priority is to make sure everyone is safe while we find a solution for each circumstance.

Last year, a participant, their family, and Ability Options staff had successfully eliminated a restrictive practice involving chemical restraint.

After discussions with the person's circle of support, the Practice Manager discovered there were concerns about the effects of the psychotropic medication prescribed to them. While it was prescribed to manage behaviour, it was making them unable to participate in self-care and leisure activities.

After a review of the participant's support plan and discussions with the individual and their circle of support, the team found the main cause of the behaviour of concern. From there, additional positive behaviour support strategies were implemented, resulting in the practice being removed.

As the participant's restrictions were reduced, their quality of life began to improve. Their support circle noticed that the person had begun to laugh and interact positively with others.

The restrictions were reviewed by the Restrictive Practice Authorisation Panel who decided the restrictions were no longer necessary.

Now though, the participant is enjoying life and are better able to drive choice and control in their own life through improved communication with their support workers.

To learn more about the NDIS' commitment to reducing and eliminating restrictive practices, **[read their joint statement here](#)** or visit their website.

<https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-07/easy-read-ndis-commission-fact-sheet-psychotropic-medicine.pdf>





AbilityOptions



We really hope you enjoy reading TheVoice.

We are always open to suggestions, comments, and feedback of any kind to:

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1300 422 454 • abilityoptions.org.au

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