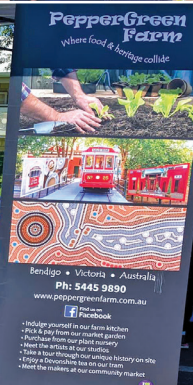


Celebrating 30 years



**In the spirit of reconciliation,
Access Australia Group
acknowledges the Traditional
Custodians of Country
throughout Australia and
their connections to land,
sea and community.**

**We pay our respect to their
elders past, present and
emerging, and extend that
respect to all Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander peoples.**



*Celebrating
30 years*



Contents:

Chair Report	3
CEO Report	4
Board of Directors	6
Who We Are	7
Vision and Purpose	7
Strategic Directions 2020 – 2024	8
Organisational Chart	9
Quality and Compliance Team Report	10
Information Technology Team Report	11
Employment Services	12
NDIS Programs	19
Access Skills Training	26
Human Resources Report	31
Service Awards	32



Chair Report

Access celebrates its 30th, or pearl, anniversary in 2022. Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish philosopher, said ‘no pressure, no diamond; no grit, no pearl’.

It is very easy to be proud of the people of this organisation when they have shown such grit over a sustained period – 2021–2022 has challenged us all. Our staff have kept on doing so much more than turning up. Innovating, trying new things, smiling, responding, covering for each other as illness, workforce shortages, supply chain disruption and sometimes plain ordinary weather disrupted plans. The Board Directors see this, hear about it from members of the community, and are proud of the sustained focus of all our staff on achieving our vision: Employment for people living with disability or disadvantage.

Our external environment is changing, across all three of our streams. Not a stone remains undisturbed. Employment Services sees changes in the Federal Government tendering processes and outcomes.

Free TAFE courses are welcomed, as education provides opportunity, and builds the skilled workforce our community needs. But it makes for very tough competition for our training arm. And changes to the way NDIS operates effects all our social enterprises.

The Board is investing time and resources on the strategic long-term positioning of Access. The outcomes for our community are too important to do anything less.

Thank you, to my fellow Directors for their intellectual contribution and personal commitment to see Access thrive, and for their support to me as Chair. To all the staff of Access for their ongoing successes. To Liz March, our CEO, who has shown outstanding leadership, courage, and determination.

To employers, who see the value we see in people with different abilities and employ them. And to all those customers who keep walking in the door and giving us work. They too understand the importance of employment for a full and rewarding life.

Prue Mansfield
Board Chair



CEO Report

How to review a year of reflections?

The human spirit is incredible. Each of us in different ways have been pushed, stretched and at times felt broken. But together our leaders and our teams have dug deep, often going far beyond the call of our 'job descriptions' to make a difference, to turn up to see and touch the humanity in each of us.

Yes, we have experienced business disruptions as a result of a range of impacts, yes we have struggled to fill key positions in our leadership team. Our AAG mission and values are strong, they remind us every day why we turn up and give our best to our community – because the work we do makes a valuable impact on the lives of people we care about.

Like businesses globally we have had some incredible knocks – whether it be the impact of Covid, employment challenges or loss of key contracts. Our team has continued to work smartly to secure our workforce and I'm eternally grateful to each of you for your support, encouragement and standing by my side in the face of incredible adversity.

As a leader I have been pushed to the edge and I would like to thank our Board of Directors for your unbending support and encouragement.

Our business arms have had a mix of successes and challenges:

Employment Services experienced a huge upheaval with the loss of Transition to Work (TTW) through the competitive tender process and the opportunity to tender for the New Employment Services Model, now named Workforce Australia.

The result of TTW saw the loss of valuable staff and impacted the business model considerably; the flow on of which saw several highly skilled and qualified Employment Consultants lost from the sector with a view that the uncertainty of tender decisions was untenable for career progression. AAG's position as a Panel Member for Workforce Australia provides hope for delivery in the future.

Social Enterprises and Social Inclusion have worked tirelessly to build new partnerships and service contracts. The Victorian Government's Social Procurement Strategy has provided the impetus to build and connect social enterprises for the scale up that is required to compete in the private sector.

Consequently, the value of the Social Enterprise Network of Victoria (SENVIC) and the GROW Bendigo initiatives have seen AAG increase positive partnerships that foster growth and innovation for the benefit of the business, and most importantly our staff who prosper in a busy and diverse work environment.

Access Skills Training has seen a decline in student numbers, primarily as a result of the low unemployment figures and people accessing work over training needs. However, the team continue to innovate with industry to ensure workforce shortages in critical areas are addressed with teams of graduating students eager to take on their new careers.

In October 2021, Access Skills Training opened AAG's new Echuca Learning Centre on the Northern Highway. The grand opening was particularly special, attended by students, industry representatives and staff; with the highlight, a moving Welcome to Country provided by Uncle Stuart Hearn who was commissioned to create an artwork that represented AAG's journey and presence on Yorta Yorta Country.

Our Annual Staff Development Day gave us the opportunity to take “time out” together, to reconnect and share some joy! International Speaker, Chris Helder brought both inspiration and structure – providing all the messaging and reframing that we needed to review the world around us with positivity and hope.

The day continued with training and service presentations, including the results of the biannual *Staff Satisfaction Survey*, which informs our focus, commitment, and dedication to staff.

This year we celebrate AAG’s 30th Birthday – not many organisations achieve 30 years – it’s an incredible achievement. Congratulations to all those who had a vision to start the work we do today. To all the leaders that shaped new visions for AAG to evolve into the business we are today.

The core success of AAG is our unbending mission and strong values. Our business models have both waxed and waned as they must in order to remain relevant in an ever-changing world. I am deeply grateful for the role I hold in Access Australia Group’s 30 year journey.

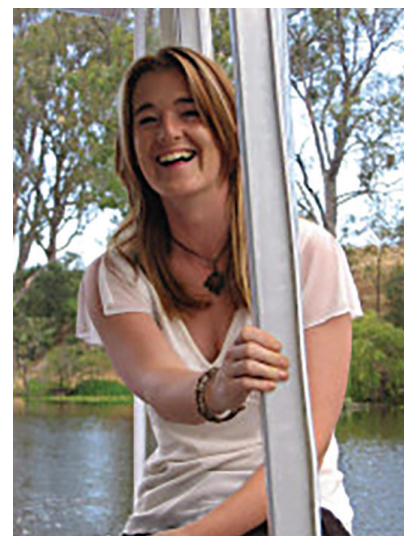
In wrapping up our year, we have learnt more about who we are as individuals at home and in the workplace. We have built resilience in ourselves and our teams and have carved out new ways of operating. We have been pushed and pulled and we are here, together, stronger now than before and ready for what comes towards us. We are open to new possibilities and working smarter to create better outcomes for those in need.

Most sincere thanks to staff, partners, stakeholders, participants, clients, and our Board of dedicated Directors – together we are strong, resilient, and hopeful for our future together.

Liz March
CEO



Vale Jo Walsh



It is with immense sadness that we reflect on the loss of Josephine “Jo” Walsh who lost her heroic battle with cancer in April. Anyone who knew Jo had a brighter life; her generosity, sense of fun and humour radiated. She had a brilliant mind for finance and an exceptional heart for humanity and fairness.

Vale Jo Walsh.

Board of Directors



Prue Mansfield – Chair



Jan Buckland – Deputy Chair



Peter Trendos – Treasurer



Paul Henshall – Director



Kevin Pittman – Director



Elizabeth Clear – Director



Lauren Ross – Director

Who We Are

About us

Access Australia Group (AAG) is a not-for-profit organisation that's been supporting a range of people through targeted education, employment and community programs since 1992. At AAG we believe everyone has a vital contribution to make to the social and economic life of the wider community. To do so, everyone needs opportunities that encourage social and economic involvement. We work with all sectors of our community to develop these opportunities.

As a NFP company limited by guarantee, we have embedded governance and management structures; policies and procedures; and risk, incident and reporting systems in place, and are fully accredited in quality and legislative compliance. We're passionate about supporting people into employment, training and other opportunities to enhance their quality of life and the benefit the wider community in which we service.

Access Australia Group employs over 140 professional staff, including industry experts, teachers, employment consultants, and NDIS specialists who work within our four key focussed aims:

- Employment Services supporting hundreds of people into jobs through Disability Employment Services, EPIC and Jobs Victoria Employment Network.
- Registered Training Organisation providing accredited training to students and organisations across Victoria.
- Social Enterprises including Access Employment Enterprises, PepperGreen Farm and PepperGreen Farm Catering, providing employment for supported employees in the Bendigo area.
- Social Inclusion including Access Creative Studios, plus a range of other NDIS funded services and programs.

We specialise in supporting people experiencing disability or disadvantage.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we have no shareholders, which means any profits are invested back into the community through innovative programs.

Vision and Purpose

Our Vision

Employment for people living with disability or disadvantage.

Our Purpose

Provide meaningful participation, training and employment opportunities for people living with disability or disadvantage.

The values that inform our behaviours:

- We value being inclusive
- We value integrity
- We value respect

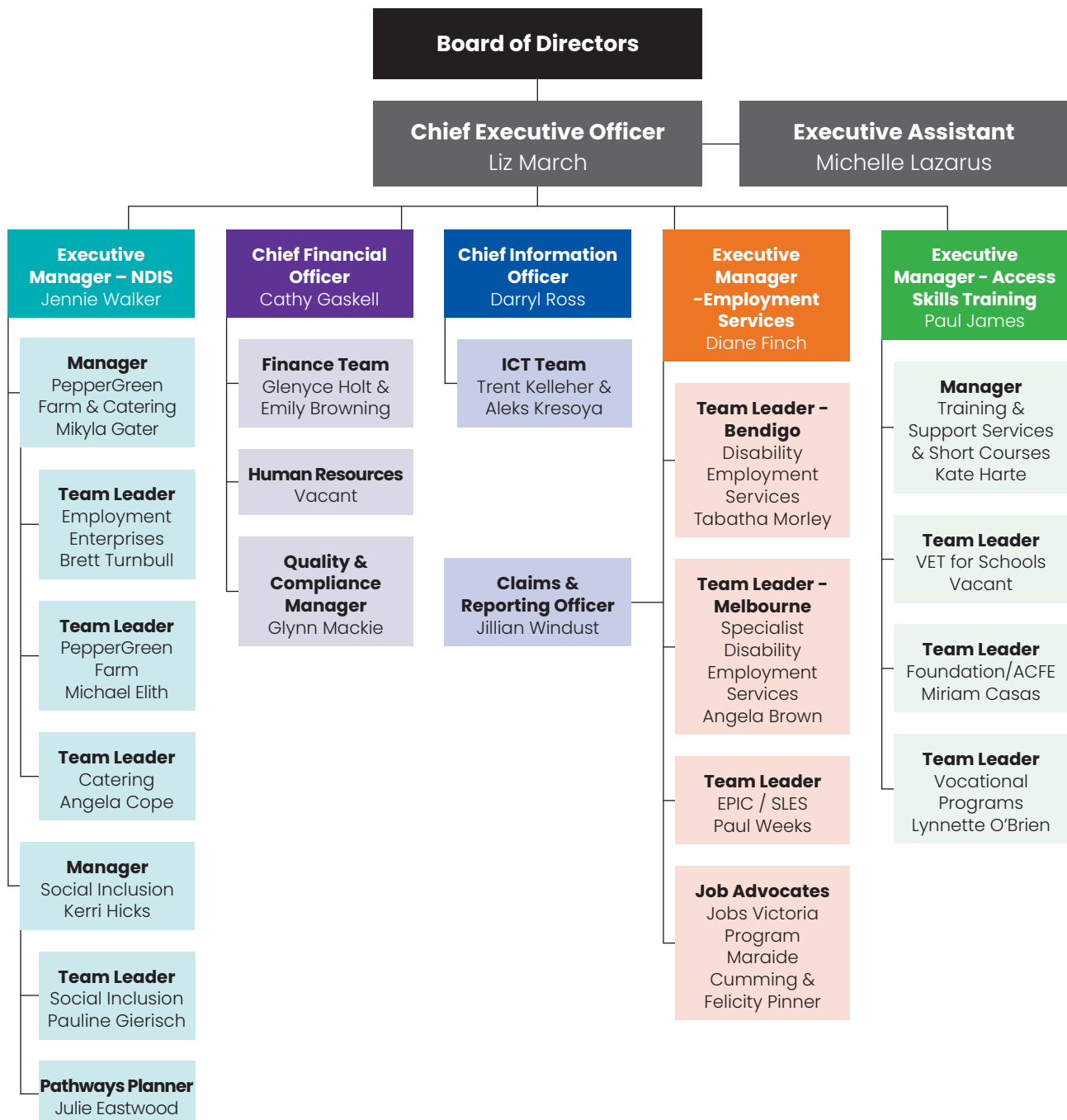
The foundations that underpin our work

- Client focus
- Financial sustainability
- Innovation in response to change
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Quality, safety and compliance

Strategic Directions 2020 - 2024

<p>The foundations that underpin our work:</p>	<p>The Access Australia Group Vision is: <i>'Employment for people living with disability or disadvantage'</i></p> <p>The Purpose of Access Australia Group is to: <i>'Provide meaningful participation, training and employment opportunities for people living with disability or disadvantage'</i></p>				<p>The values that inform our behaviours:</p>
Client focus	<p>Client Journey and Pathways</p>	<p>Culture and Competency</p>	<p>Leadership and Influence</p>	<p>Planning and Evidence</p>	<p>We value being inclusive</p> <p>We value integrity</p>
Financial sustainability					
Innovation in response to change					
Partnerships and collaboration					
Quality, safety and compliance	<p>Our goal is to be a Provider of Choice</p> <p>Provide meaningful, relevant and appropriate options that meet our clients where they are at and provide the inspiration and support to map out their journey along a pathway towards employment.</p>	<p>Our goal is to be an Employer of Choice</p> <p>A workplace culture that is focused on people, their well-being and performance.</p>	<p>Our goal is to be a Partner of Choice</p> <p>Our work is linked to our strategic direction and delivered according to our principles and values.</p>	<p>Our Goal is to be delivering best practice planning and evidence based decision making</p> <p>Our work is planned and built on the foundations of evidence based decisions and best practice service delivery.</p>	<p>We value respect</p>

Organisational Chart



Quality and Compliance Team

The Quality and Compliance team consisting of Glynn Mackie (Quality and Compliance Manager) and Samantha Woods (Quality and Compliance Officer), have been kept busy with internal and external audits as well as creating, reviewing and editing many quality documents including policies and procedures during the 2021 – 2022 financial year.

Internal audits have included:

- A variety of AST's student and training program files related to Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTO) 2015 and Skills First Funding Contract requirements.
- Child Safety Principles and Child Safety Standards
- Essential Safety Measures
- Food Safety
- National Disability Insurance Scheme Practice Standards
- National Standards for Disability Services
- OHS Internal audits

External audits have included:

- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Practice Standards surveillance audit
- National Standards for Disability Services mid-cycle audit
- Skills First Funding Contract follow up audit from 2021

Major changes to the Child Safety Standards, the National Standards for Disability Services and other legislative and regulatory requirements have made it necessary for us to make changes to our internal processes. We have been looking for options to make these tasks easier to monitor and manage and look forward to implementing better systems.

AAG has produced eleven new AAG policies and fifteen new AAG procedures and eighty-nine AAG policies and sixty-two AAG procedures have been reviewed and or amended.

Samm Woods has provided trainer / assessor qualifications requirement training to RTO staff as well as being a compliance resource to RTO management.

Two Quality Management Review (QMR) meetings have been held during the financial year, one on the 8th July 2022 and the other on the 1st December 2021.

The QMR involves senior management, including the Quality and Compliance Manager and Chief Executive Officer who review AAG's management system to ensure its suitability, adequacy and effectiveness. It includes the assessment of corrective actions taken from internal and external audits, opportunities for improvement, and any potential changes to the management system, including quality policy and objectives, and their alignment with AAG's objectives and strategy. The QMR is conducted using the 'Risk-Based Thinking' and 'Plan-Do-Check-Act' mentality.

From the two QMRs, changes were made to the AAG quality systems, trends were discovered and addressed and tasks were assigned. The QMR report went to AAG's Board of Directors for review.

Glynn Mackie
Quality & Compliance
Manager

Information Technology Team

The ICT Team is committed to delivering a strategic advantage to AAG by fostering creative and innovative use of technology to achieve AAG's objectives. The ICT Team promotes effective stewardship of information assets and provides a secure, highly reliable technology infrastructure along with high-quality, customer-oriented services and support, so as to meet the ever-changing needs of the organisation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has recently created unprecedented challenges for AAG. Strategic planning, upgrades and implementations over the last several years have positioned the ICT Team to react and respond quickly to the needs of staff and students as they transitioned to an online environment for instruction and work.

From ICT's perspective the COVID-19 silver lining was that it fast tracked AAG's cloud adoption and allowed us to quickly adapt to hybrid working being the new normal. We have transformed from using clunky remote terminals and flaky VPNs to leading edge cloud storage, device management and cyber security defence systems. Staff are now able to take an AAG device and work securely anywhere that they can get an internet connection as if they were

still in the office. This year we completed 2 major projects that significantly enhanced our hybrid work environment:

- Replaced our old on-premises phone system with the Teams Calling cloud-based phone system.
- Replaced our on-premises print server with the cloud-based PaperCut print management system.

ICT is not just about laptops and phones, we are also responsible for protecting the large amount of sensitive and personal identifiable information we are required to collect on behalf of students, jobseekers, participants and clients. AAG has a legal responsibility under the Privacy Act to protect data that we collect and store on our systems. Our key initiative in this area is being compliant with The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Right Fit For Risk (RFFR) accreditation for IT systems. RFFR combines ISO 27001 and over 700 security controls from the Australian Cyber Security Centre's (ACSC) Information Security Manual (ISM). By following the guidance provided in the ISM, AAG is in a strong position to protect our information.

In December 2021, after many hours of work from the Quality and ICT Team, AAG achieved RFFR accreditation from The Department.



This was a huge effort as we not only implemented the ISO 27001 quality frame work, but our ICT systems were also assessed against the 700 plus ISM controls. The work does not stop with accreditation, we are required to submit an annual status report to the Department in order to retain our accreditation.

To complete the report we are required to provide ongoing evidence in the form of internal audits, external assessments, annual reviews and continuous monitoring, over a three year cycle. So if you are ever wondering what Darryl does sitting in the corner with his head phones on - it's mostly this - wash, rinse and repeat forever...

It's not all doom and gloom. So far our hard work has paid off and we have managed to stay one step ahead of the bad guys in the endless game of cat and mouse. I would like to thank our dedicated ICT staff for their hard work over the past year and all AAG staff members for supporting us by taking cyber security seriously.

Employment Services



Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN)

AAG commenced the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) program in the Bendigo region in late 2016. During this time AAG supported 193 local people to find and sustain jobs.

AAG and Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services have established a partnership to assist people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds obtain employment. Over the past 5 years, assistance has been provided to people from CALD backgrounds under the JVEN banner. As a program created by the State Government, AAG saw many changes in the early days to the delivery of the program and constant re-focus on requirements. Through the JVEN program, AAG and our partner LCMS, continued to delivered all requirements and was once again extended past its finish date of June 2021 and extended until December 2021 to allow for partner LCMS to deliver services in the local area to CLAD community.



Transition to Work (TtW)

Access Australia Group successfully delivered TTW to the local Bendigo region since 2016 and has now ceased this program as of June 30th 2022.

AAG is saddened they could not continue to deliver this very high performing program and it is a significant loss to AAG. Two staff left AAG to explore opportunities in other sectors and two were able to transition for redeployment into Disability Employment Services (DES). Over 200 new young people enrolled in the TtW program for the 2021 – 2022 financial year and of these TtW assisted in approximately 150 employment commencements and forty five education placements were achieved.

With COVID restrictions continuing to impact servicing, staff continued to work as a team to achieve great results. Staff had to learn new, creative ways to interact with job seekers and support them through this time. Extra support measures were implemented to support Jobseekers through lockdowns, due to the increase on mental health challenges or issues with our young people.

This service has achieved 88 participants gaining an employment or education outcome during the year and continues to support young people in employment and education as they were placed prior to June 30th 2022.



Disability Employment Services (DES)

This year AAG continued to deliver a successful Disability Employment Service in the Bendigo, Monash and Bayside Employment Services Areas. We have seen major changes to retention of trained staff in the DES team with 8 staff leaving AAG over the past year, many of whom have left the employment services industry for new career opportunities. This necessitated continued recruitment in the team and AAG welcomed several new staff to the employment services team. The majority of the new staff are new to employment services industry and are continuing with training. This seems to be a trend nationally with employment providers struggling to retain staff and continually recruiting and losing experienced, skilled and trained staff.

Karen Egan is the new Business Development Officer and has increased AAG's employer engagement by utilising the Employer Engagement model and assisting employers to meet their many needs. Karen's strong background in sales and marketing has assisted her to build strong relationships with employers to support them. With a very low unemployment rate in the employment service areas, employers have been impacted with meeting their recruitment needs, Karen and the whole team have been very proactive in supporting employers to take opportunities to employ people with disability.

The principles of the Employer Engagement model are; working in partnership with employers, providing employers unlimited time and individualised support, aiming for the best job fit, be open and transparent, be clear about business benefits and celebrate successes. Without employers there are no jobs and building long term trusted relationships have been an asset to the employment services team.

As at March 2022, AAG was rated 3-Stars against the performance framework for its DES contract for Bendigo and Monash area and 2 stars for Bayside. This result is a testament to AAG's service delivery model as well as to the dedicated staff that work in the employment services team considering the changes the team has gone through in the past 12 months. The new star rating methodology introduced by the Department of Social Services is still bedding down and we have seen our star ratings remain stable at 3 stars. A more focused alignment of the service delivery model for the Bayside site has been implemented by the Team Leader and staff and we strongly believe for 22/23 year we will see a huge shift in the star ratings for the Moorabbin site. A more focused program assurance from the Department of Social Services has seen a strong focus on administrative tasks not being compliant nationally and this has taken away from jobseeker focus. Feedback from DES staff is the program activities seems to be more focussed on administration losing sight of the needs of disadvantaged jobseekers to build capacity and employment opportunities.

July 1st 2021 saw changes to eligibility for DES services and referrals have slowed considerably nationally. There has been an impact for disadvantaged jobseekers being unable to access supports if they are not receiving a Centrelink payment or have a benchmark of 30 hours of employment. Most of the referrals for people with a 30 hour benchmark are now going to Jobactive (Workforce Australia). Due to the reduction in referrals AAG has adjusted recruitment needs accordingly.

A key component of our service delivery model is to link job seekers in with capacity building activities to assist with job readiness and work hardening skills, develop networks and increase confidence. The DES team have continued to deliver individualised training, support and workshops including; development of soft skills, interview coaching, resume help and work preparation to help our participants feel confident in securing and maintaining meaningful employment.

Many of these workshops have been online and face to face. Other activities can consist of volunteer work, work experience, vocational training, NEIS (New Enterprise Incentive Scheme) program, referral to support and health services, and AAG's internal workshops.

AAG prides itself in preparing job seekers for work and placing them with appropriate employers. Our care with this is reflected in the high number of participants who secure and maintain sustainable employment.

AAG continues to be a member of the Headspace Bendigo, Dandenong/Narre Warren and Moorabbin consortia's, providing specialised employment advice, support and assistance to the program. AAG has recently met with the Dual Diagnoses Unit to support people with disability to gain employment and look forward to a new relationship.



National Panel of Assessors

AAG continues to provide services under the National Panel of Assessors framework. These services identify solutions to the barriers to employment participation, workplace independence and productivity for people with disability and include Supported Wage System assessments and Ongoing Support assessments.



Jobs Victoria Advocates

The Jobs Victoria Advocates support jobseekers in the community in Loddon and Campaspe areas to find the right support, no matter where they are in their search for employment and/or education.

Our Advocates assist people to find employment support, training and education, share information and tips about getting a job and referrals to career counselling. They also support people to apply for jobs on the Jobs Victoria online hub and connect people to other services such as housing support or counselling.

The advocates go to community organisations such as community and neighbourhood houses, Salvation Army, the local library and shopping centres. Maraide Cumming and Felicity Pinner have done a lot of work with community based organisations to build relationships to support all people in the community as a referral point for people wanting to make changes to career, find employment, upskill or link in with support services.

Through 2021 and 2022 Covid lockdowns made it very difficult to be able to interact with people in the community. Jobs Victoria recognised the issues of this and also the difficulties facing regional Victoria compared to Melbourne and metro areas with population differences. To support regional Advocate providers they completed a contract variation to allow for lower numbers of people engaging in the service. This has been a State Government initiative to support people after Covid for employment opportunities.

Diane Finch
Executive Manager,
Employment Services

EPIC

My apologies for beginning with a pun, but the EPIC program has truly had an EPIC year. In the 2021-22 financial year, EPIC achieved its most successful year in terms of: growth of and absolute numbers of participants; employment outcomes; social outcomes; new partnerships and sales revenue from the woodwork microbusiness.

We moved to a bigger space; acquired several motor vehicles; and added a new staff member, plus transitioned several of the team from casual to full-time employment.

In the 2021/22 year, EPIC numbers swelled from an average in the low twenties in October 2021 to an average in the mid-thirties by June 2022. Covid certainly played a part in this, as young people, particularly those with Autism Spectrum Disorder, struggled to re-engage in education after lockdowns; this group made up a significant proportion of our late-2021 enrolments.

Gaining employment outcomes for our participants is the reason for EPIC's existence, and in this respect we had an amazing year.

Coming out of Covid we discovered that many employers were willing to re-engage with us for work experience and work trials, and as a result eleven of our participants gained paid employment in the year.

This is the largest annual number of employment outcomes since EPIC started in 2018.

For context, in most instances these outcomes are the result of several years of work by the Job Coaches to guide, support, train, mentor, cajole, and otherwise prepare the participants for employment.

The EPIC team also actively market the participants to prospective employers, while training those employers in how to get the best out of their new employee.

Thanks also to AAG's DES program, who have been intimately involved with and instrumental to most of these outcomes. Some examples of the jobs EPIC graduates are now doing: cleaning and staff support at MyVet Strathfieldsaye; a traineeship in Child Care; stock control at the Kennington Tavern, casual work possibly leading

to an apprenticeship at Elliott Bros Motorcycles, the grocery team at IGA Eaglehawk, detailing for Bendigo Caravan Group, and one participant each in full-time work at Don KR and Hazledenes.

In addition to employment outcomes, EPIC continues to strive for social outcomes related to participant goals. For example, nine participants gained their Learner's Permit under the tutelage of their EPIC Job Coaches in the year, six of whom are now undertaking driving hours with us through our partnership with L to P, and several participants were supported to engage with Occupational Therapists for the purposes of gaining NDIS funding for independent living arrangements.

The EPIC manager also continues to support prospective participants and their families to apply for the NDIS, Disability Support Pension, and other related services.

In fact this type of pro bono service, often leading to new participant interest, is a significant advantage that EPIC has over its competitors.

Emerging from Covid in the second half of 2021, EPIC formed a number of new partnerships for work experience, and outlets for our woodwork microbusiness.

Our new partners include:

- Porcupine Village tourist attraction in Maldon
- NQR Kangaroo Flat
- Rebel Sport
- Midland Wreckers

All have provided meaningful opportunities for for work experience;

- Bendigo Art Gallery for art classes leading to screen printing for hoodies
- Melbourne University's Centre for Excellence in Rural School of Sexual Health for sexual health classes
- Bendigrow Nursery and Billabong Nursery Shepparton as outlets for woodwork items.

Thanks to all our partners.

The EPIC team look forward to emulating or even improving on these achievements next year.

Paul Weeks
Manager, EPIC Program





NDIS Programs

It has been a year of change and challenge.

After reviewing our practice, we enacted an organisational realignment creating a NDIS program division that oversees our service delivery in Social Inclusion and Social Enterprises. This enables cohesion across our programs and assists our person-centred focus. We have a strong leadership team in place and are consolidating our strengths and building skills to constantly reflect and improve.

Our NDIS program is all about the people we support. First and foremost, we are here to assist people living with disability or disadvantage to live meaningful lives.

This past year we have provided support to over 120 people through Social Inclusion and Supported Employment. On average 45 participants are supported by Social Inclusion programs based from Access Creative Studios in Eaglehawk. We also employ 80 supported employees through our Social Enterprises, PepperGreen Farm, PepperGreen Farm Catering and Access Employment Enterprises.

COVID-19 continued throughout the past year, and we adapted through lockdowns, isolation protocols and workforce challenges. Through all of this our staff and participants put on a brave face and went with the flow. Shutdowns, plan changes, masks all taken in their stride.





Access Creative Studios

AAG delivers Social Inclusion programs through Access Creative Studios, including our Shed in Eaglehawk. This year we have consolidated the service and moved to the NDIS Programs of Support model. This has improved our goal orientated person-centred active support. Every participant is assisted to define their goals and our support is customised to meet their individual needs.

With our focus on living our best lives, support was provided for participants in art, textiles, woodwork, music and dance, cooking and life skills, photography, gardening, and community involvement joining the local Eaglehawk Library, Eaglehawk Croquet Club and general presence within the local Eaglehawk community, and links with local Community Neighbourhood Houses.



Some of our highlights include:

- Literacy and numeracy program delivered at Access Skills Training
- 1:1 support for community volunteering
- Artist of the month curated exhibitions
- Karaoke Wednesdays
- Weekly Card Sharks
- Photography club
- Involvement in Bendigo's Day of Disability
- ACS Newsletter Group
- 5 submissions to the End of Year Celebration Card with SupportAbility
- Participant donating works to Royal Children's hospital – displayed in RCH Hub
- Participant appearing on a local radio station twice during the year announcing songs and talking footy



Staff development has included Mental Health First Aid training, LGBTIQ+ Diversity and Inclusion Diversity

We continue to host Occupational Therapy students, Certificate IV Disability and Individual Support, Disability students, which is always very successful for both Access Creative Studios, students, and participants.

A very successful year with Social Inclusion, building our team, culture, consolidating and most importantly working hard with the people we support to build upon networks, friendships, interests, aspirations and contributing to a meaningful life.



Social Enterprises

AAG's Social Enterprises, PepperGreen Farm, PepperGreen Farm Catering and Access Employment Enterprises have had significant impact from COVID-19 shutdowns and staff availability.

Innovation and adaptability were key to continue operating, supporting, and building our business. The local community and regional partners have shown great resilience and trust in our service to work with us over the past year. The business has been able to maintain operation and place us in a strong position to recover and build in the new pandemic normal.

AAG's Social Enterprises support around 80 people living with disability meet their employment goals. These Supported employees are the lifeblood of our Social Enterprises and the reason we do what we do.



This year six new people commenced supported employment across our enterprises.

We also had a few Supported Employees move on to new opportunities:

- 3 Open employment
- 3 further study
- 4 new interests/ opportunities
- 1 moved location
- 1 retired

In February we celebrated milestone Years of Service for several our Supported Employees.

Years of service for several SE's:

- 9 staff received 10 year awards
- 2 staff received 15 year awards
- 1 staff received 20 year awards



Sadly, two of our long term supported employees passed away this past year.

Zolton Suveges gave 21 years' service to Access Australia Group. Commencing in 2001 he continued with us through all the changes the company has seen, working in the woodyard in the early days and as a part of the Survey Peg team in the past few years. Zolly was well respected and a reliable worker.

Michelle (Jean) Negus brought love and laughter to every day. Jean was a valued member of the Catering team for seven years and is remembered fondly across Access Australia.

She completed courses at AST and was a bright spark at many events. She was always quick with a joke, she never let an opportunity to be a bit mischievous pass by. Access has played a significant role in Jean's life, and she will be sorely missed by all.



Access Employment Enterprises

The pandemic has forced AAG to review our business and focus on areas of growth and opportunity.

We again successfully delivered the Caddy Liner rollout for City of Greater Bendigo; continued our grounds maintenance service to Haven Home Safe and many regional customers; washed and detailed cars for state government departments, CASA (Centre Against Sexual Assault), Bendigo Community Health, RMG (Regional Management Group) and private customers; supplied mining blocks across Australia; nesting boxes to Coliban Water; folded blueys for Bendigo Health and painted Survey Pegs for Malmsbury Timber.



On top of this the team responded to ad hoc contracts and produced items for sale in our retail space. A big thank you to City of Greater Bendigo for partnering with us for the Annual Tulip bulb sales.

With COVID restrictions in place the City was unable to run their annual tulip dig so we were able to step in and bag and sell the tulip bulbs. This was an interesting project for our staff to be involved in this annual event. It was so successful that our first sale sold out of bulbs in less than one hour.





PepperGreen Farm Catering

With our corporate catering business drastically reduced during 2021-22 PepperGreen Farm Catering needed to adapt and diversify. We introduced "COVID safe" catering options, increased our preserves and packaged goods and began selling our meals from PepperGreen Farm retail store. We continued to prepare and deliver around 250 meals per week with up to ten Supported Employees working in the kitchen and assisting with customer service.



PepperGreen Farm – Café & Garden

We had a busy year at the Farm despite lockdowns and COVID challenges. Again, the Farm hosted numerous events and partnered with local agencies to welcome visitors, educate and promote all that our region offers. We started the year with a NAIDOC week celebration including a thoughtful Welcome to Country ceremony, morning tea and then a basket weaving workshop with Aunty Marilyne. Phoenix FM, wonderful supporters of AAG, broadcast live for the day from the farm.

The year continued with many more events including the 24th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy and the City of Greater Bendigo About Waste and Resources Festival.



Bendigo Sustainability Group commenced their monthly Repair cafe workshop every third Saturday of the month from the Farm, Shine Bright have partnered with AAG to provide a Bush Kinder program every Tuesday, we had a come and try day for Special Development School students. We hosted Occupational Therapy students and Certificate IV students providing value experience to their studies.

We are also pleased to be a selected venue for the Gastronomy Creative Residency grant. Aliesha Ng is completing her residency this year.

Through a generous donation the garden team were able to begin refurbishing the nursery to create an accessible propagation and education area.

THE PREVIEW

OF LIFE's visualization and information services, Propaganda Inc. has opened its new offices in Acacia, Nashville's Green Hills district. The new offices are located in a 100,000-sq-ft building that houses a variety of services, including a large conference room, a lounge, and a kitchen. The new offices are located in a 100,000-sq-ft building that houses a variety of services, including a large conference room, a lounge, and a kitchen. The new offices are located in a 100,000-sq-ft building that houses a variety of services, including a large conference room, a lounge, and a kitchen.

IF YOU GO...

THE BIRTHING CENTER is a new birthing center located in the Nashville area. The center is located in a 100,000-sq-ft building that houses a variety of services, including a large conference room, a lounge, and a kitchen. The new offices are located in a 100,000-sq-ft building that houses a variety of services, including a large conference room, a lounge, and a kitchen.

We decided to keep our volunteer program on hold this year with just our loyal band of gardeners helping out with weeding, planting and harvesting. Our thanks go to this trusty team for their much appreciated contribution to the farm. We are looking to revamp the program and grow our volunteer base in 2023.



Did you know AAG's Social Enterprises are part of a network of Not for Profit and Profit for Purpose businesses across Australia? We are a certified Social Trader which means our services meet the needs of Social Procurement policies. Essentially every cent earned is returned to supporting people living with disability. If you want to talk to us about supporting our business and whether we can do some work for you, please email info@aag.org.au

Jennie Walker
Executive Manager, NDIS



Access Skills Training

The times they are a-changing.
Ain't that the truth, Bob!

The world of Vocational Education and Training continues to see major change, with VCE reforms in the secondary school environment and many of our training packages being updated, the team here are constantly in a world of change and adapting to improve and align our delivery methods, compliance requirements and support to students, schools and organisations.

Our RTO is continuing to see great intake numbers for some of our high priority qualifications, such as Certificate III in Individual Support, Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and Certificate IV in Disability. This is especially evident at our Echuca campus, where the team have grown from strength to strength, delivering more courses in 2022 than we ever have in that region.

Our VET Delivered to Secondary Schools (VETDSS) department is building on the increased interest and program numbers from 2021 to now auspice with schools and enrol more secondary school students undertaking VET than we ever have in this department.



Schools not just from Victoria but South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland are asking to auspice with us. Our direct, student-centred support team and set-up is the contributing factor of our fantastic reputation in this area.

We have some great developments in our Foundation Skills department, commencing a new Certificate II in Animal Care as a vocational pathway for some of our participants living with disability. These students have undertaken accredited courses to build their core and employability skills and have expressed an interest in working with animals so it is fantastic to deliver this Certificate program to support their pathway to employment. However, our success doesn't come without challenges. We have seen a decrease in the number of students enrolling into some of our Foundation Skills program, with local Disability Employment Services (DES) organisations part struggling with suitable, prospective students.

At the very recent Skills and Jobs Summit held last week at Parliament House, the Australian of the Year, Dylan Alcott, was eloquent when he said that Australians with disabilities don't just want a job, they want a career.

Independent RTOs like ours are helping people with disabilities achieve this as more than 64% in skills training choose to study with an independent RTO.

So Bob Dylan was right when he sang about the changing times. Change is inevitable. You recognise it, you go through various emotions when coming to terms with it but most importantly you don't ignore it.

You work with change and embrace what you need to ensure we all stay relevant, we all stay current and we all continue to work together in a happy and caring environment that brings the best out of both our staff and our students.

Paul James
Executive Manager – RTO

Professional and Short Courses

2022 has seen the biggest change in our short course division, with our Team Leader of 10 years Colin Flitton stepping down and getting ready for retirement.

The team and I played around with a few different ways of managing this department and have now settled on the best option; our excellent Training Support Services team, led by Kate Harte, have taken on this portfolio and increased their team to effectively manage the work and deliver the best quality service to our students and private organisations.

First Aid and CPR are still our most popular courses in this division, closely followed by our Hospitality courses such as Food Hygiene and Safety, Responsible Service of Alcohol and our Barista training. We have retained our partnerships with core clients such as Jenny's ELC, Amicus, Nexus and Victory College. So whilst I would like to thank Colin Flitton for all his hard work and efforts, I would also like to send a huge shout out to Kate Harte, Mel Monti, Jackie Bransgrove, Janine Raymond, Lisa Judd and Kelsey Smith for not just their commitment and support with the new changes but also their passion and their ideas in making this program bigger and better than ever!





Vocational Courses

2022 has been yet another incredibly busy and positive year for our Vocational department. We have excellent student numbers in our certificate programs in Disability, and this is growing in both Bendigo and Echuca. For the first time in three years, we have also commenced a third Early Childhood Education and Care course this year, trained by our Echuca-based trainer Carley Beer. Another growing industry resulting in increased demand for the Certificate III qualification.

Some exciting news hit us with the recently announced Social Services Jobs Guarantee. This new \$39 million initiative guarantees a job in the Social Services sector for all students who graduate from the CHC52015 Diploma of Community Services in Victoria by 31 August 2024. This has the potential to be a big success for our department as we certainly expect our popular Diploma courses will increase in demand and student numbers.

Our partnership with Karen community groups and Bendigo Senior Secondary College continues to provide opportunities for students which could lead to a whole new level of service to our Karen community.

An excellent result so far for 2022 and I would like to thank Lynnette O'Brien, Jennie Jones, Darcy Belle and all our fantastic trainers who work incredibly hard to retain our excellent reputation in this area.





Foundation Skills Courses

Our Foundation Skills department has also seen the biggest change in three years, with student numbers in a very slow decline, Miriam Casas and the team have had to pivot and diversify, looking to offer new and exciting programs that might not have fit our usual 'mould' of the last five years.

This includes commencing two Certificate II in Animal Care courses in Melbourne for students living with disability. This is the first time in a long time that we have managed to support students in this area with a move away from a 'Foundation Skills' course and to a fully-fledged Vocational pathway. We are very proud of this and expect to build on this next year.

We have re-developed our delivery approach to now allow for a more hands-on, practical experience and less classroom-heavy teaching, for our students living with disability. Students can quickly become 'class tired' so we have taken on board their feedback and redesigned our delivery. This is something we are very proud of and keeps us current and competitive.

We have also created more smaller, bite-sized introductory courses in the Hospitality sector.

This was generated from an industry need and we have commenced delivery in this area, seeing a good number of enrolments.



VET Delivered to Secondary Schools (VETDSS)

Let's not break the habit of a lifetime; another department that has experienced huge change this year. We waved farewell to our long-standing team member Margaret Newey and welcomed some new team members, including Cheri Osborn and Hans Meinig, as School Support Officers. This was an integral part of the growth for this department, which has seen us partner with more secondary schools and colleges and enrol more students this year than in the previous five years, enrolling over 2,800 students across Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

We have spent much time tightening up our compliance requirements with ASQA, investing time in training and development in areas such as Trainer Requirements. This enables our team to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide a more direct support and advisory role to our school partners.

Our team have spent more time engaging directly with teachers and industry by holding 'Industry Forums', where teachers and industry experts from various sectors such as Building and Construction, Hospitality and Agriculture, meet with our School Support Officers and discuss the units, assessment conditions and areas for improvement. These activities are what sets us apart from many other RTOs.



Human Resources Report

AAG's Human Resources Department has been kept on its toes for the past year – always a busy service area, this year threw a few more challenges.

During the 2021/2022 management of the COVID pandemic, AAG was still challenged with service closures, staff leave due to illness and isolation and the constant process of recruitment, selection and orientation of new staff. Adding to our usual compliance requirements of safety screening and training, the team were challenged with the management of Worker Permit allocation when some staff were permitted to work depending on the activity of service delivery, these needed constant monitoring, allocation and renewal, staff member by staff member and, often class by class for our Professional Short Courses.

When vaccinations were available, the team were tasked with monitoring worker compliance in line with the State Government Health legislation and Chief Medical Officer advice; many would appreciate just how hard it was to keep abreast of changes, requirements and the often difficult position for staff who were concerned or reluctant to obtain vaccinations.

In July 2021, AAG implemented the new Employee Self Service HR program, ADP to expediate our payroll processes and staff leave needs. Further, we implemented online training program, etrainu to map and manage our staff training needs and achievements; building on our compliance in key areas.

At a time when unemployment figures are so low, AAG, like so many business struggled with recruitment and retention of staff, and despite being an Employment Service agency, we were no different. Through the 2021/22 period AAG experienced its largest change in workforce, resulting in huge pressures faced by the team to manage consistent recruitment processes.

In spite of this, we take the opportunity to celebrate the milestones experienced by many of our staff in Social Enterprises and more broadly, across AAG with the following staff achieving 10 and 15 year milestones for service to our community.

We thank them for the dedication and commitment to AAG and the community, along with all of our staff who work tirelessly in the business to create amazing opportunities, resulting in positive outcomes for our service users.

Service Awards



Fran Whelan – 15 Years

Fran is one of AAG's longest-serving employees and an absolute gem! Fran's hard work, dedication and passion in the foundation skills department is what sets AAG apart from many other workplaces. Always caring, always considerate and always wanting to let students with a disability shine during their programs with us, Fran encompasses everything we strive to achieve when it comes to inclusivity and independence. Fran has worked across several divisions of AAG during her time and her knowledge and experience is always relied upon.

She's more than a fantastic colleague, she's a wonderful person and an absolute joy to have around. Congratulations Fran; the AAG team, the RTO and our students are thankful for your ongoing amazingness!



Mik Hartshorn – 10 years

Mik Hartshorn came to Access Australia in the courier team many years ago. A Pommy through and through Mik is well respected by his peers and the staff he supports.

He has tried his hand at few roles over the years and now leads our Caddy Liner contract and contributes significantly to the grounds maintenance teams. Not a huge chatter, everyone listens when Mik has something to say – it's usually well thought out. Mik is a steady and reliable team player who treats everyone with equity and respect.

Our Supported Employees love working with Mik as do we all! Well done on 10 years' service and thank you.



Prue Lock – 10 Years

Prue Lock is our superstar Supported Employee Coordinator. She is the go-to for all NDIS and supported employment matters. A quiet achiever, Prue has built a reputation over the past ten years for being a fountain of knowledge. Prue has had many job descriptions while working with Access, joining the company as a Support and Compliance officer Prue built her skills and knowledge to be integral to our operations today.

With a dry sense of humour and wry smile Prue is a much loved member of the Social Enterprises team. Our Supported Employees know that they can count on Prue to listen and help solve any issues. She has seen so many of our staff come and go and supported each one with equality and compassion. Thank you, Prue, for 10 years' service and commitment to the company and everyone we support.



*Celebrating
30 years*

Emily Browning – 10 Years

Emily has been the face of Access Australia Group since 2012 and has seen the many changes of Access Australia Group over her time, with the change in company name and moving from Mundy Street to St Andrews Avenue. Emily has worked in the reception, administration, finance and has supported all divisions of AAG.

Emily has always been ready to offer her support and has great customer service skills, greeting visitors to Head Office. Emily is very efficient in her role and a support to the management team.

Her colleagues have watched her journey, getting married and becoming a mother to her two beautiful girls. AAG is grateful for Emily's 10 years of service and hope there will be many more.



*Celebrating
30 years*

18-20 St Andrews Ave, Bendigo, VIC 3550
PO Box 276, Bendigo Central, VIC 3552

info@aag.org.au

Phone (03) 5445 9800

Fax (03) 5441 7088

Freecall 1800 268 549

Email info@aag.org.au

www.aag.org.au

