



connect
ABILITY
AUSTRALIA

Annual Report 2025

(Front cover) ConnectAbility customer Cheyenne at ConnectAbility's 2024 International Day of People with Disability event.

Areas We Service



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ConnectAbility staff used their specialised skills and experience to build confidence and important life skills for Aboriginal children involved in the Ngarralingayil Yarramalong Program via the Aurizon Grant, see page 40.

Acknowledgement Of Country

At ConnectAbility, we have the honour to support people on the traditional lands of the Awabakal and Worimi peoples in Newcastle, Warabrook and Port Stephens; the Worimi, Wonnarua and Darkinjung peoples in the Hunter and Upper Hunter regions, including Kurri Kurri; the Darkinjung, Wonnarua and Awabakal peoples in Muswellbrook and Ashtonfield; the Wonnarua and Awabakal peoples in Cessnock; and the GuriNgai and Darkinjung peoples on the Central Coast.

We acknowledge the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to these lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and recognise their strength, resilience and enduring custodianship.

We celebrate diversity and welcome all people, regardless of ethnicity, faith, orientation or gender identity.



ConnectAbility CEO David Carey and Chairman Nathan Franks.

Welcome from the CEO and Chairman

Every year I say this – it has been another whirlwind year with so much happening for ConnectAbility and the NDIS sector. So what is new and what has changed?

Since 2017, our Warabrook facility has been the hub of ConnectAbility; offering a place for our valued customers to participate in social and recreational events and serving as a bustling operational centre for our many teams of employees. In October 2024, we celebrated purchasing this custom, fit-for-purpose property, to ensure the long-term sustainability for the thousands of staff and customers who visit our facility.

This year we were proud to be awarded a NDIS grant of half-a-million dollars, selected as one of only 44 organisations out of the 16,000 registered and 244,000 non-registered NDIS providers. The grant aims

to explore what defines quality in Supported Independent Living (SIL) services – particularly in the areas of complex behaviour and complex health requirements. The review will take into account staff costs, rostering, training and technology requirements. The NDIS will evaluate the data from the 44 organisations to gain a clear picture of the true costs involved for a quality SIL provider to deliver quality care that supports participants health and wellbeing. The project will be completed by June 2026 but take a further year to collate and define. I truly hope this project does not sit on the shelf.

Last year I spoke about our partnership with a Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) housing provider. Our role is to advocate for the long-term needs of the participants we have responsibility for. Therefore, this partnership did not progress due to a fundamental difference in the direction required. I am happy to share that we are working with two other SDA providers who are experienced in building accessible and innovative homes in a NDIS context. This will be a multi-year project, and each build is different due to block size and position, location and participant requirements – as well as our requirements. The development of house plans is quite complex.

On the back of the merger with Early Links we successfully rebranded our business and logo. The board and I are pleased with the refreshed look, which is keeping with our past, present and future. Staff had a say in the designs and what you see this year is a majority vote by staff.

This year has seen another acquisition with an organisation we have known and worked with for many years: Finding Yellow. We have a proud, long history of providing services in Cessnock. For many years they were known as 'Cessnock Hostel' and some

years back changed their name to Finding Yellow. We look forward to continuing services with the same staff providing support to participants in Cessnock and surrounding districts.

It has been very busy in the allied health space. With new offices in Maitland and Muswellbrook, both are welcoming environments for our staff and families to receive services in. Those who have had to move offices will appreciate how much planning and communication go into making it occur. We are at the front-end commencing trials for new Allied Health & Capacity services that will operate separately to NDIS. We are hoping to fill much needed services in these boutique areas.

Our contract with the NSW Department of Education continues along with our consortium partners of First Chance and Hunter Prelude. This contract does great work supporting kids in schools and is delivered with other partners across NSW.

The Government's announcement to change direction for children's allied health support from the NDIS to State based foundational supports poses some risk and uncertainty for all allied health providers. Very recently the Federal Government announced "Thriving Kids" program independent to the States being aware and is due to come into effect by July 2026 and will mean transitioning children under seven years of age from NDIS to Medicare. A lot of detail of how this will work in practice without impacting those children and families involved is yet to be revealed.

What has not changed for over 18 months is the lack of progress on the recommendations



made by the Royal Commission to the Federal Government. This silence leaves the whole sector wondering will nothing happen or will we face a wave of reform in a short time frame that cannot be met? At the heart of the issue is inadequate funding. Quality providers who deliver significantly more support and meet higher compliance requirements for participants with complex needs are still funded at the same hourly rate as those supporting basic support needs. This mismatch undermines sustainability and viability.

Meanwhile, NDIS providers have been broadly painted as fraudulent or offering poor quality care. The case of 'throw enough mud and it sticks' is true. It has been a hard climb for quality providers to rise above this in the public's eye, to rebuild trust.

Slow reforms within the NDIS have been a cyclical issue for over a decade. This is further compounded by a prolonged absence of stable leadership and direction, with acting appointments and key vacancies across executive and board levels.

The other key reform area which is moving at a snail's pace is registering all the non-registered providers, which sits with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. This is a key reform to give families and the public reassurance that high and medium risk activities will require non-registered organisations to submit reportable incidents, have independent auditors seek evidence, check training is done, interview participants, staff and families to ensure quality and safe support is an embedded practice from Board

to frontline staff. The Commission faces huge challenges to do what is right as this means potentially requiring over 200,000 providers to register so there is visibility of what they do. Currently the Commission only has enough auditors to service the 16,000 registered providers.

It's wonderful to witness the fun happening at ConnectAbility. Our annual Fun Day has been another success and is now in its third year. Each year, we acknowledge the good work of staff and thank participants for their trust in ConnectAbility. Our annual Christmas parties have become huge, every year we are bursting at the seams to get everyone in! All our Supported Independent Living homes celebrate Christmas in various ways that the participants ask for.

This year, ConnectAbility joined the Observership Program, which offers aspiring board members hands-on experience in governance. With around 250 applicants seeking limited positions across the East Coast, we were fortunate to host two Observers. Their participation included attending Board and Executive meetings and visiting our Warabrook Hub. This was a positive experience for both parties. Programs like this strengthen the not-for-profit sector by developing future board-ready talent.

As we look ahead to the next five years, it's clear that commitment and clarity from government for the reform process will be essential. Thoughtful and methodical consultation with the NDIS sector must be prioritised to ensure future changes are implemented with minimal disruption to participants and their families.

It has been a privilege to mark 10 years as CEO. While much has changed during this time, our commitment to this community remains our heart. Among change and reform, we will continue to listen, stay connected to the real needs of our people, and act as advocates and changemakers. I have great confidence in our ability to deliver thanks to our dedicated and trusted team.

To the Board of ConnectAbility - thank you for your voluntary commitment and your "can do" approach to complex challenges. To the Executive Leadership Team - thank you for your support, commitment and the volume of solutions and actions you've delivered. Managing merger deadlines alongside your day-to-day responsibilities is no small feat. I'm incredibly proud of the depth of knowledge and experience we've collectively acquired - expertise few others possess. Well done!

To all our leaders and admin support staff - thank you for keeping our operations running like clockwork and for maintaining a high standard of quality and skill across the organisation. To our frontline staff - thank you for your passion and genuine commitment to our participants. You ensure our participants live their best lives.

Financial Performance

For our full 2024/2025 Audited Statements please visit connectability.org.au.

About Us

ConnectAbility is a NDIS Registered Provider, supporting 1,335+ people across Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, the Hunter and Central Coast for 33 years.

Our people are our purpose. We were founded by community members and families in Newcastle in 1992. We believe every person deserves to live a life of purpose, choice and dignity - and our vision is to empower you to achieve your goals, dreams and aspirations.

Over time, we have evolved to become a leading NSW-based not-for-profit organisation. Today, we are able to serve all ages, across all stages, all over the region with our range of services:

- Allied Health
- Community and Centre-Based Programs
- Early Intervention Teaching
- Plan Management
- Support Coordination
- Supported Independent Living
- Youth Services

ConnectAbility customer Robert dances up a storm at 2024 ConnectAbility Interagency Disco.



Our Purpose, Vision & Values

Our Purpose:

We add value to you through everything we do

Our Vision:

Empowering people to achieve

Our Values:

-  Relationships
-  Excellence
-  Strength
-  Passion
-  Experience
-  Community
-  Trust



Cheers to 33 years: ConnectAbility Fun Day

Since 1992, ConnectAbility has been proud to support people with disabilities in the Newcastle community. In 2023, we celebrated three decades of empowering people to achieve their goals, dreams and aspirations - with a big party!

The inaugural celebration was a chance to say thank you and honour the people we support, alongside our dedicated staff from across the organisation. Families, friends, and local businesses who generously donate their time or contribute in other ways also joined the festivities.

Since then, our Fun Day has become a highly anticipated event. On 15 October 2024, it was even bigger, with over 200 people in attendance, bringing a vibrant festival atmosphere!

As a community, we come together to celebrate our valued relationships and the service excellence we're so proud of. Formalities are kept short, with the focus on fun! Margaret Taylor, our Executive Officer who arranged the wonderful event, reflected on the meaning of celebrating as a community "In my many years here, I've seen firsthand how support turns into friendship, and how friendship turns into family. This celebration is a beautiful reminder of that."

Attendees enjoyed a variety of food trucks and stayed cool with delicious ice creams under the glorious sun. Entertainment was plentiful, featuring face painting, balloons, and a petting zoo - thanks to our friends from Sweet Valley Baby Animals.

We can't wait to celebrate with our community again in 2025! Until then, stay connected with us and help us spread the word about the incredible things we can achieve together.

ConnectAbility support worker Brooke with customer Matthew at the 2024 Fun Day.

ConnectAbility staff members Naomi and Suze with customers Kell, Nicki, Kerry, Cindy and Tysun at the 2024 and 2025 ConnectAbility Fun Days.



Key Achievements



1,335+
people worked with, of all ages across communities throughout NSW



72
new employees



722,574
kilometres travelled to support people right across NSW



323
frontline staff participated in training



475,036
hours of support delivered for the year



245
staff supporting 76 people in 21 community living homes



517
valued and trusted employees



2
new partnerships with SDA Housing providers to build new homes



390
dedicated support workers



7
offices, including brand new spaces at Muswellbrook and Maitland



90
experienced allied health professionals and teachers



1
loved therapy dog named "Dash"



89%
customer satisfaction rate

Our 2025 Customer Survey recorded the Top 3 Reasons customers value us:

- ★ 1. Trust in our staff
- ★ 2. High-quality, skilled support
- ★ 3. Genuine commitment to safety and wellbeing

Our Service Streams



Community Disability

CHILDREN

Support Coordination
1:1 support

YOUTH

Youth Programs
Support Coordination
School Holiday Programs

ADULTS

Support Coordination
1:1 support
Community Access Groups



Supported Independent Living

ADULTS

Supported Independent Living

NDIS:
SIL / SDA



Allied Health + Early Intervention Teaching

CHILDREN

Playgroup
All Allied Health Services
Early Intervention Teaching
School Holiday Programs

YOUTH

All Allied Health Services
Early Intervention Teaching
School Holiday Programs

ADULTS

Dietitian
Speech Pathology
Music Therapy

NDIS
MEDICARE
SELF FUNDED



Our Branding Journey

Our Board and CEO were thrilled to launch our new logo in July 2025, marking an exciting chapter of growth and celebrating Early Links joining our family.

During this time, a dedicated and visionary team of 11 staff formed a Brand Ambassador Team, to explore key insights and considerations for the transition. Their valuable contributions helped to shape our practices and collateral. Natalie Butler, Executive Leader Business Growth and Marketing, shared the symbolic meaning behind the refreshed look:

“The ConnectAbility swirls are iconic, widely recognised by our local community, and hold a special place in many hearts. Keeping the swirls was essential – they continue to represent the powerful connection between the people we support, their families and carers, our organisation, and the broader community. These elements are the heart of everything we do.”

While our logo has evolved, our commitment to person-centred care and highly valued staff remains unchanged. Keep an eye out for our new look on vans, marketing, our website and uniforms! Be sure to say g'day when you see us out in the community or speaking at events when we're sharing the ConnectAbility difference.

ConnectAbility Housing Operations Lead Haley and Dietician Team Leader Laura represent ConnectAbility at a local Ready Set Connect event; Showing off our ConnectAbility swirls at a local event and on our busy buses.



ConnectAbility customer Steve has a go at the fire hose at the 2024 International Day of People with Disability.



In the media: International Day of People with Disability

ConnectAbility customers were thrilled to celebrate International Day of People with Disability on 3 December 2024 with an inclusive fire safety education event in Newcastle with Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW). We enjoyed highlighting the importance of accessibility, preparedness, and community connection.

The event at Warabrook brought together firefighters from FRNSW's Metro North Command, including the Wallsend crew, for a morning of hands-on learning and fun. Customers explored fire engines, handled firefighting equipment, met FRNSW's mascot Inspector Bernie Cinders, and learnt tips to reinforce FRNSW's commitment to reducing fire-related risks for people with disability, who represent almost half of all house fire fatalities in NSW. The partnership also showcased ConnectAbility's strong community links and dedication to inclusion.

Chief Superintendent Terry Farley, FRNSW Metro North Area Commander, said on the day: "Given their elevated fire risk, it's crucial for people with disability and their caregivers to be well-versed in home fire safety", with ConnectAbility CEO David Carey in agreement. He added: "People with a disability make up 16% of the world's population. Based on 8.2 billion people, that is 1.3 billion people with a significant disability. It is important that this significant stakeholder in humanity is heard about their vision for the future."

Together, FRNSW and ConnectAbility are helping build safer, more connected communities, where everyone has access to the skills and information they need to stay safe and thrive. For more information, visit fire.nsw.gov.au or connectability.org.au.

International Day of People With Disability

ConnectAbility staff and customers at the 2024
International Day of People with Disability.



In The Media: Customer Spotlight

Lynn proudly shared her story about thriving with ConnectAbility in the Newcastle Herald recently. With our help, she says she's been able to continue living with choice and control in one of our group homes and continues playing her beloved sport of bowling with our community support program.

"I'm also proud of the fact that, with the help of my walker and a great support team, I've been able to walk again. It's no marathon, but hey, I'm moving in the right direction!"

Lynn finding strength and independence

HUNTER DISABILITY & WORKABILITY EXPO 2025
ConnectAbility

WHEN it comes to resilience, 67-year old Lynn has it in spades; and she's not afraid to bring a joke or two along for the ride.

After surviving a sub-arachnoid haemorrhage and stroke more than two decades ago, Lynn lost the use of her left side and had to relearn everything from scratch due to a brain injury.

"Like a toddler, but with more life experience and fewer tantrums!" she quips.

Today, she navigates life from a wheelchair, with an infectious sense of humour and an unshakeable drive to reclaim her independence.

Lynn's journey is supported by ConnectAbility, a local organisation that has helped thousands of Novocastrians with a disability achieve their independence goals through person-centred support.

ConnectAbility's impressive 33-year portfolio has now merged with Early Links, providing locals with supported independent living,

community participation, support coordination and plan management; as well as physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, dietetics, behaviour support

and more with Early Links 40-year portfolio. Lynn says that with ConnectAbility's help, she's not only been able to continue living independently in one

of their group homes, but also continue her beloved sport of bowling with ConnectAbility's community support program. "I was an absolute bowling



ConnectAbility's dedicated team of support workers and therapists empower customers like Lynn to reimagine what's possible, one goal at a time. Picture supplied

I'm also proud of the fact that, with the help of my walker and support team, I've been able to walk again.

Lynn, ConnectAbility customer

pro before my stroke," she says with a smile.

"Now I bowl with my right hand, a ramp and a ball with no holes. My average score is 124 - not too shabby, right?!"

ConnectAbility's dedicated team of support workers and therapists empower customers like Lynn to reimagine what's possible, one goal at a time.

She has so far managed to walk further than she ever thought she could, making strides in her physical recovery.

Lynn continues to defy expectations and her ultimate goal is to walk unassisted.

She is grateful for the support of her children and husband before he passed.

"I'm also proud of the fact that, with the help of my walker and support team, I've been able to walk again," she says.

"It's no marathon, but hey, I'm moving in the right direction!"

She says that her kids and the incredible support team from ConnectAbility have helped her stay on track. And she never forgets to laugh along the way.

"One thing I wish everyone knew is how funny I am," she says with a twinkle.

"I mean, someone has to bring the jokes, right?"

Through community, connection and a whole lot of laughter, Lynn is proving that independence comes in many forms - and sometimes, with a great punchline.

To learn more about ConnectAbility's services, visit Booth 23 and 108 at the Hunter Disability & Workability Expo, call (02) 4962 1000 or visit www.connectability.org.au and www.earlylinks.org.au/

Half-Million dollar NDIA Grant

ConnectAbility was proud to be chosen as one of 44 organisations from across Australia to play a key role in a pilot aimed at defining what quality Supported Independent Living (SIL) care looks like.

We were delighted to feature in the September issue of Hunter Disability Magazine, where David Carey, our CEO, and Executive Leader for Community Living, Dr Karla Seaman, shared their reflections on what quality support means to ConnectAbility and their hopes for shaping the future of SIL services across Australia.

Provider receives major grant for pilot

Newcastle-based disability support provider ConnectAbility has been awarded a half-million-dollar grant as part of a national pilot aimed at defining what quality Supported Independent Living (SIL) care looks like.

ConnectAbility CEO David Carey recently shared the news with his 550+ staff and 1780+ customers: "With more than 16,000 registered NDIS providers nationwide and over 260,000 SIL entities linked to the NDIS, being chosen as one of just 44 providers highlights our reputation for delivering safe, person-centred, and high-quality supports." Well-known locally for its buses, which travel over



Earlier this year, executive leader for Community Living, Karla Seaman, joined 13 amazing customers and support personnel at the ConnectAbility Customer Engagement Forum, including Kenny (middle) and Justin (right).

750,000 kilometres a year and feature the distinctive 'ConnectAbility swirl', the much-loved business was founded by community

members and families in Newcastle in 1992 and has evolved to become a leading NSW-based not-for-profit disability provider.

Today, ConnectAbility provides 500,000 hours of support each year, with 21 community living homes for 82 people, the Warabrook community hub and Early Links Allied Health and capacity-building clinics in Maitland, Kurri, Ashtonfield and Muswellbrook.

Executive leader for Community Living, Karla Seaman, will oversee the project's implementation. "This project gives us a seat at the table nationally to influence what 'quality' means in SIL and ensure participants receive the best possible support," she said.

To ConnectAbility, quality support includes many things, such as comprehensive staff inductions, robust

training, innovative technology from Best Med - AI-led medication software and Safety Culture software to identify and report hazards.

ConnectAbility has an overarching quality framework with effective internal audits and a registered nurse who trains staff and reviews complex healthcare plans. At the forefront of ConnectAbility's quality support is the way the business engages with and includes customers and stakeholders with regular forums, consultation and a co-design approach.

The NDIA's Quality Supports Program aims to improve service delivery across the SIL sector by identifying best practice models, workforce skills

needed, and the true costs of high-quality care. Insights will help shape future NDIS policies, pricing and market settings. Running until June 30, 2026, chosen providers will meet later this year for a Community of Practice workshop to look at how providers deliver quality supports and new models of care and practices, and providers will also ensure they include participants receiving SIL supports.

ConnectAbility is honoured to take part in this national initiative, shaping the future of Australia's Supported Independent Living services. Learn more at ndis.gov.au/community/quality-supports-program.

Source: ConnectAbility

Kimmy: A Life Changing Move

The last 12 months have been big for Kimmy and her family, as it was during this period that she moved out of her parents' home and into a ConnectAbility SIL home she shares with four other women. The year also marked a big shift for her mum, Agnesa, who – with Kimmy's father – has been supporting their daughter at home for her first 36 years.

KIMMY: When we met with Kimmy to talk about her transition into a ConnectAbility home in late 2024, she was excited to explain that this is the first time she has lived away from her parents' home - and she loves it!

Kimmy shares her new place with four housemates, and says her family is still an important part of her life as she has regular catch-ups and longer stays with them. Kimmy describes herself as bubbly, with a cheeky side, which her support workers and housemates agree with. When it comes to hobbies, Kimmy enjoys hanging out with her boyfriend, going bowling with ConnectAbility, shopping



for lip glosses, and eating out for lunch. Because she is vision impaired, she uses her cane to help with walking, and support workers guide her by holding her arm when she needs it. She's also a big Newcastle Knights fan and lights up when she talks about them.

Those around Kimmy have seen her take huge leaps in her personal growth recently and she agrees the move to ConnectAbility SIL housing has been life-changing. She has hit a few personal milestones recently, one of being more active, saying "I did exercise with my physio yesterday who came to my house, and that made me feel good" and another around her first date with her boyfriend Nathan. With two support workers, Kerry and Ash, coming along, the pair spent the day at the beach riding around in a little car and later enjoyed a meal together at Queens Wharf Brewery. "It was so good," she said simply, with her smile giving away how happy she is.

AGNESA, KIMMY'S MUM: Agnesa says that Kimmy moving into ConnectAbility housing has been a good change. "The move was scary in one way but good in another, and all our extended family and friends now agree it was exactly what Kimmy needed. She has grown much more independent and confident in herself. This has felt life-changing both for Kimmy, me and our family", she explains.

Agnesa says life in the new home has opened up opportunities Kimmy didn't have before. Instead of only being able to have her mum to chat to, Agnesa is excited to know Kimmy now has four housemates to share time and conversations with, as well as the ConnectAbility support workers, who Kimmy also adores.

Agnesa says: "All the housemates have things in common, and all enjoy things like pizza nights and listening to the Knights games, which has always been one of Kimmy's favourite things to do. One of the girls, Jenny, has become especially close with Kimmy, and we are thankful that she really likes all of her housemates."

The chance to move into special SIL housing came about almost unexpectedly, Agnesa reflects. Kimmy had been trying out respite housing with ConnectAbility, when the option of a permanent place came up during a chance discussion with ConnectAbility Team Leader Natalie Ransom. She explains:



"I had tried different respite places, but they were so expensive. This one worked perfectly with our funding, and the timing was just right."

For Agnesa, the most important thing was safety and the right match of housemates. "When we came and looked at the unit, I thought it was brilliant. Safety was our first consideration for Kimmy, and who the other girls are. It was an added bonus that they don't allow boys here - staff or customers. The age group was important too as we didn't want her to be living with lots of older people she couldn't relate to. It all just felt like a good fit."

Since the move, Kimmy's days look a little different. She's learning to get herself up and ready for her day program and is building her own routine with the support of ConnectAbility staff, and the encouragement of her housemates.

The change hasn't only been practical, and Agnesa is thrilled by Kimmy's emotional growth.

Agnesa says her hope now is simple: "for Kimmy to live her life with more independence." Reflecting on her own journey supporting her daughter with her transition into ConnectAbility housing, she encourages other families in a similar position to consider it. "It's hard at first, but you have to think about your loved one, not yourself. I thought it meant I couldn't look after her anymore, but it turned out to be the best thing I could do for her and we still catch-up regularly and Kimmy comes to stay with us every holiday and special occasion."

Agnesa acknowledges the support that made it possible. "If it wasn't for NDIS funding and ConnectAbility's amazing help with the process, as well as the outstanding support we get from the disability support workers at the house, I know that Kimmy wouldn't be where she is now. I will be forever grateful."

Kimmy with her Mum and Dad, who are so happy they supported her move to a ConnectAbility home; Kimmy at the ConnectAbility home she shares with her four housemates/friends.



Community Support: Inclusion For All

Our Community Support team consists of Community Support Workers, Support Coordinators and Disability Youth Workers who operate in our various offices and communities throughout Newcastle, Hunter and Central Coast. Each day, they deliver meaningful and inclusive activities and events which recognise and celebrate the individuals they support.

Reflecting on 29 years at ConnectAbility, Scott Harvey, Executive Leader Community Support speaks of his team of 145 staff with the upmost respect:



Aleesha enjoying some selfies as part of the 2024 Interagency Disco.

with their supports. As in previous years, the team have continued to look for ways to improve services and do more with available resources.

Support Coordination continues to enable capacity building and support our customers and families to develop independence. We'd confidently say we would want any one of them in our corner any day. Some of our families recently described what their Support Coordinator means to them:

“At ConnectAbility, our support workers are the backbone of what we do. We believe supporting our frontline staff is paramount to continuously improving our services for customers. I am thankful to our amazing staff for their commitment and dedication to providing great support to our customers throughout the year”.

In the past 12 months, we welcomed many new customers and families, which saw us support 450 people from youth through to adults. Each year, we conduct a Customer Survey, and take on the positive and constructive feedback to help shape our services. The most recent customer and family survey achieved a **34% participation rate** for our community division, and **89% of total respondents satisfied with the services they receive from ConnectAbility, with two thirds strongly agreeing.** It is so wonderful to hear the outstanding work of our support workers as well as customer achievements when they're "out and about"

“When families have other things going on in life, it's good to feel that someone else is there to help manage my supports and take the pressure off”

“It's so good to know when someone has my back and helps me keep my supports in line”

“I love that my Support Coordinator thinks outside the box and offers me different options to my supports”

Customers have experienced amazing achievements this year through their Support Coordination. The growth of knowledge within the team has enabled us to focus on providing more capacity building supports with our customers and families, to help them develop greater independence and navigate the ever-changing NDIS landscape and legislative changes.

Our ongoing improvements ensure we continue delivering best practice. Our internal reporting is improving, meaning we are better placed to achieve strategic actions and provide the Executive team and Board with sound metrics, improving our accountability and governance. We can't wait to see what meaningful and inclusive outcomes the team will deliver next year - you can count on fun and festivity that is inclusive for all!



Customers Justin, Daniel and Tyson with ConnectAbility support worker Steve at the 2024 Fun Day.



ConnectAbility Community Support Worker Paul, AKA our in-house Music Man, running the group music session.

“I love seeing the reaction on the customers’ faces,” he says. “For some, music is immediately engaging. For others, it takes time, but the transformation is remarkable.”

Music also enables customers to express themselves in ways that words sometimes cannot. “Every customer’s preferences are unique,” Paul notes. “It’s about encouraging them to explore and express their individuality.” Each customer chooses songs that reflect their tastes, with drums, karaoke, and a music player providing a hands-on experience.

Paul also provides ongoing one-on-one support for a customer he has been working with for 10 years. Beyond the technical setup, Paul emphasises the relational aspect of his work: connecting with customers, observing their reactions, and tailoring experiences to each individual’s needs.

For Paul, the integration of music into disability support is deeply fulfilling. “Do it,” he encourages other services. “It’s uplifting. Music touches the soul and reaches places other things just can’t.”

For Paul, music is not just an activity, it is a bridge to joy, expression, and human connection for the customers he supports.

Staff Spotlight: Paul our Music Man

Paul Corkett has been a valued Community Support Worker at ConnectAbility for nearly 11 years. Paul’s journey into disability support began after a cervical spine injury 18 years ago, prompting him to retrain in community service, a field that always interested him.

Paul holds a Certificate IV in Community Services and, given he has performed with renowned Australian acts including Cold Chisel, INXS, Midnight Oil, The Angels, and the Divinyls, he feels grateful to combine his professional skills with a lifelong passion for music.

At ConnectAbility, Paul runs music sessions at the Warabrook Hub twice a week. These sessions form a core part of the Monday and Thursday schedule, alongside cooking activities he has been involved with for over a decade.



Interagency Disco

Our Interagency Disco was a real highlight this year, with over 125 tickets sold and a total of 215 people attending - bringing together individuals from over 10 agencies in a fun, welcoming space.

Customers danced, laughed, and formed new friendships, while staff took the opportunity to build stronger connections and partnerships with other agencies. These shared moments created not just fun, but also movement, joy, and a true sense of community.

A great reminder that sometimes, the best way to build connection is on the dance floor.



ConnectAbility support workers Melissa, Khiara and Dean and customers Kimmy and Nathan at the July 2025 Interagency Disco.

Surfing day **Surf's up!**

ConnectAbility Community Supports have once again been able to facilitate inclusive surfing opportunities. This has been achieved by utilising modified longboards that customers can safely surf the waves with. Each time we run this program, customers and staff have a fantastic time and we look forward to running the program again this coming Summer.



***Clockwise:** ConnectAbility customer Aleesha hits the waves; Executive Lead Scott Harvey leads the way with customer Jonathan during an inclusive day at the beach, while CEO David Carey and support worker Michael look on; and support workers Michael and Anthony support customer Colin.*

Local teens enjoy making new friends and learning skills at the ConnectAbility school holiday program. Activities vary, and transport leaves and returns to the Kurri Hub.



Youth **Hubspace**

Our HubSpace at Kurri welcomes kids and teens every afternoon during school term to enjoy inclusive and supported activities such as informal cooking classes, arts and crafts, and active indoor games such as ping pong, pool, pickleball, and Lego play. Older teens also use the space for practical skill-building experiences, including cooking, laundry, budgeting, and money management, alongside opportunities to build their social skills. Sessions are supported by a multidisciplinary team, including allied health professionals, youth engagement workers, and community services trainees, bringing a breadth of experience to the program.

Each school holidays, thanks to an ongoing NSW Government's Holiday Break program grant, our youth team runs excursions, workshops and skill-building activities for teens at low cost to families. Activities such as movies, ten-pin bowling, and hands-on cooking workshops at Our Italian Table (above) are popular, and give teens the chance to learn new skills, enjoy practical experiences, and connect with peers in a supportive environment. This funding is critical to ensuring accessibility, as many families would otherwise face financial barriers, with participation often limited when costs apply.



Customers Tysun and Phil at 2024 Fun Day.



TAFE Student Placements

ConnectAbility has continued our partnership with TAFE NSW, with leads in the Community Living and Community Supports divisions supporting nine students completing their Certificate in Disability through placement hours. This collaboration offers valuable hands-on experience for students while enriching our programs with fresh insights and perspectives.



Community Living: Your life, your home

Our Community Living team continues to build on the strength and dedication of our frontline support workers. Their professionalism and care remain central to creating welcoming homes and delivering high-quality 24/7 services for the 76 people we support across 21 homes throughout Newcastle and the Hunter Region.

This year saw major progress in home upgrades that have improved safety, comfort and accessibility for our customers. Working in partnership with Evolve Housing, several key projects were completed including:

- **SALIX HOME:** kitchen, bathroom, fence, and pergola renovations transformed the living environment and further improved the lifestyle of our customers.
- **GLEBE HOME:** a new roof installation improved comfort and safety.
- **MCFARLANE'S HOME:** accessible emergency pathways were constructed to enhance safety and ease of evacuation.

These improvements elevate the physical standards and functionality of our homes and reflect ConnectAbility's commitment to creating inclusive and supportive living environments where people thrive.

One of our focus areas has been on improving how we communicate with staff, while investing in the homes where our customers live. With four editions of the Staff CONNECT newsletter released in the period, these regular updates include training opportunities, operational improvements, quality indicators, SDA build timelines, and NDS eTrainU training schedules.

Staff forums and casual training sessions over the last 12 months provided opportunities for collaboration and feedback. Participation and satisfaction remained high, reflecting a strong culture of openness and shared learning. Ongoing improvements to the induction process and manual handling training have further enhanced staff confidence, safety, and readiness to deliver exceptional care.

As we look ahead, our focus is to remain dedicated to refining our practices, enhancing the quality of our services, and maintaining strong relationships with our customers, staff, and stakeholders, to shape the future of Community Living at ConnectAbility.



ConnectAbility supported independent living customers Troy and Peter were encouraged to pursue their passions when choosing activities.



Peter's Story

Peter has called his ConnectAbility supported home his own since January 2023. He loves the location, the food and the sense of community it brings. As his 66th birthday approached, Peter had a very clear goal - he wanted to get a tattoo.

With thoughtful planning, Peter worked with a staff member over several weeks to design something meaningful: a dragon with its tail wrapped around a tower. His brother was consulted and fully supportive, ensuring Peter's wish could be safely and confidently fulfilled.

Finally, the big day arrived. Supported by staff, Peter brought his design to life and proudly celebrated this new milestone. The experience was so positive that he's already thinking about his next tattoo! Peter's story highlights the importance of listening to individual aspirations and providing the support to make them happen.

Troy's Story

Troy is part of ConnectAbility Supported Independent Living (SIL) and SIL Community Support, where he thrives in a supportive and inclusive environment. Here, Troy has the space to live more independently while being guided towards his personal goals. With encouragement and support from our dedicated staff, he continues to grow and achieve milestones every day.

Troy shares: "I like being here. The staff are really kind to me. I really like ConnectAbility — the staff help me reach my goals."

Troy, who had grown up around horses, had long hoped to rebuild his confidence to engage with them again. With support from his support team and a boost in self-esteem from starting work at Kmart, Troy participated in a special four-session horse program.

He especially enjoyed sharing lunch with the horses in the paddock, appreciating the fresh air and peaceful surroundings.

Troy's story is a wonderful example of how the right support can empower someone to build confidence, independence, and a sense of belonging.



Housemates Ken and Justin with ConnectAbility Executive Lead Dr Karla Seaman.

Forums: Consumer Engagement Forums

ConnectAbility hosted two consumer engagement forums in the last 12-months to strengthen communication with the people we support and their networks.

- **NOVEMBER 15 FORUM:** Attended by eight participants, this forum provided updates on community living activities and reinforced a sense of belonging.
- **MAY 7 FORUM:** A lively session with 13 customers and their support teams, celebrating achievements and exploring areas for improvement. Key suggestions included implementing Buddy Shifts to encourage peer support and developing Enhanced Communication Strategies for clearer interaction.

As a result, nine actionable items from these forums were incorporated into the **Community Living Quality Improvement Plan**.

Workforce Engagement & Development: Staff Forum

On April 30, nine Disability Support Workers participated in a staff forum to review survey results and co-design solutions. The session generated 16 actionable items, which were added to the Community Living Quality Improvement Plan. Staff rated the forum 4.67 out of 5, reflecting high engagement and satisfaction.

Staff Training

Casual Staff Training

Two sessions were held during the period for 43 casual staff members, focusing on practical skills and workplace procedures. Feedback highlighted a desire for more hands-on training, with the overall session rating was 4.86/5, reflecting high satisfaction.

Manual Handling Training

In-person manual handling training was delivered to 214 staff across all SIL homes. Participants reported increased confidence in applying best practices, with feedback overwhelmingly positive.

Induction Process Review

A new two-step induction process was introduced in 2024, with the enhanced process significantly improving the onboarding experience, with **50% of new staff rating their experience as exceeding expectations and 50% as meeting expectations.** It included:

- **PRE-COMMENCEMENT:** A two-hour session with an Operations Lead covering administrative tasks and expectations.
- **ONSITE INDUCTION:** A buddy champion-led orientation, focusing on customer-specific and home-specific knowledge.



ConnectAbility housemate Heather is safely and correctly moved to her SIL house van by a staff member as part of the 2025 manual handling training.

BESTMED Evaluation

After rolling out our BESTMED system across all 21 ConnectAbility SIL homes, this period we began our evaluation. Key findings suggest an initial increase in incident reporting, reflecting improved transparency and reporting culture. Reporting also showed a significant reduction in medication errors, which dropped from 10 to 4 incidents per 100 customers per quarter, indicating improved safety and accuracy in medication management.



University Engagement

Monash University Presentation

ConnectAbility Executive Lead Dr Karla Seaman had the privilege of presenting on evidence-based support in the disability sector at Monash University. Drawing from experience implementing electronic medication administration software in hospitals and aged care, Karla shared insights on how this technology has been successfully adapted for SIL homes. The presentation also explored opportunities for further research to advance evidence-based practices in the disability sector, administrative tasks and expectations.

Students Placements

We hosted three students from Macquarie University, who contributing in several key areas within Community Living, including:

- Comparative analysis of websites with recommendations for improving website accessibility and user experience.
- Development of a mock-up redesign proposal for future implementation.
- Literature review of evidence-based medication administration in disability accommodation.



ConnectAbility housemate Heather took a recent trip to Sydney with her external support worker Michelle on a trip made possible by ConnectAbility.

Heather's Supported Holiday

Our Alfred Street Community Living team worked closely with one of Heather's other community supports, Ring a Bell, and her Trustee and Guardian to make this holiday possible. Staff enjoyed preparing the itinerary, supporting Heather with packing, organising medications, and putting together a support plan to ensure she was safe and supported throughout her trip. Heather had the best time away and continues to fondly talk about her holiday, recalling the fun activities and special moments. The trip made a lasting impression!



Disability Service Awards Recognition



We're thrilled to share some incredible news – Dr Karla Seaman, Executive Lead Community Living at ConnectAbility, has won the Best Sector Impact category at the 2025 Australian Disability Service Awards (ADSA)!

Karla attended the awards in Melbourne alongside our CEO, David Carey, representing ConnectAbility with pride at the industry's premier celebration of excellence in disability services.

The win recognises Karla's outstanding leadership, innovation and evidence-based approach to driving real and measurable change across the sector.

With a Master's in Clinical Epidemiology and a PhD in Pharmacoepidemiology, Karla is a respected researcher whose work bridges policy, data and practice.

Karla shared her gratitude following the win:

"It's such an honour to receive this recognition. I'm so proud to be part of a team that constantly strives to deliver meaningful, person-centred support. Every success we achieve is shared with our incredible staff and customers. This award belongs to all of us at ConnectAbility."

The Best Sector Impact Award celebrates changemakers who challenge systemic barriers and deliver sustainable improvements in service quality and inclusion. Karla's impact reflects the heart of our organisation – combining compassion with evidence to make a lasting difference.

David has expressed how proud he is of Karla and her dedication to ensuring that reforms move beyond theory to create real, positive change in the lives of people with disability, noting that it is a true testament to her impact that her name was the only one put forward by the panel.

We couldn't be prouder of Karla and the entire team for their dedication, innovation, and unwavering commitment to quality support. This win is a celebration of not just one person's efforts, but of the shared values and hard work that define who we are.



Dr Karla Seaman awarded Best Sector Impact at the prestigious 2025 award ceremony in Melbourne.



Our Music therapist Kate (centre) outside our Maitland office with Amy (left) and Mill (right).

Capacity & Therapy Services: **Allied Health and Teaching in Action**

Showcasing the formidable expertise of our allied health therapists and teachers, our multi-disciplinary and collaborative team approach enables impressive comprehensive service delivery. The collective efforts of our team: Behaviour Support Practitioners, Dietitians, Early Intervention Teachers, Music Therapists (pictured), Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Psychologists, and Speech Pathologists is instrumental to the impressive outcomes achieved. There are over 1,000 families who we are privileged to provide support to under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) goals for children and adults.

Our **operational footprint** is vast, delivering our community service throughout Newcastle, the Hunter and Upper Hunter, to over 200 schools, in-home, or in-clinic at Ashtonfield, Kurri Kurri, Maitland and Muswellbrook. We are also contracted by the **NSW Department of Education** to provide the Sector Capacity Building Program to 225 preschools in the Hunter New England, Northern NSW and Mid North Coast regions. This **\$2.1M program** enables our specialist Early Childhood Intervention Teachers to work with community-based preschools and their staff to strengthen inclusive practices

and increase their capacity to support children with disabilities.

In the past 12 months we have acquitted \$30,000 of grant-related funding being; \$10,000 for the **Strengthening Rural Communities** grant, enabling the physiotherapy team to support children who experience a wide variety of disabilities and developmental delays, including autism, cerebral palsy and chromosomal or genetic syndromes such as muscular dystrophy and downs syndrome. In addition, a \$20,000 **Aurizon** (Australian rail freight) grant funding for health, wellbeing, and education created a wonderful Ngarralingayil Yarramalong Program. This program helped Aboriginal children develop skills and confidence to reach their full potential, leading to improved literacy, numeracy, education, and life outcomes.

The **School Holiday Groups Programs** continues to be a permanent drawcard with over 200 children thriving with new learnings who participated in our Kids Gym (31), Messy Magic (29), Block Builders (39), and Cooking Group programs (117).



Playgroup Fun!

Hosting Maitland Fire Station at our playgroup has been a highlight for the children, and staff. The firefighters shared important fire safety tips with the children, teaching them about what to do in an emergency. After the safety chat, the excitement continued as we got to explore the fire truck!

The children had a blast climbing aboard, checking out the equipment, squirting the fire hose and even hearing the sirens. It was a fantastic, hands-on learning experience that made fire safety both fun and memorable for everyone! Thank you to all the families who bring your children to our free playgroup at Maitland Presbyterian Church Thursdays at 9.30am during the school term.



Children love coming along to the Early Links Playgroup in Maitland, where curiosity meets creativity!



John Hunter Hospital Neuromuscular Education Day

In November 2024, our therapists participated in Neuromuscular Education Day at John Hunter Hospital with a diverse group of professionals including neurologists, social workers, and allied health teams (physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and dieticians).

We viewed presentations on diagnosis and evidence-based management of neuromuscular conditions, including Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, and Charcot-Marie-Tooth (CMT); and discussed palliative care and family-led approaches for individuals with neuromuscular disorders.

This day enriched our understanding of neuromuscular diseases and strengthened our ability to work collaboratively as a multi-disciplinary team as well as developing connections with the public health services. Together we are excited to apply this knowledge to enhance our support for clients, ensuring evidence-based and holistic care tailored to their needs.



Lots of information was soaked up at Neuromuscular Education Day at John Hunter by ConnectAbility therapists, from left, Maddie, Rachel, Ange, Hollie, Natalee and Kyle.

Customer story Levi

Levi, an energetic and determined young boy with Developmental Epileptic Encephalopathy, has found the past two years incredibly challenging. A significant decline in his physical function, multiple hospital stays, and increasing fatigue meant Levi could no longer ride his bike or spend extended time playing with his siblings. For a boy who loves the outdoors and the simple joy of being active with his family, this was heartbreaking.

Determined to give Levi back his independence and joy, his family, therapy team and assistive technology provider worked together to apply for an adaptive bike through the NDIS. Recently, the application was approved. Levi's new adaptive bike is specially designed to support his unique needs, offering stability, comfort, and even a bit of fun innovation. I asked Levi what his favourite thing about his new bike is, he told me:

"I love putting it in monster mode, and it has proper brakes!"

With his new bike, Levi can now ride alongside his family for up to an hour, something he hasn't been able to do in years. The adaptive bike doesn't just provide mobility; it restores a sense of freedom, adventure, and connection. Watching Levi ride again is a testament to his resilience and the power of accessible solutions.

ConnectAbility customer Levi loves riding his adaptive bike.





Team leader, Early Intervention Teaching Alex enjoys leading the Messy Magic play therapy groups, and making sure our customers have lots of fun while learning.

The Messy Magic Group

The group has had a successful year, supporting children's development through engaging sensory play. The Messy Magic group has enhanced sensory regulation, communication, motor skills, and emotional regulation while fostering social connections and confidence.

A key highlight has been watching children make friends, engage effectively with peers, and eagerly return each session. Increased interest in our play therapy services has followed, with families seeking ongoing support beyond the group. Other highlights include increased confidence and enthusiasm, with many eager to return; positive family feedback, leading to ongoing play therapy engagement; noticeable improvements in social skills, emotional regulation, and communication.

The Messy Magic group has provided a fun and supportive environment for children to explore, learn and grow. Its structured yet flexible approach has built vital developmental skills while fostering joy in play. The program's success reflects the dedication of facilitators, the enthusiasm of participants, and the commitment of families. Moving forward, we aim to expand the program's reach, strengthening our impact in play-based therapeutic support.



Mason's Story

Mason and his mum have worked with our team of therapists since 2023, when Mason's ConnectAbility Speech Pathologist Rachel quickly noticed he was exhibiting several neurological symptoms that could not be explained by his medical or developmental history. Mason's mum Bec was already concerned and relieved that Rachel had noticed the same issues. Rachel engaged with Lauren (ConnectAbility physiotherapist) and Raphaela (ConnectAbility Occupational Therapist) who together worked with the family to arrange further testing, however scans and specialist visits provided no further answers except a developmental delay, inconsistent with what his family and therapists had seen.

With Mason's team continuing to advocate for him, Mason was finally referred for genetic testing and Mason was diagnosed with a rare genetic mutation which resulted in cerebellar dysfunction; a non-progressive condition explaining ALL of his symptoms. This discovery was new and rare - that there are only around 50 documented cases, IN THE WORLD!

Mason does not require long-term specialist care and has been advised that the most beneficial course of action is ongoing supports with his therapy team. Mason, his family and the team were relieved to have answers, and his ConnectAbility team look forward to seeing what his bright future holds! Each child's experience is different, and outcomes may vary.



Allied health therapists Rachel, Raphaela and Lauren during a session with Mason.

Ngarralingayil Yarramalong Grant Program

A generous \$20,000 grant from Aurizon (Australia's leading rail freight company), has led to a meaningful partnership between Yarramalong campus and ConnectAbility during this period.

Together, we've delivered a multidisciplinary program focused on supporting children's health, wellbeing, and education. This program provided face-to-face support from allied health therapists to help identify and respond to developmental needs early.

The program focused on supporting Aboriginal children to build confidence and important life skills, with the goal of improving literacy, learning, and long-term wellbeing.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Supported children to build their literacy skills
- Conducted school-based assessments focused on communication, thinking skills, and emotional regulation
- Shared assessment reports with families, supported them to work with teachers
- Ran group programs to support social communication and self-regulation
- Delivered professional development to teachers, helping them better understand complex behaviours and respond with positive, inclusive strategies

This partnership has supported children, families, and educators to grow together and create positive learning experiences.

Allied health therapists Rachel, Raphaela and Lauren during a session with ConnectAbility therapist Chelsea with the children who took part in the Yarramalong Grant Program.



NDIS Registered Provider: Our Responsibilities

ConnectAbility Australia's Quality and Safeguarding team has led the rollout of new systems and processes to strengthen compliance, ensure our services remain safe, and deliver operational transparency across the business.

The are 269,432 active NDIS providers, of which only 21,000 are registered. As we are one of the 6.56% registered providers approved by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, we must meet strict standards for safety, quality and accountability.

Key projects we delivered included:

- **Implementation of Safety Culture (WHS System)** Successfully deployed across the organisation, enabling digital inspections, issue tracking, and real-time reporting via QR codes at all sites.
- **Integration of iAuditor for Internal Audits** Leveraged existing team expertise to embed iAuditor into daily operations, streamlining audit processes and enhancing data visibility.

Key Outcomes & Measures

CUSTOMER & STAFF IMPACT

- Staff empowered to report hazards, near misses, and property issues directly via mobile devices.
- Leaders gained improved oversight of safety performance and training compliance through dashboard analytics.

AUDIT ACTIVITY

- **21 Community Living Sites Audited**
- **247 Inspections Completed** using iAuditor

AVERAGE SCORES BY CHECKLIST

- Community Living Checklist: **91.71%**
- Customer Health Records: **88.12%**
- Customer Support Folder: **87.3%**
- Customer Medication Folder: **80.54%**

While the team remains focused on aligning with strategic business goals – particularly in compliance, customer safety and continuous improvement – they are also actively preparing the organisation for the upcoming NDIS Surveillance Audit in February 2026.

We remain committed to quality and compliance, ensuring we adhere to the NDIS Practice Standards and Code of Conduct. This commitment is not only regulatory – but it also reflects what our customers value most.



ConnectAbility's People and Culture team, led by Acting Executive Lead Amanda Saunders (centre in blue shirt).

ConnectAbility Community Support Team Leaders Nat and Laura at the biggest Interagency Disco yet in July 2025.



People & Culture

Over the last 12 months, ConnectAbility Australia's People & Culture team has played a pivotal role in strengthening our workforce, enhancing service delivery, and driving strategic initiatives that reflect our commitment to person-centred care and community inclusion.

We recognise that a thriving workforce is the foundation of exceptional service. People are at the heart of everything we do. Our strengthened capability and cohesion of our workforce have directly enhanced service quality, responsiveness, and client satisfaction. These examples of staff-led innovation combined with organisational commitment, reflects Connect Ability's ongoing dedication to fostering a positive workplace culture where staff feel valued, energised, and equipped to bring their best selves to work every day.

Key Achievements

WORKFORCE GROWTH & STABILITY: We successfully onboarded over 72 new team members across community living, allied health, and community support services, contributing to a more diverse and skilled workforce. Our retention strategies, including more streamlined onboarding through the HRIS, have contributed to improved tenure and reduced early turnover.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: A new leadership capability framework was introduced in our Allied Health & Capacity division, supporting emerging leaders through targeted training, coaching, and succession planning. This has fostered a culture of empowerment and accountability across all levels of the organisation.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: Our annual staff survey was our first blending of both former Early Links employees, and existing ConnectAbility employees. Notable improvements overall were captured in communication, recognition and wellbeing.

Projects Delivered

DIGITAL HR TRANSFORMATION: Ongoing implementation of a new HRIS platform has streamlined recruitment, onboarding, and performance management, and is expected to improve efficiency and data-driven decision-making.

HEALTH & WELLBEING PROGRAM: We've rolled out a Health & Wellbeing Program across the organisation to promote physical activity, mental resilience and healthy lifestyle choices. It includes discounted corporate gym membership, access to financial resources and regular bite-size information shared to staff through training, resources, and peer networks. The program is designed to empower employees to take charge of their wellbeing in a supportive and inclusive environment, contributing to a healthier workplace culture for all.



Our Workforce: Quick Stats



Our total workforce increased by 99 between July 2024 and June 2025 (500 total).

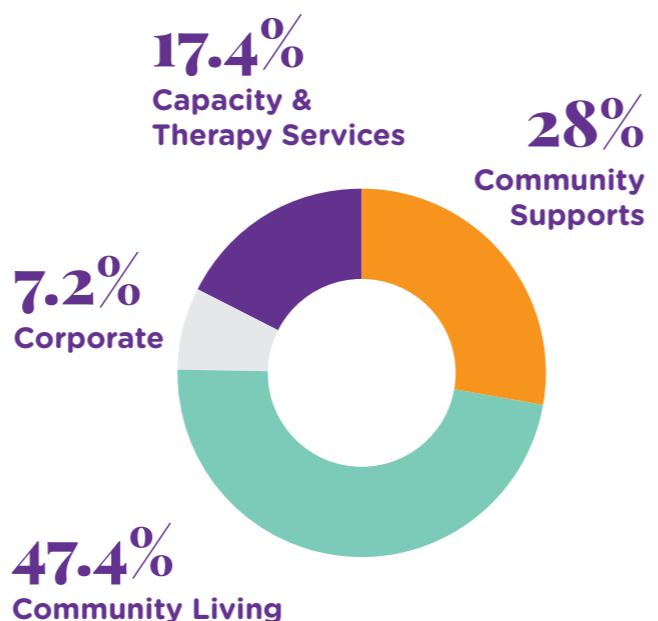


A total of 323 frontline workers participated in some form of training via the ETrainU platform in 2024-25 (67.3%)



The 2024-25 average years of service was 6.11 years. Well above the National average of less than 5 years' service in the human services sector.

Staff Breakdown by Division



72% of our workforce identify as female, on par with the National care and support workforce statistics (75.2% female)



Wine & Dine for Disability: A record breaker!

Wine and Dine for Disability has become a well-known fundraiser in the Newcastle community. Since 2016, it has brought together local businesses and generous supporters to raise funds for a meaningful cause – supporting the thousands of people living with disability.

On 21 October 2024, the inspiring team of Colin Law (ANZ Bank), Julianne James (AON) and Elechia Jones (CFO Centre) proudly launched the fifth Wine and Dine for Disability. Hosted at Earp Distillery, the sold-out evening welcomed 150 guests who were treated to a gourmet experience prepared by well renowned chefs and local wine makers. Exceptional service was delivered by hospitality students from Callaghan College, adding a special touch to the night.

This year's event raised a record breaking \$25,000, which was used to modify a purpose-built bus, enabling our customers to connect and participate more fully in our beautiful community. A standard Toyota HiAce costs \$70,000 with modifications adding an additional \$30,000 – a significant investment made possible only through the generosity of events like this.

We were thrilled to unveil the new vehicle, proudly featuring the iconic ConnectAbility swirls we're known for! With this addition to our fleet of over 40 vehicles, more people can access the services, experiences and connection that help them to thrive.



Our Board



Nathan Franks
Chairman
2015 - Present



Luke Sessions
Board Member
2017 - Present



Bernie Garrett
Deputy Chair
2015 - 2024



Joan Gatt
Board Member
2008 - Present



Dr Susan Carter
Board Member
2022 - Present



Elechia Jones
Board Member
2024 - Present

Our Executive Leadership Team



David Carey
Chief Executive Officer



Margaret Taylor
Executive Officer



Leigh Tull
Chief Financial Officer



Amanda Saunders
Acting Executive Leader
People & Culture



Donna Vallette
Executive Leader
Quality & Safeguarding



Scott Harvey
Executive Leader
Community Disability



Karla Seaman
Executive Leader
Community Living



Austin Smith
Executive Leader
Capacity & Therapy
Services



Natalie Butler
Executive Leader
Business Growth &
Marketing



Annual Charity Golf Day: A Swinging Success

The 2025 Newcastle Office Interiors (NOI) Charity Golf Day brought together 110 players for a day of golf, connection and community spirit, all in support of ConnectAbility. Held on Friday 14 March, the event marked its ninth successful year, raising more than \$10,000 to help rebuild and expand kitchen facilities that support people to build independence through cooking and life skills programs.



Photos from the 2025 Golf Day. Thank you to the local businesses who continue to support this event. Next year marks the event's 10 year anniversary!



The day was filled with great golf, auctions, networking, refreshing drinks tents, and the much-loved dino races, along with inspiring stories from ConnectAbility customers that reminded everyone of the event's purpose. ConnectAbility CEO David Carey thanked sponsors and players, saying the funds would "create both lasting and immediate change," helping enhance programs and services across the organisation.

Long-time major sponsor Newcastle Office Interiors once again played a key role. Managing Director Jock Whyte said,

"We're proud to continue supporting ConnectAbility's fantastic work and have already committed to sponsoring the next five years."

With support from sponsors including Dynamic Business Technologies, Andersen Pest Services, DABS Plumbing, and many hole sponsors, next year's event will be bigger and better, as we continue to strengthen community connections. Next year marks the 10th anniversary of this much-loved charity tradition, promising to be the biggest yet!

For event and sponsorship enquiries for our fundraising events in 2026, please contact Margaret Taylor on (02) 4962 1000 or marketing@caa.us.org.au

Thank you to Our Supporters

Thank you to all the individuals and businesses who continue to support us. The year wouldn't have been made possible without you!

- | | |
|---|--|
| Alexandra Joy (AJ) | Form 1 Fire |
| Altapac - Kotara | Frame Promotional Products |
| Ambassador Locksmiths | Hunter Care Living - Peter Harvey |
| ANZ Bank | Ian Barry Photography |
| AON Insurance | JD Electrical |
| BNI Chapters Newcastle | Jezweb team |
| Board volunteers - Rebecca Lou and Sean McCann under the Observership Program | Kmart Waratah |
| Carpet Diem | Liz Murray - Edge of Possibilities |
| Catholic Diocese - Maitland Newcastle | LJ Hooker Maitland |
| CFO Centre | LMS Newcastle |
| Chubb Fire & Security - Shane Pryce | Maitland City Council |
| City & Regional Cleaning Management | Marsh Insurance |
| Club Macquarie Argenton | Mayfield Blooms |
| Coles Mayfield | My Supply Store - Joan Karam |
| Commonwealth Bank | Newcastle & Maitland Toyota |
| ConnectAbility Board | Newcastle City Council |
| DABS Plumbing | Newcastle Community Arts Centre |
| Dolphin Line Marking | Newcastle Office Interiors |
| DVCA Holdings Pty Ltd - David & Christine | NewVo Communications |
| Dynamic Business Technologies | Novo Car Detailing - Brad Eyb |
| Earp Distilling Co. | One Roof Agency |
| Ethos Health | Pitcher Partners |
| Evolve Housing | Presence Real Estate & Property Management - Nathan Finney |
| Fire and Rescue NSW - Metro North Team | Prosperity Salary Packaging |

Skip Bags to Go – Greg Bayly
Smallman Security
Steve Koulis Smash Repairs
Superior Pest Management
TAFE Newcastle
Thirdi - Rosie Trantham
Toby Thomas
Total Transport Solutions
Transcend Health
UltraTune Jesmond
UrbanOps P/L
Waratah Golf Club, Argenton
WHO Printing Newcastle
Woolworths Waratah
YCM Photography
Sue Roskell Toy and Gift Drive

Grant Providers:

APT Management Services Pty Ltd
Aurizon – for Ngarralingayil Yarramalong Program
Glencore Coal Assets Australia Pty Ltd
Maitland City Council
NSW Government, Communities and Justice
NSW Government, Office for Regional Youth

Golf Day Sponsors

Newcastle Office Interiors
Dynamic Business Technologies
Andreson Pest Services
DABS Plumbing
Adept IT Solutions
Carpet Diem
City and Regional Cleaning Management
Jezweb
JD Electrician
NewVo Communications
Smallman Security

Golf Day Prize Donors

Drummond Golf Newcastle
Camplify
Cheeky Bikes
City Cave Mayfield
Hunter Valley Tours
Steel and Anchor
Hungerford Hills winery
Rippit Golf
Nutrition Warehouse Kotara
Weber Store,
Harvey Norman Kotara

Christmas Party

Carpet Diem
Chris Ryan Legal Pty Ltd
DABS Plumbing
Leading Edge Innovations
Nathan Finney - Prescence Property Management



Young girl jumps with joy at the Early Links Playgroup in Maitland



connect
ABILITY

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