

# AbilityOptions



## Our year in review: 2023-24



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## Acknowledgement of Country

Ability Options acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands in which we operate across the state of New South Wales, and we pay our respects to the elders and peoples of all nations including Gumbaynggirr, Dhanggati, Biripi, Worimi, Darkinjung, Awabakal, Kuring-gai, Eora, Dharug, Bundjalung, Yaegl, and Tharawal.

Ability Options acknowledges that, no matter where you are in Australia, the land is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

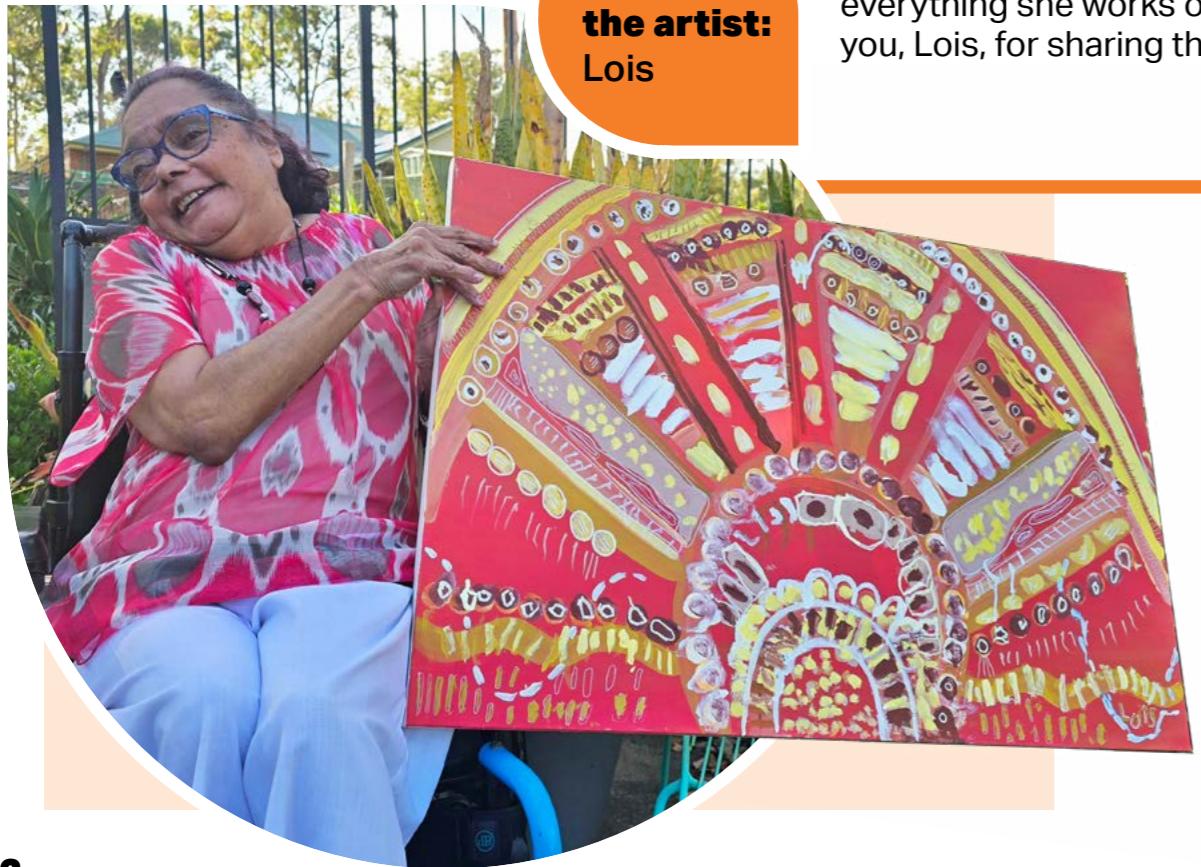
### About the artist: Lois

Lois is a proud Aboriginal woman and talented artist, who connects to her dreamtime and heritage through art. She was part of the Stolen Generation, placed into long term care at a young age.

She has lived in the Maitland area for over 10 years and enjoys spending time in the great outdoors watching local wildlife and working on her arts and crafts. She is also an avid football fan, supporting first nations people playing footy.

The staff at Thornton have supported Lois to reconnect with her family in recent years and she now loves going on trips to Sydney and Taree to visit and catch up with her people for celebrations.

Lois's painting is about her dreamtime and people. She enjoys the freedom of expression in her art and takes great pride in everything she works on. Thank you, Lois, for sharing this with us.



## Who we are

At Ability Options, our founding purpose is for inclusion; to support people who need assistance to be included in their communities. This founding purpose is as relevant today as it always has been. We work to our purpose and our supporting vision and values every day.

Advocating for the Human Rights of our participants and for all people who find it hard to be included in their communities is a critical part of delivering our mission.

We work to deliver our mission guided by our Values of Trust, Inclusion, Respect, Lead and Courage, and by our Vision to inspire and lead communities, creating opportunity and services for people to participate fully in society.

We are proud that more than 11,800 participants who choose our Employment, Specialist, and Disability Services trust us to enable them to advocate for themselves, and partner with them to get the outcomes they want to be included in their communities.

## Our people and services

We have more than 1200 passionate and dedicated employees driven to support people who need assistance to meet their aspirations at over 110 sites and in communities across New South Wales, including Greater Sydney, the Central Coast, Hunter, Mid North Coast, Illawarra, and Northern Beaches.

### Our services:

- Support people to live in their own homes;
- 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.

From our beginnings in 1976, Ability Options has been a courageous sector leader and a strong advocate, partnering with participants and their families. Our long history means we are a chosen, respected, trusted and valued registered provider of services.

Our vision, mission and values remain as strong as ever. Supporting people with disability and others who need our support to be included in their communities to meet their aspirations and achieve their goals has been a part of our story since Ability Options opened its doors almost 50 years ago. We are proud of that history, and we build on it in our forward planning to grow and retain the trust people place in us for decades to come.





## Total site breakdown:



**Mid North Coast 37**

18 19

**Hunter 24**

19 5

**Central Coast 11**

4 7

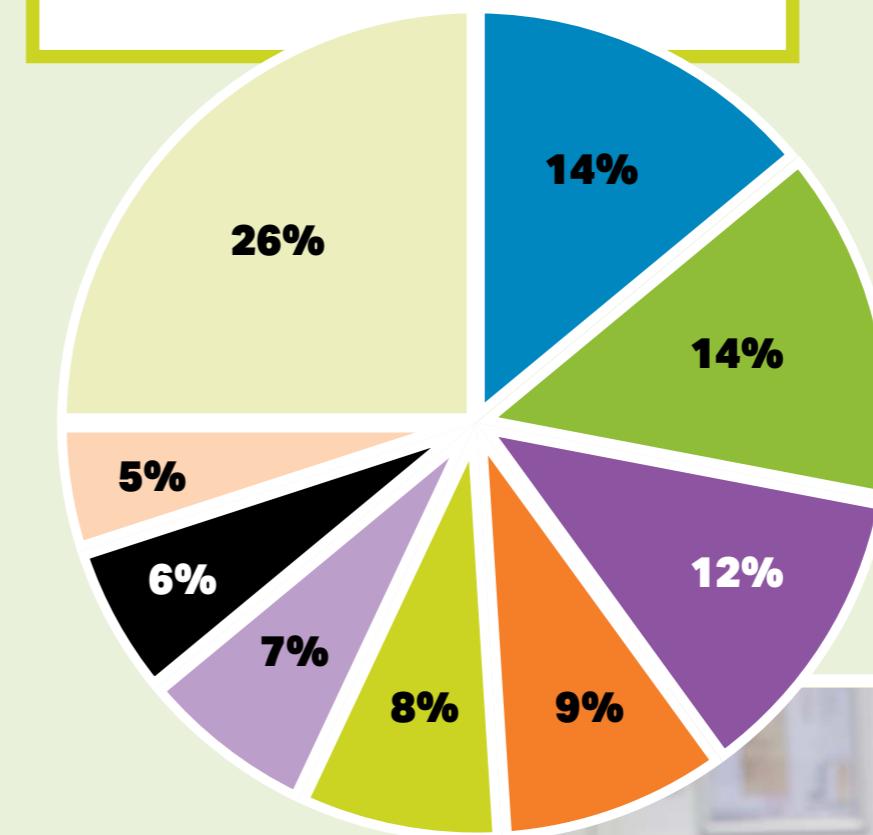
**Sydney 44**

19 25

*60 of our locations are homes and accommodation settings for people living with disability*

## Top industries for our employment participants

Through our delivery of Disability Employment Services, Workforce Australia and ParentsNext, we supported our participants into employment across the following industries this year.



## Key:

Health Care and Social Assistance	14%
Accommodation and Food Services	14%
Retail Trade	12%
Construction	9%
Administration and Support Services	8%
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	7%
Education and Training	6%
Manufacturing	5%
Other	26%



## Our impact

We proudly support over 11,800 people who choose our services to support them to reach their goals and be included in their communities.

To recognise their achievements, and the people that support them, we have shared some of their highlights in this Annual Report.

**Day  
Programs**

## Meet June: Embracing life and community with Ability Options

In February 2024, Ability Options proudly welcomed participants and staff from The Junction Works' Seven Hills facility and Day Program into our community.

It's always a thrill to bring passionate people on board and see them continue delivering top-notch services in a modern, purpose-built space. We've had the chance to meet the amazing participants and hear their inspiring stories.



One particularly remarkable story is that of June, whose journey has been nothing short of extraordinary.

At just four years old, June faced a life-changing moment when she was hit by a car. This wasn't just any accident; it left her in a coma for over nine months and led to years of hospital visits and rehabilitation to relearn how to walk and talk.

### DID YOU KNOW

**We supported  
17 participants  
into new homes  
this year**

### DID YOU KNOW

**This year,  
we supported  
almost 1400 people  
through Support  
Coordination**

Emerging from a coma and regaining those vital skills is no small feat, but today, June is thriving.

As the middle child among seven siblings, June holds her family close to her heart. Her youngest sister, Julie, has been a constant source of support throughout June's life.

Julie hired a carer to assist June three to four days a week. However, it soon became clear that the support wasn't meeting their expectations.

"The level of care wasn't proactive enough, and it didn't offer the choice and control that June deserves. She loves being outdoors and engaging in various activities," Julie shares.

While there were some productive moments, Julie felt June would truly shine in a group setting.

Determined to find better options, Julie began searching for local disability services that offered group activities. That's when she discovered The Junction Works Seven Hills, now part of Ability Options.

June, who loves staying active, has found her perfect spot at the Seven Hills Day Program. With numerous weekly outings,

she attends the program three times a week and often jokes that she'd rather be there than at work!

Having been part of the Seven Hills community for nearly a year, June couldn't be happier. She enjoys a real sense of belonging among her friends, and the program fosters inclusion and active participation that resonates deeply with everyone involved.

**"I can't choose just one favourite thing about the Day Program—there are too many! I love the people, playing games, and I always feel included. Fridays are my favourite, especially when I'm trying to score high at bowling!" June says.**

Outside of the Day Program, June works part time at a leading timber manufacturing and packaging solutions company. When she's not at the Program, she's busy packing boxes and is considering exploring more opportunities through Ability Options' Employment Services.

We're incredibly proud of June and excited to support her as she engages with her community through various activities at our Day Program. We can't wait to see her continue to flourish in the years ahead!





#### DID YOU KNOW

**We support 2540 people in our disability services and over 9300 through employment and specialist services**

## Christmas employment drive a resounding success

In the lead-up to Christmas 2023, Ability Options set a goal to help 300 participants from across our employment services secure employment during the busy holiday season.

The 300 Jobs for Christmas Campaign reached our goal, placing 301 people in jobs, providing much-needed financial stability and opportunities for personal growth. The campaign also helped our teams expand our connections with other businesses for future job referrals.



### Employment

Karen, General Manager for Employment Programs, said, "This campaign changed lives while helping businesses meet their staffing needs."

One participant, Catherine, found a role as a school crossing supervisor. With support from her mentor, Anita, she overcame barriers, gained confidence, and now enjoys her new job and community involvement.

**"This campaign helped us make real change for the people we support, especially those who were experiencing hardship," Anita says.**

The 300 Jobs for Christmas Campaign was a major success, empowering participants and strengthening communities.



## Brett thrives in new purpose-built home

Brett, a South Windsor local, has taken a big step towards greater independence after moving into his new purpose-built home.

With support from Ability Options, Brett is now building connections and enjoying a more independent lifestyle.

One of Brett's passions is being outdoors and staying active, so the team at Ability Options worked together with Brett and his family to create a home that suited his needs. An in-ground trampoline was installed in the backyard, which quickly became Brett's favourite spot.

**"He loves it!" says Ability Options Practice Manager Jessica, "It was important to us that Brett felt at home and comfortable".**

Brett has settled in well, with the staff supporting him every step of the way.

This move is a significant milestone for Brett, helping him on his journey to greater independence, with a home, support team and environment tailored to his unique needs.



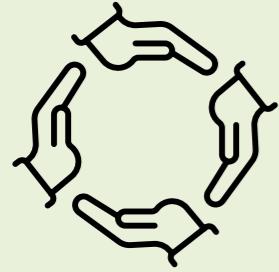
## Finding a path to employment success

Julia, a participant in the Disability Employment Services (DES) program with Ability Options, has made significant progress in her professional and personal life despite facing challenges due to her intellectual disability. Before joining the program in 2018, she struggled with low confidence and transport barriers, often resigning from jobs.

With support from Ability Options, Julia completed a Certificate III in Disability Support and a First Aid course, which enabled her to secure a role as a Support Worker. She gained her driver's licence and bought her first car, enhancing her independence and ability to transport clients. This new job has boosted her self-confidence and improved her mental health, providing her with a sense of stability and purpose.

**"Getting my licence and buying my car was a huge milestone," Julia says, "It gave me the independence I needed to succeed in my job and feel confident in my abilities".**

Having maintained sustainable employment for over a year, Julia is now focused on saving to buy her own home. She finds immense satisfaction in making a difference in her clients' lives, illustrating the transformative impact of the support she received from Ability Options.



#### DID YOU KNOW

**We have over 1200 dedicated team members supporting people in our communities**



#### Accommodation

## Choosing to STA-y with Ability Options brings Jarred closer to independence

Jarred, a passionate Manly Sea Eagles fan from the Mid North Coast, has a big goal—living more independently. With the support of his mum Michelle, he is taking steps toward this goal by staying in Short Term Accommodation to develop essential life skills and get used to time away from home.

Before finding Ability Options, Michelle struggled to secure quality short-term disability accommodation in their rural area. Challenges like limited availability, distance, and staffing shortages made the process difficult. However, when they discovered Ability Options' Short Term Accommodation service at The Retreat on the Coffs Coast, things changed.

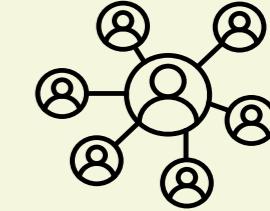
After meeting with Jarred and his mum, the Ability Options team developed a strong understanding of his interests and needs. To make his stay special, they decorated his room in Manly Sea Eagles colours. This personalised approach, along with supportive staff, helped Jarred feel comfortable and confident during his time at The Retreat.

**"We couldn't be happier with the support and service we've received and would recommend The Retreat to anyone looking for respite accommodation," says Michelle.**

Since his first stay, Jarred has grown in confidence, formed friendships with other guests, and is steadily working towards his goal of living independently, with his eyes on another stay soon.



#### DID YOU KNOW



**We worked with over 1600 employers in 2023-24 to place over 2500 people into education or employment opportunities**

## Adam's journey of resilience to employment

Adam, born blind, has faced lifelong challenges navigating a world not designed for visual impairments.

Despite barriers in education and employment, his resilience helped him push forward. His journey with Disability Employment Services (DES) led him to Ability Options where he found the support he needed to thrive. While Ability Options also supports people to find employment elsewhere, this time, we had the pleasure of welcoming Adam to our team.

In 2012, Adam connected with CHESS Connect (now Ability Options) whose inclusive hiring practices stood out. With support, he applied for and secured a role as a Customer Service Call Centre Operator. As part of his role, he was supported through essential accommodations like specialised text-

to-speech software and a wireless keyboard, ensuring Adam could perform his duties effectively.

When Adam transferred to Ability Options in 2023, he was offered a full-time role.

**"Receiving the job offer was a wonderful moment. It was the opportunity I had been seeking," Adam shares.**

Adam's progression from casual to full-time employee is a testament to his determination and Ability Options' commitment to inclusivity. Now, he contributes to a supportive, accessible workplace, helping others while continuing to grow in his role.

"To individuals with disabilities seeking employment, my advice is simple: do not give up."

***"They've shown me so many things, listened to me, and helped me feel whole."***

**Low Intensity Mental Health**



## Kimiley's journey to wellbeing

Kimiley, a single mother of two, was going through a tough time after a distressing experience. Recognising she needed support, she joined Ability Options' Low Intensity Mental Health service through a referral from the Head to Health phone line. This marked the start of her journey with our program.

Through the program, Kimiley was paired with a Wellbeing Coach who helped her set meaningful goals and guided her through Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques.

**"After talking through my experiences with my Wellbeing Coach, I felt understood and supported," Kimiley shares.**

"They've shown me so many things, listened to me, and helped me feel whole."

Over time, she learned essential coping strategies such as mindfulness, journaling, and assertive communication. She made significant progress in setting healthy boundaries, prioritising self-care, and embracing problem-solving skills.

With each session, Kimiley grew more resilient and felt more in control of her emotions. Kimiley is now more confident and empowered to face life's challenges.

**Dr Rob Lang**  
Chair, Ph.D., B.E.(Hons),  
B.Sc., FAICD, FIE (Aust)

**Julia Squire**  
Chief Executive Officer



**A message from our Chair and CEO**

## Our year in review

This year we are proud to say that we continued to deliver outstanding services to our valued participants and ensured that their voice was heard in keeping with our mission and our purpose. Thank you to all the staff who made that possible in a year of great challenges.

The financial year which ended on 30 June 2024 was a tough one for providers in our sectors and Ability Options was no exception. The sectors in which we operate – employment and disability services – continue to be impacted by multiple reviews and reform proposals following the NDIS Review, the Disability Royal Commission, and reviews of employment programs.

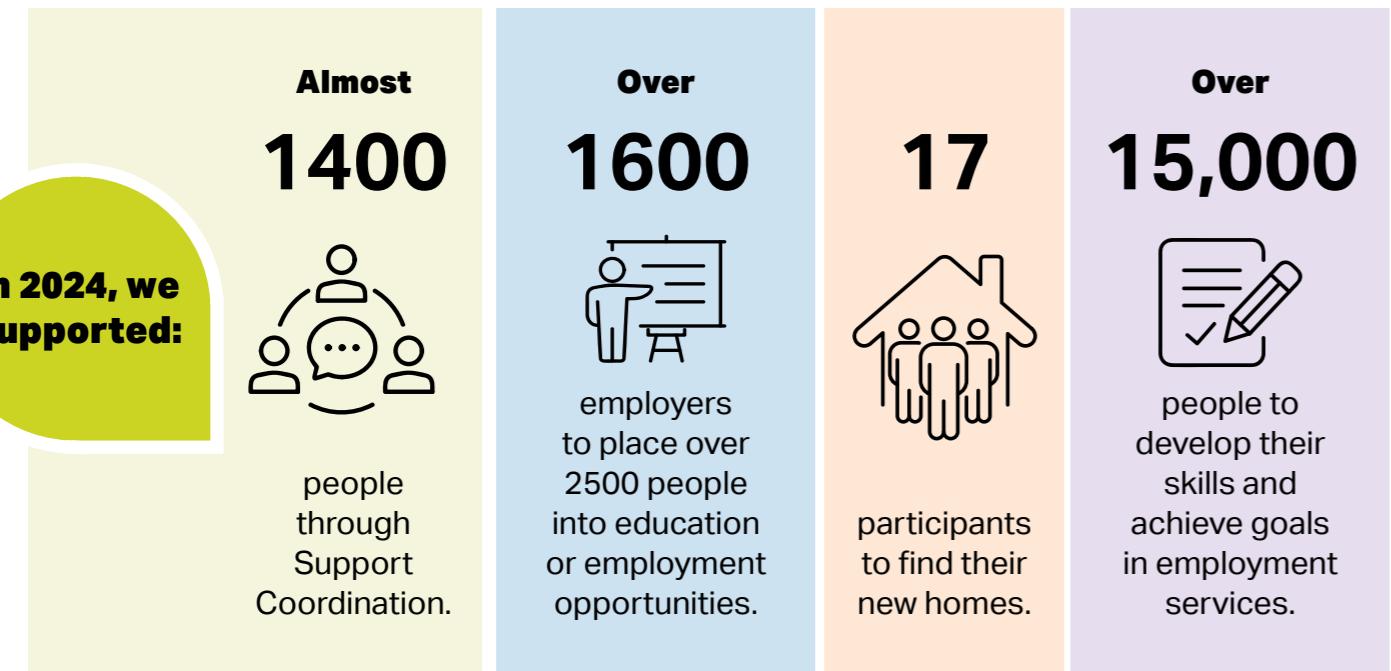
We continue to advocate for reform and whilst recommendations have been made by these Reviews, decisions on what changes and reforms were not clear throughout the year, creating uncertainty.

Financially, the increased pressure on pricing and funding, the increasing costs to operate and, for Registered Providers, increasing compliance requirements adversely affected our organisation.

Like everyone in our communities, cost of living pressures have had a significant impact and this together with funding pressures impacted our results.

As a mission led, values driven not-for-profit organisation, we prioritise the safety and quality of services for the participants who have chosen Ability Options and our people who support them so well.

The Board and Executive remained focused on making sure our governance continues to be best practice, meeting community expectations. We ensured that we contributed to the inclusion of all our participants in their communities and to communities more broadly by improving our social and environmental footprints. It is important that we contribute to a sustainable world by implementing changes to our operations which help meet climate goals, community expectations and our mission. Our strategy is reviewed each year to ensure it meets our mission, vision, and values and that our organisation is sustainable for the second 50 years of its life.



*\*Total number of participants supported throughout this financial year*

In 2024, we continued to grow and participants continue to value and trust our services. Acquiring smaller organisations to safeguard the services participants choose and provide employment opportunities to the teams who provide them, continues as a key part of delivering our mission. Our programs and services continue to attract new customers.

We also improved our assets and broadened our services, ensuring we can offer more services in better environments. We concentrated again on reducing overheads and investing in our people to make sure they are supported to provide excellent services.

Key projects were undertaken in learning and development, in career opportunities and in best practice. La Trobe University's Frontline Practice Leadership and Active Supports program is well underway. The Design for Care Research Program's first stage occurred with Monash University, Sydney University and Curtin University. This aims to use the best evidence available to promote positive staff wellbeing and job design. This includes jobs designed to ensure they best use skills and that employees understand their role, are connected to

their work, have manageable workloads, and feel supported and able to take control of their working lives.

Our quality and compliance processes had 100% success rates again and we increased our best practice results in our best year ever. The National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission and the Australian Community Industry Standard (ACIS) auditors considered that the delivery of services is, in many cases, exemplary. This is reflected in a number of criteria being rated as a "3" – reflecting best practice. Best practice ratings were received against 15 NDIS indicators and 5 overall outcomes, plus 26 ACIS indicators and 6 overall outcomes.

As clarity about the Government responses to the various Reviews is, hopefully, provided in the next few months, we look forward to seeing reform which ensures our sectors thrive for the people who need them and those who work in them, with Ability Options continuing to meet our mission for many decades to come.

The biggest theme for our Year in Review is a focus on our incredible participants; focusing on their successes, both

## Three key strategic pillars for F25

### Putting People First:

Providing great quality support for our customers and our staff. That way we retain our customers, our staff, grow our organisation and meet our mission.

### Stabilising and simplifying our work:

Embedding recent changes to our organisation and how we do things, simplifying where we can.

### Being Future Facing:

Growing services carefully and steadily, limiting change and creating stability and certainty, as much as we can.

personally and in using the supports that are becoming more challenging to provide in the current financial climate.

This year, we wanted to share some fabulous highlights from across our services that have been achieved despite the numerous operating challenges that we encountered as a community.

It's not just the work that our teams do each year that makes a difference to the lives of those we support, but it's doing it in a time where the sector is going through rapid review and change.

### Challenges from this year

Some of the largest big-ticket hurdles for the disability sector this year include:

- an initial response from government to the Disability Royal Commission's landmark final report that left much to be desired
- the Annual Pricing Review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme that sparked a loaded advocacy campaign from providers and peak bodies.
- In the employment and specialist services space, we:
  - Tendered to deliver a new parent-centred support program designed to better support parents through work and study goals
  - Tendered for the new Specialist Disability Employment program (SDE)

that will replace Disability Employment Services (DES) with less red tape and expanded eligibility for participants.

### Outlook for 2025

Also this year, we recommitted to our organisation's strategic plan and simplified our focus under three key pillars.

These pillars underpin our plan and provide a framework for prioritisation and decision-making for the year ahead.

Lastly, we'd like to thank the following for their commitment to Ability Options:

- Our incredible participants, their families, Support Coordinators and circles of support
- Our wonderful employees who live and breathe our mission daily
- The Board which ensures our mission continues, sets our Strategy, supports the Executive, undertakes multiple visits and governs according to best practice
- Our carefully chosen partners who together with our stakeholders support our mission ongoing and share our values and
- Our Executive team whose attention to Vision, Mission and Values, concern for customers and staff and efforts to lead, manage and sustain Ability Options is exemplary.



By:  
**Luke Hughes,**  
Chief Operating Officer

## Our year in review: Spotlight on our sectors

**Disability  
Services**



As we reflect on 2024, we proudly celebrate ten years of empowering people with disabilities through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). This remarkable initiative, championed by advocates and allies, transformed lives by restoring choice and control for many.

This year showcased the resilience of our teams at Ability Options. Despite ongoing financial challenges in the sector, we remained dedicated to refining our operations to better serve our participants.

The landscape of disability services shifted significantly with the release of two key reports: the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and

Exploitation of People with Disability (DRC) and the NDIS Review.

The DRC's extensive findings and 222 recommendations called for a more inclusive society, free from harm. We committed to addressing these recommendations by tackling ableism and fostering pride, belonging, and connection within the communities we support.

The NDIS Review outlined a vision for a reformed sector, emphasising a unified support system and more responsive market dynamics. We backed the government's push for a sustainable NDIS while advocating for the necessary funding to maintain high-quality supports for everyone we serve.

Throughout the year, we focused our efforts on enhancing our disability operations.



### **Active Supports:**

Our Practice Managers and Support Workers collaborated with the La Trobe University Active Support Project, showcasing our commitment to best practices in disability support.



### **Community Services Project:**

Launched in Coffs Harbour and Nambucca Valley, this project aimed to ensure all our community service participants received consistent, high-quality support.



### **Role Clarity:**

We introduced new Practice and Administration Guides through a co-design process, clarifying roles and ensuring our staff delivered high-quality services effectively.

### **Exciting Developments:**

- **Wallsend:** A new Specialist Disability Accommodation was approved by our Board to be built in Newcastle, ensuring modern, quality housing for our participants.
- **Casuarina Grove Medium Term Accommodation:** We partnered with CCLHD to plan much-needed Medium Term Accommodation for people transitioning from hospital settings, aligning with the NSW Government's goals.
- **MidCoast Assist:** We successfully tendered for the MidCoast Assist services, reflecting our capability and experience in integrating new programs while enhancing our service offerings in the Forster, Hawks Nest, and Tea Gardens regions.

As we celebrate these accomplishments, we remain vigilant about the challenges within the sector. Our commitment to advocating for positive change continues, ensuring that everyone we support can lead a life filled with dignity and independence.

Here's to another year of progress, connection, and empowerment!

**Highlights**

# Our year in review: Spotlight on our sectors

## Employment & Specialist Services



By:  
**Luke Hughes,**  
Chief Operating Officer

Over the last year, we've seen some big changes across Workforce Australia, ParentsNext, and Disability Employment Services (DES). Our services continued to provide great support for participants, and our employees responded to the changing requirements with courage and leadership, reflecting our values.

The Select Committee's review brought a lot of recommendations and set out Eight Principles for reforming Employment Services.

These principles guide how the Department approaches these changes, focusing on public service support and respecting individuals' rights. Employers now have better access to help and guidance.

This year was a turning point for the ParentsNext program. In 2023, the program moved to a voluntary model, pausing all compulsory requirements. This reduced our number of ParentsNext participants, but our team continued their commitment to engage and support everyone involved. In October 2023, we fully integrated CHESS Connect on the Mid North Coast into our community, extending our services from Coffs Harbour to Campbelltown.

We're proud to have supported our participants in achieving 857 employment outcomes and 2840 educational enrolments over the course of the ParentsNext contract, which concluded at the end of October 2024.

At the time of writing, the ParentsNext program is being replaced by a new voluntary service called Parent Pathways. We thank our incredible ParentsNext team and the participants we supported to find employment and educational opportunities for their support and their amazing, shared achievements.



Change has been the name of the game this year. In August 2023, we kicked off our DES program as a subcontractor with CoAct, strengthening our ties with local employers across all regions. In October 2023, we also acquired a Mid North Coast Disability Employment Services provider CHESS Connect, welcoming their team to our community and adding to our capabilities.

## WorkReady and School Leaver Employment Supports Program

In the face of challenges, our WorkReady teams helped develop a better service delivery model for our NDIS supported employment participants. Our Support Coordination teams have worked hard to maintain quality services, even after five years without a price rise.



## Workforce Australia (WFA)

Our partnership with CoAct has flourished, creating positive impacts for our participants. The Workforce Australia team has built stronger connections with local employers, helping more participants find sustainable jobs. We've also improved outreach services in Woy Woy to tackle transportation issues and increased referrals by offering more flexible appointment times.



## Sector evolution

As we celebrate these successes, we've also faced some changes to our service delivery:

- **ParentsNext:** The switch to a voluntary program in May 2023 responded to participants' needs for more flexibility. This program concluded on 31 October 2024, giving way to a new initiative called Parent Pathways, which launched on 1 November 2024.
- **DES (Disability Employment Service):** We're gearing up for the new Specialist Disability Employment Program, which will replace the current DES program by 30 June 2025. The government is reviewing how these programs align to better support people with disabilities in the workforce.
- **WFA (Workforce Australia):** The Select Committee Inquiry into Workforce Australia released its final report in November 2023, with the government responding in July 2024 and introducing new performance measures for upcoming tenders.

As we navigate these changes, our commitment to empowering participants stays strong. Here's to another year of growth, support, and success!

# Finance

## Consolidated Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

For the year ended 30 June 2024

in thousands	2024	2023
<b>Revenue and Income</b>		
Revenue from ordinary activities	114,007	111,635
Other income	-	984
Finance Income	1,487	1,668
<b>Total revenue and other income</b>	<b>115,494</b>	<b>114,287</b>
<b>Costs and Expenses</b>		
Employee benefits	(102,502)	(96,099)
Depreciation	(6,025)	(6,019)
Other expenses	(17,705)	(18,117)
Finance costs	(497)	(415)
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>(126,729)</b>	<b>(120,650)</b>
Gain on bargain purchase	1,030	3,150
<b>Net operating deficit</b>	<b>(10,205)</b>	<b>(3,213)</b>
Other comprehensive income	624	352
<b>Total comprehensive (loss) / income</b>	<b>(9,581)</b>	<b>(2,861)</b>

## Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2024

in thousands	2024	2023
<b>Current Assets</b>		
<b>Assets</b>		
Current assets	28,902	41,147
Non-current assets	36,533	34,780
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>65,435</b>	<b>75,927</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Current liabilities	23,954	28,182
Non-current liabilities	12,080	8,763
Total Liabilities	36,034	36,945
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>29,401</b>	<b>38,982</b>

## Overview of our financial performance this year

Our financial reporting covers the consolidated results of Ability Options Group (the Group) and includes Olympus Solution Limited (Olympus), R&R Care Limited (R&R Care), and Coffs Harbour Employment Support Services Limited (CHESS).

In FY24, the Group reported a net operating deficit of \$10.2M. Of this, over 70% resulted from underfunded cost increases and a number of significant external events including:

**\$2.1M**

shortfall in prices to pay for Fair Work and Superannuation increases

**\$1M**

as a result of the incorrect reallocation of some Disability Employment contracts in 2022

**\$1M**

impact of unexpected changes to the ParentsNext contract to make the service voluntary

**\$2.3M**

funding removed which had been used to support the additional costs to provide services during covid outbreaks which continue

**\$800k**

reclaimed by the Department due to events in 2018

## Review of our financial results

The Ability Options Group recorded two per cent growth in operational revenues against a backdrop of significant funding and operating cost challenges, which increased from the previous year. Our growth was mostly the result of acquisitions of R&R Care and CHESS Connect.

The remaining \$3M results from additional costs of labour including the need to use agency support workers when employees are unavailable, often due to illness including COVID, project management expenses, and efficiency programs including back-office role redundancies to keep ongoing costs down.

At the same time, we have achieved some positive change in cost containment through several efficiency projects, for example, optimising workforce composition and restructuring rostering support (so far resulting in an overtime cost reduction of \$0.7M), consolidation of administrative functions and the reduction of employment programs and other property costs.

In 2024, Ability Options continued to explore growth opportunities and after being chosen as the preferred provider to take on MidCoast Assist, the disability services provided by Mid Coast Council, subsequently entered into the agreement, covering participants in Forster, Taree, Tea Tree Gardens, and Hawks Nest. The transition commenced in August 2024. This service is expected to increase overall group revenue by more than \$4M per annum and the number of participants by more than 300.

There is a continued focus on costs including overheads, property and effective use of labour by recruiting and retaining the best staff and reducing the need for overtime and agency staff. There is an equal focus on bringing in new customers into the services we are so proud of and building relationships with existing customers. With increased pressure on pricing, we expect these challenges to continue and therefore strive to operate efficiently and effectively whilst maintaining our mission and focus on outcomes for our participants.



By:  
**Marina Korneeva,**  
Chief  
Finance Officer



By:  
**Ian Fuller,**  
Chief People Officer

## Spotlight on our people

This year, our focus has been clear: nurturing our incredible teams, enhancing our operations, and laying the groundwork for a stable and sustainable next 50 years knowing that people are at the core of everything we do.

With over 1200 dedicated staff members across over 110 sites, our frontline and support teams work tirelessly to ensure our participants achieve their goals and feel included in society. Their commitment shines through every day!

We've made significant strides in developing our leaders, empowering them to inspire and manage their teams effectively. Central to our culture are our core values, which we're actively weaving into conversations throughout the organisation. This ensures that our values guide our actions every day.



Career growth is key at Ability Options. Every team member has the opportunity for meaningful conversations about their roles and performance at least twice a year with their managers. We're proud of our internal promotion successes this past year, with all promotions being offered in-house first, showcasing our commitment to career progression and the achievements of staff.

Safety and training are non-negotiables at Ability Options. Our compliance with our training programs has been excellent, ensuring that our staff are well-equipped to carry out their roles effectively and safely.

Recognising the importance of mental health in the workplace, we've invested in training for our managers to effectively support their people; a healthy and supported team is crucial in providing the best possible support to our participants.

### Learning and development highlights

Our commitment to professional development is reflected in our extensive Learning and Development program, boasting 175 active courses.

**Here's a glimpse into what we offered this year**



**57**

Courses focused on participant and employee safety



**35**

Processes and policies

**Onboarding for new employees:** 74 courses in Disability and 67 in Specialist Services

**Instructor-Led Training (ILT) sessions since January 2024:** 51 sessions attended by 307 employees, totalling 417 hours of specialist training



### Trainee successes at Ability Options

We're thrilled to highlight our traineeship program, which welcomed 13 new trainees into Support Worker roles through the More Jobs More Care (MJMC) scheme. With a remarkable completion rate of 70 per cent—well above the national average of 55.4%—our trainees are thriving.

One shining example is Bradley, who transitioned from a construction background to become a permanent Support Worker. He shared his experience:

### ***"I love what I do!"***

"I was a bit nervous starting my traineeship having no prior experience in disability. But from day one, I felt welcomed. The staff took me under their wing, easing my transition with buddy shifts. Fast forward two years, and I've worked across many respite houses, gaining the confidence and tools I need. Ability Options has truly changed my life—I love what I do!"

# STAR Awards<sup>2023</sup>

## Recognising our people at the 2023 STAR Awards

In September 2023, we gathered at Novotel Sydney Olympic Park for the 2023 STAR Awards, a night dedicated to celebrating the incredible efforts of our colleagues. This annual event highlights how our team brings our Mission to life, supporting participants in achieving their goals and fostering community inclusion.

The atmosphere was electric as we recognised the hard work and dedication of our staff. Our CEO, Julia Squire, captured the spirit of the night, noting how our team consistently goes above and beyond to provide great quality services that participants value and trust while creating an inclusive environment for everyone.

**Here's a snapshot of our amazing Award recipients who represent their 1200 colleagues so beautifully.**



### STAR Employee of the Year: Leacia

Leacia, a Support Worker at Kempsey, took home the top honour for her unwavering commitment to participants. Always positive, she helps individuals reach their NDIS goals and continually suggests improvements to enhance their experiences. Leacia is an asset to our team!



### Ability Options Values Champion: Alana

Alana shines by embodying our values daily, advocating for participant inclusion and providing exceptional support. Her trustworthiness and integrity make her a standout team member.



### Productivity and Efficiency Award: Caitlin

### Stellar Safety Award: Rebecca

Rebecca's dedication to workplace safety ensures her team is well-prepared for first visits with participants. Her knowledge of risk management is invaluable.



### Motivator, Mentor and Coach Award: Daniela

Daniela's exceptional guidance during the R&R Care integration made her a pivotal figure in supporting her team, always ready to lend a hand.



### Team Player Award: Lawrence

Lawrence fosters a positive environment across multiple sites, always willing to support colleagues and boost morale.





#### **Self-Starter Award: Casey**

Casey has quickly become a standout team member, identifying potential issues before they arise and ensuring participant safety.



#### **Peer-to-Peer Support Award: Mish**

Mish provides vital support to the Workforce Australia team, ensuring compliance and consistency across sites.

#### **Extra Mile Award: Nikki**

Nikki brings joy to participants with her creativity and positivity, making every interaction special.

#### **Customer Service Expert: Sharon**

Sharon's exceptional support empowers participants, ensuring they have choice and control over their lives.



#### **Problem Solver Award: Simone**

Simone's deep knowledge and problem-solving skills give her team confidence to tackle any challenge and support teams to use our systems and processes effectively.



#### **Standout Leader Award: Julie**

Julie's commitment to her teams in employment services has led to significant performance improvements, with her support making a real difference to improving outcomes for participants and the job satisfaction of staff.



#### **Excellence in Teamwork Award: Mid North Coast Therapy Team**

The Mid North Coast Therapy team delivers outstanding support to over 140 participants, focusing on people-centred services and community engagement.



#### **Champion Employer Award: Aussie Gardening & Cleaning**

For over five years, Aussie Gardening & Cleaning has employed more than 80 people referred by Ability Options, demonstrating exceptional leadership and commitment to participant development.



#### **Thank you also to our amazing Award Sponsors**

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all our sponsors for making this event possible, especially our Gold Sponsor, Speak Your Language. Your support helps us celebrate our dedicated individuals and teams, who truly deserve this recognition.

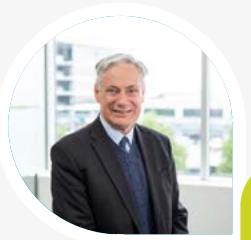


# Our leadership team

## Our Board

Many of our Directors have lived experience with disability either themselves or with close family, and all our Directors are passionate about Ability Options' Vision, Mission and Values.

Each Director sits on at least one Board Committee; Audit Risk and Finance; Quality and Outcomes or Remuneration and Nominations. Directors also undertake site visits, attend Family Forums and attend our Peoples' Rights Committee.



**Dr Rob Lang**  
Ph.D., B.E.(Hons), B.Sc., FAICD, FIE (Aust)  
**Chair, Board of Directors**

Rob has over 35 years of career experience in State and Local Governments and Boards, including over 20 not-for-profit Boards.



**Patricia Biszewski**  
MSc, GAICD  
**Director**

Patricia has over 30 years' experience as an Executive in the maritime and logistics industry, and for-profit and not-for-profit Boards in a range of sectors.



**Heather Scheibenstock**  
FAICD, FGIA  
**Deputy Chair, Board of Directors**

Heather has spent 20 years as a Senior Executive in the hospitality industry and as a Director in listed companies and on not-for-profit Boards.



**Claire Cavanaugh**  
BCOMM  
**Director**

Claire has a broad range of business experience through senior finance roles and has experience in not-for-profit Boards, particularly in the Disability sector.



**Elaine Fok**  
CA  
**Director**

Elaine has an extensive career in governance and risk management services for large corporates. She also has direct experience in the Disability Sector as a volunteer.



**Owen Gilbert**  
MAICD, CA  
**Director**

Owen has extensive senior executive experience, in a range of industries and as a Director on listed, private, and joint venture companies.



**Michael Maxwell**  
MSocSci, GDURP, GradDipAdEd (VET),  
GAICD, MPIA  
**Director**

Michael has over 20 years of leadership experience in public and community services, serving on Boards of organisations committed to creating liveable communities.



**Matthew Levy**  
GAICD, OAM  
**Director**

Matt has an extensive career in corporate Australia. He is a highly successful athlete and Paralympian and an advocate and ambassador for people with disability.

## Our Executive team in FY24

Our Executives are all highly committed, experienced, and qualified in their fields. Many have relevant experience within a range of sectors in senior executive positions in not-for-profits, government and the commercial sector. The team has a combined service with Ability Options exceeding 30 years.

**Julia Squire**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

**Greg Bergan**  
**Chief Growth Officer**

**Mark Chaffey**  
**Chief Operating Officer, Specialist Services**

**Ian Fuller**  
**Chief People Officer**

**Michelle Hodge**  
**Chief Quality, Practice & Assurance Officer**

**Luke Hughes**  
**Chief Operating Officer, Disability**

**Marina Korneeva**  
**Chief Finance Officer**

**Mark Twomey**  
**Chief Corporate Services Officer**



**Thank you**  
See you next year!





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