

A Black man with a beard and short hair is smiling broadly, looking off to the right. He is wearing a blue button-down shirt with white polka dots. The background is a brick wall and a green door. In the top right corner, there is a blue brushstroke graphic containing the word 'enable' and the text 'Autumn 2021'. At the bottom, there is a red brushstroke graphic containing a list of topics and the 'achieve australia' logo.

# enable

Autumn 2021

Global adventures • Disability employment • Green thumbs  
• Love on four legs • Meditation • Travel Port Macquarie

**achieve**  
australia





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Welcome

# CEO welcome



*Pictured centre and back row: Jo-Anne Hewitt alongside the new Frontline Management Team and Executives at Achieve Australia.*

Welcome to the first edition of Enable magazine for 2021. While we continue to remain on alert for COVID-19, there are many positives to start off the year.

Earlier in February, Achieve Australia welcomed the Government's vaccine rollout plan for COVID-19. Vaccination against COVID-19 can save lives and, in the long run, will help everyone return to normal activities sooner. Importantly, Phase 1 of the rollout includes people with disability and vulnerable community groups, the health, aged care and disability work forces, which is great to see.

In March, I celebrated International Women's Day with our colleagues in the sector at an online panel session to champion progressive mindsets and inclusive behaviours. Our commitment to gender equity in the workplace was shared with an inspiring line-up of female leaders, including the Auditor General of New South Wales, Margaret Crawford, who spoke about her own experience of gender discrimination in the workplace. By working together to encourage change, we can help create a more equal future for all women and girls.

**The launch of The Achieve Foundation, planned for later this year will be key to achieving many of our strategic initiatives. The Foundation will help us deliver evidence-based practices through innovation and research to enrich the lives of people with disability. Leading the new venture as Chairman of the Achieve Foundation Board is Achieve Australia Board Director Doug Reid.**

Doug is an experienced business manager with a proven track record of success within corporate, government, telecommunications and commercial market sectors. He has strong operational leadership with business development management experience. More recently, Doug has been involved in funding and managing several technology start-ups.

In addition, Strategic Engagement Research

and Innovation Executive Kirsty Nowlan has also joined The Foundation's team. With more than 20 years' of experience in social policy, advocacy and research, Kirsty will enable strategic engagement, develop social policy positions, and drive new initiatives for the disability sector.

Previously, Kirsty worked as an executive at the Benevolent Society where she led the creation of the 'Every Child Counts' and 'EveryAGE Counts' campaigns. Prior to this, she held the role of Global Director of Public Policy at World Vision International. I am excited to keep you updated on the work of Kirsty and Doug at The Achieve Foundation, so that we can co-create more great outcomes with and for people with disability in the future.

**On the frontline, we have been working to support our new Management Team introduced last year as part of several organisational improvements. During a training and development session I attended with the team recently, I witnessed first-hand their enthusiasm and passion for making our services even better for our clients, families and carers.**

Many of our leaders have a story to tell about their inspiration for working to support and care for people with disability. In this edition, Employee of the Year, Charles Agbapulonwu, shares his lifelong passion to help people in need and search for meaningful work.

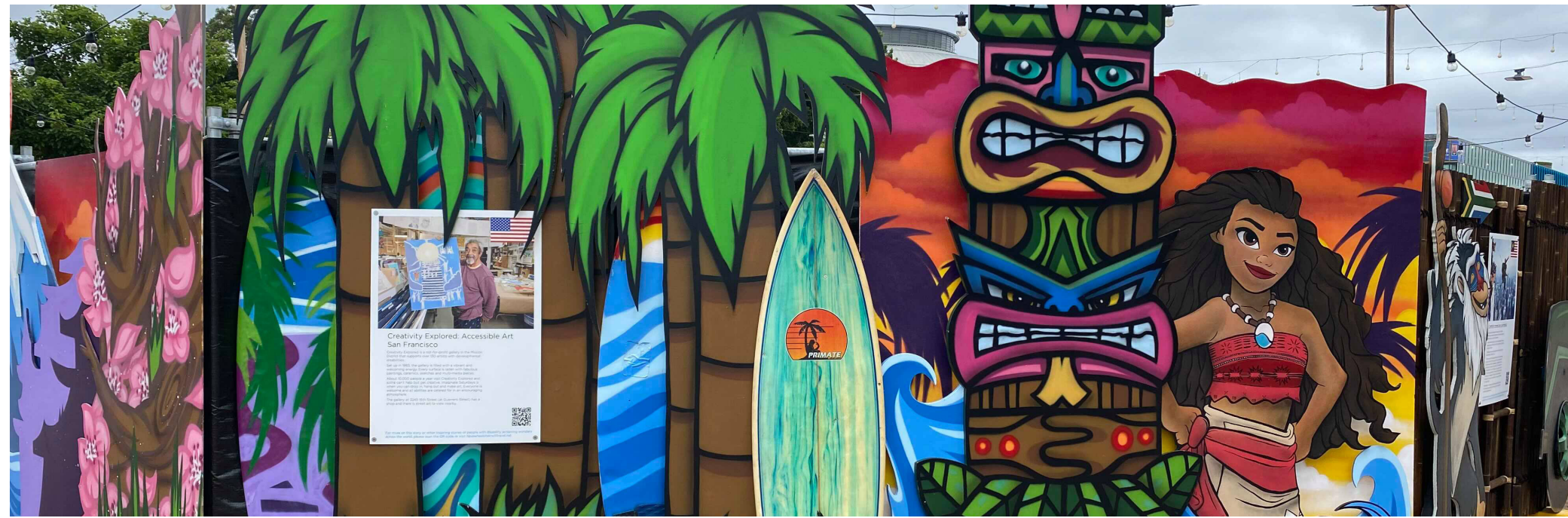
Alongside Charles, is the story of our Team of the Year, AchievAble Enterprises, that employs around 65 people with disability. Many people with disability looking for work can face discrimination and a lack of understanding or support in the workplace. In challenging times, the team at AchievAble has not only survived but also continues to grow and develop their inclusive workplace. I hope you enjoy these stories and more as part of this edition.

Jo-Anne Hewitt,  
CEO, Achieve Australia





# Global adventures in the heart of Sydney



In celebration of International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD) on 3 December 2020, a free outdoor installation opened to the public. The displays were designed as accessible and inclusive spaces for everyone in the community.

Created by Achieve Australia, in partnership with Sydney Olympic Park Authority, the vivid displays at Sydney Olympic Park blended global-inspired artworks and travel stories from people with disability and their families. Throughout the site, highlights from the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games and videos of Paralympic athletes added a sporting touch to mark incredible achievements.

Julie Jones at Travel Without Limits magazine and Have Wheelchair Will Travel, provided the personal stories from her family's travels around the world as well as those from her magazine. Julie's son Braeden has cerebral palsy and, together with his adventurous spirit, loves travelling with his family to accessible destinations in Australia and overseas. The family share these journeys regularly with thousands of followers online and across the world. And One World provided another great opportunity to connect with the community.

**“We were keen to be involved in the One World exhibition to showcase travel experiences that are possible despite a person living with a disability,” says Julie. “There is still a lack of representation of people with a disability in the community and in the media, so we welcome initiatives like this.”**

Julie visited the installation with her family and was excited to see the community getting involved. “It was really lovely to visit and see people reading the stories, taking photos and to see the exhibition integrated with other messaging around IDPWD,” says Julie. “We hope the stories inspired others with disability to see there are good opportunities within the tourism industry. An exhibition like One World can do a lot for disability awareness.”

Sydney Olympic Park Authority's Manager of Community Engagement and Social Outcomes Mantej Singh, says that changing community attitudes is a step in the right direction. “Sydney Olympic Park is committed to access and inclusion as a key part of creating

great places and precincts. An important way of doing this to positively influence the attitudes and behaviours of our local residents and workers,” says Mantej. “This is where Sydney Olympic Park Authority has taken the approach of inclusion-

focused activations in public places, to inspire and engage our community and stakeholders on the importance of inclusion.”

For Achieve Australia, the importance of social inclusion for people with disability goes to the very heart of our passion and purpose. “Initiatives such as this play an important role in helping to change people's perceptions about what is possible for people with disability and create more inclusive communities through personal stories,” says CEO of Achieve Australia, Jo-Anne Hewitt. “As part of this project, in partnership with Sydney Olympic Park Authority and Travel Without Limits, we could bring inclusion into the hearts and minds of the community.”

The COVID safe One World installation was held at Sydney Olympic Park from 3 to 24 December 2020. In this time, an estimated 1,000+ people engaged with the public displays.



Above: The colourful Hawaiian installation at One World. Below: Braeden and his sister AJ enjoyed seeing their travels on





# The latest on disability employment in Australia

Employment is not only about having an income and financial security, but it also links closely to many aspects of an individual's wellbeing. Steady employment can add a sense of belonging and purpose, stability in a regular routine as well as the opportunity to develop new and existing relationships.

According to the Australia Bureau of Statistics (2019), the unemployment rate for working-age people with disability has increased in recent years. While it remained steady for working-age people without disability (around 5% between 2003 and 2018), it increased slightly for people with disability (8% to 10%).

"We know based on current research that Australia is behind other western countries when it comes to disability employment. People with disability are significantly underemployed," says Operations Executive at Achieve Australia, Daniel Kyriacou. "The real challenge for us as a nation is about changing community attitudes and expectations to provide more opportunities for people with disability to be employed."

So, how can we as a nation achieve this?

At a national level, the Department of Social Services is developing a National Disability Employment Strategy to increase employment opportunities for people with disability.

The Employment Strategy will focus on five priority areas:

1. Lifting employer engagement, capability and demand
2. Early intervention – transition from school to work and return to work
3. Driving better performance and quality from employment service providers
4. Making the system simpler for jobseekers with disability and employers
5. Changing community attitudes

Alongside the development of the Employment Strategy is a new Disability Employment Advisory Committee (DEAC), which will inform the strategy and address the barriers faced by many people. The committee is made up of people with disability, employers, service providers and peak bodies.

Operations Manager at AchievAble Enterprises, Leanne Larche, knows firsthand the challenges people with disability face in finding and keeping work. Leanne says that many of the 65 employees, who currently work at the local Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) in NDIS supported employment, could do more.

**"One of the biggest challenges people with disability face when looking for work is around a lack of support and understanding in the workplace,"** explains Leanne. **"A person may go to find work in a local coffee shop where it might be fast paced, but then they are left alone with no support. Sometimes people are also given less opportunity to learn new tasks and take on more responsibility because they have a disability."**

At a local level, further education and supports for the business community, and their staff, about how to create more inclusive workplaces would be a step in the right direction. "Everyone should have a right to work where they want to with the right supports in place," says Leanne.

Recently at Achieve Australia's social enterprise The Sewing Basket, the business has grown to allow for an additional 25 NDIS supported employment positions at its newest location on the Central Coast. The ongoing training, supportive team environment and welcoming community is something which sets ADEs like The Sewing Basket and AchievAble Enterprises apart right now.

However, as the new national Employment Strategy gets underway this year, there is new hope. As more businesses across the country are better supported to create diverse and inclusive workplaces, greater employment opportunities will be available for people with disability into the future.



## Disability in Australia at a glance

About **4.4 million** people or 1 in 6 Australians have a disability.

About **340,000 people** with disability are active NDIS participants.

**68%** of people aged 15-64 with disability have 1 or more employment restrictions.

**48%** of people with disability are employed compared to **80%** of people without disability.

**1 in 10 people** (15+) with disability experienced discrimination in the last year.

**93%** of people aged 15-64 with disability experience difficulties in finding employment.

People with disability are **twice** as likely to be unemployed than people without disability.

*Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*





# Get the facts on disability employment





# Q and A

Our Support Coordination team answer some of the most frequently asked questions they get about disability employment.

## Q What employment options are available for NDIS participants?

A There are two types of employment – open employment and supported employment.

Open employment refers to the job market advertised to the general public. Supported employment refers to disability specific employment that offers additional supports in the workplace which are not available in open employment. Supported employment is primarily delivered in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs).

## Q Which type of employment is right for me?

A When deciding which type of employment is the best option for you, it is useful to consider the kind of supports that are required at home. If the in-home supports with a support worker are also required in a community setting, then supported employment would be beneficial. This type of employment is available for people with disability who may not be able to successfully hold a job in open employment. Otherwise, if no support worker assistance is required in a community setting, then it would be beneficial to explore open employment. This can either be within the open labour market or through disability employment

services. Each individual situation can be different, so it may be useful to look at both types of employment to find the best fit for you.

## Q Where can I find disability employment?

A Achieve Australia provides supported employment at AchievAble Enterprises located at Newington. Further information can be found on the Achieve Australia website. Other ADE providers can be found online by searching for ADE providers in your local area or your Support Coordinator can also assist you with finding an ADE. If you would like to explore open employment within the disability employment sector, it would be beneficial to inquire with a Disability Employment Service provider (DES). There are many DES providers servicing Sydney and NSW. These are available to assist with job seeking and job ready skills. Further information can be found online by searching for DES providers in your local area.

## Q What type of NDIS funding is required for disability employment?

A Disability employment within open employment does not require NDIS funding. Disability employment via DES is funded through a separate government scheme. If you are exploring supported employment the NDIS can provide funding assistance. The NDIS can fund supports in employment for participants who need extra help to achieve their employment goals. Generally, these supports are greater than what may be reasonably provided by an employer in open employment or with the support of Disability Employment Services (DES).

If you are continuing with your current ADE or would like to enrol in an ADE, remember to advise the NDIA at your NDIS plan review meeting, so that adequate funding is provided to allow for these supports. The supported employment funding is located in the core support budget of your NDIS plan. A quote of service would also need to be provided by the ADE provider to be submitted to NDIA to ensure the correct level of funding is provided.

## Q What is the supported employment NDIS funding used for and what supports do I receive?

A The purpose of the funding is to enable the employer to be effectively resourced to engage supported employees in a work environment. The funding contributes to the costs associated with training, supervision, any repeated job and work training, coaching and prompting, specialist staff such as employment support staff, appropriate workplace safety and duty of care.

## Q If I am dissatisfied with my current ADE can I change to another ADE provider?

A Yes. The NDIS gives participants greater choice and control about where and how they work, and who provides their supports. Changing ADE providers can occur at any time if there is enough funding available.

## Q If I am unsure about which ADE provider to enrol with, can I do a work trial?

A Most ADE providers will allow for a work trial on site, however this is dependent on the ADE provider. Work trials are beneficial for both you and the ADE provider as it provides an assessment of the suitability of the workplace for each

individual. This can also provide opportunity for you and the ADE provider to get an understanding of the type of supports that would be required on site to ensure a safe workplace. We would encourage you to ask for a work trial prior to enrolling with an ADE.

## Q What are the employee wages when working in an ADE?

A Supported employees are generally paid wages based on productivity assessments set by the Fair Work Commission (FWC). Further details about employee wages and contracts are best directed to the ADE provider as policies may differ between providers.

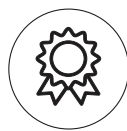
## Q Does working with an ADE affect my Disability Support Pension (DSP)?

A DSP payments can be affected if the income earnings per fortnight are above the threshold. Based on the Services Australia website, fortnightly income earnings of less than \$178 will not affect your DSP. Fortnightly income earning greater than \$178 will reduce the DSP by 50 cents for every dollar over \$178. This applies to single individuals. Payment differences may apply to other circumstances such as couples. For further information and to stay up to date with the current legislation, visit the Services Australia website [servicesaustralia.gov.au](http://servicesaustralia.gov.au)

## Q Where can I inquire about Achieve Australia supported employment opportunities?

A If you would like further information about Achieve Australia's supported employment or you would like to enrol in supported employment, please contact the My Pathways team on **1300 22 44 38** or email [MyPathway@achieveaustralia.org.au](mailto:MyPathway@achieveaustralia.org.au)





# Green thumbs of the Northern Rivers



The Northern Rivers region of NSW is blessed with a subtropical climate and rich soils, making it the ideal place to garden. At Achieve Australia's homes in Casino, enthusiastic gardeners have been putting their green thumbs to work lately with some impressive results.

Service Manager, Karen Moore-Evans, says recent gardening projects have inspired both clients and staff. "The four people we support at Frances Street have different support needs, so it has been a chance to build a new garden that everyone could get involved in and enjoy," explains Karen. "We don't have to go to the shops to buy produce as much either since we are growing a lot of our own food."

At the Frances Street home, the team started by removing an old hedge in the garden to make room for some vegetable garden beds. The people we support then got involved in planting seeds, maintaining the gardens and watering the plants with support from staff as needed.

Today several flourishing patches are filled with seasonal fruits and vegetables, including zucchini, tomatoes, squash, cabbage, pumpkin, watermelon, strawberries and much more. Along with keen gardeners, the team say the secret to their success is the alpaca manure from a staff member's farm.

Over at the house on Hickey Street in Casino, the gardens have also been receiving lots of care and attention. Originally created during Achieve Australia's Creating Home Competition in 2018, the garden at Hickey Street has continued to develop and thrive under the watchful eye of client, Matthew Lohman.

**"We started out with just a couple of fruits trees. Now, there's an Indigenous totem pole, waterproof artworks, a bird bath, fruit trees, vegies and renovated outdoor furniture," says Service Coordinator for Casino, Shawn Gill.**

"It's all been created by the team and the people we support, but mostly championed by one person, Matthew Lohman, who is an avid gardener."

Every day you can find Matthew out in the garden, tending to and watering the plants and lawns. "The garden is a bit of therapy for Matthew," says Shawn. "Everyone else enjoys sitting out in the garden on a sunny day or when family and friends come to visit."

There are many benefits to getting out into the garden to either build your own vegie patch or to nurture some potted plants if space is an issue. Stress relief, exercise, healthy eating and increasing our connection to nature are just some of the known health and wellbeing benefits to gardening.

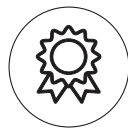
Gardens can also be a sensory experience for people. "The gardens are beneficial for people who may not be as involved in the planting or watering. Everyone can still enjoy the sights, smells and sounds of the garden," says Karen.

The benefits also extend to the kitchen where new recipes using the seasonal produce are encouraging home cooking and healthy eating. Right now, there are plenty of zucchinis in the garden and zucchini fritters have been one delicious item on the menu.

As we head into the cooler months, the gardeners of Casino will be keeping busy with seasonal planting ready for the winter harvest.

*Pictured clockwise opposite page: Matthew Lohman loves working in the garden at Casino. Seasonal produce is always on the menu at Frances Street. The garden beds thrive at Hickey Street.*





# A love of sewing reaps many rewards

Robyn Wilson spots a familiar sign out the window on her local bus travelling down Darling Street in Sydney's Inner West, it's The Sewing Basket. The pop-up shop has just opened on the bustling strip in Balmain in April 2019, which was followed soon after by a permanent location down the street.

**“When I saw The Sewing Basket had arrived in town I was like ‘Oh yes!’” says Robyn who has been an avid shopper and supporter of the popular fabric shop for many years. “I signed up to volunteer straight away. I just love all the things that we sell and the people I work with.”**

After signing up to volunteer one day a week, Robyn felt she had found her place. The opportunity gave Robyn not only the chance to share her love of sewing and fabrics with others, but also the chance to have some time just for herself. “I love it because I'm really happy working here and I feel free,” she says. “It's also respite for me because I am also a full time carer for my son Tim.”

The family's connection to The Sewing Basket goes back several years. Robyn's son Timothy Wilson, who has

cerebral palsy, intellectual disability and 9% of his vision, was involved in the sports program at Crowle Home for children with disabilities. “We knew many of the families who used to go to Crowle Home back then, and I supported the local fabric sales and the Meadowbank shop,” says Robyn.

As Tim's main carer, Robyn admits that, while it is hard work being a carer, the NDIS has really helped her family. Today, Tim travels to and from open employment at the dental hospital where he has worked for more than 20 years. An NDIS support worker is also helping Tim to learn new skills at home like using the computer and getting out and about in the community.

“It's a 24-hour job being a carer. I know the NDIS has its problems, there's no denying that, but it has great potential and will only get better in time,” explains Robyn.

Community attitudes have also come a long way over the years. “People are very kind and supportive these days too,” she went on to say. “Everyone knows Tim around the community to say hello and sometimes he even gets an extra bread roll at the bakery.”

At The Sewing Basket, a supportive and like-minded community also draws people to its three shops across Sydney, and to the newest location on the Central Coast. The Kincumber shop and warehouse opened on the Central Coast at the end of 2020. Together with an additional 20 community volunteer positions, the new location is offering 25 NDIS employment positions for people with disability.

For carers like Robyn and for people with disability, The Sewing Basket offers much more than just a job. The growing social enterprise is a place of freedom, acceptance and belonging. “All the time I was employed, I've never said this but it's a joy to come to work, I really love it,” says Robyn.



Robyn Wilson shares her joy and passion with others at The Sewing Basket in Balmain.



# AchievAble Enterprises: Team of the Year

Following one of the toughest years in its nearly 20-year history, AchievAble Enterprises came out on top after being recognised as Achieve Australia's Team of the Year in 2020. The social enterprise operates out of Newington, providing training, mentoring and supports for 65 employees with disability. When the team heard the news of the award, staff were thrilled about the acknowledgment and recognition they received.

**“Everyone was really proud to hear that we had won,” says AchievAble’s Operations Manager Leanne Larche. “Through COVID it was really difficult for the team when about 80% of our work stopped. Employees were feeling anxious and we had to shut down for two weeks with the lockdown.”**

Throughout March and April, many businesses who AchievAble relied upon were unable to continue their operations, including the airline industry. Labour hire operations, where employees are supported to work at local business sites, also stopped for some time.

It was with the help of regular customers, Rode Microphones and Finsbury Green, who kept the team going. “Without Rode Mics and Finsbury, we would not have had enough work to keep people going. We are really grateful to their teams for continuing to give us work during that time,” says Leanne.

In July, operations started to pick up. Leanne and her team came up with new rosters to rotate shifts, so that all employees could have the chance to come back to work if they wanted to. COVID safety policies and procedures also meant social distancing and infection control was prioritised.

**“We felt it was important for people to come back when it was safe to, as everyone had been at home for a long time,” says Leanne. “I could also hear when I spoke to the people we support and their families that many wanted to come back.”**

Leanne kept in regular contact with the AchievAble team throughout the challenging times, remaining positive and encouraging that COVID was a hurdle they could get through. When businesses reconnected again from September, the team was operating at nearly full capacity.

Chai Brandwood has been working at AchievAble since July 2018 and says it was important to return to work for a few reasons. “The best thing about coming back was seeing everyone and getting back to a routine. It was boring at home,” says Chai. “I like the people here and enjoy the staff training me on new jobs. As part of the AchievAble team we are like family.”

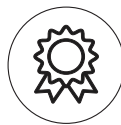
Today many employees have now returned to work on a regular basis. On the job it’s not all serious, there’s often laughter and fun as well as regular sing-a-longs with the radio playing in the background.

As a long-term employee, Wayne Lightfoot has worked AchievAble since August 2008. Wayne says he was happy to hear the team received an award because he enjoys coming to work at Newington. “I felt fantastic and happy when we got the award,” says Wayne. “I make new friends here and everyone is nice.”

The team celebrated their award with a morning tea and presentation of a plaque and certificate. A well-deserved acknowledgement for a resilient and hard working team who together got through 2020.







# Charles Agbapulonwu



Charles Agbapulonwu prefers not to be in the spotlight. Yet in December 2020, the Service Coordinator for Macquarie was awarded Achieve Australia's celebrated Employee of the Year Award.

Nominated not only by his colleagues but also clients, families and carers, Charles was recognised for his outstanding professionalism and patience in the field. His ability to inspire and lift people's spirits to make them laugh is a quality which also made him stand out as a leader.

Charles says that supporting people with disability is a privilege, and one that he owes to the managers who have inspired him along the way. "I feel fortunate to be involved in the clients lives, so that they can achieve their goals and have a better life," says Charles.

"Whenever I do my work, I do it to honour the opportunities given to me by my managers who I really enjoyed learning from, particularly Ruchika Mangla and Taher Hessam at Achieve."

Previous Manager for the Southern Region, Taher Hessam, says that Charles is a very passionate, understanding and caring person.

**"Charles is a good listener and is encouraging rather than critical. He leads by example and provides opportunities for growth for his team," says Taher.**

Even from a young age growing up in his hometown of Nigeria, helping others was just part of life for Charles. "My family was always involved in helping people in communities, orphanages and prisons at our church. Through our charity work, we were taught to do good things for other people," says Charles.

As the first-born son of six siblings, Charles took the traditional path for his family and attempted to become a priest. Soon after he realised he wanted something different. Encouraged by his father, Charles took an opportunity to study overseas in Singapore.

After completing qualifications in Computer Science and IT in 2014, Charles came to Australia in search of new opportunities. "When I came Australia, I was working in a job where I was not fulfilled and it didn't have any meaning for me. I wanted to do something more meaningful."

Inspired by a friend working in the disability sector, Charles followed a new career path that would put his skills and passions to good use. With a young family to care for by then, Charles had to work hard and return to study to follow his new path.

After completing his studies in disability, Charles secured work at a number of disability providers, including complex care for clients

with quadriplegia. "I loved my work there and the experience I got in complex supports. It was exactly what I wanted to do, to help people who appreciate it," he says.

In 2016, Charles came to work at Achieve Australia as a Social Educator. Today he looks after four community homes at Crowle Estate, supporting 17 clients and more than 30 staff. Charles has many client stories that have inspired him over the years, but it was one client who challenged him to push the boundaries.

The client was a young man living at Crowle who has schizophrenia, ADHA, autism and personality attachment disorder with challenging behaviours. At the time, daily living and receiving support was very difficult and distressing for the client. Working with the client's family and his manager at the time, Taher, Charles went to work to set up regular staff rosters and daily living routines. In time, the client started slowly showing signs of improvement and his behaviours were reduced.

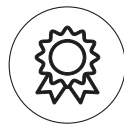
"We moved the client from his

**"The client began stepping out of his comfort zone, recognising regular staff and interacting and trusting us more," says Charles.**

current workplace where he wasn't getting paid to AchievAble Enterprises. Here he received training, support and the chance to earn his own money. He became more stable in that supportive work environment and still works there now."

Today Charles is looking at supporting the young man to get his own driver's license to further his independence and self-confidence. It was a proud moment for Charles. "I realised then that anything is possible, we can achieve anything."





# Love on four legs

Tim McCallum calls assistance dogs, “50:50 dogs” to describe the support he receives from Labrador Casper – “50 per cent physical and 50 per cent emotional”.

The classically trained tenor relies on Casper and a wheelchair to help him navigate his busy life. Tim’s work schedule includes performances plus roles as Peer Support Officer in the Spinal Unit of Princess Alexandra Hospital, and board member of Assistance Dogs Australia.

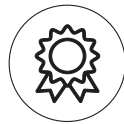
Tim lives with wife Mel and their son Nelson, four. The family adores Casper but knows to leave him alone when he is working or resting.

**“Things are always rolling off my lap and Casper picks them up – keys, the television remote, my phone,” says Tim. “He also opens doors, helps with shopping and presses lift buttons. Before you ask how he knows which floor to press, he presses them all. The trip might be slow, but we get there.”**

Assistance Dogs Australia is a non-profit that provides dogs at no cost. It relies on donations and sponsorship to train dogs, with \$40,000 invested in each dog. Volunteer Puppy Educators teach the dogs the basics before they start their advanced training at about 12-months-old. The people assigned dogs must also undergo training.







When out, dogs wear special blue jackets to identify them as assistance dogs and owners carry a licence, like a driver's licence, featuring a photo of them with their dog.

"Assistance Dogs are licenced to go pretty much anywhere with a few exceptions such as a hospital surgical theatre and parts of a zoo," says Tim.

Last year, Casper accompanied Tim in taxis and on planes to Melbourne so he could record his first ever CD, "Let Your Heart be Light" and also to the Gabba in Brisbane where he sang the National Anthem at the 2020 AFL Grand Final.

This year Assistance Dogs Australia is celebrating its 25th anniversary. The charity started with Mobility Assistance Dogs but has expanded over the years to provide Autism Assistance Dogs, PTSD Assistance Dogs for military, police and fire service officers and Educational Support Dogs for classrooms. Dogs support young victims of crime to give evidence in court.

"People think we are helping individuals, but we are helping the whole community because these

dogs are keeping families together and supporting people with disability to participate more fully in life," says CEO, Richard Lord.

"One of the most powerful things an Assistance Dog does is break down barriers. People approach someone with a disability more readily when they have an assistance dog by their side," he said.

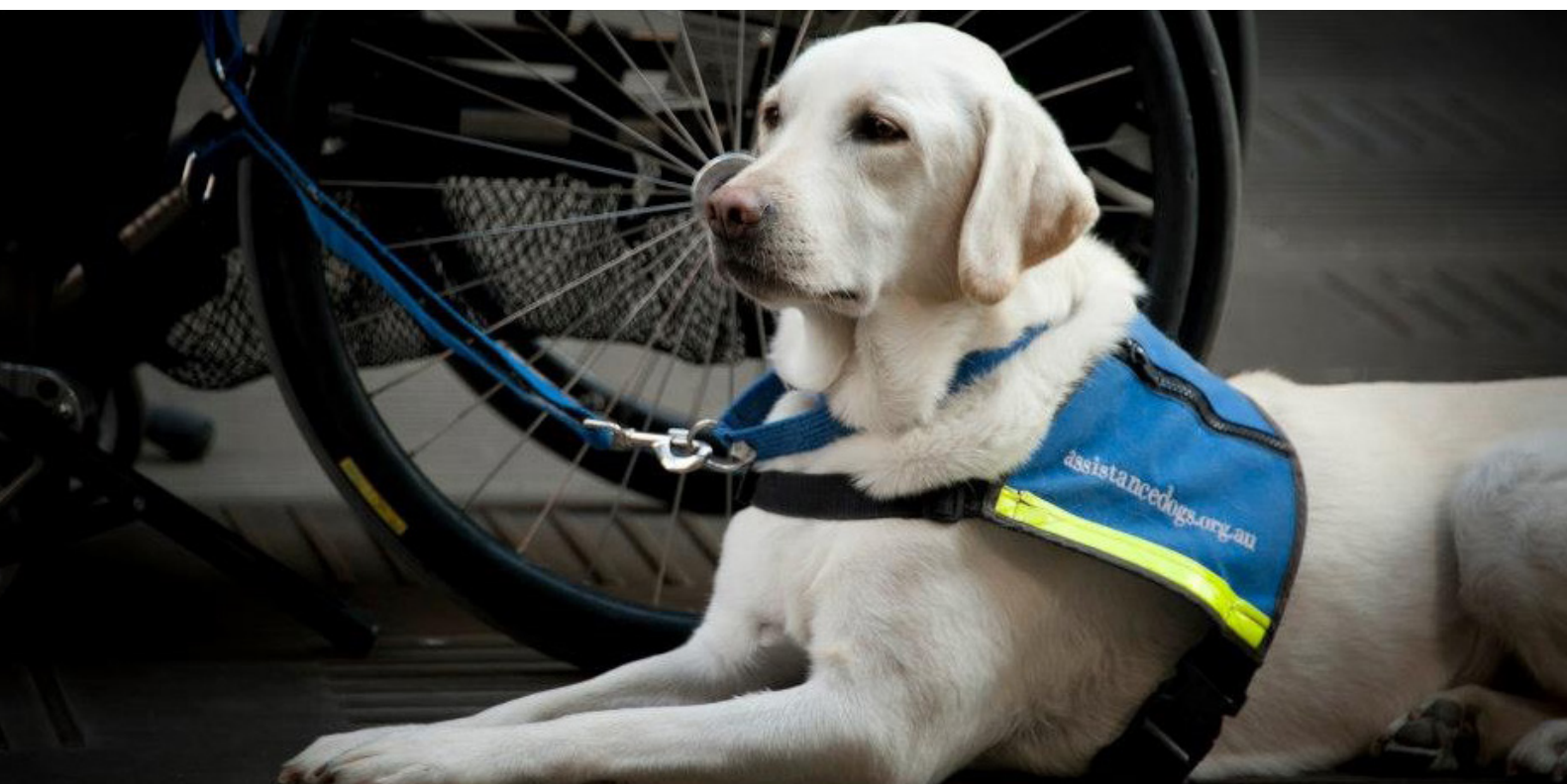
Dogs are monitored as they age, and a succession dog lined up in plenty of time. Retired dogs typically live with extended family. Tim was 18 when a diving accident resulted in serious spinal injuries. He has received three dogs from Assistance Dogs Australia in 21 years and his first two dogs, Buster and Roxy, were in his wedding party.

The Assistance Dogs Australia website is filled with real-life examples of humans stay engaged with life of how dogs help a wide range whether they live in a group home, with family or on their own.

All stories have a loving and skilled dog at its centre bringing inclusion to life not just for the person they support, but for their family and friends too.



Tim and his assistance dog Casper share a special bond.



### Assistance Dogs fast facts

- Dogs take two years to train at a cost of \$40,000 a dog but are provided to people at no cost. There is currently a two-year waiting list to receive an assistance dog.
- The Pups in Prison program is helping increase the pipeline of dogs. Specially selected inmates in adult and juvenile facilities gain confidence and new skills by getting puppies ready for advanced.
- People with assistance dogs are protected under the Federal Disability Discrimination Act.
- The NDIS included assistance dogs in its trial phase but has not yet funded them in the range of supports it provides. Guide Dogs are included.
- In 2020, Assistance Dogs Australia placed 38 dogs with people. Expert trainers made 200 aftercare visits as part of an ongoing support program.
- National Animal Therapy Day is on 30 April 2021 and Dogtober celebrates assistance dogs for the entire month of October.



# Meditation for clarity and calm

**“You should sit in meditation for twenty minutes every day, unless you are too busy. Then you should sit for an hour.” – Old Zen saying**

An ancient practice dating back thousands of years continues to benefit many people today who turn to meditation for its healing benefits. Someone who knows first-hand the benefits of meditation from her work with people with disability, and people who have complex needs or injuries, is adaptive yoga instructor and meditation teacher Lisa Bidgood. She says meditation is one of the best things you can do each day to relieve stress and maintain a healthy mind and body.

“The benefits of meditation are well-documented and backed by scientific research,” explains Lisa. “Many of my clients use meditation as a tool to quiet and calm the mind, to slow down and connect with the body through breath. For some it can also help with sleep and more positive mental health.”



## **The impact of COVID-19**

When the COVID-19 lockdown cancelled all face to face yoga and meditation classes, Lisa was unsure about moving to a virtual set up. “Clients were contacting me during lockdown to say they were missing their practice, so I trialed a couple of small group sessions with 45 minutes of yoga and 15 minutes of meditation online,” she says.

“I didn’t think it would work because my classes are so hands on, but I was surprised to see that people were still enjoying the class in the comfort of home.” For Lisa’s clients using wheelchairs there was also the added benefit of reducing the travel to and from practice and directing that energy to their practice.

## **Rosemary’s story**

“I’ve been practicing meditation since 2016 when I joined Lisa’s adaptive yoga class. I’d been doing yoga since the mid-1980s but just saw the bit at the end as a relaxation, not as meditation as such. Then I was knocked off my bicycle in 2016 and suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) which gave me hemiplegia, or paralysis down the right side, so that I had to work hard to get some sort of fluid mobility.

Lisa’s guided meditation at the end of the class gives me a chance to be in the moment and focus on my body in its entirety by focusing on my breath. I use my breathing as an anchor not only in meditation but throughout the day when I need to slow down my mind. The TBI means I can be very easily overstimulated but meditation and using the breath as an anchor helps me overcome this.”

## **Greg’s story**

“I started meditation as part of a yoga practice five years ago. The reason was to look after my body and mind. Meditation has always

interested me but I had never had anyone guide me before. The effects were immediate. I am long term disabled and my mind needed to rest and be calm. Something I struggle with every day. On the outside no one had a clue what my mind and demons were like. Meditation helped me to find peace and rest. To be able to stop my mind and focus on being calm and peaceful mentally. Each meditation session helping to strengthen and reinforce that.

This translated into each day being more peaceful and calm within my mind. Meditation also helps me when my mind does wander to negative thoughts in being able to focus my mind back to being peaceful and calm.”

## **5-MINUTE MEDITATION**

If you want to give meditation a try, Lisa has a simple and short technique which can be practiced anytime, anywhere. “This meditation is known as ‘ghatika’. It uses a counting technique and gives the busy mind a job to do,” she explains. “If you have a spare 5 minutes, practice this each morning and night, or whenever you need to find a sense of calm in your day.”

1. Find a comfortable place to sit and close your eyes.
2. Breathe in, pause, breathe out, count 1.
3. Breathe in, pause, breathe out, count 2.
4. Continue breathing and counting in this way until you reach 21.
5. Open your eyes and notice how you feel.

To learn more about meditation, access these free resources on YouTube or download the apps for a free trial:

- Calm
- Smiling Minds
- Headspace
- Insight Timer





# Zucchini fritters

Recipe by Kelly Senyei from Just a Taste  
Prep: 20 minutes  
Cook: 5 minutes  
Serves: Makes 14 fritters

## Ingredients

4 cups shredded zucchini  
2/3 cup plain flour  
2 large eggs, lightly beaten  
1/3 cup sliced spring onions (green and white parts)  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
Salt and pepper to taste

## Method

Place the shredded zucchini in a colander set over a bowl and sprinkle the zucchini lightly with salt. Allow the zucchini to stand for 10 minutes. Using your hands, squeeze out as much liquid from the zucchini as possible. Transfer the zucchini to a large bowl.

Add the flour, eggs, sliced spring onions, 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/8 teaspoon pepper to the bowl, stirring until the mixture is combined. Line a plate with paper towels.

Add the olive oil to large sauté pan set over medium heat. Once the oil is hot, scoop 3-tablespoon mounds of the zucchini mixture into the pan, pressing them lightly into rounds and spacing them at least 2 inches apart. Cook the zucchini fritters for 2 to 3 minutes, then flip them once and cook an additional 2 minutes until golden brown and cooked throughout. Transfer the zucchini fritters to the paper towel-lined plate and immediately sprinkle them with salt. Repeat the scooping and cooking process with the remaining zucchini mixture.

Serve the zucchini fritters topped with sour cream (optional) and sliced scallions.



'Rocket Ship' by Chris Wilkinson



Chris lives in the Northern Rivers of NSW and enjoys creating colourful artworks inspired by his love of science fiction and Dr Who. "It gives me inspiration and I like space," says Chris. In the past, Chris' creative talents have been exhibited in several local art galleries, including

the Lismore and Kyogle Art Galleries. Recent works are also proudly on display at the entrance to Chris' local GP practice. Chris enjoys attending an art program twice a week to further enhance and develop his work, which he has been doing for more than 10 years.





Travel

# Discover Port Macquarie

By Julie Jones,  
Have Wheelchair Will Travel and Travel Without Limits







As annual visitors to the Port Macquarie region we have come to know the best places to stay and play. We keep returning to the area because, not only does it offer a stunning beach escape, but it also provides a lovely accessible holiday for the whole family.

**Beach accessibility**

Port Macquarie has an extensive beach wheelchair program with Town Beach, Flynn's Beach and Rainbow Beach (Bonny Hills) all offering a Sandcruiser beach wheelchair free to use. When the lifeguards are on duty, they are happy to assist. Accessible parking and bathrooms are also located at these locations.

**Inclusive playground**

Westport Park in Port Macquarie is home to a Livvi's Place playground complete with a wheelchair accessible carousel, pirate ship and other accessible features including musical instruments.

**Sightseeing**

Port Macquarie has an abundance of options when it comes to accessible attractions.

Sea Acres is a popular tourist attraction offering a 1.3 kilometre walk through the rainforest. Rising seven metres through the forest it is the perfect spot to enjoy the cool of the rainforest while spotting the extensive birdlife. Sea Acres boardwalk, cafe and bathroom are all wheelchair accessible.

Port Macquarie's Koala Hospital has been rehabilitating sick and injured koalas since 1973. The Koala Hospital is open to visitors each day and offers volunteer led tours. Getting to know the koalas who call the Koala

Hospital home is free, but a donation does help ensure the centre can continue its important work.

The Koala Sculpture Trail consists of large scale, one-metre high fibre glass koala sculptures which have been decorated into beautiful pieces of original art by local artists. Grab a free Koala Sculptures map online or from the visitors centre and see how many you can spot around town.

Billabong Zoo is the perfect day out for any animal lovers. Meet a python, feed a kangaroo and watch the animal presentations offered by this accessible zoo.

One of the best ways to appreciate the Hastings River is to hire a BBQ boat. Pack your food, drinks, and something to barbecue and you are set for a few hours of checking out Port from the river. Keep an eye out for dolphins.

Just before sunset is the ideal time to take an accessible walk along the breakwall in Port Macquarie. It is popular with locals and visitors alike for the level access and the interesting graffiti left by visitors on the rocks along the way.

Located just 10 minutes north of Port Macquarie, Ricardoes Tomatoes & Strawberries is a fun spot to visit on a non-beach day. At Ricardoes you can pick your own strawberries and stock up on a range of local produce. Their tomatoes are delicious!

The Bago Maze and Winery is about a 30-minute drive from Port Macquarie and is a favourite spot with local families. We love the fun of the maze and when we find our way out, we stop at the café for a reward. Speak to staff regarding wheelchair access when booking



and they will usually allow you to drive your vehicle closer to the maze entrance.

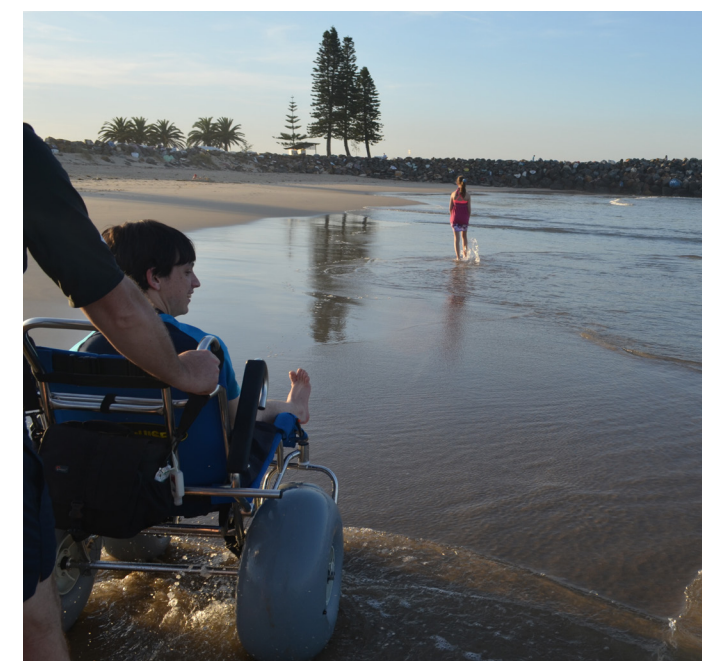
Lake Cathie probably does not make it on to the must-see list of many tourists but when the lake is full it is a fabulous spot to swim for children or those who prefer calm waters. It is only about 30 minutes from Port Macquarie and makes a good day trip. An accessible fishing platform, with rod holders, makes this popular local fishing spot great for all anglers.

**Accessible accommodation**

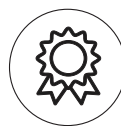
Port Macquarie offers a range of accessible accommodation to suit all budgets and family sizes. In Port Macquarie's town centre, Northpoint Apartments has a three-bedroom accessible apartment with a view, Rydges offers a one-bedroom apartment conveniently located on the Town Green and Beachcomber has a two-bedroom accessible apartment. A little further out of town, but both located near an accessible beach, you can stay at Beachside Apartments, Flynn's Beach and Reflections Holiday Park at Bonny Hills.

Port Macquarie offers all the conveniences of the city including a good hospital, but the fresh air and

relaxed pace always results in our family leaving feeling rejuvenated and happy. We cannot wait to return.







# Out & about



### The Sewing Basket Fabric Warehouse Sale

To celebrate the opening of our first regional shop on the NSW Central Coast at the end of 2020, The Sewing Basket in Kincumber held a massive warehouse sale in November. We received an overwhelming response from the community who have now become friends and family of The Sewing Basket. Our sale included a wide range of fabrics, including cut fabric and rolls, upholstery and furnishing fabrics. We look forward to holding more sales throughout the year to encourage creative projects at an affordable price, all while supporting people with disability in more training and employment opportunities.

### We would love to see your creations

Thank you to our supporters across all The Sewing Basket stores. If you have shopped with us and created something special, please share it by tagging us on Instagram @achievesewingbasket.

### A trip to the Koala Park

Recently in Sydney, the team from our My Life community and lifestyle day program services adventured to the Koala Park Sanctuary. It was a fun-filled day for all to have the chance to be outdoors in nature, experience something new, and get up close and personal with some adorable Australian wildlife. The team at the Koala Park are always very helpful and supportive, going above and beyond when we come to visit. Staff enjoy helping to educate the people we support not only on the koalas, but also about environmental conservation and other Australian wildlife at the park.



On the day the team ensured it was a memorable trip for everyone, with time made in the program to even cuddle or pat a koala. Afterwards everyone took a visit to the local Coffee Club to catch up and talk about the experience, with everyone enjoying the opportunity to get back out into the community.

### Sydney Royal Easter Show

The Sydney Royal Easter Show is the largest ticketed event in Australia. Before COVID-19, people travelled from all over the country and the world to enjoy the experiences the show has to offer, from rural traditions to modern-day lifestyles. The show is an accessible event and this year will also be COVID Safe.

Joining in the fun, Achieve Australia's supported employees from AchievAble Enterprises have been involved once again to help pack showbags for some of our favourite brands, including Nestle, Bertie Beetle, Allen's lollies and much more. More than 90,000 showbags will be packed, on behalf of Chicane



Marketing, in time for this year's show. The team say they really enjoyed this stimulating, therapeutic and fun work with many excited to attend the show again.

Visit [eastershow.com.au](http://eastershow.com.au) for more information and to buy your tickets.

## Coming up

- 26 March** Purple Day for Epilepsy
- 2 April** World Autism Awareness Day
- 2-5 April** Easter
- 7 April** World Health Day
- 25 April** ANZAC Day
- 9 May** Mother's Day
- 15 May** International Day of Families
- 17-23 May** National Volunteer Week
- 20 May** Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD)
- 22 May-**
- 1 June** Casino Beef Week Festival
- 27 May-**
- 3 June** National Reconciliation Week





# Stay up to date on the latest from the NDIS

## Support coordinator measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic will be extended until the end of March

Support coordination line items claimable under a participant's Core budget will continue until 31 March 2021. Beyond this date, support coordination will continue to be available to all participants who have a reasonable and necessary need for it and can be claimed from their Capacity Building budget.

## Independent assessment panel announced

The NDIA has today announced the successful organisations that will make up the Independent Assessment Panel, to deliver free assessments for NDIS applicants and participants.

The panel of eight experienced organisations has Australia-wide coverage to ensure that new and existing participants, irrespective of their circumstances or where they live, will have access to the free assessments to receive supports through the NDIS.

The Agency has completed a formal and thorough open tender process to

find the right organisations to deliver independent assessments, selected for their capability, experience and expertise.

## COVID normal supports for participants and providers

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the NDIA has responded quickly to government health advice, implementing a number of temporary measures to ensure participants continue to have access to essential supports.

## The following COVID-19 supports have been extended nationally until 30 June 2021:

- COVID-19 positive participants living in Supported Independent Living (SIL) arrangements can access cleaning services and higher intensity support. These supports are also available to participants living in SIL who are required to self-isolate or quarantine.
- If a participant has a support worker attending their home who later tests positive to COVID-19, the participant can access a one-off deep clean.
- The provision of a clinical first responder service for SIL providers through Aspen Medical.

## Quarterly Report

We have released the latest Quarterly Report. This Quarterly Report is a summary of the Scheme's performance from 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020. We have also released NDIS 2020 in review (PDF 1MB). This short report gives an overview of the progress we made across the Scheme in 2020, our response to COVID-19 and our plans for the future. We are working hard to make the Scheme better. The highlights of our progress are on page 8 of the Quarterly Report.

## 12-month automatic plan extensions are still in place

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we changed what happens when your plan reaches its end date. If your plan reaches its end date and your new plan hasn't been finalised yet, your current plan will be automatically extended for up to 12 months.

This means that your current funding will automatically continue for up to 12 months, or until your new plan can be finalised, because we don't want you to have any gaps in your funding or supports. This change is part of our commitment to deliver a quality experience for you.

For more information about plan extensions, visit the plan extensions webpage: [ndis.gov.au/participants/reviewing-your-plan-and-goals/what-happens-your-plans-end-date](https://ndis.gov.au/participants/reviewing-your-plan-and-goals/what-happens-your-plans-end-date)

## Participant reimbursement

In line with the updated Participant Engagement Payment Policy, participants taking part in the second independent assessment pilot will be eligible for a reimbursement payment. The reimbursement will be made at a one-off flat rate of \$150 per participant after they have completed an independent assessment.

The Participant Engagement Payment Policy allows us to pay NDIS participants, people with disability, their families and carers, who give up their time to provide input to our improvement projects.

## Latest Specialist Disability Accommodation information is available

The latest Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) data, including SDA demand data, is available on the Data Downloads page on the NDIS Data and Insights website. To find the SDA data, expand Participant data downloads. The data to 31 December

2020 is under 'Specialist Disability Accommodation participants'. This data release is part of the NDIA's commitment to publish additional SDA information for participants and the sector. The data helps participants and providers understand the current SDA supply, where the demand for SDA is greatest, and where there are opportunities for more SDA.

## We've improved webchat

Webchat is our online live chat platform, giving participants, nominees, providers and the public the ability to interact with the NDIS National Contact Centre (NCC) via instant messaging.

We have spoken directly with participants and users about their experience of webchat and made improvements to it by:

- making it easier to find on our website
- making our services more accessible by making some services you can do over the phone also available via webchat
- highlighting the availability of webchat transcripts and NCC receipt numbers so customers can easily reference their webchat conversations.

Find webchat at the top of all pages of the NDIS website next to the phone number, or for mobile devices at the bottom of the menu list shown as an icon of two speech bubbles. Webchat is available between 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday.



[ndis.gov.au](https://ndis.gov.au) 1800 800 110

For the latest advice on COVID-19, visit [ndis.gov.au/coronavirus](https://ndis.gov.au/coronavirus)





## Take a look at some of the latest news and highlights in disability



Image sources: Disability Support Guide, SBS News, ABC News

### 1 **Disability Support Guide, 2 March** **Aged Care Royal Commission calls for end to young people with disability entering aged care system**

No person under the age of 65 should be living in residential aged care from 1 January 2025, says the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety in its Final Report released to the public on Monday. The Australian Government delivered its initial response to the Final Report findings from the Aged Care Royal Commission, which outlined 148 recommendations that aim to fix the broken aged care sector and create an industry that puts care, dignity and respect first.

### 2 **SBS News, 23 February** **'Everything about us, without us': Concerns about lack of evidence from people with disabilities at royal commission**

More than one year after the disability royal commission was established, advocates say there are still key problems stopping people with disability from coming forward to give evidence. People with disabilities are still vastly underrepresented among witnesses at the disability royal commission, advocates fear, prompting concerns the landmark inquiry is overlooking key evidence. Only five witnesses called to address the eleventh public hearing - or 15 per cent - have lived experience of disability, according to witness lists compiled by the commission.

### 3 **ABC News, 27 February** **From jail to in-demand speaker: The disability royal commission hears Justen's story**

A First Nations man with cognitive disability has told a public inquiry his criminal record is like a "life sentence" that makes it hard to break the cycle of crime and move on with his life. Now working as an advocate supporting others in the criminal justice system, Justen Thomas wants people with cognitive disability to be pardoned for their criminal past. The 43-year-old, who was last in prison 15 years ago, told the disability royal commission that people with cognitive disability had "fallen through the cracks" through no fault of their own.

### 4 **ABC News, 18 February** **Yeppoon cafe trains and employs people with disability, Emily urges others to give it a go**

When many people are hitting snooze on their alarms, Emily Slotosch jumps out of bed to prepare for her shift at the local cafe. The 27-year-old never thought she would work two hospitality jobs. "I am so proud of myself," she said. Ms Slotosch has a disability, which she describes as ability. "It makes me shine, it makes me happy ... it makes me proud. "I never give up, I always give [things] a go and I just try."

### 5 **ABC News, 17 February** **Disability Club social media site to boost social connections, online accessibility for people with a disability**

When 26-year-old Nathan Johnston tried to connect with people during the peak of last year's COVID-19 lockdown, he realised how challenging it could be for people living with a disability to use social media networks like Twitter and Facebook. Mr Johnston, who has cerebral palsy, lives on the New South Wales Far South Coast and has been inspired to start developing a new social media site called Disability Club after feeling isolated during the peak of the pandemic.

### 6 **Disability Support Guide, 9 February** **Aussie band has big plans for 2021 thanks to NDIS support**

After a successful 2020, Australian band The KingStones, who are all National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants, have their sights set on an even bigger 2021 with plenty of new music in the works. Drawing inspiration for the band's name, named after Kingston - a local suburb in Logan, Queensland, Juliet (Jewelz) 21, Nicholas (Nicky Drizz) 21, Evangel (Voice of Evangel) 19, William (The Bill) 20, and Daniel (Dan) 21, are out to prove there is no 'dis' in disability.



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