



inclusion melbourne *in*  
believing. living. belonging

# impact report 2024



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As Chair of the Inclusion Melbourne Board, I am delighted to introduce this year's Impact Report, which highlights our dedication to creating a more inclusive and supportive community.

This year, we have continued to make meaningful progress, thanks to the hard work, commitment, and compassion of our remarkable staff, who work tirelessly to enrich the lives of those we serve.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to our dedicated volunteers, whose generosity and

energy inspire us all, and to my fellow board members for their strategic guidance and passion for inclusion.

Lastly, I am grateful to our CEO, Helen Williams, whose leadership, and vision drive Inclusion Melbourne forward.

Together, we are building a brighter future for everyone in our community.

**Chris Allan**  
Board Chairperson

## board members

Chris Allan  
Robert Crosthwaite  
Paul Gleeson  
Ellie Hearn  
Mark Hearn  
Beverley Jeffreys

## our vision

For people with cognitive and intellectual disability and who are socially isolated, to live within inclusive communities, where everyone's participation is of value.

## our mission

To partner with people to live a good life!

## our values

### individuality

A single person regarded as a unique personality, distinguished from others by special qualities

We will embrace individuality by:

- Acknowledging uniqueness and accepting differences in a non-judgemental manner
- Using a person-centred approach to meet the unique needs of each person
- Supporting people to make choices that build the lives they want
- Working with people in unique and personalised ways
- Respecting individual and family customs, practices, beliefs, traditions and heritage

### potential

The inherent ability or capacity for growth

We will see the potential of all persons by:

- Believing that everyone has the potential to keep achieving more
- Ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities for development
- Understanding that overcoming obstacles is a necessary part of the journey to success



### integrity

To consistently act on sound moral principles

We will act with integrity by:

- Being respectful
- Doing what we say we'll do and being open about how we do it
- Being honest about what we can and cannot achieve
- Acting in a manner that is deserving of your trust
- Having skilled, competent and professional employees

### relationships

A significant connection existing between people and communities

We will foster relationships by:

- Being honest with each other
- Supporting and encouraging each other
- Connecting people with their community and nurturing new relationships
- Working together to solve problems
- Listening to each other to achieve mutual understanding
- Strongly believing that together people create better lives





# ceo's report

Our 2024 Impact Report is a reflection of the transformative work we have achieved over the past year.

At Inclusion Melbourne, we believe success is creating lasting, positive change in the lives of the people we support. We continue to remain steadfast in our commitment to empowering people with cognitive and intellectual disability and those who are socially isolated, to build genuine relationships, discover their unique skills, and pursue full citizenship, education, and employment opportunities. Guided by our vision of a world where everyone has the power to thrive, not just survive, this report captures the stories, outcomes, and insights that have shaped this year's journey of empowerment and inclusion.

Inclusion Melbourne stands apart in the disability sector, driven by a unique approach to creating opportunities and exploring possibilities with the people we support. Our services are carefully tailored to meet individual needs, focusing not only on what someone requires but on who they are as a person. Through this holistic and person-centred model, we aim to foster independence, empowerment, access, and respect, helping individuals build and achieve a good life within their local communities.

This approach recognises the importance of allowing people to have a go and take supported risks, essential for fostering their independence and personal growth. Taking risks, with the right support, empowers them to step beyond their comfort zones, explore their potential, and work toward achieving their dreams. Our staff appreciate this importance, and work to understand and facilitate opportunities that enable confidence building, development of new skills, and experiences of fulfillment, as they pursue aspirations on their terms.

This year, we have continued to honour our rich 76-year history while embracing innovation and learning. By drawing on data, research, and feedback from the people and communities we serve, we continue to evolve our practices to ensure we remain impactful and relevant in a changing world. We have expanded our reach, welcoming new cohorts into our community that can benefit from our approach, and forging partnerships that strengthen our ability to continue delivering meaningful support.

As a values-driven organisation, we remain committed to measuring and understanding our impact to ensure we are making meaningful contributions to the lives of our clients and the broader community. Constant reflection on our work, asking questions, seeking feedback, and learning from everyone's successes and challenges, keeps us relevant and in alignment with the people we support.

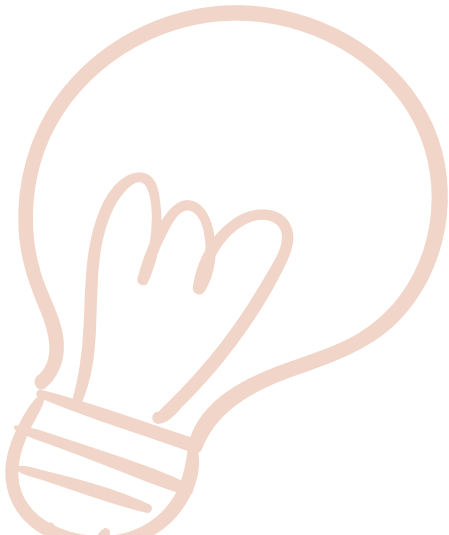
These insights have shown us the importance of holistic approaches to driving systemic change—building partnerships, nurturing networks, and advocating for transformative policies at local and national levels. These efforts require time, perseverance, and collaboration with a myriad of stakeholders, for as a community united, we can achieve so much more.

None of this would be possible without the dedication and passion of our staff, the generosity of our volunteers, the trust of our partners, communities of practice, and supporters, as well as the steadfast backing of our Board and the Gawith Foundation. Most importantly, we are continually inspired by the resilience of our participants and their families, who remain at the heart of everything we do. Together, we are shaping a more inclusive future, grounded in the principles of respect, empowerment, and access for all.



Thank you for being part of our journey. I hope this report inspires you to join us as we continue to create more opportunities, explore more possibilities, and further champion inclusion.

Helen Williams  
CEO



# snapshot a year of growth and transformation

In the past year, Inclusion Melbourne has made significant strides in expanding and enhancing our services to meet the diverse needs of the people we support. By focusing on innovation and collaboration, we have implemented initiatives that not only broaden access but also deliver meaningful, long-lasting outcomes.

To enrich the social and community lives of our clients, we have expanded direct support services to include evenings, weekends, and public holidays. This has enabled individuals to participate more fully in desired social settings, community events, and activities such as sports, music, and the arts. This increased flexibility empowers clients to pursue their passions and build deeper connections within their communities.

Our dedicated volunteers have also played an essential role in supporting individuals who are socially isolated or living with cognitive disabilities. Their tireless efforts enable people to enjoy social and leisure activities, fostering a sense of connection, belonging, and joy. Whether through companionship, assisting with outings, or facilitating new experiences, our volunteers bring invaluable energy and compassion to every interaction, helping clients lead richer, more fulfilling lives.

Recognising the growing complexity of support needs, our expanded support

coordination services now cater to a wider range of cognitive impairments, including acquired and traumatic brain injuries, level 3 support coordination, and psychosocial conditions. This holistic approach ensures that individuals and their families receive tailored, comprehensive support, enabling them to navigate life with greater independence and confidence.

Through our Registered Training Organization (RTO), we have delivered new vocational, social, and community programs, paving the way for the launch of the Worklink program in 2025. In response to the growing demand for qualified disability support professionals, we have also reopened our Certificate III in Individualised Support-Disability accredited training. This initiative helps meet the critical need for skilled support workers, ensuring better care and opportunities for people with disabilities.

One of our most exciting achievements has been the launch of our Work Opportunity Placement and Matching Tool. Developed from over a decade of research, this innovative tool bridges the gap between the employment experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities and their actual skills. It maps out tailored pathways for employment growth over 1-3 years, supported by a unique vocational coaching program.

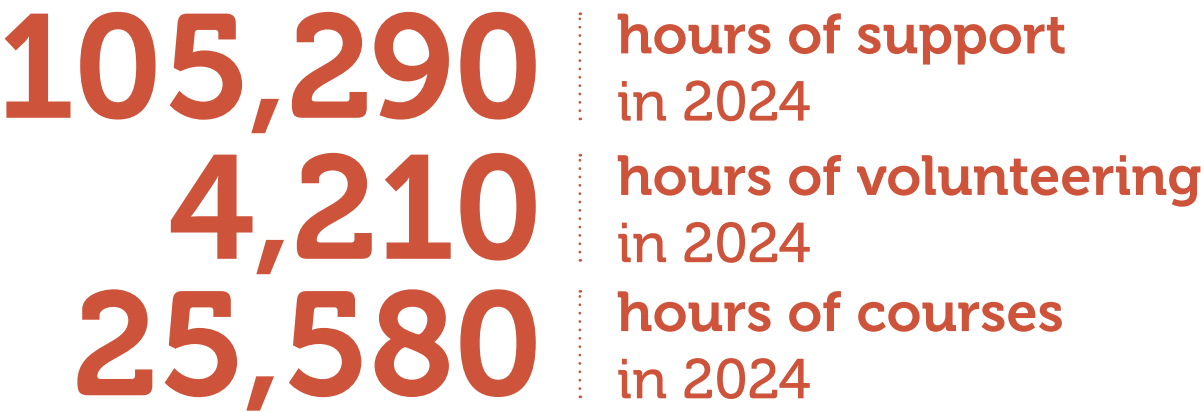
Complementing this, we have partnered with various employers wanting to



embrace the delivery of services to people with NDIS support, enhancing their ability to effectively support clients and employees with cognitive and intellectual disabilities, fostering inclusive workplaces across multiple sectors.

Inclusion Melbourne has also been successful in securing various government funded grants to deliver outcomes for underrepresented groups, including people with intellectual disabilities and members of the rainbow community. These projects are addressing critical gaps, ensuring that more people can access the support and opportunities they need to thrive.

This year's achievements demonstrate our unwavering commitment to innovation, collaboration, and empowerment. By continuing to adapt and grow, Inclusion Melbourne is paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive future for all.







# looking beyond the numbers

While the numbers in this report illustrate the meaningful outcomes Inclusion Melbourne have achieved, they represent only part of the story. Behind the everyday statistics lies a disability sector facing profound challenges that shape how organisations like ours operate and deliver support.

The sector is navigating a landscape marked by increasing demand, workforce shortages, rising costs, and increasing complexity in participant needs. The complexities of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) have created administrative burdens coupled with fluctuating funding models that place immense pressure on service providers to balance quality with sustainability.

For organisations striving to uphold person-centred, tailored approaches, these challenges can often feel insurmountable. Yet, they also present an opportunity to advocate for meaningful reform and innovation.

The Disability Royal Commission has been a watershed moment, shedding light on systemic issues and exposing gaps in care, oversight, and accountability. These findings underscore the need for a sector-wide shift towards a culture of safety, respect, and empowerment.

Key learnings include the importance of:

1. **Listening to lived experience:** People with disabilities and their families must be central to decision-making processes.
2. **Improving workforce capacity and training:** Addressing workforce shortages and enhancing skills through better training is critical to equipping workers with the knowledge and tools to provide safe, respectful, and person-centred care.
3. **Enhancing governance and accountability:** Strengthening oversight mechanisms and embedding robust safeguards that build trust and protect the rights of individuals.
4. **Fostering inclusivity and community engagement:** Holistic approaches that connect individuals to their communities and nurture meaningful relationships that improve well-being.

The implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations is crucial if we are going to rebuild confidence in the sector. High-quality support depends on sustainable funding models, skilled and valued workers, and systems designed to prioritise people over processes. To achieve this, we must continue to prioritise investment in our workforce, including training, professional growth opportunities, and fair remuneration. This year Inclusion Melbourne introduced a compulsory series of practice training for all staff, in addition to the Certificate 3 Individualised Support Disability for staff wishing to be paid whilst building in-depth knowledge and practice.

Collaboration across government, service providers, advocacy groups, and communities is even more essential to creating systemic change. We believe the reciprocity of partnerships is vital and creating pathways for stronger collaboration is critical to enabling us to amplify our impact and extend our reach. Working with like-minded organisations, community groups, businesses and government bodies, has enabled us to pool resources, share expertise, and create innovative solutions.

Our consultancy services are designed to empower partner organisations across a breadth of various sectors, not just disability; to deliver informed, inclusive support for people with disabilities. By delivering tailored training and sharing our expertise, we have helped businesses build their capacity to better understand and respond to the needs of individuals with cognitive and intellectual disabilities in particular. Listening to the people we work with and their families is central to our work and decision-making and informs all the consultancy and training we deliver.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, social isolation continues to significantly impact people with intellectual disabilities, as many rely on routine, social interactions, and structured support services—many which are still disrupted. Our direct support services provide stability to these routines and encourage gradual expansion of them as our participants build confidence and progress towards their goals. Our trademarked Leisure

Buddies Program focuses on the importance of fostering friendships and belonging outside of a paid service. However, with the decline in volunteer participation, influenced by economic challenges and changing lifestyles, many organisations like us have felt the impact around recruitment of volunteers. Continuing to support people who are isolated from 18+ yrs requires an ever-increasing need for volunteers, as paid supports and health professionals are not able to offer the same type of connection that a volunteer can provide.

Lastly, we continue to observe a growing gap in employment rates between individuals with cognitive disabilities and the general population, along with a growing % of people with intellectual disabilities who have never been employed, despite aspiring to hold a meaningful role within their community. We understand the importance for inclusive employment strategies, vocational training, and employer education to better integrate individuals with cognitive disabilities into the workforce. Our WOPMAT assessment and vocational coaching service helps us and employers understand a person's current abilities, their needs, and the meaningful opportunities that could be offered. We work closely with employment partners to foster these positive outcomes.

At Inclusion Melbourne, we are committed to leading by example. We continue to understand the broader landscape and to adapt, innovate, and prioritise the voices of those we support to ensure we deliver meaningful, high-quality services. As we look to the future, we call on all stakeholders to join us in building a sector that empowers people with disabilities to thrive and achieve their aspirations.

**Helen Williams**  
CEO





# our services

## overview of services

At Inclusion Melbourne we are dedicated to fostering an inclusive community where individuals with cognitive and intellectual disabilities can thrive. Our comprehensive range of services, including volunteering, direct support, and support coordination, are designed to empower participants and build their capacity. We follow a whole-person approach, ensuring that each individual receives personalised support tailored to their unique needs and goals.

AT INCLUSION  
MELBOURNE OUR  
COMMITMENT TO  
INCLUSION AND  
EMPOWERMENT DRIVES  
EVERYTHING WE DO

### our services

#### 1. Community Support & Volunteering

- **Engagement and Inclusion:** Inclusion Melbourne volunteers play a crucial role in creating a supportive community. We offer two distinct programs, Leisure Buddies and one supporting our aging community called ACCVS. Our volunteers provide genuine friendships, companionship, and engage in social and recreational activities with participants.
- **Skill Development:** Through volunteering, participants gain new skills, build confidence, and develop a sense of purpose through meaningful friendships with our volunteers.

#### 2. Direct Support Services

- **Personalised Care:** Our direct support services are tailored to meet the specific needs of each participant. This includes assistance with daily living activities, health and wellness support, vocational aspirations and access to community resources.
- **Empowerment and Independence:** We focus on empowering participants to achieve greater independence and improve their quality of life.

#### 3. Support Coordination

- **Person Centred Planning:** Our support coordinators work closely with participants to develop comprehensive plans that address their goals and needs. This includes coordinating services, advocating for participants, and ensuring they have access to necessary resources.
- **Building Capacity:** We aim to build the capacity of participants by providing them with the tools and support they need to navigate their lives more independently.



At Inclusion we work with a variety of cohorts including Individuals with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) and people with People with Cognitive and Intellectual Disabilities. The specialised support we provide to individuals with ABI, helps them regain skills and adapt to new challenges. Our services promote recovery and enhance their ability to lead fulfilling lives. Inclusion Melbourne’s programs are designed to meet the unique needs of individuals with cognitive disabilities. We focus on enhancing their cognitive abilities, promoting social inclusion, and improving their overall well-being.

Our programs support:

1. **Those suffering from loneliness and isolation:** Inclusion Melbourne offers programs that encourage social interaction and community participation. By fostering connections, we help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation among participants.
2. **Elderly participants aging with dignity:** Our services for the elderly are aimed at promoting independence and enhancing their quality of life. We provide support with daily activities, health management, and social engagement.

At Inclusion Melbourne our commitment to inclusion and empowerment drives everything we do. By offering a wide range of services and adopting a whole-person approach, we are making a significant impact on the lives of individuals with cognitive and intellectual disabilities. Our efforts not only support participants in their daily lives but also empower them to achieve their full potential and lead fulfilling, independent lives. Together, we are building a more inclusive and supportive community for all.



## future expansion: extending our reach and impact

At Inclusion Melbourne, our mission to support individuals with cognitive and intellectual disabilities has driven us to continuously innovate and expand our services. As we look to the future, we are excited to share our vision for extending our reach and impact. Our goal is to ensure that more individuals can benefit from our inclusive and empowering approach, fostering a society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

### expanding geographical reach

One of our primary objectives is to extend our services to underserved regions. We recognise that many communities lack access to the comprehensive support that individuals with disabilities need. By establishing partnerships in these areas, we aim to bridge this gap and provide essential resources to those who need them most. Our expansion will focus on both urban and regional areas, ensuring that our support is accessible to a diverse range of participants.

### specialised programs for diverse needs

As we expand, we are committed to developing specialised programs that cater to the unique needs of different cohorts. This includes:

1. **Youth Programs:** We aim to create targeted initiatives for teenagers with disabilities, focusing on education, skill development, and social integration. These programs will empower them to achieve their full potential and prepare for a successful transition into adulthood.
2. **Employment Support:** Recognising the importance of meaningful employment, we will continue building on our comprehensive employment support services. This will include job training, placement assistance, and ongoing support to help participants secure and maintain employment. Our goal is to promote economic independence and enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.



### strengthening community partnerships

Collaboration is key to achieving our mission. We plan to continue to strengthen our partnerships with local organisations, businesses, and government agencies. By working together, we can create a more inclusive community and amplify our impact. These partnerships will enable us to share resources, expertise, and best practices, ultimately enhancing the quality and reach of our services.

### investing in staff development

Our dedicated staff is the backbone of our organisation. To ensure we continue to provide high-quality support, we will invest in ongoing training and professional development for our team. This includes specialised training in areas such as disability support, mental health, and best practice. By equipping our staff with the latest knowledge and skills, we can better serve our participants and adapt to their evolving needs.

As we embark on this exciting journey of expansion, our commitment to empowering individuals with cognitive and intellectual disabilities remains unwavering. By extending our geographical reach, enhancing services, developing specialised programs, strengthening community partnerships, and investing in staff development, we are poised to make a greater impact than ever before. Together, we can build a more inclusive and supportive society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

**Sarah Stevenson**

Head of Services and Development



# direct support

## fostering opportunities and inclusion

The Direct Support Team at Inclusion Melbourne embodies a person-centred approach, ensuring every person is given the opportunity to fully engage in all aspects of their lives. By building strong relationships and shared aspirations, the team works toward a collective vision of a fulfilling and inclusive future.

Over the past year, the team has strengthened its services through a comprehensive intake process, individualised person-centred planning, and tailored support plans aligned with participants' personal, NDIS, and vocational goals. Understanding and adapting to the needs and preferences of the people we support has been key in helping us stay true to our values and mission. We recognise that everyone's needs, goals, and preferences are unique and respecting these differences is critical. We practice flexibility in our approaches to make sure that support remains relevant and meaningful.

Delivering consistent personalised supports, has enabled the team to empower individuals to develop skills, access work and education, and connect

with their communities. By fostering social inclusion and reducing isolation, the team has remained steadfast in upholding the values of flexibility, relevance, and respect for individual needs and preferences.

A critical focus has been equipping participants with tools to advocate for their rights and take ownership of their aspirations. Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are carefully matched and trained to understand participants' unique visions for a good life and how to align their goals with the support provided. Organisation-wide practice coaching has enhanced competencies in person-centred approaches and supported decision-making, with a larger aim to continue to create new and inclusive opportunities.

Recent innovations include enhanced communication channels utilising the rostering platform, monthly collaborative meetings to share successes and practice knowledge and identify challenges. Our robust evaluation mechanisms track service impact and goal achievements. Sharing success stories has not only inspired participants but also fostered broader societal change. Through these efforts, the Direct Support Team continues to champion inclusion, empowerment, and opportunity for all.



69,000  
hours of direct support  
in 2024

107,000  
kilometres driven  
in 2024

## what we learned

The past year has brought many insights which have informed the evolution of our services. What continues to stand out, is the importance of building strong, trusted relationships—both within our organisation and with the individuals and families we support. Trust and rapport are foundational to effective direct support, and establishing them requires mutual confidence, transparency, and consistent delivery of quality services over time.

The Direct Support Team has prioritised creating open communication channels that foster transparency and respect. By valuing clear and honest communication among staff and with participants, we aim to ensure consistency in service delivery while minimising misunderstandings. Internally, we emphasise collaboration and teamwork, recognising that a unified approach strengthens outcomes. Our communication strategies are tailored to meet the unique needs of individuals and their families, ensuring their voices are heard and respected. Active feedback is sought to guide improvements, remaining adaptable to evolving needs. These learnings drive us to refine our practices, ensuring that trust, collaboration, and participant-focused communication remain central to our approach.

Deeper communication with our clients has sparked a growing interest in exploring vocational opportunities and identifying roles that offer meaningful contributions to the community. By fostering open, individualised conversations, coupled with our insightful WOPMAT assessment, we've been able to better understand each person's aspirations and guide them toward achievable vocational goals. To support this, we now offer personalised vocational pathway mapping and coaching, empowering participants to navigate their journey with confidence. Our Direct Support Professionals work closely with clients in training rooms, within the community, and alongside employers, ensuring consistent support across every stage of their journey toward securing a valued role in the workforce.

This year, we've seen a significant uplift in interest from our clients to explore leisure and fitness activities, as well as greater engagement with community events spanning sports, concerts, and the arts. These pursuits not only enhance physical and mental well-being but also create opportunities for social connection and personal growth.

Our support has focused on facilitating access to these enriching experiences, ensuring that participants feel empowered to try new activities and immerse themselves in the community. From joining fitness programs to attending live performances and cultural events, individuals have embraced opportunities to broaden their horizons and build meaningful connections. These engagements are integral to fostering inclusion and a sense of belonging for the people we support.



### afi's journey to the stage - a tea party performance for melbourne fringe festival

Afi, a young man supported by Inclusion Melbourne, recently took part in Tea Party, an immersive play performed by the theatre company Rollercoaster as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival. This unique production invited audience members to participate, creating moments of discomfort to encourage empathy and reflection on the experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Throughout the year, Afi rehearsed weekly with the guidance of Inclusion Melbourne's Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). This preparation included practicing lines, projecting his voice, and learning to navigate potential off-script scenarios.

Afi's passion for performance and his energetic, social personality shone through, and he grew in confidence as the performance date approached.

To foster Afi's independence, his DSPs stepped back when possible, encouraging him to build relationships within the theatre group while providing gentle guidance. Afi's dedication paid off as he performed all nine shows of Tea Party over one week with confidence and enthusiasm.

His mother and several of his support workers attended the performances, sharing in the joy of his accomplishment.



# support coordination



## what we delivered

Over the last 12 months, the Inclusion Melbourne Support Coordination Team have assisted people they support to implement their NDIS plans and flexibly use their budgets in line with latest NDIS guidelines, with a strong focus on keeping on top of the changes to the NDIS rules that occurred in October 2024.

Furthermore, the team have enabled those they support to envisage a better-quality life, explore possibilities and create opportunities; tailoring supports to meet individual needs and navigate services in their local community. They are focused on positive outcomes for those they support, to pursue their goals, connect with NDIS providers, mainstream, community and government services.

Our team are creative thinkers, continuously looking for different ways supports can be delivered. We have a committed and passionate team with a range of knowledge and backgrounds, skilled across a variety of areas.

Our specialist areas include but are not limited to; supporting people with behaviour support plans, home and living applications / accommodation, employment goals, with expertise supporting people with intellectual disability, dual disability, neurological conditions, acquired brain injury, hearing loss, early onset dementia and psychosocial disability to name a few. Please see Greg's story below about his experience with inclusion Melbourne Support Coordination over the past 12 months.

# 6,500

hours plan managed in 2024

One of our participants, Stefania, supported by Richard, her Support Coordinator, enjoys volunteering at a café. Here she is working hard in the kitchen learning new skills towards employment



## what we learned

Over the past 12 months, the team reflected and noted there's often several ways to implement a plan, however, providing a person-centred approach is the key to ensure people they support are empowered and can exercise their choice and control.

In 2025, the Support Coordination team will be focusing on broadening our audience with an emphasis on supporting more people with complex support needs, employment goals and those that may be experiencing social isolation or have an acquired or psychosocial disability.



## Greg Scott's NDIS journey

Greg is 62 lives with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In 2022 his mother passed away from pancreatic cancer which left Greg living alone without many of the skills he needed to thrive. With family living both overseas and interstate there was even thought that he may need to live in a supported care facility. With the help of NDIS funding Greg is now living independently and thriving.

Greg moved to Melbourne to live close to his sister Jenny and her family. Greg with the support of his sister started to navigate the NDIS system. Greg has been assisted by the Inclusion Melbourne support coordination team for the past 18 months, they have worked with great commitment to ensure Greg utilises his funding to best support his needs.

The funding provided by NDIS has allowed Greg access to support workers who have helped with some domestic work but mainly providing companionship and outings to get to know Melbourne.

Greg has been connected to Caulfield South Community Centre where he goes 2-3 times a week for community meals, card and board games and a walking group. He participates in an exercise program funded by NDIS which is tailored for improving coordination and muscle strength.

Greg enjoys taking part in a weekly cooking class which includes cooking in the home of the organiser followed by sharing a meal and conversation. Greg has been supported through allied health professionals such as speech therapist who have provide support in developing conversation skills to help Greg in social situations especially when he gets overwhelmed. This has given Greg the confidence to participate in other community-based groups such as the University of the Third Age which have included current affairs sessions and a film group.

Maintaining order is important especially living alone. The NDIS funding has also provided Greg with regular cleaning service to help him with keeping his flat a calm, clean and relaxing space.

After 18 months of building his capacity to participate in the community, Greg went on his first holiday since his mother passed away. This was NDIS funded for the support staff which meant that Greg could travel and not be alone. He thoroughly enjoyed touring along the Great Ocean Rd and spending time in nature.

Greg and his sister Jenny are so grateful for the support and opportunities the NDIS has provided. Greg's life would be a lot different without it. The quality of care has been outstanding.



**GREG HAS BEEN CONNECTED TO CAULFIELD SOUTH COMMUNITY CENTRE WHERE HE GOES 2-3 TIMES A WEEK FOR COMMUNITY MEALS, CARD AND BOARD GAMES AND A WALKING GROUP.**





# community supports

## what we delivered

The Community Support team delivers two key volunteer programs: The Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS) and our signature Leisure Buddies program. Both programs deliver outcomes through the facilitation of one-on-one matches between Inclusion Melbourne volunteers and community members. The Community Support team brings expertise in volunteer engagement; supporting volunteers across the engagement cycle, as well as supporting participants and their families on both the ACVVS and Leisure Buddies programs. In addition, we support the recruitment of volunteer tutors for Inclusion training.

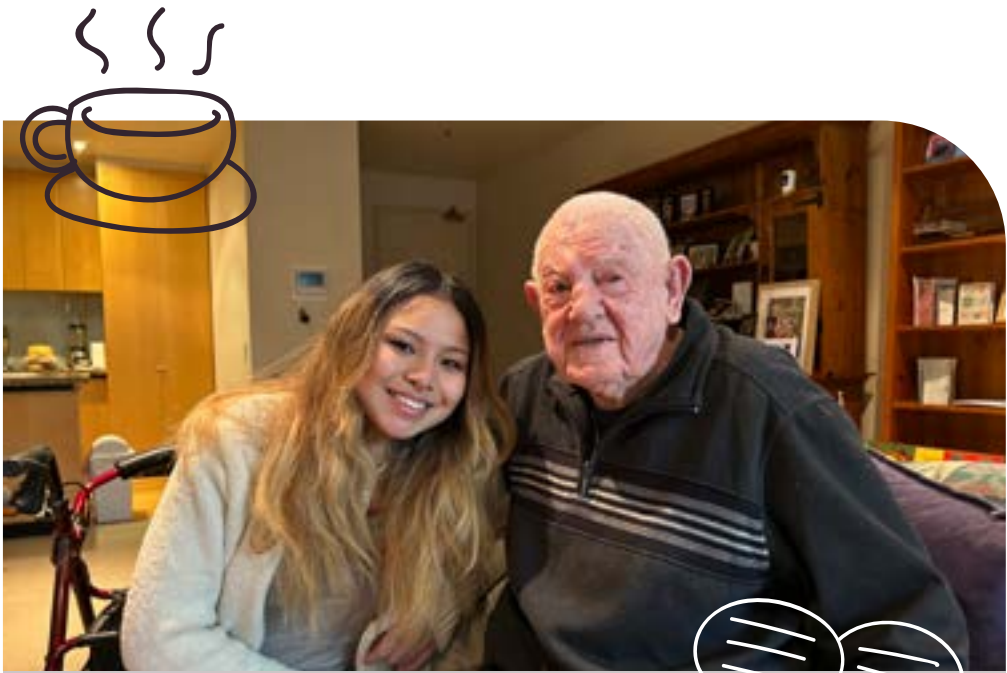
### ACCVS

ACCVS supports friendship and companionship to older people and builds community connectedness through the facilitation of volunteer visits. Inclusion Melbourne has been an auspice for ACVVS since 2014 and operates across all Melbourne metro areas. Our ACVVS matches support older people who:

- feel isolated from their culture and heritage
- have little contact with friends or relatives, or
- have mobility and health issues that prevent them from taking part in social or leisure activities.

Inclusion Melbourne volunteers meet older people in their homes and in residential aged care homes twice a month and over time build genuine connections and friendships.

Inclusion Melbourne manages 30 ACVVS volunteer matches across the Melbourne metro area.



megan and kevin

Megan and Kevin really enjoy each other’s company; they laugh, talk about sports, reminisce and delve into current topics of the day.

### Leisure Buddies

Inclusion Melbourne’s award-winning **Leisure Buddies** service matches a NDIS participant with a volunteer from their local community, fostering informal community connection and inclusion. A match with a volunteer assists the participant to achieve their goals through the medium of a lasting and meaningful friendship.

Leisure Buddies supports mentoring, peer-support and individual skill development. A Leisure Buddy friendship is organic and flexible in nature and complements relationships such as family and paid supports.

Leisure Buddies support participants to build:

- natural community connections when they have been marginalized in the past
- experience developing friendships and communicating socially
- life skills that can be transferred to other contexts such as work and study, and
- mutuality for people who are often viewed as recipients of charitable care.

This service creates unique opportunities for participants to make new friends, have fun, and complements more traditional relationships such as family and paid support.

Inclusion Melbourne manages 19 Leisure Buddy matches across the Melbourne metro area.

## what we learned

Through our volunteer programs, we’ve learned that social isolation remains a significant issue, particularly for individuals with cognitive disabilities. To address this, fostering collaboration with grassroots organisations, councils, and charities has proven essential, and in 2025, Inclusion Melbourne will launch the Leisure Buddies social franchise to bring our trademarked program to communities in need.

Other learnings this year have been:



### spring adventures await: jacob and joel hit the road for sunshine and shopping

On a sunny spring day, Jacob and Joel set out for a nice day filled with long walks and exciting shopping expeditions, making the most of their time together.



### Successful matches are based on:

- mutual benefits and interests
- ensuring the volunteer lives nearby or has access to transport
- recruiting a diverse volunteer workforce
- creating a welcoming first meeting; this initial introduction sets the tone for the relationship
- meeting in a relaxed and friendly environment can help both parties feel at ease and excited about the match.

### Successful support requires:

- providing a dedicated Community Support Coordinator who delivers ongoing monitoring and support to the volunteer and the Leisure Buddy and/or ACVVS recipients to manage any personal, structural or environmental barriers that may arise
- facilitating open and ongoing communication between both parties to set the tone of the relationship
- a periodic review of the match to ensure it’s working well and to allow for adjustments to be made when needed, and
- providing meaningful volunteer appreciation, both informal and formal, and opportunities for volunteers to be involved in professional development activities.

### wendy and anita

June was very happy to have Anita visit her again today. She showed Anita her album of beautiful orchids that she had in her old garden. They had a nice time chatting. June had been looking forward to her coming. It was lovely to see June so engaged.



### bringing people together through music and friendship

Jess invited Mike to enjoy his piano performance, creating a memorable moment that highlighted the power of connection as they shared an afternoon filled with music and friendship.

4,210

hours of volunteering in 2024



18 - 84

age range of volunteers in 2024



# inclusiontraining *in*

## what we delivered



Inclusion Training provides vocational training and educational programs aimed at improving foundational skills, such as literacy and numeracy, along with specialised training for workplace readiness. The programs are designed to accommodate diverse learning needs, ensuring an inclusive learning environment aligned with national standards.

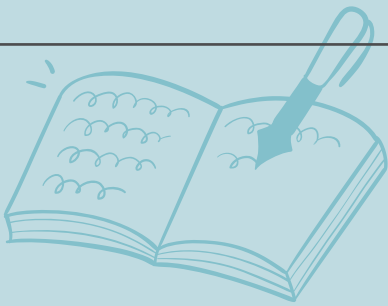
Through these offerings, Inclusion Training contributes to fostering a skilled and inclusive workforce, aligning with Victoria’s commitment to equal opportunity and community participation for all.

### accredited courses and vocational coaching

Inclusion Training provides accredited courses designed to support individuals with disabilities in building essential skills and achieving recognised qualifications. These accredited programs align with national standards, ensuring that students gain competencies relevant to today’s workforce, such as foundational literacy, numeracy, and specific vocational skills that are directly applicable in various employment settings.

Accredited courses offered by Inclusion Training emphasise a customised approach, tailoring learning experiences to meet the individual needs of each student. This commitment to accredited training ensures that each student is equipped with skills and knowledge that are formally recognised, thus enhancing their employability and fostering inclusivity within the workforce and the broader community.

Along with existing courses offered, Certificate I in Transition Education,



Certificate I in Work Education, Certificate I in General Education and the Course in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy, Inclusion Training introduced two new programs in 2024. These have two streams – vocational (employment) and social inclusion and both consist of individual coaching, classroom activities, job site visits, volunteering or work placement and activities in the community.



### key components of vocational coaching:

1. **Personalised Skill Assessment and Development:** Each student would undertake a digital Language, Literacy and Numeracy test and a digital workplace skills test to determine their current capacity. A Work Opportunity Placement and Matching Tool (WOPMAT) would also be completed to identify strengths, interests, areas for development to be worked on (both soft and hard skills). A report summarises all these results and recommends a 1-3 yr personal vocational journey, that support services and employers can work with the participant on to achieve their personal vocational goals.
2. **Career Planning and Goal Setting:** Working with individuals to set realistic, achievable career goals and create a roadmap for achieving them.
3. **Job Search Support:** Assisting with job search strategies, resume building, and interview preparation.

4. **Workplace Adjustment and Support:** Coaching would often include guidance on workplace accommodations, self-advocacy, and strategies for a smooth transition into employment.
- Vocational coaching is used to provide personalised, inclusive support, empowering participants to build confidence, enhance employability, and succeed in meaningful careers.



**VOCATIONAL COACHING IS A SUPPORTIVE, GUIDANCE-DRIVEN APPROACH FOCUSED ON HELPING INDIVIDUALS IDENTIFY, DEVELOP, AND PURSUE CAREER-RELATED SKILLS AND GOALS OR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.**



## what we learned

The main learnings taken from 2024 are in relation to the recruitment of students and differentiation of programs from those of competitors.

There is considerable competition in the disability sector for students – TAFE’s, Private RTO’s, Disability Employment Services, Secondary schools with disability cohorts and Day Care centres, who are all in the market to educate students with disabilities.

Growth strategies include:

- **Collaboration with Disability Organisations:** Partnering with disability advocacy groups and support networks can help reach potential students and provide them with

resources and support needed for vocational training.

- **Accessible Marketing Materials:** Ensure promotional materials, websites, and social media campaigns are accessible, including the use of large print, braille, screen-reader compatibility, and captioned videos, so all potential students can learn about program offerings.
- **Success Stories and Role Models:** Share stories of successful students with disabilities to inspire new applicants, demonstrating that vocational education can be an empowering step towards meaningful careers.
- **Disability-Friendly Platforms:** Use of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn with accessible posts to reach potential students and their families.

- **Collaboration with secondary schools and special education programs** to reach students with disabilities early, offering guidance on the transition from school to vocational training.
- **Visual Representation:** Inclusion of images and videos of students with disabilities in promotional materials to show inclusivity and demonstrate that these programs are designed for everyone.
- **Inclusive Employer Partnerships:** Highlighted partnerships with inclusive employers who offer accessible work placements and opportunities for students with disabilities, providing confidence in post-graduation prospects.

When looking at our competitors, there are a lot of similar courses and programs on offer. We continue to provide a unique approach to support our participants that larger entities

can’t maintain. We regularly review and adapt our programs to ensure that a variety of programs can be delivered more flexibly (i.e. less theory and more practical).

Fostering reciprocal partnerships with employers, schools and employment services has been core to what we deliver.







# non-accredited courses

Non-accredited training/learning refers to a program of structured training or instruction that does not lead to the attainment of a formal qualification or award, for example, short courses. Inclusion Training has developed a range of non-accredited courses over the years to cater for a wide number of students with different levels of intellectual disabilities.

Accredited training is important however it can come with a caveat -the trainer can be constrained by the curriculum which does not always suit some students with certain disabilities. There can be at times a degree of repetition and learning that is not relevant – this is where non-accredited training comes in handy and fills the gaps to better suit the individual learner’s needs. This is why both forms of training combined provide a well-balanced outcome for students.

Inclusion Training receives funding from Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) under the Victorian Government. They provide funds to registered Learn Locals who are not-for-profit community organisations registered and funded by the Victorian Government. These providers deliver education and training programs to a broad range of Victorians who are above compulsory school age and who are seeking to gain the educational capacity and core skills for work, life or study. There are over 200 Learn Local locations across Melbourne and Regional Victoria offering a wide range of courses.

Programs delivered under ACFE as a Learn Local last year by Inclusion Training include:

- Digital skills
- Cooking skills
- Health and hygiene
- Word Wise
- Let’s Talk Money
- A few different literacy and numeracy programs
- Lifestyle Skills

As part of the Social Inclusion and Vocational programs introduced this year, informal training has been included for some students where the need has been identified. For example, students at the Sunshine campus have been involved in several community programs that are offered by local councils or community houses. Students have volunteered at various organisations and undertake training on workplace safety and how to use machines or equipment. This helps build confidence and skills practically in the workplace to support their development towards their aspired careers.

There has been an increased emphasis on non-accredited/informal training and learning at Inclusion Training in 2024 to provide different environments and experiences for the students which benefits them in so many ways.



# what we learned

Whenever possible, learning for students should be more than formal training. Informal training can provide added benefits of socialisation, belonging, understanding different cultures, self-improvement, lifelong learning, flexibility and adaptability.

Programs developed by Inclusion Training also concentrate on lifestyle skills (travel training, how to use everyday items, independence) and soft skills such as communication and decision making. Given the extensive use of digital platforms in everyday society and workplaces, we provide regular immersion to various digital platforms and devices to enable students to learn and feel confident with their navigation.

Depending on the cohort, Inclusion Training will further diversify our non-accredited training programs with the introduction of exciting new strategies.

We are committed to fostering innovative, engaging, and inclusive learning experiences to empower our participants and enhance their personal and professional development.

These strategies focus on creating dynamic learning environments that cater for diverse needs and learning styles:

- **Mentorship for Growth:** Establishing opportunities for connection with experienced mentors who provide personalised guidance and insights.
- **Interactive Workshops:** Offering focused, skill-based workshops led by industry professionals to inspire and equip learners with practical tools.
- **Empowering Self-Directed Learning:** Encouraging participants to take ownership of their learning journey by exploring topics of interest and sharing their knowledge with peers.
- **Real-World Simulation:** Engaging in role-playing scenarios and problem-based exercises to develop critical skills such as problem-solving, customer service, and adaptability.
- **Collaborative Communities:** Building supportive networks through communities of practice where individuals can share experiences, best practices, and collective learning.
- **Game-Based Engagement:** Integrating gamified learning techniques to make education fun, interactive, and motivating.
- **Flexible E-Learning:** Expanding access to learning through digital platforms, microlearning modules, and mobile-friendly content.

By embracing these, non-accredited training methods we offer flexibility, practical experience, and tailored learning, valuable for personal growth, skill-building, and workplace development. They ensure that participants are equipped with the skills and confidence to thrive in their communities and workplaces.

LEARNING GOES BEYOND FORMAL TRAINING – INFORMAL EXPERIENCES FOSTER BELONGING, CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING, SELF-IMPROVEMENT, AND THE ADAPTABILITY NEEDED FOR LIFELONG GROWTH.



25,580  
hours of courses  
in 2024

20  
suburbs students  
come from

19 – 64  
age range of students  
attending classes

Jane Howard  
Head of Education & Training





# what we delivered

Inclusion Designlab is Inclusion Melbourne’s centre for research and development, policy, projects and quality. Our team’s combined work and experience in community development projects, research partnerships, quality, practice training, communications, and project design is unique in Victoria’s disability sector. Coupled with our independent funding and direct engagement with the Inclusion Melbourne board, the team also functions as a semi-independent systemic advocacy body – one of only a handful across Australia.

2023-24 saw Inclusion Designlab expand its delivery of training to external providers, including:

- **Practice Training:** A 5-part series integrating an introduction to a range of evidence-based practices, as well as an overview of the NDIS, rights, and citizenship
- **Pass it to Me!:** Training for local sports and recreation clubs looking to be more inclusive of people with cognitive disability
- **Circles of Support facilitation training:** Training for community members, support coordinators, advocates and others who are keen to learn how to help a person with disability build a Circle of Support around them to help them reach their goals, build their agency, and live a full life.

The year also saw our most successful grant application outcomes ever, with funds totalling almost \$1 million coming directly to Inclusion Designlab for projects in employment, Circles of Support, and LGBTQA+ inclusion for delivery over the coming two financial years. In particular, we were successful in securing funds from:

- Transport Accident Commission (TAC): A Guide to forming Circles of Support with people with Acquired Brain Injury
- Jack Brockhoff Foundation: Pilot of the manual Work Opportunity Matching Tool (WOPMAT)
- Australian Government Department of Social Services:
  - › Funds from the Structural Adjustment Fund for the digital

version of the Work Opportunity Matching Tool (WOPMAT)

- › Funds from the Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program for the Accessible Pride Project, a consortium partnership with Thorne Harbour Health to develop training and resources to support the inclusion of LGBTQ people with intellectual disability

We continued to work closely with partners at City of Brimbank, Deakin University, and University of Melbourne to consolidate our work and plan future projects in oral health, political inclusion, and employment.

Our successful Political Inclusion National Summit, held in September 2023, led to our team presenting findings from the Summit at the Virtual Disability Conference 2024 alongside our partners at University of Melbourne.

Inclusion Designlab’s staff were members of the following panels and advisories:

- Deakin University: Graduate Courses Advisory Committee
- Disability Oral Health Collaboration (and DOHC National Intellectual Disability Health Roadmap Subgroup)
- City of Brimbank Disability Network Group
- State-wide Disability Network for Culturally Diverse Communities: Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV)
- Curtin University: Advisory Committee for Graduate Positive Behaviour Support Courses
- (As chair) National Community of Practice for Circles of Support and Microboards
- Microboards Australia: Advisory group for development of AAC resources for sexual support

## quality and practice

Inclusion Designlab coordinates Inclusion Melbourne’s quality management system, continuous improvement meetings, Board Quality and Risk Services sub-committee, NDIS Practice Standards audits, and Feedback and Complaints processes.

2023-24 saw Inclusion Designlab deliver the first three rounds of its Practice Training series internally, meaning that all staff have now undertaken five 90 minute live online sessions to build key skills in Supported Decision Making, Active Support, Positive Behaviour Support, identifying and preventing restrictive practices, supporting full citizenship, understanding advocacy, and building personal self-awareness for sustainable long-term practice.

Our team remapped several of Inclusion Melbourne’s end-to-end processes and developed tools to drive improved performance in intake and support planning. We also created a BSP quality check tool that has attracted substantial interest from across the sector. We received the highest volume of consulting requests in recent years.

**Nathan Despott**  
Head of Policy, Research and Advocacy



*Nathan was recently named Outstanding Leader of the Year at the 2023 National Disability Awards held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. This was welcome recognition for many years of work driving systemic advocacy across critical areas of need in the disability community.*

# project snapshot: 2023-24

## pass it to me! inclusive practice workshops

*People with intellectual disability and inclusion in local sport and recreation*

We continued our partnership with Freedom Solutions Australia (FSA), Deakin University, and South East Water to deliver free online workshops to 60 representatives of sports and recreation organisations and local governments. The workshops were co-delivered with a team of self-advocates with disability.

People with intellectual disability are often unintentionally excluded from community sport through a lack of confidence and awareness within sports clubs. Our training raised awareness of evidence-based practices, strategies for inclusion, reasonable adjustments, rights and legislation.



[LEARN MORE](#)

## WOPMAT

Inclusion Designlab has taken a significant step in developing the Work Opportunity Matching Tool, or the WOPMAT. The WOPMAT is a powerful new approach to making sure people with intellectual and cognitive disability have a clear individual pathway to employment. The WOPMAT includes an Assessment, a Report, and a Level Guide. These are used to identify the attributes of a series of placements that the person can do to build skills, meet goals, and experience a broader range of options.

The WOPMAT Project has been funded through substantial grants from the Jack Brockhoff Foundation and the Australian Department of Social Services to be refined, piloted twice, and developed into a digital platform.



## accessible pride: celebrating lgbtq people with intellectual disability

Inclusion Melbourne joined a consortium with Thorne Harbour Health and Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS, La Trobe University) to co-lead a \$1.6 million DSS-funded project in 2024-26. This will be our largest ever project. Our team will develop groundbreaking training for disability support organisations and LGBTQA+ community health organisations to enable them to better support LGBTQ people with intellectual disability. The project builds on our Rainbow Inclusion project (2020-22).

Australian research (Private Lives 3, La Trobe University) has found people with intellectual disability have one of the highest rates of suicidality among LGBTQ Australians. They are regularly subject to practices designed to suppress their identity development. Our project is all about changing this!



[LEARN MORE](#)

## circles of support and people with acquired brain injury

A Circle of Support is a group of people chosen and trusted by a person with disability to support them with their goals and choices. Using principles of Supported Decision Making, the Circle meets regularly to help develop relationships, discuss the person’s hopes and dreams, ensure the person’s autonomy, and even review performance of existing formal supports. Circles can assist with goals like finding a job, getting more connected to the community, moving out of home, developing independence, joining community groups, or going on a holiday.

Inclusion Melbourne has received funds from Victoria’s Transport Accident Commission (TAC) in 2024-25 to create a guide for people looking to facilitate, implement or fund Circles of Support for and with people with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI). Our team has been working with advisers, including self-advocates, from across the country.

Click on the button below to learn more about Circles of Support.

[LEARN MORE](#)



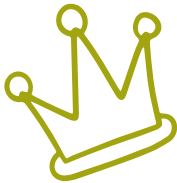


# our supporters

The unwavering support of our volunteers, partners, funders and donors is vital to the success of Inclusion Melbourne’s mission. Their commitment allows us to offer transformative services and programs that empower individuals with disabilities to live fulfilling, independent lives. By standing alongside us, they help create a stronger, more inclusive community where people with disabilities are respected and valued. This support is integral not only to our daily operations but also to the broader systemic change we are striving for, ensuring that we can continue to make a real and lasting impact in the lives of those we serve.



# volunteers



- Batool Al-Bidiri

Sutasinee Anantanawat

Fahimeh Anari

Riyah Asad

Emma Bardon

Jessica Barrett

Amber Bowman

Sophie Boyd

Christian Brett

Kylie Castan

Sarah Coakley

Sarah Curtis

Nur Ezzati Daud

Richard Day

Rebekah Delahoy

Carolyn Den Hartog

Renuka Dharmaratne

Niki Esler

Rosita Fernandes

Michelle Glanville

Shane Golden

Joanne Gooren
- Steven Hains

Emma Holder

Deborah Holmes

Linda Hughes

Thien Huynh

Barbara Hutchinson

Beverley Jeffreys

Navpreet Khairah

Stephanie Koochew

Anastasia Kossivas

Oliver Lacy

Natalie Lake

Anastasia Lembovski

Abby Levy

Lucas Lewit-Mendes

Megan Lim

John Lloyd

David Luffman

Brian Lynch

Melissa Masutti

Emma McCaul

Peter McLeod
- Shana Miller

Mike Moffat

Sally Murshell

Jess Newman

Jid Ofole

Jane O’Loughlin

Giulia Paulin

Lefteris Patlamazoglou

Joel Pearce

Anita Peng

Ruwandi Perera

Pete Riley

Carol Robinson

Janet Self

Nicholas Straman

Olivia Strickland

Kevin Tran

Marek Turski-Szendzielarz

Yao Wang

Ivan Zulman

# volunteer milestones

25 years

Rosita Fernandes

Paul Gleeson

20 years

David Luffman

Frances Wheeler

15 years

Lefteris Patlamazoglou

10 years

Amber Bowman

5 years

Pete Riley

Ivan Zulman

Oliver Lacy

Rebekah Delahoy

# staff milestones

10 years

Bianca Davis-King

Shae Beard

5 years

Stephen Wheeler

# inclusion melbourne partners

We also thank our international collaborators:

# inclusion melbourne funders





**inclusion**melbourne  
believing. living. belonging



inclusiondesignlab *in* inclusiontraining *in*

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Curious about receiving services  
from us, eager to collaborate, or  
just have a question?

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and get in touch today - we'd love  
to hear from you!

**GET IN TOUCH**