



30 Years Celebration

Supporting local
people achieve



Annual Report 2022 – 2023

Our Mission Vision and Values

Our Vision

We create fulfilling opportunities for people and communities through our passion

Our Mission

Empowering people to achieve

The *Respect* we have for each other and the *Respect* we have for people and communities gives us the opportunities to build for today and grow for tomorrow.

ConnectAbility acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land where we work and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and future. Together we acknowledge the contributions of Aboriginal Australians and non-Aboriginal Australians with a disability to this country, and reaffirm ConnectAbility's purpose of building an inclusive society where people can live the life they choose.

Our Values

Relationship

Excellence

Strength

Passion

Experience

Community

Trust

Michael is really
creative.

Here is just one of his
creative projects over the year



Michael

Welcome

From the Chair and CEO

ConnectAbility turned 30 in this financial year!

An achievement for any business that required the organisation to grow, meet changes in how we were funded, community and customer expectations and the incorporation of new service offerings. A change from our original inception as Newcastle and Hunter Community Access. (NHCA) that commenced in 1992.

NHCA started with a grant through the University of Newcastle after local families identified a need for people with a significant disability to be able to get out into their local community. The organisation started with 4 staff and ten customers. We are proud that we still have original staff working with us and, until he passed away earlier this year Paul who was one of our first customers was still coming to ConnectAbility.

We became ConnectAbility as a way to better identify who we were and what we did within the community. The local TAFE assisted with the name and our branding which is still in use today.

As we grew we needed to meet customer requirements for activities and social interactions so moved from smaller premises firstly in Newcastle, then in 2007 to Hamilton ending now with our purpose built customer space at Warabrook in 2017 and our space at Erina to better support customer goals through spaces where people can meet friends, learn a new skill and access resources such as virtual reality, games, accessible kitchen and other technology.

Throughout the years we have considered it important that we maintained our fleet of vehicles so that people who are unable to catch public transport, or do not have family or other providers to bring them to ConnectAbility can still get out and about. Our vehicles can travel thousands of kilometers a year taking people to their desired locations. We have transported people to concerts, football games, to see families and of course from their homes to ConnectAbility and back.

As part of our growth strategy we welcomed the team and customers from Erina to the ConnectAbility family and as part of the NSW Governments' transfer of disability housing to the not for profit sector we also saw the transfer of a number of disability houses to ConnectAbility. This included nearly 90 customers and 250 staff.

During this year we also farewelled our aged care and Jesmond services to better concentrate on our core work in disabilities. In Aged Care both staff and customers were offered the choice of transferring to alternate providers. Our Adolescent and Family Counselling service was re-auspiced through the Department of Family and Community Services taking into account their new focus for the program.

While we were sad to farewell both staff, customers and families the change has allowed ConnectAbility to look at further opportunities in the disability sector that will ensure we stay current and viable for the coming years so that we can continue to meet the expectations of customers.

The landscape of disabilities has also changed since we began. Where disabilities were originally funded through the NSW Government, we saw the introduction of the NDIS that allocated funding directly to individuals and focused on providing supports that improved outcomes and allowed for clearer goals of achievement. This has of course provided challenges along the way as the scheme has constantly changed and flexed to meet different needs.

Then came COVID. This impacted all of us. We did however find ways to support people in a COVID safe way and achieved some unexpected positives. Art became an online class giving people a chance to meet up and continue their passion for creating artworks. We provided more one to one services. Customers learnt new skills, engaged in more exercise which resulted in greater health benefits and staff collaborated online around options for activities. ConnectAbility bought in updated technology so customers and families could meet virtually.

This year we have witnessed the conclusion of the Disability Royal Commission. The recommendations that will be implemented will see a major shift in how services are supplied. It is envisaged that customers should see greater flexibility within their Plans, changes in reporting and quality assurance for providers and changes to roles of people who support different services under the NDIS. There is also new disability funding becoming available outside the NDIS for supports that do not fall under the NDIS. These new changes will gradually be phased in. ConnectAbility will work through the changes to ensure our customers continue to be provided with the quality of services they expect.

The combination of customer and family expectations coupled with changes driven by the Disability Royal Commission will drive our strategic direction over the coming years. It is an exciting time for change and growth.

While this is a very brief overview of the organisation as a whole it is really the customers and community members who have shone over our thirty years and left their legacies of achievement that make us who we are today.

One young man achieved his own success in art and is now making and selling art away from ConnectAbility. For ConnectAbility there is no better outcome than having a person with a disability to not need a disability service any longer!

There is a group of young men learning work ready skills doing grounds maintenance tasks at Downer EDI. This project is a one of a kind supportive environment where the men get to be a part of the workforce, included by Downer, where they experience what it is like to work and be part of a business. The men have found a sense of purpose and self esteem and Downer have a very engaged group looking after their site. The Downer staff look forward to meeting them on site and swapping stories and experiences. We are thankful that Leanne and Anthony from Downer recognise the talents and abilities of the people attending ConnectAbility and have embraced them. This is a project with true inclusion.

We also have witnessed many small goal achievements, catching public transport, cooking a meal, finding and making friends or learning to live independently. These achievements make up the fabric of ConnectAbility and we are so proud of every achievement.

Do we do this alone, of course not. We have a great community around us from our Volunteer Board of professional people who give generously of their time and expertise to ensure our governance requirements are exceeded and to support the new projects that help us achieve our strategic direction of growth and customer excellence.

Our trades, corporate supporters and the community have also played a part in our 30 years of success. They keep us functioning well so that we can focus on our customers. Whether it is the Electrical Trades Union who let us make changes to their building to meet customer needs, DABS plumbing team looking at yet another blockage or Dynamic Business keeping the ICT up and running or Newcastle Office Interiors making yet another change to the interiors of our buildings we thank everyone of them for being part of our organisation. Your donations, prioritisation and the way you value us keeps us going.

Of course none of this would be possible without our professional and dedicated staff who continue to ensure our customers are the most important people in our organisation, what a great culture we enjoy here.

To the front line staff—thank you, you add value to our customers and make a difference to them, their families and to the community every day.

To all our Team Leader, Support Coordinators, Operational Leads, Admin and reception staff—our engine room, thank you.

To the Senior leadership team, a sincere thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to duty.

We want to express our gratitude to all the stakeholders who assist us to make a difference for everyone who comes to ConnectAbility.

David Carey CEO & Nathan Franks Chair.

FINANCIAL RESULTS 2022/2023

FINANCIAL RESULTS 2022/2023

For our full 2022/2023 Audited Statements please go to the ConnectAbility website and click on the Resources tab.

www.connectabilityaus.org.au



30 Years – It deserves a Celebration

How do you celebrate 30 years of providing support to local people that has assisted in the achievement of goals, independence, built lasting friendships, partnerships and where ConnectAbility has become part of the community?

With a Party

In fact with two parties as the Central Coast team chose to celebrate with a lunch whereas the team in the Hunter were looking for activities to enjoy.

On the Central Coast it was a lavish lunch where the team enjoyed an array of treats. People were able to catch up with friends and make new friends.

At Warabrook the weather was good, the customers excited and the food vans, petting zoo, music, photos were ready to go.

The formalities were kept short and everyone focussed on having a great time. It was a day where we celebrated with customers across the organisation, their families and friends, staff, past staff, local businesses and our corporate and community supporters.

We even had two customers who made an impromptu speech thanking us for the party which was “the best ever” (which they want to have every year) and for keeping them safe. There were a few tears shed.

We thank everyone who has been a part of our history and making us the customer focussed organisation we are.

We know that in the coming years we will be expanding and growing our services to ensure we can support more people with a disability live the lives they choose, having independence and control over how and where they are supported, where they live, who they live with and what THEY want to achieve.



We look forward to celebrating many more years to come.

WARABROOK CELEBRATIONS

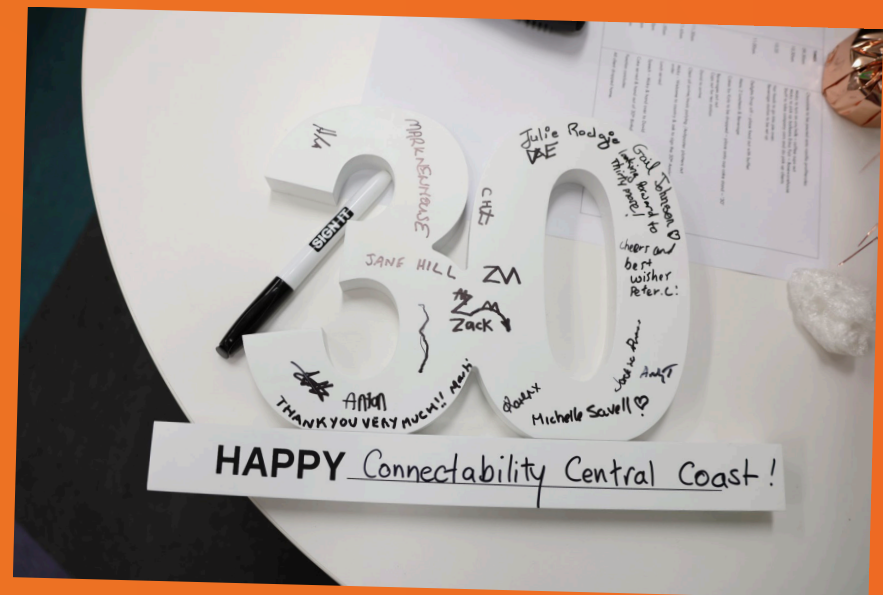








CENTRAL COAST









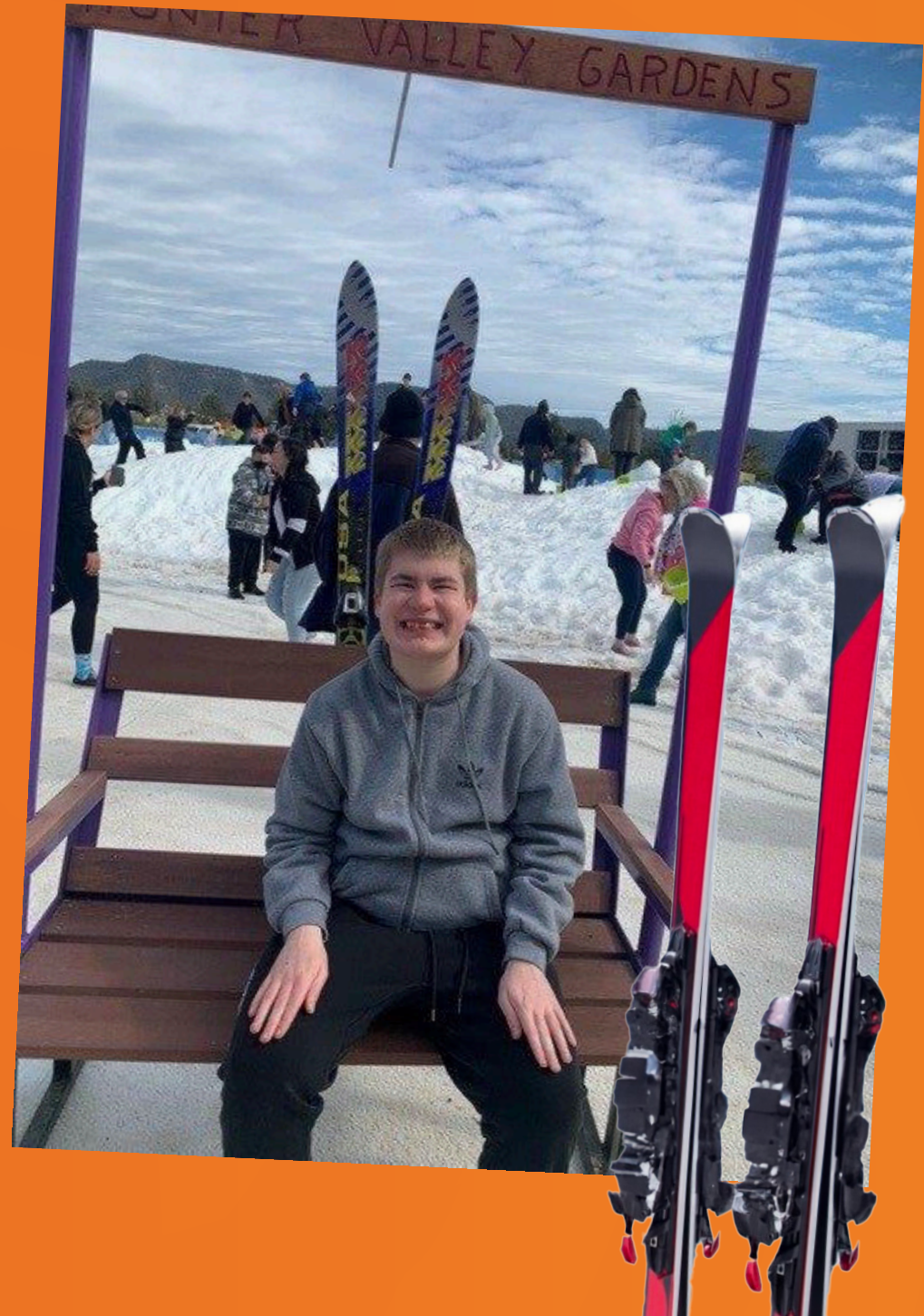
FUN IN THE SNOW—BEST DAY OUT

If there is one activity that our customers look forward to each year it is the trip to the Hunter Valley Gardens Snow Day.

Here they get to ride the slippery dip and other rides and play in the man made snow. For many people this is their first or only opportunity to be in the snow.

For some people it is a goal to make friends and this event certainly gets people together and interacting in positive ways. Some would say the activities also provide incidental exercise and therefore a healthy activity.

It is the best day and there are usually a few people in need of a quick nap in the busses on the way back.





AND THEN INTO THE SURF

A major part of living in the Hunter are our beautiful beaches. Surfing is something that many of our customers aspire to participate in as they watch friends and family enjoy the beach lifestyle.

Great exercise, great fun and an opportunity to learn some water safety skills as well.

Sometimes though it takes just a little more assistance to enjoy this activity.

Money raised through our fundraising activities allowed us to purchase surfboards and our community supports team regularly plan surfing days across the summer months.

An inclusive activity where the staff support everyone who wants to surf get out and into the water.





WHAT A DAY FOR A BIKE RIDE

Two intrepid explorers took advantage of the opportunity to swap wheelchairs for a bike ride utilising Nova Cares' special bikes. They were able to tour around Newcastle taking in the sights. While out they found a visitor to Newcastle also enjoying the sunshine.



FUNDS TO GOOD USE

Fundraising dollars — When funds are donated it is important they are used to benefit the purpose and the people they were raised for. This year we had an early and clear goal for funds from the Newcastle Office Interiors Charity Golf Day. Customers wanted a trampoline.

So here is our new trampoline. Safely installed at ground level, with soft fall and a safety net. It also has plumbing to rid the hole of any water. A very good bounce to be had by anyone. Thanks to all our tradies who helped with the install.



CUSTOMER DRIVEN ACTIVITIES

A group of friends decided they wanted to have an activity they could all enjoy. They also looked at something that would be accessible and help them stay healthy. Enter Coach Lawrence from the Belmont Tennis Club. He has worked in improving the skills of our tennis enthusiasts over many months. He has brought out the strengths of the group and everyone is now playing a better game. It has also seen improved fitness and gross motor skills for some people. Coach Lawrence is able to work with each individual and his ability to look past disability and see the person and their talents have made him a much loved member of the ConnectAbility Family.

The players also know he does not let them slacken off as he knows they are great players.



TENNIS ANYONE?



THAT NEW CAR SMELL

We all love a new vehicle. The gentlemen from Adamstown are no exception and wanted to share their excitement around the delivery of a new people mover today.

They have all been anticipating the arrival and will now be driving around the community in style and comfort while enjoying that “new car smell”

ConnectAbility keeps our fleet current for the safety and comfort of our customers that use them. Vehicles are modified dependent on the needs of the individuals. Some prefer traditional cars while others like the people movers for space or to accommodate a wheelchair .

Each of our accommodation houses have a vehicle allocated to the premises so that residents have transport available for appointments, shopping or to go to recreational activities.



COORDINATION OF SUPPORTS EQUALS ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

The National Disability Scheme (NDIS) was introduced to improve opportunities for people with a disability to meet their goals and help them become more independent and active members of the community. One area of opportunity for people is when they have coordination of supports within their NDIS Plans.

ConnectAbility Australia is registered through the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to provide Coordination of Support – “Assistance to strengthen participant’s abilities to coordinate and implement supports and participate more fully in the community.”

Coordination of Support can include initial assistance with linking people to the right providers to meet their needs, assist to find appropriate service providers, coordinate a range of supports both funded and mainstream and build on informal supports, resolving points of crisis, parenting training and developing connections important to people in their community.

The NDIA has a three-tiered approach to funded coordination of support

Support Connection

Supports are time limited (e.g. 1 hour per week) supports to strengthen people’s ability to connect with informal, mainstream and funded support, and to increase capacity to maintain support relationships, resolve service delivery issues, and participate independently in managing their NDIS supports and plans.

Support Coordination

This level assists to strengthen abilities to connect to and coordinate informal, mainstream and funded support in a complex service delivery environment. This includes resolving points of crisis, developing capacity and resilience in a person’s

support networks and coordinating supports from a range of service providers who may be required to help meet those needs and goals e.g. behaviour support; speech therapy; occupational therapy; physiotherapy.

Specialist Support Coordination

The highest tier of support set within a therapeutic framework, necessitated by specific high level risk in a person’s situation. This support is time limited and focuses on addressing high risk/complex barriers and reducing complexity in the support environment, while assisting people to connect with appropriate supports and services.

Coordination of Support will only be provided by ConnectAbility for time-limited periods as negotiated with each person and their NDIA planner. ConnectAbility has three Coordinators of Support available to assist people to link services to goals.

Over the past year the Coordinators of support have assisted people to achieve their goals. Some of these have included :

- living independently
- linking them with external services
- Supporting people through change in circumstances
- Skill and capacity building
- Sourcing and engaging allied health professionals
- Assisting with a change in service provider

Each member of the team is committed to seeing individuals gain skills, achieve goals and build their capacity to lead lives as independently as they choose.

FROM ERINA TO ANYWHERE!

The Royal Easter Show

Everyone loves the Royal Easter Show – including ConnectAbility customers living on the Central Coast. To ensure they got to be included in this yearly event, staff had the bus packed early in the morning for the drive down.

Customers then spent a great day at the Royal Easter Show . Whats not to love – the pavilions and displays, animals, rides, sideshows and food. A great day out.



OPPORTUNITIES AND ACHIEVEMENT

The Central Coast continues to be an area of growth for ConnectAbility, built on the foundation of the organisation's values and the vision of creating fulfilling opportunities for people and communities through our passion.

One on one community support remains a popular service on the Central Coast, with ConnectAbility's Direct Support Workers assisting customers with activities of their choice. These supports include companionship, developing living skills and encouraging our customers to pursue their interests. At times, our Direct Support Workers can suggest different activities or options for our customers, especially if they are not sure what they would like to do that day. Our Direct Support Workers accompany customers to medical appointments, shopping, as well as participating in recreational activities including ten pin bowling, going to the gym, swimming, fishing, lunch at a social venue or simply going to the park for a walk or to sit and watch the whales migrate from many of the Central Coast's vantage points. Our community support programs are tailored to each of our customers and can be as busy or as laid back as our customers choose. ConnectAbility additionally maintains pool cars for our Direct Support Workers to use if our customers request them.

Michaele and Michelle have also organised small activity groups at the Erina office location. In the large multipurpose space they have been able to support people to establish friendships while enjoying creative activities.

Michaele continues to be involved within the Central Coast community so that she can share opportunities with customers. Her goal to ensure they are included and able to participate fully in local life.

Another service that is valued by our customers and the Central Coast community is our support co-ordination program. Our Co-ordinator of Support staff assist our customers with all aspects of the NDIS, helping to navigate the NDIS process including review meetings, managing customer service budgets, liaising with other service providers and allied health professionals. Co-ordinator of Support

staff ultimately provide a holistic service to our customers to ensure that their NDIS package is maximised to their full advantage.

ConnectAbility is set for another exciting year as we continue to grow our presence on the Central Coast. Key objectives are to focus on providing person centred services to our customers, ensuring services are flexible, innovative and meet best practice; increase our engagement with the community by raising ConnectAbility's profile; and to provide the support and structure required for staff to effectively support our customers and each other.



OUT AND ABOUT ON THE CENTRAL COAST

Sailability

The freedom of being out on the water and feeling in charge of the boat.
Our customers from the Central Coast enjoyed the spring weather and got out on the water.



Gail, who lives on the Central Coast spent a day not just achieving one of her goals but she also had a brilliant day out as she worked with the horses.





SUPPORTING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

A small step leads to bigger outcomes

Our Garden Harvest

Our first harvest was put to good use in the Warabrook kitchen. Our Monday Life Skills group has worked really hard growing vegetables to use when cooking. Scraps go back into compost for the garden. We would love to grow a diverse range of vegetables and salad items. If you have, or know anyone who might have seedlings or seeds they could donate to the group they would be very welcome.





NO BARRIERS TO SPORTING ACHIEVEMENTS

A new skill and new friendships

Lawn Bowls – A new sport

This is the Thursday Lawn Bowls group who head to Redhead Bowling club each Thursday for a game. Redhead club kindly let us use their bowls and have someone at hand to help out. They also kindly let us utilize the covered area for the duration of our visits. Everyone is supported to play to the best of their abilities and to develop new skills.





A COMMUNITY IN ACTION

GOLF DAY 2023

On the 17th March 2023—St Patricks Day the seventh annual ConnectAbility Golf Day dawned at Waratah Golf Club. A beautiful day and the spirits of players were high. Again we chose to include another charity –REACH Homeless Services to join us as a beneficiary for the day. REACH provide supports to those at risk or who are homeless in the Hunter. Their supports are particularly needed over the weekends when traditional support options are closed.

Players from local and Sydney based business joined us to see who could beat ConnectAbility CEO David Carey from being the “top” player. Apparently not the hardest task David believes. David brings a huge bucket of balls just for himself to get through the course. Kerry Houghton stepped up once again to manage the golfing parts of the day. He is a driving force in ensuring the success of the event and assisting ConnectAbility in hosting such a fun and successful event. We again had fantastic support for the hole sponsorship and the novelty events tested even the best players. Luckily they were well fortified by a good and hearty breakfast and with the promise of a great lunch. Crema Coffee kindly ensured there was also caffeine to keep people going throughout the day by setting up and donating coffee services.

The drinks cart was in high demand and led to a decrease in skill for some players. It was St Patricks’ Day after all!

Many were still celebrating late into the evening. Sharing the skills (maybe some tall tales) from the day.

Our major sponsors were back again so special thanks to:
Major sponsor— Jock Whyte and the Newcastle Office Interiors team
Drink Cart Sponsor —Anthony Green and all the DABS plumbers
Lunch Sponsor—Connor Perry—Moneylinks
Our Golf Guru—Kerry Houghton—Jims Carpet Cleaning

Thanks to everyone who donated prizes, sponsored holes, bought lucky numbers and attended. Without their generosity the golf day would not go ahead.

Many of the teams that played had a connection to either ConnectAbility or to someone living with a disability or to REACH and their services. Players felt it was an opportunity to make a difference while also connecting with other local businesses.

Upon course completion many stayed to network and celebrate achievements from the day. Players again showed their support through the raffles on offer and through generously sponsoring holes. A great way to get noticed on the course. The success of the golf day raised much needed funds to enable ConnectAbility to provide supports to more people with a disability. Customers had requested a trampoline and funds will now be put into its purchase and installation. REACH can now provide additional meals and supports to vulnerable people . The support of the businesses and individuals that came to play golf and support ConnectAbility and REACH Homeless Services directly make an impact upon the achievements of others.

Please contact us now if you would like to play in our next golf day at Waratah Golf Club Argenton.







DO YOU REMEMBER



THESE MOMENTS AT CONNECTABILITY?



IT IS THE PEOPLE



WHO MAKE CONNECTABILITY

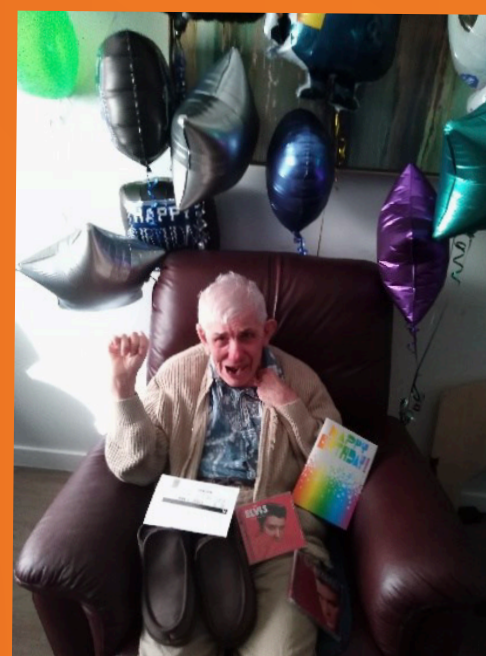


THANK YOU



FOR OUR MEMORIES





CELEBRATIONS & MARKING MILESTONES

Community Living is about home, family, friends, community and celebrating events that are important and mark life's milestones. Karla, the Senior Leader for Community Living (SDA & SIL) ensures that no one misses out on enjoying life.

Each year residents and staff celebrate Christmas together in the way that residents choose, whether out in the community or at home together with family and friends.

Birthdays, Easter, NAIDOC Week, ANZAC Day are all reason for people to get together in different ways. Some choose to dress up such as our ladies who celebrated their birthdays by dressing up in 60's groovy outfits followed by another party where The Wizard from Oz was chosen as the theme.

Thanks to the ConnectAbility team who ensured friends were also able to attend the parties.

Melbourne Cup brought out a love for dressing up and pretty hats. Easter was a time where some decided to cook a bountiful feast to share. Community Living – more than a title. Staff ensure it is a way of life, often getting into the spirit of events with residents and ensuring everyone lives their best life. Being able to celebrate with other members of the community and each other.



OUR BOARD—GOOD GOVERNANCE



Nathan Franks Chair

Nathan joined the CoM in 2015 to support ConnectAbility through sharing his ICT skills. He has expertise in cloud computing, information technology and managed services. Nathan is constantly seeking new ways to bring the future of ICT to ConnectAbility. Nathan has a strong commitment to the community and has been integral in developing strategic measures to allow advances in the way that ConnectAbility works as an organisation.

Nathan has been able to assist the organization navigate the current cybersecurity environment and provide the other Board members with information and an overview on ensuring data management. He maintains expert and up to date knowledge on the latest offerings and trends in this space for new ICT applications that can support our networks.



Luke Sessions

Luke is the principal of Sessions Legal and an experienced property and commercial lawyer. He established Sessions Legal was in 2013 after working for more than 10 years as a lawyer in local and national law firms. Luke enjoys being a lawyer and works in an environment where you are able to help people achieve their goals. A desire to help people and contribute to the wider community is the reason Luke jumped at the chance to join the ConnectAbility Board.

His knowledge gained by working closely with ConnectAbility has supported the organisation in growing such as the purchase of property.



Bernie Garrett Deputy Chair

Bernie Garrett has over 25 years of corporate leadership and sales management roles in Australia and 10 years working and living in China. Bernie has a focus on developing professional teams through his leadership principles and making a difference in their business and personal lives. His vision is to develop organisations, team and individuals to reach their full potential through his Sales and Leadership programs, along with his motivational talks to develop their true potential.

He currently works within the mining sector and understands the pressures of change and scale to ensure viability. He also advocates for the “right person in the right job” to achieve strategic goals.



Sue Carter

Sue has a clinical background, having worked in the Public Health space over many years. Sue has also specialised in strategy and planning. She joined the ConnectAbility Board in 2022 with an aim to improve outcomes for customers.

Sue said that working in the field of disability is relatively new for her, and as the most recent appointment to the Board of Connectability, she has found herself on a steep learning curve which thus far, has found it to be both challenging and highly satisfying.

Sue is now retired, having worked for almost 40 years in the public health system. Sue started as a trainee nurse at Royal Newcastle Hospital in 1979 and ended her career working for NSW Health Pathology leading their statewide planning and performance services.

Sue said of her reason for applying to be a Board member;

“I applied to be on the Board of Connectability as I felt it was time for me to give something back to the community. I was interested in working for an organisation that is making a real difference in people’s lives. Connectability supports people with a disability to live as independently as possible – positively impacting the lives of our clients and their families.

I hope to continue to serve on the Board and be a strong advocate for people living with a disability.”



Joan Gatt

Joan joined the CoM in November 2008 and is a customer representative. Joan has a adult son with a disability and volunteers with the service to assist in his support. Having day to day experiencensuring dataes in supporting her son and dealing with Government, other providers and allied health services gives Joan a real time experience of disability life. Joan’s advice and support is vital in ensuring customer and family needs are at the forefront of our supports. During COVID her lived experiences in the health system supported our organization in how we supported individuals.

CONNECTABILITY SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

As a not for profit organisation being able to give back to the community that supports us is something we are proud to be a part of, hence ConnectAbility's continued sponsorship and involvement with Surfest. Colin Law had the original idea of crowdfunding the Surfest women's event with the Newcastle and Hunter business community showing its support for the Surfest Women's Pro by crowd funding the event to a WSLQS6000 level.

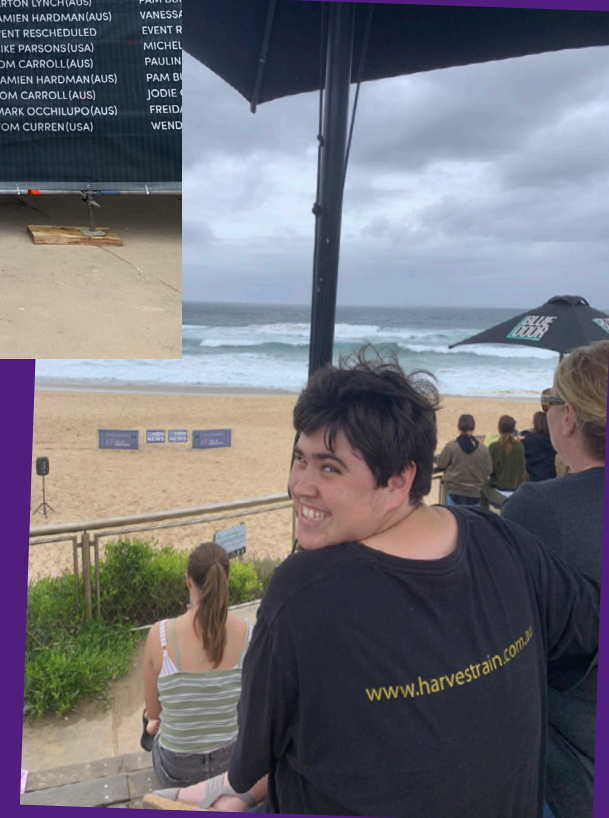
Surfest has for three generations placed Newcastle on the national and international stage. The crowd funding initiative is just another part of that rich history of this iconic event. It brings the community together and raises the awareness of the womens event.

Surfest, like ConnectAbility is also about developing the potential of the participants and assisting them reach their goals and ambitions. Our customers enjoy the opportunity to get out each February and be involved. It is an opportunity to meet these fantastic role models and get involved in the activities on the beach.

Our "allocated surfer" is keenly followed and everyone loves to get an autograph. It is also an opportunity to break down social barriers, see the benefits of sport on your health and learn about perseverance when trying to achieve your goals.

We are pleased to be able to be a part of this great event. We also received promotion at the event as part of the initiative and attendance at promotional activities.

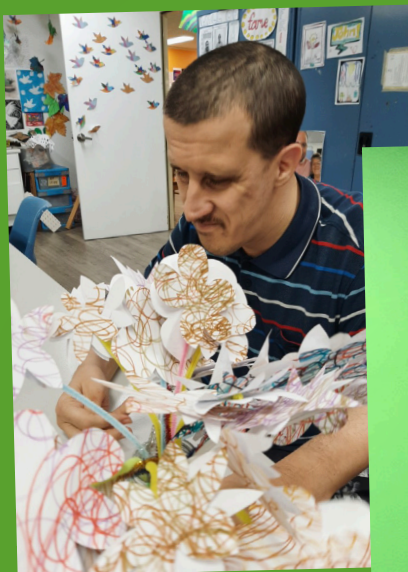
We look forward to participating again in 2024.



RESPECT

Remembrance Day

Customers across the organisation made artwork and poppies as a mark of respect for Remembrance Day for those who made the ultimate sacrifice



IMPROVEMENTS TO HOUSING— MEETING CUSTOMER NEEDS

Community Living

As we age our needs change and it is no different for those with a disability. Once we identified that at one of our Community Living homes the small bathroom with separate toilet was becoming too difficult to use for our customers both the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) (home owner) and Evolve Housing (Manage the properties for DCJ) were quick to plan for rectification. They worked closely with staff, customers and Allied Health professionals to ensure the new bathroom exceeded the needs.

At the same time they made minor improvements to the entrance layout of the home so anyone who now has additional mobility issues can safely navigate around the house.

The building works were carried out while residents remained at home. This meant they needed to be flexible with working times, how rubbish and demolition were handled and ensuring that there was a thorough cleanup completed each day.

The project came in on time and any small area needing attention was quickly dealt with. Customers and staff are very happy and thankful for the quick response that has enabled residents to continue to live independently.



OUR SENIOR

David Carey CEO

Over the past 25 years I have been involved in the community services sector.

With the advent of the National Disability Insurance Scheme a greater focus has been placed on participants and families to truly individualise services they receive and how and when they receive those services. ConnectAbility continue to work closely with families and customers to ensure goals are met. Services cannot be delivered without a cohesive team, from the committee of management, to staff, volunteers, managers and office staff and many thanks for your commitment to providing these much needed services to the community.

With the changes that will no doubt flow from the Disability Royal Commission more focus will be on providers to ensure quality and compliance. ConnectAbility will continue to adapt and incorporate the recommendations so that customers and families feel secure in the services offered.

As CEO I will continue to explore opportunities for growth and technology improvements that provide efficiencies in our back office administration.

I hope that through good governance together we can continue to build a strong and resilient organisation that staff and customers are proud to be a part of.

Leigh Tull CFO

Leigh has a Bachelor of Commerce and is a CPA. With over 20 years experience in large corporate and NFP organisations Leigh is well equipped to ensure the viability and growth of the organisation. Leigh though, sees her objective somewhat differently. “My role is not just about planning, monitoring and being strategic about the finances of the organisation but about the impact of those decisions on the people we support” said Leigh. “Being able to see an impact for an individual through the work that you do is extremely rewarding”

“It is also a challenging and therefore interesting environment to work within, no day is the same which gives you variety. As changes to funding, policy or rates are implemented by the NDIA or Dept of Health and Ageing it provides a constant need to look for additional savings or project potential opportunity” Leigh understands the limitations financially for customers, families and ConnectAbility and works to achieve best outcomes. Her human approach to finance is often appreciated by both staff and families trying to navigate the NDIS and its implications and opportunities.

Helga Smit Business & Engagement Leader

Helga is an accomplished and pro-active senior leader with a strong humanistic and quality orientation. Over 20 years of varied international experience in Strategy, Operations and HR across For-Profit and For-Purpose (NFP) sectors that provides valuable perspective to executive teams and boards, cultivating a sense of partnerships across the organisation and setting the focus and strategies for best possible business results in a customer-centric manner. Balancing a drive for growth with fiscal responsibility and emphasis on corporate governance whilst empowering employees and local community.

Helga has an Honours bachelors in Industrial sociology, cert IV in training and assessment, advanced diploma in community sector management, diploma in quality auditing with a NDIS focus and also graduate of Australian institute of company directors.

Helga started her career in South Africa in HR & Training and then moved to the United Arab Emirates to continue in this field for various international organisations before settling in Australia. She has lead major community sector projects with a strong focus on people with disabilities.

Helga said of her role

“I can bring my international commercial experience to operate on business principles in a sector which delivers solutions to people needing support services. Having the ability to make a difference is such a big reward. I count myself blessed to be a part of the change we want to see in the world.”

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Scott Harvey

Senior Leader Community Disability

Scott has been with ConnectAbility for over 25 years. Scott has worked across many roles with ConnectAbility and was appointed as Operations Manager in 2010. He has overseen many changes in the disability sector including the successful transition of ConnectAbility to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and ensured the continued growth and diversification in service delivery and development. Scott stays at the forefront of changes within the disability sector and the NDIA so that customers and their families continue to get the most from their funding and have choice and control on how they live their lives.

Scott supported the family and adolescent counsellors located at Jesmond until they transitioned out as part of the funding changes from Government. Their roles provided outcomes including greater family cohesiveness and gave young people strategies to grow personally.

Scott said of his role:

“Our primary focus still continues to be to create opportunities for people to achieve their dreams, goals and identify further aspirations as their independence, confidence and control grows.”

Scott continues to lead with humour and practical solutions for everyday problems.

Karla Seaman

Senior Leader Community Living (SIL & SDA)

After starting out as a Pharmacist, Karla found her passion in working with people with a disability and older adults. Karla has a Bachelor’s degree in Pharmacy, a post graduate certificate in Pharmacy, a Master’s in Clinical Epidemiology and a PhD in Government Policy Reform and Pharmacoeconomics.

Karla has worked across many sectors including health, not-for-profit and academia. This has enabled a combination of multiple perspectives along with a drive to implement evidence-based practice to achieve the desired outcomes for our customers and their support networks. This is demonstrated in her role as Senior Leader for Community Living overseeing the operations of 20 homes.

Karla has looked for opportunities to improve supports for residents. This has included the introduction of an electronic medication management system and rolling out updated technology to each home.

Her passion though is ensuring the holistic wellbeing of people. Karla encourages celebration and activities that bring joy.

Karla said of her role:

“The customers are at the centre of everything we do. We strive to ensure we promote and create participation and engagement opportunities through the development and nurturing of relations with all our customers and their support networks.”

SUPPORTING OTHERS

Supporting each other – Hope's contribution

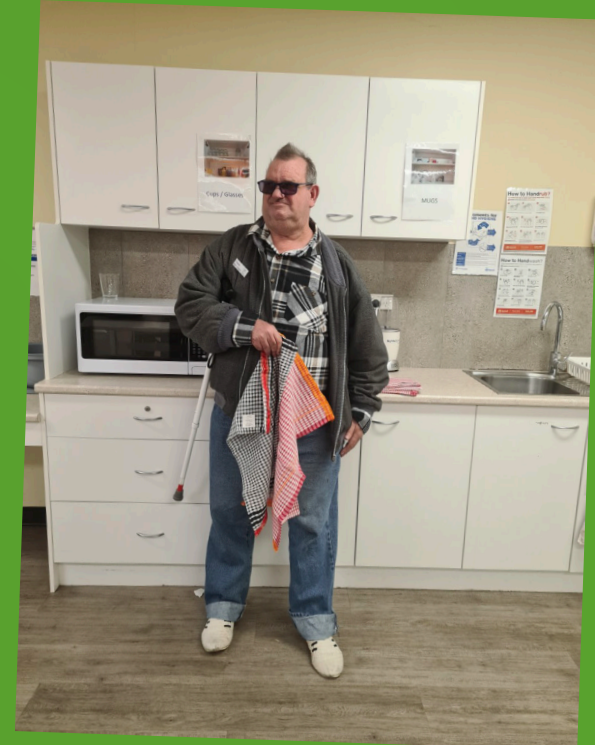
REACH Homeless Services provide nutritional food supplements, toiletries and referral supports for those who are homeless or at risk in Newcastle. Having a disability doesn't stop Hope from wanting to assist others. Hope has spent time packing food packs that REACH will distribute to those in need. She does a fantastic job and it will make a difference. Both REACH and ConnectAbility are proud of her efforts.

Finding volunteers has been more difficult for many charities following COVID so having Hope step up has meant that REACH can assist more local people. A great partnership.



Richard and his mum— giving together

Sometimes it is the little things that make such a difference, Richard and his mum recognize that when people spend lots of time creating beautiful food in our accessible kitchen the other outcome is lots of drying up. Thanks to Richard and his mum for making and decorating T towels that get used every day at ConnectAbility. Recently we also had some extra special ones that we were able to use as prizes at our Christmas Party. This terrific duo contributes an essential services to ConnectAbility. Thanks to you both!



WE SUPPORT CONNECTABILITY

Why are supporters so important to ConnectAbility, what outcomes are achieved through their involvement and, why should you become involved? What type of supports are possible?

Newcastle Office Interiors

ConnectAbility are good at supporting outcomes and goal achievement for our customers. We are not so good (or legally allowed) at building those spaces. Enter Newcastle Office Interiors. Jock Whyte and his team have been supporting ConnectAbility for over seven years create beautiful and innovative spaces that make it possible to support people learn and have fun in a home like environment. They fit both our budgets and timeframes—often working out of hours and on weekends to avoid disruption to customer activities. They are also on hand for free build and compliance advice and to make those yearly repairs to our buildings that get well used over the year.

Jock and his team have also been the major sponsor at the ConnectAbility golf days—most of the build teams being out on the course raising money that ultimately provides the extras for our customers that give them better life experiences such as the in ground trampoline newly installed at Warabrook. They are a major part of our organisation that we are blessed to have as a partner.



Marsh Insurances

Insurance—generosity and community giving. Not the things you normally think go together. Insurance is a necessity for ConnectAbility, whether it be for our fleet, buildings, contents or business coverage.

Marsh Insurance has been protecting our assets and security for a few years now.

A local business that believes they should give back to the community and regularly donate to a variety of organisations including ConnectAbility.

The donation is welcome and used to purchase items for our learning and sensory programs. As these items often have short life spans it is a real benefit to have funds to either replace or purchase additional products.



All our customers, families, community and corporates who support us each and every day.

Ambassador Locksmiths

BNI Chapters Newcastle

Carpet Diem

Chamberlain Brown Property Acquisitions

City & Regional Cleaning

Commonwealth Bank

ConnectAbility Board

Concept BSG

ConnectAbility Board

DABS Plumbing

Dynamic Business Technologies

Downer EDI

Electrical Trades Union

Ethos Health

Form 1 Fire

Jayes Travel—Michelle Barker

JD Electrical

Jezweb team

Juice Plus

Kerry Houghton – Jim's Carpet Cleaning

Liz Murray—Edge of Possibilities

Marsh Insurance

Michael Cain

Nathan Finney

Newcastle Community Arts Centre

Newcastle City Council

Newcastle Office Interiors

Newcastle Toyota

Newcastle University—Forum Gym

Newvo Communications

Phil Moore—Nova Graphic Design

Pitcher Partners

Prosperity Salary Packaging

Presence Real Estate & Property Management

Smallman Security

Superior Pest Management

The Forum

Titan Graphics

Transcend Health

UrbanOps P/L

WHO Printing Newcastle

YCM Photography

We would love your support—Please think of us when choosing to donate to a charity or leave a bequest.

Your generosity will make sure people with a disability get to live

“THEIR BEST LIFE”

Continue to make a difference in your community

Call our office today



From everyone at ConnectAbility a sincere THANK YOU
The support of our community, families and businesses ensures that we continue to
achieve our goals and be active members of the community



THANK YOU TO ALL OUR STAFF WHO ENSURE OUR CUSTOMERS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE AT CONNECTABILITY

Part of the furniture—Jillian Woollard From Support Worker to Coordinator of Supports

My name is Jillian Woollard, I started with Connectability Australia in 1994, which back then was known as Newcastle and Hunter Community Access. I began my journey in a little cottage in Murray Street Hamilton where I was one of 4 employees who supported 16 Individuals 1:1 with complex support needs.

The organization stemmed from a survey conducted by the University of Newcastle regarding unmet need.

It was identified that there were individuals living in the Newcastle and surrounding regions that basically fell between the cracks. These individuals weren't able to access support due to their diagnosis and inability to attend a day program centre or access the community in a group, which at the time were the only options on offer.

State funded block funding was made available and the organization began to provide support auspiced by the University of Newcastle. Customer applications were prioritized through a sub-committee at which time if the individual met the criteria typically they were allocated a day a week support using available block funding.

When I commenced, it was in the role as a casual community support worker.

I was fresh out of university and keen to put my new learnt skills into practice. Once I commenced, I knew that I had found my calling and perhaps even my long-term employer of choice. It was not long before an opportunity came forward for a permanent full-time position as a community support worker.

I remember fondly sitting in front of an interview panel which consisted of our secretary Dallas Barwick, manager at the time Mark Grierson as well as our much loved customer Vicki Haslam.

I was successful in gaining the position and enjoyed a few years within this role.

Not long after I commenced in this position our Manager resigned and our new manager Chris Morris commenced

Connectability moved from Hamilton and moved to King Street Newcastle. It was at this time that another opportunity came forward. This time as a Team leader, I was once again successful in my application and started my new role as team leader which I held for quite a number of years.

Connectability once again moved, this time from King street and set up shop in the Hunter Street Mall.

It soon became evident that Connectability had grown to a stage that we yet again needed bigger premises, so another move was again on the cards.

Hudson Street Hamilton was our new home where I continued to work as a Team Leader.

I also took on the role of Return-to-Work Coordinator and sat on the WHS Committee for many years.

The one thing that many will remember at our Hamilton office was how crazy parking was of a morning and afternoon at drop off and pick up times. Team Leaders and Management took it in turns to manage the traffic coming in and out of the carpark with our bright orange vests often having to manage the frustrations of other residents within the complex who had zero understanding or empathy for people with disabilities. On one occasion I remember a heated discussion from a resident within the complex even threatening to run staff and customers over as they didn't want to wait to get out the carpark. We can look back now and laugh about it, thankfully nobody was ever injured although we did manage to put a vehicle through the wall of that residents building accidentally.....

Whilst at our Hamilton site unfortunately our Manager at the time Karen Stace resigned and for a period of time I took on the role as Operations Manager whilst Scott Harvey also stepped up into the position of Manager.

This opportunity provided me with many opportunities to broaden my skills from a management point of view. It was also at this time that Newcastle was identified as a trial site for the new NDIS scheme.

At this time I took on a new role as NDIS transition Manager and successfully transitioned all existing Connectability customers over to the new scheme. That time was quite challenging but also rewarding as I learnt a lot during this space of time. I also had the opportunity to speak at the CEO conference in Sydney regarding Connectability's experience of the NDIS as part of the trial site.

I was also fortunate to be part of a panel discussion at a conference in Dubbo where once again this was used to assist other organisations transitioning

to the new scheme by hearing stories of the achievements and barriers Connectability had experienced.

One last time Connectability was on the move to yet another premises that was big enough to cater for our ever growing client base. An opportunity for a purpose built client hub was also an exciting time at our new facility at Warabrook.

With the new NDIS scheme a further opportunity afforded itself where I was successful in gaining a position as NDIS Coordinator of Support, a position that I still hold to this day.

I am passionate about my current position as I love working with the individual customers, families and stakeholders and feel that fellow Coordinators and I are able to work affectively in managing customer budgets and assisting our customers to achieve their goals and live their best life.

In March 2024 I have been with Connectability for 30 years....it's hard to believe that I have been with the company for over half of my lifetime. The reason I am still here is because I love working for a company that is ethical and supportive as well as person centred in their approach to providing support to the customers we work for.

Hopefully Connectability will continue to be my employer of choice for years to come and I thank them for the support and many opportunities that I have had over almost 30 years.

Jill (Left) and Michelle (Right) – with us since the beginning. Thank you ladies



RECYCLING

The crafty team at ConnectAbility decided to recycle some of their old T Shirts to save waste. They did some research and came up with the idea of making them into bags. Fantastic effort to reduce landfill.



Support Us— Together we can achieve anything!

If you are an individual or business and would like to make a real difference for people living in our community please call our reception and talk to Margaret on 4962 1000 to discuss the many ways you may be able to assist. This could be through direct supports, staff giving or sharing your skills, passions and expertise. **We would love to hear from you!!**

FAREWELLS

We remember those we lost but still hold in our hearts.

We hope that the families continue to think of ConnectAbility as part of their family.

CONTACT US

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E-mail: contact@connectabilityaus.org.au
Web: www.connectabilityaus.org.au

About ConnectAbility

ConnectAbility Australia was founded in 1992 by a group of community members and families to meet the needs of people with significant disabilities to provide opportunities to access community based resources, facilities and services. Since then ConnectAbility have grown to include disability accommodation.

We now provide a broad range of personalised supports to people with disabilities.

ConnectAbility customers reside throughout Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens, Maitland, Central Coast, and other Lower Hunter local government areas.

Our approach is personal, flexible and centred on the person. If you are a person with a disability looking to achieve goals and dreams or live a more independent life ConnectAbility will work with you and, should you choose, those closest to you to ensure you achieve your goals. ConnectAbility also support better relationships through family and adolescent counselling.

ConnectAbility look at creating meaningful relationships and true inclusion for people within the community.

Whether you are looking to live independently, undertake further education and training, volunteer work or recreational activities using local facilities such as libraries, parks, gyms, shopping centres and other recreational venues ConnectAbility can work with individuals to address any barriers that exist for people being able to achieve their goals, dreams and aspirations.

We actively seek community and corporate supports and partners to further enhance opportunities and outcomes.

ConnectAbility Australia is a not for profit company limited by guarantee, and is registered as a gift deductible recipient with tax charity concessions. We are governed by a Board consisting of volunteer community and consumer representatives. This report reviews our activities and operations for 2022/2023. Many of our supporters have had input into the information in the report and have allowed their photos to be used and we are grateful for their contributions. It is also a celebration of the achievements of the individuals and families who use our services and we thank all of them for allowing us to use their photos and share their stories in this report. Additional copies of this report can be obtained from our office, website or by contacting us by e-mail, phone or post.

We would welcome any feedback about this report or about any aspect of our operations.



**What goals and dreams
can we achieve together
in the next 30 years?**

**Supporting local
people achieve**

