

Annual Report 2023 - 2024

Distinctive
Options
In Life

The Distinctive Options Way





About this report

Our Annual Report provides information about our activities, operations, highlights and performance on objectives for the financial year. We created our report with input and ideas from management, staff, participants and the Board to provide a detailed reflection about our service, our impacts and our role in the communities we serve.

INDIGENOUS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

AUDIENCE

Our report is written for the following stakeholders: Our participants and supported employees, their families and supporters, our local communities, federal and local government partners, and our business partners, as well as our Board of Directors and our employees who share and deliver our collective vision and mission.

FEEDBACK

We welcome and appreciate all feedback on this report. You can provide feedback via the contact details on the back cover of this report.

ACCESSIBILITY

This report has been optimised for screen readers and other assistive devices used by people with disability. The Annual Report is available in PDF on our website or in other alternative formats on request to Head Office.

The Distinctive Options Way

The theme of our Annual Report this year is The Distinctive Options Way. It is demonstrated in our culture and behaviour, by our quality and risk management, along with our core values which are all aligned to our Vision and Purpose.

The Distinctive Options Way permeates throughout all aspects of our organisation - through leadership from our Board and management, down through into all of our operations, supports, partnerships, and community relations.

The Distinctive Options Way constantly evolves in order for our organisation to best meet the needs of the people who we support now, and into the future, but the underlying characteristics always remain fully embedded into our culture.



Benji (centre) is gaining skills and confidence in hospitality at the DO Food Project Cafe. Pictured with Support Worker Rebecca (left) and Supervisor Abby (right).

At Distinctive Options, stories are created every second.

Everyone in the Distinctive Options world has a story to tell. Stories that share challenges, stories that show perseverance, stories that celebrate achievements and stories that are filled with pride. They exemplify the Distinctive Options Way.

We thank the people who have shared their stories throughout this report.

Table of Contents

01

Introduction

Message from the Chairperson

05

Message from the Chief Executive Officer

07

02

About Us

Distinctive Options

14

Performance

21

Strategic reflection

32

03

Participants & Supported Employees

Demographics

38

Service reports

39

04

Governance

Board of Directors

52

Corporate governance

56

Board committees

63

05

People and Culture

Organisation chart

66

Executive management team reports

67

Our staff

77

06

Quality and Safety

Operating environment

83

Risk management

86

07

Financial Statements

Independent audit report

90

Directors' declaration

94

Audited financial statements

96

08

Appendices

Glossary, abbreviations and index

101

Thank you

104



Introduction

A Story Every Second



Chelsea

"I love to cook. I am in two cooking programs each week where I get to learn how to make new recipes with chef Zak. We go to the shops and buy the ingredients.

We ran some cooking classes at a community hub for people to come along and learn to make healthy lunchbox snacks. I enjoy being helpful in the kitchen."

01



Message from the Chairperson

Alistair Lloyd

As Chair of Distinctive Options, and on behalf of the Board, I am grateful to share our reflections on our organisation, our achievements, and our aspirations.

As a Board, we continually engage to be a supportive, interested and curious body who work with the management team with the best interests of our participants, their families, our people, and our communities at heart.

The Distinctive Options Board bring perspectives borne from their considerable depth of skills, knowledge and professional experience, as well as cultural and gender diversity, and lived experience of disability.

For our sector, and everyone it involves, the last decade has been a remarkable story with three distinct 'Acts' – the formation and implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the sudden and striking impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and the post-pandemic recovery leading up to the 10-year NDIS Review.

To be able to survive and grow through these circumstances is a noteworthy achievement. For Distinctive Options, the last financial year was a period of consolidation and leading through change, underscored by the ongoing imperative of sustainability. The prevailing strategic influences of policy, economics and risk continue to provide challenges and opportunities for us.

The financial performance of the organisation is of ongoing concern. For this financial year, our full year result reflects a continuation of the economic pressures experienced across the country, which have hit human services particularly hard.

Distinctive Options has made pragmatic decisions to hedge financial risk through our investment strategies; however, further action is required to ensure that we are operating sustainably. In this, I applaud the work of the Finance and Audit Committee, and the considerable energy and support provided to the senior management team, in improving the reporting and accountability in this vital area.

The Development and Fundraising Committee are providing ongoing support and guidance over the portfolio of growth opportunities which actively involve our participants. Our food and hospitality endeavours, and employment and trades initiatives, present fun and encouraging ways to develop skills, build confidence and gain autonomy.

The Governance and Risk Committee continue to assess and guide on the checks and balances of the organisation. This is a dynamic space which ensures that the policies, guard rails and risk tolerances of Distinctive Options are fit for purpose. Two highlights of this year have been a review and assessment of our overall Strategic Risk position, and the formation of our inaugural People and Remuneration Committee. This new Board Committee was created to provide guidance on matters concerning that which truly differentiates us – our incredible people.

Distinctive Options' culture and compassion has been epitomised by our retiring Chief Executive Officer, Ernie Metcalf. Since joining the organisation, Ernie has brought a wealth of experience and judgement, and more importantly, his warmth and caring leadership style.

Ernie has led Distinctive Options from his heart and engages with our people, participants and community partners like no other. On behalf of the Board and the organisation, I extend my thanks and gratitude and wish him all the best in health and happiness in retirement.

Thanks also to our Board Directors, who support the organisation pro bono, for their time, energy and enthusiasm. Your observations, guidance and respect as a Board is commendable and a pleasure to work with.

The search now begins for a new CEO to lead Distinctive Options in 2025. They will take the reins of an organisation that has an enviable culture and reputation, and with an exciting path ahead.



Yvette and Ash work at the DO Food Truck in Sunbury, serving locals light meals, snacks and beverages.



Message from the Chief Executive Officer

Ernie Metcalf

Our report theme for this year is The Distinctive Options Way and it truly reflects our experiences. It highlights individuals and their accomplishments in improving their quality of life. From an organisation-wide perspective, our most notable achievement this year was the acquisition of Noweyung in Bairnsdale. We not only managed to save operations in Bairnsdale but also improve them with a proactive team and strong local community support. Personally, this year has been both professionally frustrating and financially challenging due to the ongoing effects of the NDIA's unrealistic mandatory pricing system on registered providers. This will be my final report as I retire early in 2025. A further reflection on my time at Distinctive Options is provided on Page 32.

Noweyung Acquisition

Distinctive Options' acquisition of Noweyung progressed well, taking operational control from early October and bringing Bairnsdale staff over into our organisation from November. The time, effort and support provided in East Gippsland to participants, supported employees, families, support networks, staff, the Noweyung Board, Members, business partners and the wider community were significant. More importantly, conversations were managed with the dignity, care and patience expected from a quality organisation with an exemplary reputation.

The legal consultation process undertaken to finalise the acquisition and for the transfer of major assets required a significant amount of time and effort. I would like to give a special thank you and acknowledgement to our Board's Project Control Group and the management team for the lengthy due diligence work and processes undertaken, and to the Noweyung Board who assisted during the acquisition.

I thank all who participated and our Board for their insights and support along the way. Management successfully filled key senior roles in Bairnsdale internally from existing staff, with just a few external appointments required. The transfer of services and supports went smoothly and efficiently. This is a testament to the quality of our executive management team and their staff, along with senior Bairnsdale staff and the former Noweyung Board. I've included some of the key events for the acquisition on the following page.



Ebony enjoys painting with DO Noweyung's Colour Gang.

February 2023

Noweyung's Board seeks merger and acquisition (M&A) talks with Distinctive Options. An Acting CEO is appointed.

April-June 2023

The Project Control Group undertakes a full due diligence process to assess the M&A.

August 2023

Both organisations sign a formal Merger Deed. Special Noweyung members meeting agrees to wind up organisation once transfers are made.

November 2023

Noweyung staff transfer over into Distinctive Options. Legal processes commence to transfer all major property assets to Distinctive Options.

May 2024

Noweyung's NDIS Quality and Safeguards audit commences.

December 2022

Noweyung's CEO resigns.

March 2023

Distinctive Options establishes a Project Control Group.

July 2023

The Project Control Group recommends an acquisition. The Board reviews and adopts the recommendation. The Noweyung Acting CEO finishes up.

October 2023

Distinctive Options assumes full financial control.

January 2024

Noweyung's auditors start financial audit for year ended June 2023.

June 2024 Onwards

Three property assets are legally transferred to Distinctive Options. Distinctive Options requests Commission to revoke Noweyung's NDIS Registration. The Noweyung Board voluntarily wind up the company and charity.

Financial Impact of NDIS Pricing

Funding, funding, funding! This remains the disability sector's major issue. Mandatory NDIS pricing continues to slowly strangle the viability and sustainability of registered service providers. Current sector benchmarking sources identified there was at least a 10.9% gap between what the hourly price of service delivery costs, versus what NDIS mandatory prices provide. This gap only continues to widen.

In July 2023, the NDIS announced a 6.25% funding increase to meet provider costs by matching the Fair Work Commission's 5.75% wage increase and the 0.5% increase in Superannuation. Unfortunately, there was no additional increase to match higher penalty rates, nor any sufficient funding additions factored into NDIS pricing to cover other significant cost pressures, like spiralling Workcover premium rates in Victoria. Premiums based on rateable remuneration jumped from a rate of 1.27% to 1.8% - a whopping 41.7% increase! The inadequacies of mandatory NDIS pricing are obvious. The sector continues to ponder on whether this is NDIA's plan - to significantly shrink the number of registered providers - but at what cost to the individuals who we support? The NDIA has failed the sector through its unwillingness to address viability issues imposed on registered providers. It's about time the Federal government's monopoly through mandatory pricing was scrapped in line with the Productivity Commission's initial and ongoing recommendations.

Pressure to achieve better funding that recognises all cost impacts continues by the sector's peak body and others with the Federal Minister, the Shadow Minister, and the NDIA bureaucracy. Additionally, an Australia-wide marketing campaign commenced to raise awareness of the unfunded additional costs that registered providers incur to deliver and ensure safe, quality services and supports. Unfortunately, none of these efforts have delivered a satisfactory result yet.

The audited financial statements and performance results contained in this report provide further insights into the impact of NDIS mandatory pricing on our organisation and operations.

External Issues and Pressures

If funding issues were not enough to contend with, Distinctive Options and 14 other Victorian providers are dealing with a claim lodged by unions around out-of-date or "zombie" staff enterprise agreements. This application through Fair Work calls for new enterprise bargaining agreements with wages and conditions higher than in the modern award. NDIS funding or mandatory pricing only aligns to pay rates within the modern award, so Distinctive Options and other providers are vigorously opposing the union claims. Unfortunately, this matter will continue to consume our time and resources in 2024-2025, adding additional costs with no real benefit to providers.

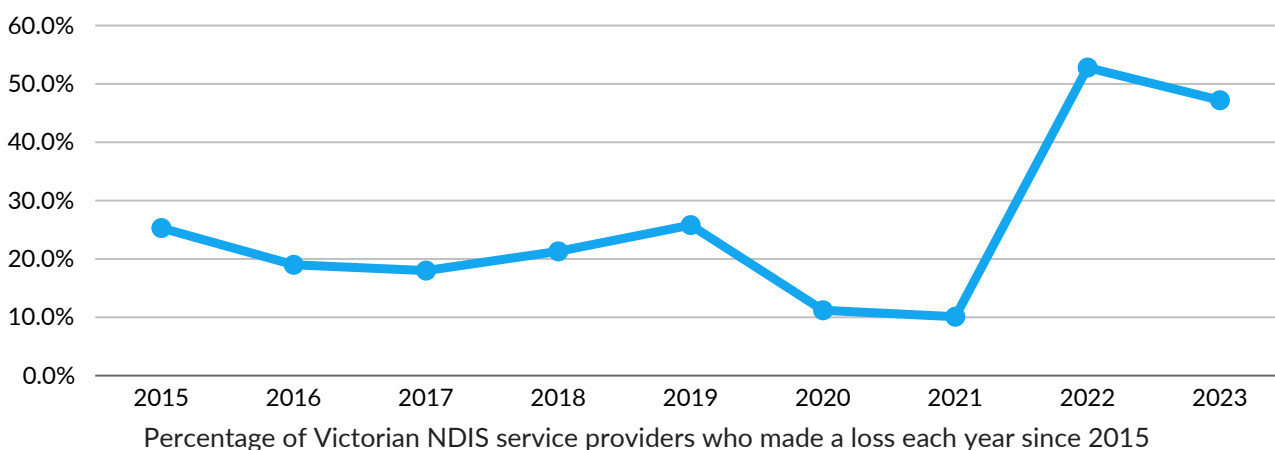
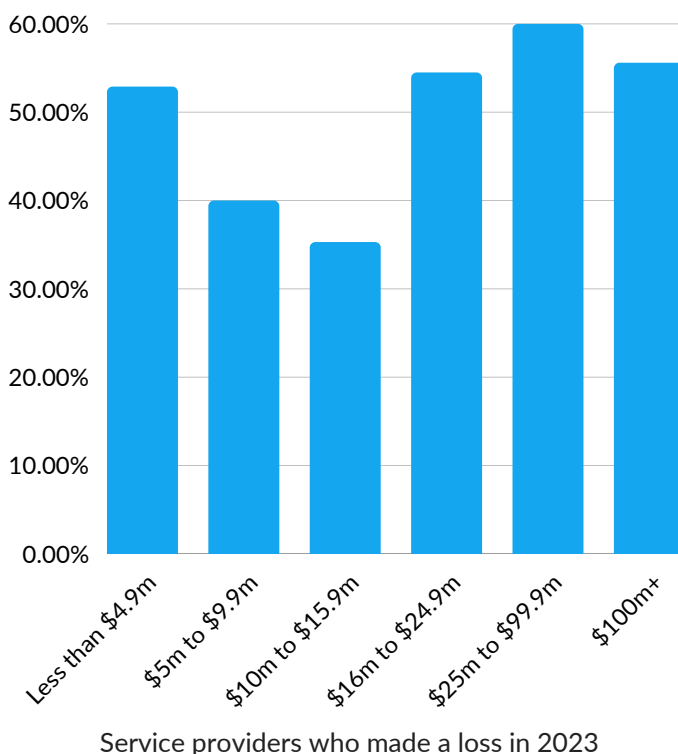
Losses Becoming Industry Standard

Registered disability service providers continue to wear the financial impact from the inadequacies imposed on them by mandatory NDIS pricing and rules. In short, NDIS funding does not cover actual operational costs. This has never been more obvious than in the data from audited financial results for the year ended June 2023. The sector's peak body, National Disability Services, in its 2023 State of the Sector Report, commented: "We knew that the last three surveys... were not completely reflecting the underlying health of the sector, but we were taken aback by the 34 per cent of respondents reporting a loss last year and the 18 per cent just breaking even. This is the worst year for financial viability in the eight years of the survey." Other research conducted by auditors Stewart Brown and from Ability Roundtable confirm these findings and forecast even worse sector results for 2023-2024.

Distinctive Options' own financial research into providers operating in Victoria is shown below. Data came from 89 charities delivering disability services, through their financial reports lodged with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. The graph illustrates the plight of registered disability service providers. For the year ended June 2023, 47.2% of providers operating in Victoria, including Distinctive Options, recorded losses.

More alarming is a trend by many organisations showing they have recorded consecutive losses over the past two years. The number of organisations making losses increased considerably, while noting results in years 2020 and 2021 were skewed downwards only because of JobKeeper subsidies during the COVID pandemic.

From our research, the bar chart below shows a consistent percentage of losses recorded in 2023 across all organisation sizes. Large providers were not immune, showing similar high percentages. These large providers also generated the biggest losses.



Special Acknowledgements

After 8 years as CEO of Distinctive Options, I plan to retire at the end of March 2025. It has been an interesting, challenging and rewarding time to be the CEO of such a fabulous organisation. I will miss all those people who I have been involved with over this journey. I have many people to thank.

Rick Dunn's sector knowledge, empathy and willingness to embrace new opportunities are the reasons why he has been part of this organisation for so long. His passion and support during what have often been very trying, challenging, and sometimes exciting times, is without question. He has played a pivotal part in Distinctive Options' journey and I sincerely thank him for his support and contributions over these past 8 years. His ability to bring his support services team along with management's vision, including the acquired Noweyung operations, is a credit to his own dedication, professionalism and ethics. There are many within his support services team that I thank individually and collectively. All have added something special to the way Distinctive Options operates, enhancing our reputation and brand.



Mark chooses 1:1 support while on holiday.

Christine Meilak joined us more recently to run our corporate and financial operations, bringing extensive business experience and the associated skills. We threw her into the deep end with an acquisition to work through on top of managing our corporate services and IT functions. She not only embraced the opportunities but excelled at them, making my job much easier. I thank her for all her support, along with her positive can-do approach to challenges and operational issues within Distinctive Options. Her ability to work collaboratively with her colleagues throughout the organisation sets a positive example for her team. She has carefully remodelled the team established prior to her appointment, further improving corporate services outputs. I thank all corporate services team members individually and collectively. They have added a unique and highly professional 'back-of-house' function which supports all other operational areas.

Paul Pearman took on developing and establishing a new business enterprise section to add value to Distinctive Options, as well as to develop new and meaningful pathways for supported employees. During the acquisition, he ensured Noweyung's business enterprises effectively integrated into Distinctive Options' operations. He not only achieved this, but we are beginning to see growth in Bairnsdale business operations. Paul is highly enthusiastic in pushing forward new opportunities. His business acumen is an important professional trait for Distinctive Options. I thank Paul for his work and drive to deliver new and expanded pathways. He too has an effective team and I thank them all for what they have achieved over the past couple of years.

It would be remiss of me not to mention former Chief Financial Officer Alma Tuazon during her four years as part of the executive management team. Alma provided a highly accomplished, steady and level-headed stand on Distinctive Options' finances and corporate operations. With her team, she delivered many system improvements and efficiencies that continue today. She also nurtured and developed her staff to help them achieve strong organisational results. I cannot thank her enough for the support she provided me and the organisation during her time at Distinctive Options.

I have worked with four different Board Chairs over this journey: Anthony, Simon, Kalma and Alistair. Each wholly supported me, the management team and a committed Board of Directors. I thank the Board for their dedication to Distinctive Options. I confidently look forward to the current Board overseeing the next phase of our organisation as it develops into the future. In my time at Distinctive Options, the 2024 Board has the best group of Directors with the strongest skill sets.

To our participants, supported employees, and their families, I have always loved the banter and discussions between us. You epitomise what Distinctive Options is all about and why this organisation is so important to many people. Your feedback and advice have always been appreciated. I will miss you all.

Finally, to all our current staff members as well as to many of our former staff members, I graciously thank you for the services you have provided, and for your passion and dedication to the Distinctive Options Way.

Ernie Metcalf holds a Master of Business Management from Monash University, a Graduate Diploma in Accounting, an AICD Foundations of Directorship Certificate, plus qualifications in total quality management and internal auditing.

Ernie brought a wealth of skills and experience following his appointment to Distinctive Options in November 2016, being a CEO of a successful disability service provider since 2003. Additionally, he brings business acumen developed from other commercial and business experience, including working as a General Manager and an independent business consultant, along with many years employed in senior management roles within the water industry and local government. Ernie has held positions on, or worked with, boards, councils and audit committees across different and diverse sectors. He successfully steered the organisation through significant changes and challenges, ensuring growth and stability at Distinctive Options.

As CEO, Ernie is responsible for the organisation's entire operations and reports directly to the Chairperson and Board of Directors. He oversees development and growth, strategic planning and leadership.

Ernie is a member of the Global Leadership Exchange (GLE), National Disability Services (NDS), the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD), and Harvard Business Review. He is also a member of a CEO Collaboration Group, one of 110 members from across Australia. Representing the company and for reporting purposes, Ernie is the appointed Company Secretary/Public Officer for Distinctive Options.

About Us

A Story Every Second



Robert

"When Distinctive Options started a program called Radio Chat, I was very keen to be involved.

Each week we prepare our scripts and choose songs before heading up to the radio station and setting up the studio.

We run 'The D.O. Show' with the help of Steve from Sunbury Radio and read our scripts live on air. We announce the weather, mention any local events coming up and give shoutouts to people we appreciate. In the afternoons, we do research and prepare for the next show."

02

Distinctive Options

Established in 1985, Distinctive Options provides disability support services to 335 children and adults. We have a range of group and individual support options available which include supported independent living services, as well as supported employment options. Distinctive Options also offers a Financial Plan Management service to families.

Following the acquisition of Noweyung, Distinctive Options had 224 employees operating from sites across the north-central-west region and East Gippsland region of Victoria, including Keilor Downs, Sunbury, Gisborne, Macedon Ranges, Bendigo and Bairnsdale.

Distinctive Options is a registered not-for-profit charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). We see ourselves as a profit-for-purpose disability service provider, where we re-invest and grow service options for our participants.

As a registered charity, Distinctive Options is a deductible gift recipient, endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office. The organisation is a company limited by guarantee.



Vision

Enhancing life choices for people with disability by enriching life's journey.



Purpose

Offering people with disabilities real life choices to reach their potential and to enjoy equality in the community.



Values

Partnership and Co-Design
Active and Responsive
Respect and Dignity
Integrity and Accountability
Safety and Trust



Tammy, Molly and Shirley adventure into the surf at Apollo Bay.

Our History

1895 - Sunbury Adult Unit opens

The Sunbury Adult Unit commences in May, supporting 15 participants.

1993 - Renamed Able Community Services

The organisation is renamed Able Community Services with 50 participants.

2004 - Certification and accreditation

Quality certification is achieved against the Victorian Disability Standards and ISO 9001:2000 accreditation is attained.

2013 - A focus on support delivery

Employment services are ceased with the organisation moving its focus to direct support delivery only, resulting in revenue decreasing to \$2.21m.

2020 - COVID-19 brings further change

COVID-19 in the last quarter results in widespread changes to service delivery, yet support hours reach an all-time high average of 15,778 per month, with revenue at \$9.06m.

2024 - Stronger than ever

Distinctive Options sees total revenue at \$12.6m. Support hours reach a record, averaging 23,375 per month to 355 participants.

1854 - Noweyung is founded

Noweyung is founded in Bairnsdale by a group of parents who are seeking better supports for their children who have disabilities.

1989 - First R&R group

First Rights & Responsibilities (R&R) network is formed and two new employment businesses are established.

1999 - Renamed Distinctive Options

The organisation is renamed Distinctive Options following the acquisition of MBM Association Inc.

2011 - Record numbers

The organisation has 88 participants and total revenue reaches \$4.03m.

2018 - NDIS transition begins

70% of the organisation's 234 participants transition to the NDIS with revenue topping \$5.5m.

2023 - Acquisition of Noweyung

Total revenue tops a record \$11.2m. Support hours also reach a record, averaging 18,576 per month for 266 participants. Acquisition of Noweyung, a Bairnsdale-based service provider with total revenue over \$5m.

Volunteers

Distinctive Options has 15 volunteers who support our organisation, being 9 volunteer Directors, 2 volunteer Committee members, and 4 service volunteers. In the prior year, Distinctive Options had 11 volunteers. Screening of all volunteers, including Board members, occurs before people commence volunteering and we provide structured induction programs. We are grateful for the involvement of volunteers who support our organisation. Their impact cannot be underestimated.

Lifetime Fellowship Awards

Inaugural awards were made to 6 recipients in 2024, presented to Christopher Dean, Tony Graham, John Hansen, Liz Hansen, Grace Jobling, and Kaye Thurbon.



Kaye Thurbon presents an award to Jessica.

Human Rights

Distinctive Options is committed to supporting participants to recognise and preserve their rights and wellbeing. We design each of our services and supports to ensure high quality service provision that delivers human rights. Our approach is to empower participants through information, support and education so they are in the best position possible to understand their rights and options to make informed choices and decisions. Measures we take include providing accessible information to participants, being aware of cultural and communication needs, assisting people to always exercise their rights, and ensuring comprehensive systems are in place to identify and address any potential human rights breaches. There were no breaches to human rights identified in the previous twelve months.



Molly enjoys a break at Apollo Bay.

Rights and Responsibilities (R&R) Networks

Distinctive Options is committed to ensuring that individuals understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities. As part of this commitment, Distinctive Options has four R&R Network Groups that run weekly or monthly advocacy sessions. R&R Network Groups are based at our Bendigo, Brimbank, Bairnsdale and Sunbury sites. First launched in 1989, the groups provide participants the opportunity to express their views and ideas, as well as to raise and problem-solve any issues they identify. The participants are responsible for managing each meeting and actioning any items raised. Regular agenda items include networking, community events, health and wellbeing, safety and personal business.

R&R members provide feedback on organisational issues, including document reviews and strategic planning. Guest presenters from the community may attend meetings to create opportunities for participants to ask questions and explore what is happening within their local communities. This year, members also attended the annual VALID Having a Say Conference.

A formal structure is in place to provide a conduit to the Board through R&R representatives meeting with members of the Development & Fundraising Committee. This, along with surveys, is an important structure to ensure a voice for participants at the highest organisational level. The Development & Fundraising Committee's Terms of Reference include specific objectives relating to consulting with our R&R Networks each year.



Laura and Stephanie from R&R Sunbury presented at the International Day of People with Disability event at Brimbank.

Australasian Reporting Awards (ARA)

Reporting transparency is a high priority for Distinctive Options. Our organisation aims to provide the best and most comprehensive information in our annual reports. This allows interested readers to make informed decisions about service choices and options, along with Distinctive Options' ability to deliver positive outcomes for individuals. Distinctive Options was awarded its fourth Gold Award from ARA for our 2023 Annual Report. Gold Awards are awarded to organisations that demonstrate overall excellence in annual reporting and provide high quality coverage of most aspects of the ARA criteria, including full disclosure of key aspects of core business. A Gold Award report is a model report for similar organisations to follow. For the first time, Distinctive Options was also a finalist for the ARA's best Community & Welfare report.



Stakeholders

Distinctive Options has a number of stakeholders, including:

- Our participants, supported employees and their networks
- Our Board of Directors, employees and volunteers
- Government regulators and funders
- Sponsors and donors
- Local communities
- Contractors and suppliers
- Informal partners

We engage with our stakeholders in a variety of ways. Engagement opportunities include meetings, newsletters, surveys, memos, website, social media, plain English resources, Annual Reports, invitations to Annual General Meetings, workshops, reference groups, Committees, data submissions, site visits, participation in external audits, private and public acknowledgements, advertising, events, and press releases.

Feedback

Feedback plays a vital role in our service provision at Distinctive Options. It informs the supports we provide, the way we run our organisation and continuous improvements to our services. People can provide feedback to us in many ways, including:

- Using a Participant Feedback Form (provided to all participants when they commence and throughout the year)
- Annual surveys, including the Participant Survey, Supporter Survey and Staff Survey
- Via our Facebook page
- Via email to info@d-o.com.au
- Through the Contact Us page on our website
- In person at any service to any member of staff

Compliments

We are so grateful to receive many compliments each year from our participants, their support networks, local area coordinators, other organisations, and our staff. They provide validation we are meeting our purpose and help to build a positive culture in the workplace. Here are a selection of some of the compliments we received this year.

From our participants:

- Thanks so much for everything you have done for me. I really appreciate it. You push me to improve myself. I really like Distinctive Options and the support workers.
- Thank you to this amazing group for always supporting me! The most incredible people you will ever meet at Distinctive Options!
- I really like coming to Distinctive Options it gives me something to look forward to. It has helped my mental health so much.

From our participant's families:

- Distinctive Options provides the best opportunities. The communication from DO is outstanding. Well done guys.
- I just wanted to thank you as the organiser and all your staff involved for the trip to Disney on Ice. Watching the glowing faces and listening to the excited chatter was a joy to behold.
- Quite a few of the management team first worked as support workers which gives them an intimate knowledge of disability and a deeper perspective.

From our staff:

- Working at Distinctive Options has been the best work place I've ever experienced. I feel valued and acknowledged.
- I'm so proud to be a part of our team.
- I just wanted to thank you and the wonderful team for being so supportive.
- I can't tell you how well supported I feel in my role. I have never worked in a place that I have felt this much support.
- Supportability and the information we provide for staff about participants is very detailed and impressive compared to other similar services I have worked for.

From our community:

- We get a lot of feedback from the community on the success of your groups. – Support Coordinator
- I really appreciate how professional and trustworthy your team at Distinctive Options is. I would definitely recommend your team to any clients in your area. – Support Coordinator
- I really appreciate your help and collaborative approach. – Occupational Therapist
- I work with a large number of support services and rarely see this level of commitment and care to participants at other organisations. – Speech Therapist
- I had the pleasure of meeting a fantastic group led by DO Travel. They way the support workers engaged with the clients was exceptional. The group were active participants and were always laughing, chatty and smiling. – Member of the public.

2023-2024 Key Events

July

The Board resolves to acquire disability service provider Noweyung in Bairnsdale.

Distinctive Options secures \$56k State grant to fund a mobile kitchen to expand Business Development Pathways.

August

The Acquisition is announced to the public and conversations begin with participants, families and supporters in Bairnsdale.

September

Four new Directors are selected and inducted into Distinctive Options.

The Board ratifies appointment of an external Project Manager, Gillian Afenya from Robert Half Talent Solutions, for the post-acquisition integration of Noweyung.

Rosenthal generously donates \$20k from its community grants program to Pathways for its Woodworks Pathway.

October

Participants showcase their art and pottery at the Sunbury Show, taking home multiple awards.

The new kitchen funded by the Living Local Fund Community Grant opens at Sunbury groups.

November

The Board establishes a Kaye Thurbon Award for Bairnsdale participants.

Management agrees to participate in a new State Government funded 'Pathways to Home' program.

December

Distinctive Options becomes registered to deliver Financial Plan Management.

Christmas celebrations are held across the organisation.

January

A new timetable begins across the organisation in line with the new year.

February

Participants and staff attend the Having A Say Conference in Geelong.

March

The Board approves criteria for first Lifetime Fellowship Awards. Inaugural inductees for this award are the six living Noweyung life members.

April

Assured Auditing completes a quality audit of Distinctive Options, achieving an overall rating of conformity, plus some ratings of best practice.

May

Lifetime Fellowship Awards are presented to inaugural inductees in Bairnsdale.

June

QIP completes a quality audit of Noweyung operations, achieving conformity against Quality & Safeguards standards.

Performance

Distinctive Options evaluates performance across three unique domains to ensure comprehensive coverage of all performance types. These domains include strategic performance (assessed via the Balanced Scorecard), support performance (assessed by hours of support delivered), and financial performance (measured through financial data).

Strategic Performance

Distinctive Options' Balanced Scorecard measures operational performance against strategic objectives. It assesses progress across the following domains:

Targeted growth

1. Organic growth
2. Inorganic growth
3. Business development
4. Scope extensions

Industry exemplar

5. Participant satisfaction and engagement
6. Quality practice design and execution
7. Safety and trust with all parties
8. Progressive leadership
9. Sustainable operations
10. Governance

Engagement model

11. Provide a voice and agency for participants
12. Anticipate and respond to the needs of families
13. Maintain strong relationships, connection and communication with the sectors we operate within
14. Establish an organisation design that gives certainty to roles and responsibilities
15. Live and breathe simple and powerful values centered around care, safety, respect and dignity.

Results are presented with a trend colour guide to demonstrate the organisation's results over time. The colour key is as follows:

- Acceptable
- Acceptable with movement ↑↓
- Within tolerance
- Unacceptable with movement ↑↓
- Unacceptable

For 2023-2024, Distinctive Options achieved 76.7% of the objectives set for the year, during what has been a very tough financial year. This is a pleasing result, highlighting the organisation's entrenched commitment to quality services and supports.



Kristeen at the first Distinctive Options Ball.

Targeted Growth

Targeted growth objectives focus on increasing the scope and scale of services provided by Distinctive Options to further our mission to participants and families, improving the quality of life for our communities and providing opportunities for our people. This year, we scored 65.5% of these Scorecard targets.

Although lower than our 72% achievement target, it is still a satisfactory result. The main reasons identified for the lower result included a delay in building our two accommodation houses, plus the longer than expected time to delve into an appropriate fundraising strategy without diminishing the abilities or impacting on the people who we support.

Objective	Target	2023	2024	Trend →
Organic Growth				
Average monthly support hours	>19,000	18,576	23,375	
Specialist disability accommodation houses built	30/6/24	Revised	In progress	
Inorganic Growth				
Noweyung monthly support hours remain stable	>9,700	New	10,096	
Total participants/supported employees	>364	334	355	
Proactive review of sector performance	31/3/24	New	27/3/24	
Business Development				
Fundraising goal for Year 2 of Strategic Plan	≥\$56.6k	\$92,000	\$76,000	
New travel business delivers budgeted profit	>\$29,900	New	\$114,538	
Long term fundraising strategy developed	30/4/24	Revised	Not achieved	
Scope Extensions				
Applications for new accommodation services	≥6	3	9	
People using DO Travel	≥25	17	74	

Industry Exemplar

The industry exemplar objectives focus on maintaining strong relationships, connection and communication with the communities and sectors we operate within to influence growth and future opportunities. It is the largest and most complex section of the Scorecard. Despite external issues impacting financial results, Distinctive Options still achieved an incredibly positive 77.0% of the total Scorecard targets. The result is underpinned by particularly strong scores against satisfaction and engagement, quality, and safety.

Workcover claims finished higher than the target set but were still reasonable compared to the prior year result. Post the pandemic, we continue to experience high sick leave. In reality, both targets set were likely too optimistic.

Workforce issues remain an issue for our sector and others. A decline in staff numbers has not reduced our service capabilities - it has just meant a more even spread of hours over a slightly reduced number of employees. There are many and varied reasons, including external factors, why the disability sector's workforce continues to have issues in attracting and maintaining its pool of staff.

The financial results reflected within Sustainable Operations on the following page highlight the impact on registered providers by mandatory NDIS pricing. NDIS pricing is not only driving sector losses, but also eroding cash reserves. While something must change in the near future to improve the sector's ongoing sustainability, Distinctive Options at least has an accumulated reserve of cash invested in longer-term fund management investments, should we need it. Other organisations in the disability sector are not necessarily in this same position.

Objective	Target	2023	2024	Trend →
Participant Satisfaction and Engagement				
DO satisfaction survey results	≥95%	95.9%	92.7%	
Noweyung satisfaction survey results	≥85%	New	86.0%	
Annual satisfaction surveys completed	>4	2	3	
Quality Practice Design and Execution				
Achieve conformity in all external quality audits	≥Rating 2	Rating 2	>Rating 2	

Objective	Target	2023	2024	Trend →
Safety and Trust				
Reported injuries to participants and supported employees	<10	0	0	
New Workcover claims lodged	≤1	6	3	
Lost staff hours from reportable Workcover injuries	≤500	61	475.8	
Staff sick leave hours taken	<7,500	5,292	8,053	
Progressive Leadership				
Staff satisfaction rate from employee surveys	≥80%	73.5%	69.0%	
Staff numbers increase to support growth in participant numbers	≥247	247	224	
Sustainable Operations				
Growth in long-term fund managed investments	≥8%	10.4%	18.5%	
Merged entity operating cash and cash equivalents	>\$2.9m	\$2.904m	\$1.203m	
Days cash available from operating accounts only	>75	73	26	
Merged entity current ratio (liquidity)	>\$2.05 to \$1	\$2.08 to \$1	\$1.34 to \$1	
Merged entity profitability from core operations	≥\$148,200	-\$266,561	-\$1,110,912	
Annual operational profit margin	>0.8%	-2.4%	-7.3%	
60+ or more days debtors as percentage of total debtors	<30%	25.2%	15.6%	
Financial or legal claims greater than \$20k	≤1	0	0	

Objective	Target	2023	2024	Trend →
Governance				
Annual review and adoption of financial audit management report	31/10/2023	18/10/2022	24/10/2023	
Completion of annual Director's performance review	31/03/2024	21/11/2022	Deferred	
Director's median attendance at Board meetings	≥66%	88.5%	85.7%	
Director's median attendance at Committee meetings	≥66%	88.3%	91.7%	
Annual review of risk appetites and risk tolerances	31/03/2024	29/06/2023	In progress	
Annual compliance with ACNC reporting requirements	31/02/2024	30/11/2022	14/12/2023	
Charity details updated in ACNC portal	01/12/2023	30/11/2022	14/12/2023	
Annual ASIC review of charity Responsible Officers completed	30/09/2023	28/11/2022	11/09/2023	
Number of NDIS and/or other NFP sector issues reported to the Board	≥30	31	34	
All Noweyung assets successfully transferred to Distinctive Options	15/09/2023	New	In progress	
Noweyung is voluntarily wound up and registrations revoked	30/09/2023	New	In progress	
Board completes CEO's annual performance review	15/12/2023	10/11/2022	23/11/2023	
Governance & Risk Committee completes CEO succession plan review	30/09/2023	New	18/10/2023	

Engagement Model

The engagement model objectives focus on continually adapting and developing our relationships with participants, families, service partners, industry bodies, communities, and government.

This year, we achieved 77.1% of these targets. Work to realign Committee meetings with Rights & Responsibilities participant groups continues to evolve, and new partnerships suffered due to the amount of time and effort required for the acquisition.

Objective	Target	2023	2024	Trend
Provide a Voice and Agency for Participants				
Committee meetings attended by R&R Network	≥4	0	0	
Radio show programs participants are part of	>80	Revised	127	
Community programs participants are part of	>100	Revised	647	
Social media articles about Distinctive Options	>700	Revised	529	
Anticipate and Respond to the Needs of Families				
Compliments received	≥150	167	183	
Complaints received	≤10	3	5	
Complaints requiring remedial action	≤3	0	1	
Maintain Strong Relationships, Connection and Communication				
New partnerships developed to grow services or employment options	≥4	2	0	
Revised website for merged entity	01/02/2024	New	19/04/2024	
Annual Report achieves Gold Award from ARA	Gold	Gold	Gold	

Objective	Target	2023	2024	Trend
Establish an Organisation Design that Gives Certainty to Roles and Responsibilities				
Annual staff turnover ratio	≤5%	11.8%	9.3%	
% of staff undertaking training or development courses	≥75%	88.1%	79.8%	
Live and Breathe Simple and Powerful Values Centered Around Care, Safety, Respect and Dignity				
Reported cases of abuse or neglect for participants	0	0	0	

Support Performance

While the impact of the COVID pandemic is obvious by the results of 2020 and 2021, growth in average monthly support hours continued again in 2023-2024. A significant part of this growth occurred because of the acquisition of Noweyung, but some relates to growth within our existing services and expanding pathway options.

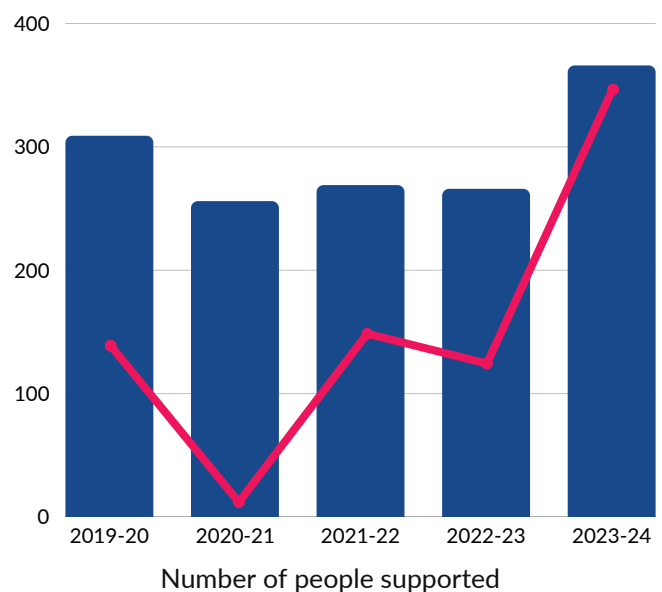
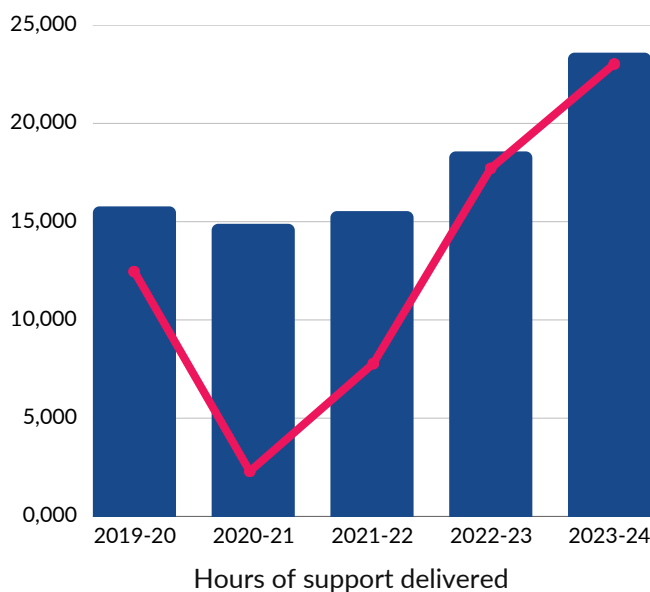
In a highly competitive marketplace, continued growth indicates the Distinctive Options Way is attractive to participants, to supported employees, and to their families and carers. Additionally, our reputation is highly regarded by external NDIS Planners, Support Coordinators, and Financial Plan Managers.

Support and choice are fundamental principles within the NDIS framework. This allows individuals to transition between services freely, exploring the variety of options available in their communities through both registered and unregistered disability providers. Although the number of people supported provides some indicative insights, it should not be considered in isolation of average support hours, or vice versa.

Both charts below provide an indication that Distinctive Options services and employment pathways are recognised by people with disability and their support networks because they deliver the outcomes individuals are seeking. Aligned with choice, people can and do move around in Distinctive Options supports and employment pathways.



Peter and Kevin at the DO Food Truck.





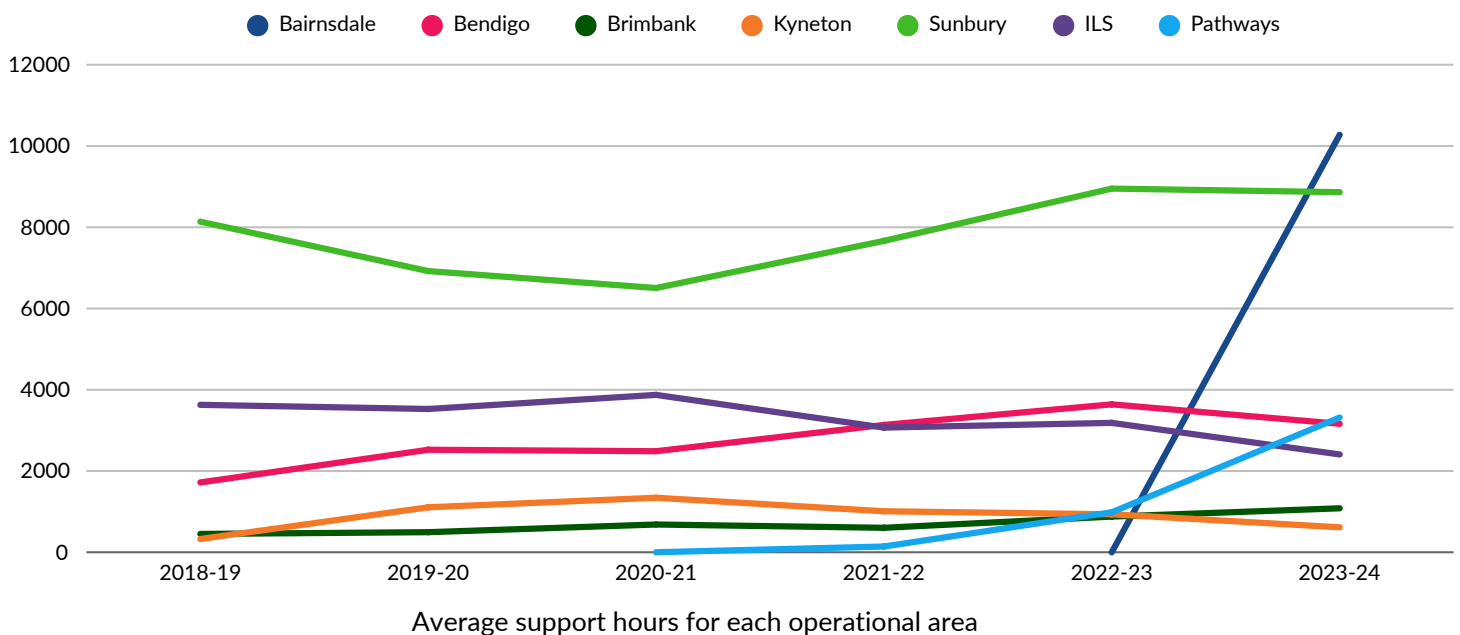
Ryan (centre) and fellow participants check the health of the DO Honey hives in Sunbury.

The chart below shows that Sunbury historically was the largest operation, but the newly acquired Bairnsdale operations (which include accommodation services) have become the largest operational area for average support hours.

Pathways supported employment have edged their way into the third largest operational area.

We have seen a number of existing participants choosing to move from Sunbury and Independent Living Supports into supported employment.

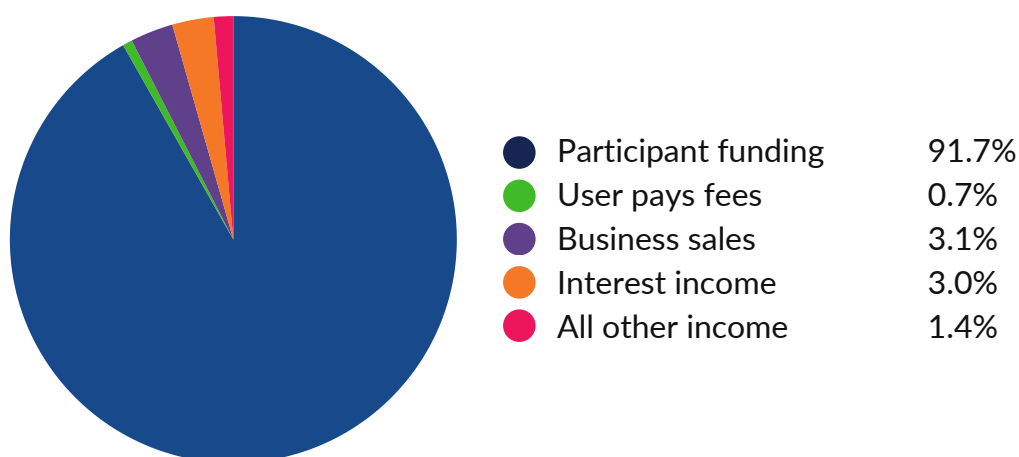
The graph suggests a decline in Kyneton supports, but these in fact are now part of Independent Living Supports, and Kyneton data represents only the first five months of the year.



Financial Performance

The financial challenges around NDIS mandatory pricing impacted Distinctive Options' financial result for the year. Added to this were some one-off costs associated with the acquisition of Noweyung operations.

For the year, total revenue topped \$15.7m for the first time, including revenue generated from the acquired Noweyung operations. This represents a 40% growth rate in revenue compared to the previous year. The chart below highlights the distribution of revenue sources for 2023-2024, including the unrealised gain on long term investments.

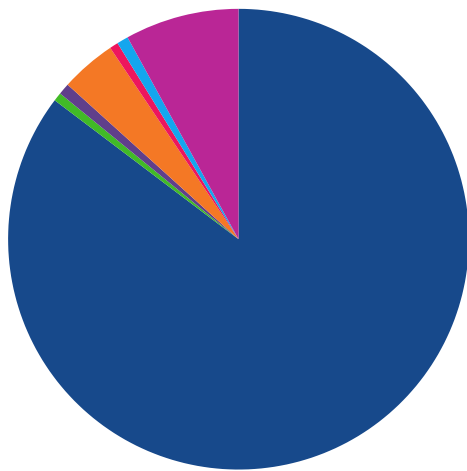


Distribution of revenue for 2023-2024

Compared to the previous year, the major additional costs incurred during 2023-2024 included:

- Salaries and wages related to some redundancies paid out following the acquisition of Noweyung operations, plus ongoing salary costs for acquired staff. Salaries and wages in total increased by 40.7%, while Workcover premiums rose by a staggering 41.7% in Victoria.
- Motor vehicle expenses increased following the acquisition of Noweyung operations and assets.
- There were one-off legal and consultancy costs associated with the acquisition of services and assets.
- Distinctive Options invested more into growing and developing our existing Business Enterprises and the acquired Noweyung enterprises in Bairnsdale.

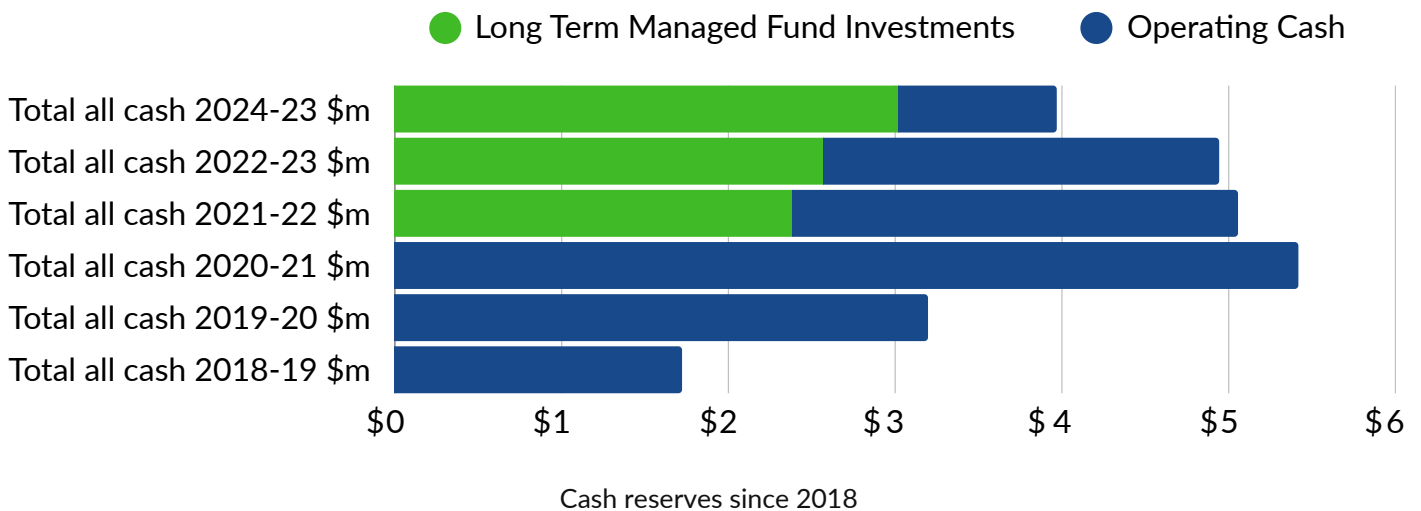
The chart on the following page displays the distribution of costs Distinctive Options incurred during 2023-2024.



Category	Percentage
Employee benefit expenses	85.3%
Client program costs	0.6%
Rental expense	0.8%
Depreciation and amortisation expense	3.9%
Motor vehicle expenses	0.6%
Audit, legal and consultancy fees	0.8%
All other expenses	8.0%

Distribution of costs for 2023-2024

From a cash perspective, the financial loss reported meant that Distinctive Options used more of its available cash reserves during the year. The small amount of cash held by Noweyung was not enough to offset the additional costs for 2023-2024.



During 2023-2024, Distinctive Options' long-term managed fund investments with Koda Capital continued to grow, but pricing impacts and acquisition costs reduced the organisation's operating cash reserves. The Board and management reviewed and evolved operational plans to maintain or grow our operating cash reserves over time. Long-term managed fund investments provide a source of income to top up operating cash, as well as to grow or expand operations, along with new business ventures.

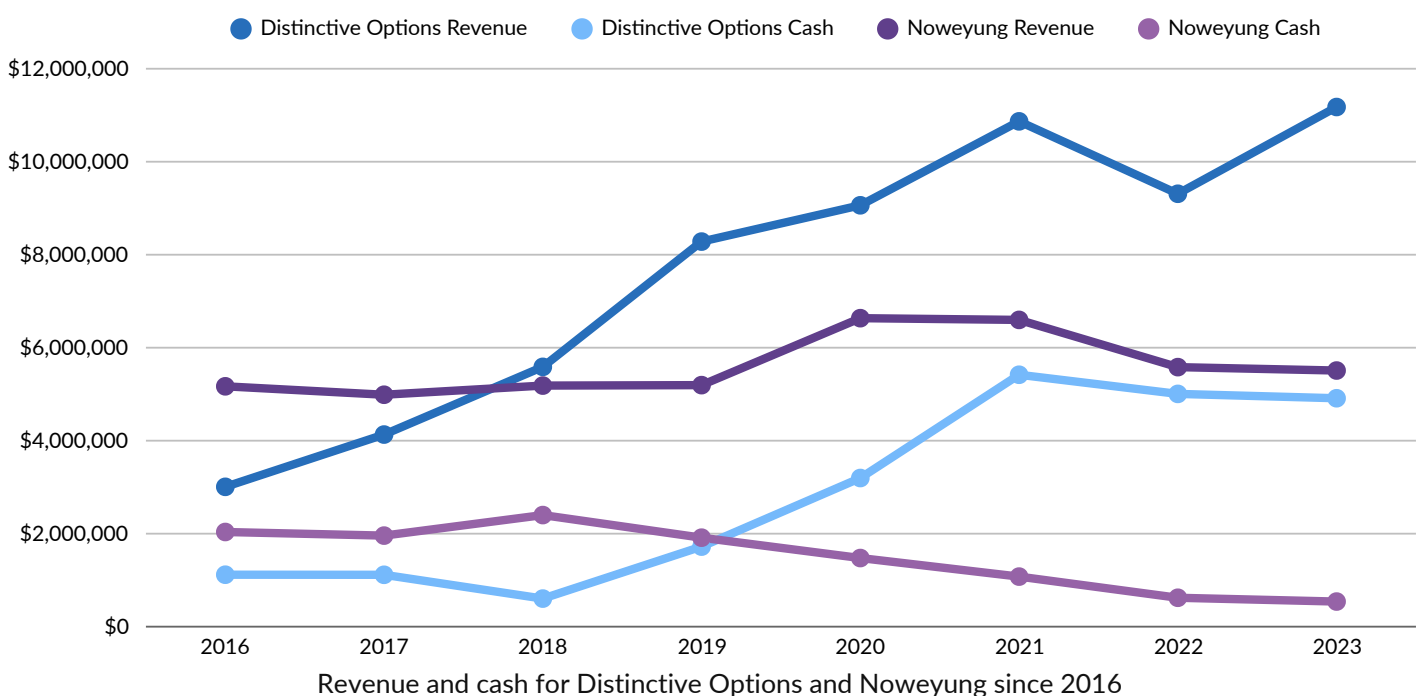
Strategic Reflection

Ernie Metcalf

Chief Executive Officer

While it may be a bit self-indulgent, I thought it appropriate to reflect on my time. A lot has happened and changed over the past 8 years. When I joined Distinctive Options, the organisation was looking for leadership stability following a turnover of three prior CEOs. These former leaders left Distinctive Options in February 2013, in June 2014, and in November 2016. After 13 years as CEO of Noweyung, I left a financially sound service provider that, back then, was about twice the size of Distinctive Options. I was looking for new professional challenges and opportunities, as well as a lifestyle change. There were many daunting challenges and frustrations at Distinctive Options to meet, particularly in my first few years! For comparative purposes, the baseline data used for this reflection is the June 2016 audited results.

Back then, total participant numbers were 129, with average support hours per month at around 10,900. The chart below shows the revenue and cash reserve trajectories of both organisations prior to the acquisition. With total revenue of \$11.1m in June 2023, the organic growth rate for Distinctive Options at that stage compared to 2016 was 270%, averaging out to 38.5% per annum over 7 years. Similarly, participant numbers were 266, a growth rate of 106.2%, or an average of just under 15.2% per annum. Support hours sat at a then record of 18,576 per month, being a growth rate of just over 70% from the base year. Organisational growth came from delivering enhanced quality service offerings and by expanding pathways to meet each person's individual outcomes.



By June 2023, Distinctive Options was in a much stronger financial position than it was back in 2016, showing significantly improved growth in cash reserves. This financial strength ensured our organisation could meet the current funding challenges imposed by NDIS mandatory pricing, noting these pricing restrictions continue to erode our cash reserves.

Establishing and delivering this financial and quality foundation for Distinctive Options is an extremely proud legacy for the organisation's current management team and for those who assisted us along the way. Without effective cooperation throughout the management team, senior staff and the Board, we could not have achieved these results. Highlighted are some key decisions which I believe helped to shape Distinctive Options into the organisation it is today.

A Better Way To Manage Performance

A positive, pro-active decision was made to introduce a **Balanced Scorecard** back in 2017 to measure operational performance against strategic goals. This turned the organisation's previously very narrow governance focus from just bottom-line financial results into a range of key performance indicators to explain why Distinctive Options did, or did not, achieve its strategic objectives. The Scorecard has continued to evolve over time, showing the organisation's maturity in measuring its effectiveness.

Another positive step came from management providing a **new risk framework** for the Board to consider. The framework included a risk appetite statement, along with identified measurable risk tolerances. As circumstances change, Distinctive Options undertakes regular reviews and makes any necessary modifications required. The organisation has come a long way in its approach to effective risk management.



Rebecca, Benji and Abby prepare fresh foods and coffees at the DO Food Project Cafe in Gisborne.

Making the Right Calls at the Right Time

A sound business decision resulted from Management's decision in 2017 **not to proceed with a tender** expression of interest to run some Victorian Government Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) homes. This proved to be a smart decision because the providers that run these SDAs today have found group homes unviable due to NDIS mandatory pricing and its occupancy and vacancy rules. One large provider in NSW even returned all former government accommodation homes for this reason!

The CEO undertook an **organisational restructure** early in 2019, focusing on the management team structure. This restructure was designed to limit the impact of mandatory NDIS pricing and to remove blockages within the team to achieve more growth potential. The restructure involved three management position redundancies, resulting in two terminations and one re-deployment. From the restructure, a new executive management team emerged. Although this process is never a pleasant path to take, we achieved substantial change with minimal impact on the organisation or staff following lengthy consultations. The restructure was a tough operational decision that proved extremely positive. An additional benefit proved to be that those staff who stepped up into Coordinator roles have never looked back, embracing the opportunities given. I am extremely proud of their achievements.

After School Care services were operated in Sunbury and later in Melton at local specialist schools, but management **closed both services** in 2019 due to unsustainable Education Department funding. This was a tough but correct business decision. These closures resulted in little to no reputational damage because management took the initiative and time to discuss closures well in advance with families and the schools.

A smart business decision proved to be when Management lodged an expression of interest for the Victorian Government's **Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) program** via a tender funded through the Department of Education. Services were based at specialist schools located in Bendigo and St Albans. In 2018, Distinctive Options won the contract and the Board signed a funding agreement for \$2m+. Following consultation with the Department, we recommended another service provider that could operate the same OSHC programs in Officer and Aspendale. This other service provider won a \$2m+ contract for these sites. Despite a lot of time and effort to set up, staff, and then manage the program, Distinctive Options and its partner service delivered quality OSHC programs and outcomes to children with disability. The tender generated additional revenue with good cash flow, providing an effective profit margin to allow Distinctive Options to adjust to the post-service payment model of the NDIS and to re-invest in new initiatives.

A positive expansion decision came after local NDIS Support Coordinators contacted Management, advising that Kyneton residents needed and wanted more disability service options. As a result, Management established a **new Kyneton service** in 2018, attracting a group of new participants and expanding local people's choice in this community.

A prudent decision followed the Board's approval of the recommendations from an external organisational review in 2021 for Distinctive Options to establish a **new Business Development operation**. This paved the way for the Board to consider the advantages of commencing small enterprises that could provide viable supported employment and sales opportunities, as well as enhanced pathways attractive to people with disability.

A great decision proved to be Management's establishment of a **minimum rate of \$12 per hour for supported employees**, providing a reasonable training rate of pay for work undertaken. This rate is much higher than the current minimum SES Award rate of \$6.03 per hour. Our minimum rate establishes a significant point of difference between Distinctive Options and most other traditional supported employment providers.

A good business decision occurred when the Board accepted **management's investment strategy** in 2021. Minutes state that the organisation was in an advantageous financial position compared to others due to prudent management aligned to growth strategies adopted. The Board appointed Koda Capital as Distinctive Options' investment Funds Manager, then invested \$2.5m with Koda. By June 2024, this investment's increased value is exceeding the growth target set.

A great decision and partnership arose from our discussions with local Rosenthal developers about a **proposal to donate two purpose-built accommodation houses plus land in Sunbury**. Distinctive Options embraced this fabulously generous offer and the partnership formally signed a Heads of Agreement in May 2022. By June 2024, both houses were under construction with an expected completion date on or before the end 2024.

Prior to the transition into NDIS funding in 2015, the Board had approved a previous CEO's concept to set up houses as 'pop-up' service bases for small numbers of participants. These small sites were designed as a way of enhancing people's service experiences. Once the NDIS was rolled out, mandatory pricing meant leased houses with a small number of participants were no longer a cost-effective or viable practice. To correct this situation, Distinctive Options entered into **larger site leases and closed down the small house sites**. This was a good long-term decision for the organisation.

Another good long-term decision occurred in February 2023 when Noweyung's Board approached the CEO to discuss a **potential merger/acquisition (M&A)** with Distinctive Options. The management team unanimously endorsed the acquisition. Due diligence process commenced through a Board-appointed Project Control Group. In August 2023, both parties signed a binding Merger Deed.

Greater Reporting and Transparency for Key Stakeholders

Prior to 2018, some Board of Director appointments came from Directors who recommended a friend they knew to fill any Board vacancy. Distinctive Options' Board back then was not always professional, and at times some members displayed unacceptable behaviours towards others. In these early years, this led to issues at both Board level and with management. The CEO I replaced in 2016 cited this as the main reason for his resignation. Between 2016 and 2018, I found these early years extremely challenging and demanding, dealing with Board member issues that distracted my attention and time away from managing an organisation which needed to grow its services. In 2018, I too considered leaving Distinctive Options, engaging in and moving through final interviews to run another local service provider. I am glad I declined the opportunity and helped our then-Chair to effect positive Board changes. From 2018, Director **appointments became based on identified skill sets** needed to fill any vacancies and recruitment was conducted by an **external recruitment agency**. This was a great Board decision that had a positive impact on the Management team. Today, the Board is an organisational strength with a professional, highly competent team that is attuned to the sector and its issues.

Up to June 2016, Distinctive Options' annual reports were only eight pages or less, providing limited information for interested stakeholders. To improve reporting and transparency, and for marketing purposes, Distinctive Options **adopted the Australasian Reporting Awards (ARA) criteria**. At our first attempt, Distinctive Options won a Bronze Award for the organisation's 2017 Annual Report, a Silver Award for the organisation's 2018 Annual Report, and then its first Gold Award for the 2020 Annual Report. Today, our level of reporting and transparency is second to none. This has proven to have been a great decision.

It can be a Tough World, with Tough Lessons Learned

Tough decisions during tough times occurred in 2020 during the **COVID-19 pandemic**. This impacted Victorian services for two years. By April 2020, the State Government closed all services because of escalating pandemic cases. The State Government later announced restricted support services could re-commence under strict COVID Plan strategies developed by each provider. Commonwealth Government JobKeeper subsidies commenced and operated throughout 2020 and 2021 to maintain required services and staff. Distinctive Options did not lose any participants from the pandemic, and just a few employees chose to leave the organisation due to Government requirements.



Support worker William takes a coffee break.

Participants and Supported Employees

A Story Every Second



Peter

“I like coming to Employment Pathways because the staff are helpful. I learn new things such as using different tools and equipment, like Woodwork and Food Truck.”

I get paid to work here and try other jobs. I like meeting new people and team mates. Supervisors help me with skills on new gardening tools and help with any problems.”

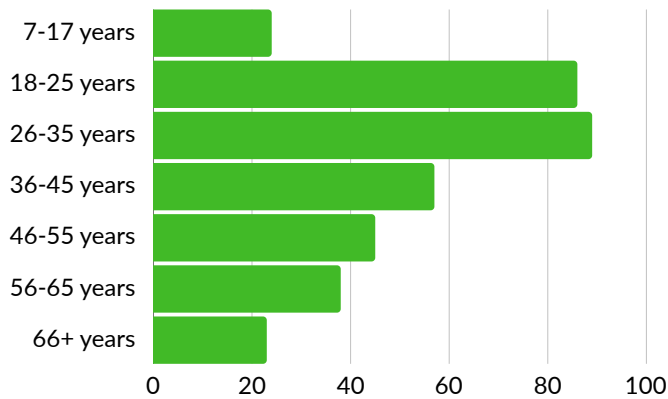
03

Demographics

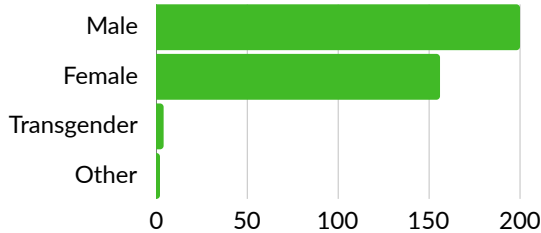
This year, participant numbers increased to a total of 355, up from 334 last year. Gender distribution remained steady with an increase in the number of participants and supported employees identifying as belonging to another category. There was no significant change to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) status of our participants and supported employees. Country of birth also remained steady, with a slight increase in the number of people born in Australia.

The most common primary disability remained Intellectual Disability, although this decreased from the previous year. There was an increase in people with Autism and Down Syndrome.

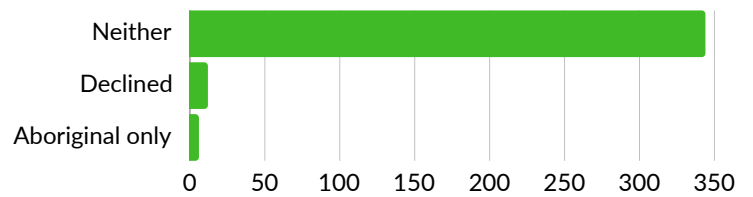
Age



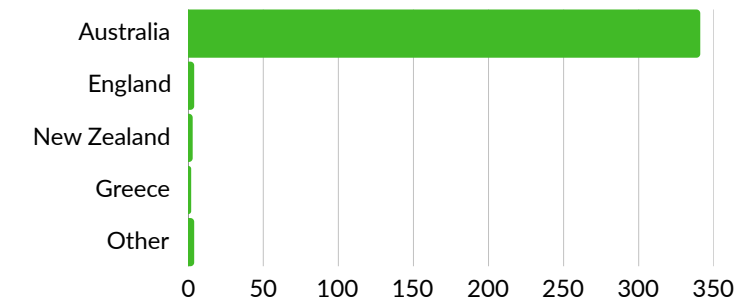
Gender



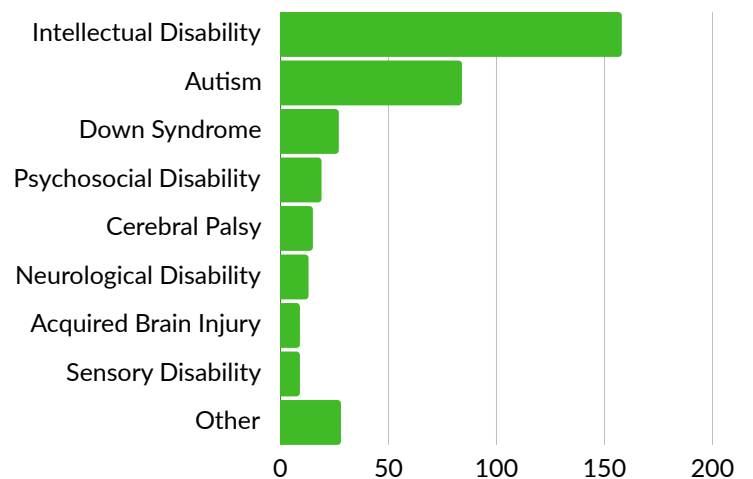
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Status



Country of Birth



Primary Disability



Service Reports

Group Supports

Group supports in Sunbury were established in 1985. Brimbank was launched in 2015 and then Bendigo in 2016. Finally, Bairnsdale was added in 2023, joining as part of the acquisition of Noweyung. These services provide a range of supports for various group and individual supports, including home and independent living skills, sport and recreation, photography, art, literacy and numeracy, rights and responsibilities, advocacy, travel training, community access, radio shows, online services, physical fitness, survival skills, communication, social skills, extended hours or after hours supports, supported holidays, volunteering, Supported Independent Living (SIL), and more!

Independent Living Supports

Independent Living Supports (ILS) was first established in 2013 as a regional service that provides various one-to-one support activities. ILS can include independent daily living skills, community access, social support, personal care, physical activities, online support, cooking and meal preparation, support to access health, medical or other personal appointments, support with banking and budgeting, and so much more!

DO Travel

DO Travel was introduced in 2023 to provide supported respite options to participants. Choices include local, interstate and international travel experiences that are tailored to participant needs.

Employment Supports

Also known as Pathways, our supported employment service commenced in 2022 through the development and operation of a range of business enterprises. By comparison, employment pathways in Bairnsdale had commenced as early as 1989 through the establishment of Banksia Fine Foods under the former Noweyung. These business enterprises provide pathway options for people through supported employment opportunities. All supported employees are employed under the Supported Employment Services Award (SES) 2020. The minimum hourly wage rate paid by Distinctive Options was \$12.00 per hour, well above the minimums set by the SES. Independent, external, accredited wage assessors are used to determine the level of wages for each supported employee in accordance with the conditions in the SES and in relation to Fair Work Australia legislation. Any individuals assessed by a wage assessor at a higher rate than the minimum paid by Distinctive Options is paid according to the assessment calculation. These arrangements guarantee a fair pay rate for a fair day's work.



Jenny Horton

Bairnsdale

We have had an incredible year working with all the new faces at Distinctive Options.

This year we implemented many new skills-based programs that blend program content with Learn-Local pre-accredited courses. Participants have had the opportunity to increase their knowledge in their areas of interest and participated in a number of courses including IT, Get Ready to Volunteer, Financial Wellbeing and Women’s Wellness. A huge congratulations to all participants for successfully completing these courses, earning certificates to further enhance their impressive list of achievements this year.

Our talented artists in Colour-Gang have showcased their artwork right across our region this year. Colour-Gang held a very successful public exhibition in the Nicholson St Mall which saw the majority of displayed art purchased by the public. Vanessa has found her niche as a feature artist, exhibiting in a local cafe. She has even been contacted to commission some bright and colourful artwork to cheer up the residents of an aged-care facility up in the high-country region of Omeo.

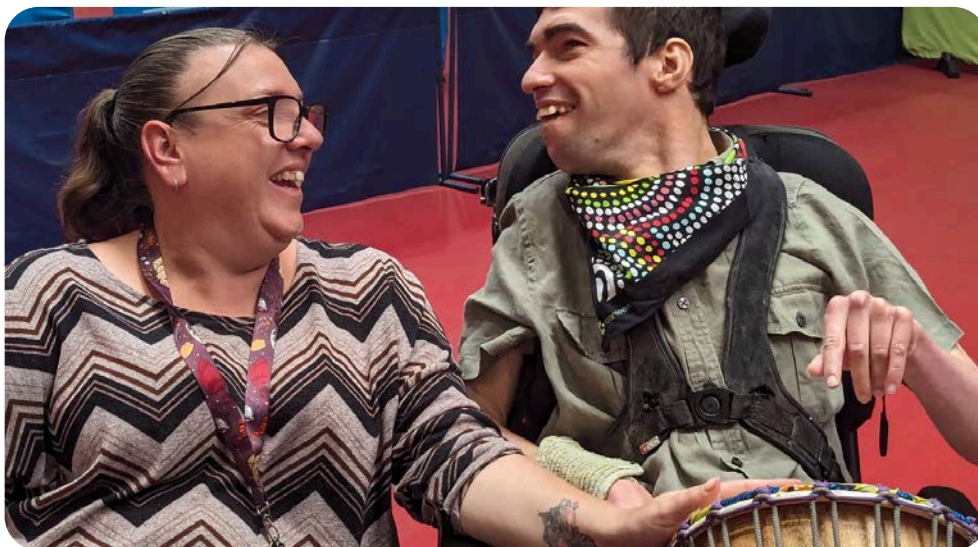
Pricilla and Josie have ventured into business together. The women are being supported to produce, show and sell their work which is proudly displayed and sold from their art gallery in Bruthen. Colour-Gang and Creative Craft also turned their artistic skills to lantern-making by creating winter festival lanterns that were displayed in a shopfront in Bairnsdale as part of local celebrations for the East Gippsland Winter Festival.

The skill development programs are achieving excellent outcomes. The Mechanics Workshop has seen remote control cars being built, raced, crashed, and repaired, engines brought back to life, a motorbike stripped and rebuilt, and many vintage mowers, scooters and engines restored to their former glory.

The participants in Now-Projects have tackled a wide range of projects, including chessboards, CD boxes and a replica of the Titanic. Participants are developing new skills and completing projects independently. There is always plenty on the go and the quality of work is outstanding. The groups are working together to reuse and repurpose materials, seeing the benefits of recycling and learning about the environment.



Hollie sanded and oiled each piece to complete her chessboard.



Deanna and Nathan learn a new rhythm together.

The Community Engagement and Volunteering group are making a name for themselves as valued helpers in our community, delivering meals on wheels to the elderly, working at the Salvation Army Opportunity Shop, maintaining vegetable gardens at the Bairnsdale Community Hub and assisting at Animal Aid. Their can-do attitude is amazing and it is wonderful to see the difference their contribution makes to the community.

Yackety Yak continues to ensure that the voices of our participants are heard every week with interviews, music and laughter across Gippsland airwaves for all to appreciate.

Participants have been out and about with the Gippsland Disability Advocacy group, focusing on rights and responsibilities while exploring local culture, attractions, cafes and even joining a scavenger hunt around our region.

Individual supports continue to thrive. We have seen participation in a wide range of activities across the region, including table tennis, music, swimming, gym fitness, fossicking, community events and local markets, all while meeting individual goals and interests.

We have taken part in celebrations, including the inaugural Kaye Thurbon award that was presented to Vanessa and Jessica and DO Lifetime Fellowship Awards that were presented to exiting Noweyung Board members.

Our participants and staff also said goodbye and celebrated the life of our beloved friend Cosmo Kyriazis when he sadly passed away earlier this year.

During the acquisition, our staff have undergone some huge changes and have continued to impress with their input and dedication. They are to be commended as an integral part of the continual growth of our services. We been provided with unwavering support from the rest of the organisation, from Sunbury to Bendigo, with onsite and remote assistance as needed. Noweyung is now a part of a dynamic team and we are excited to be providing quality disability support into the future.



Tara Boag

Bendigo

Bendigo continues to be a large and ever-growing regional city that has seen many service providers start up or expand into the region in recent years. We continue to provide alternative and flexible services that are truly person-centred with a focus on the individual and their strengths, needs, interests and goals.

We welcome new participants to group supports, each bringing their own views and voices. We believe strongly in collaboration with other providers, support coordinators and participant supporters. These partnerships have a huge benefit for participants, giving them access to various opportunities for social and community participation. We are very proud of our culture and outcomes here in Bendigo which focus on prioritising choice and control with participants who are well supported by our skilled workers.

This year, Bendigo groups has been honoured to have the opportunity to collaborate with some LGBTQIA+ community members to plan and potentially offer an activity that provides a safe and open space for people to meet and feel included within a community setting.

Rights and Responsibilities

Participants continue to be involved in our Rights and Responsibilities (R&R) Network. The group have had various guest speakers. This year they attended and ran the Self Advocacy Resource Unit (SARU) stall at the Bendigo International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD). The groups planned the Distinctive Options stall and were very proud of the display that they were able to provide to community members on the day.

Event Planning

Our new Event Ninjas group have been very busy planning and creating events within Distinctive Options for external fundraising. The group were also involved in the creation and planning of a new clothing label called the DO Crew for our Bendigo participants, staff and supporters to purchase which include shirts, hats and jumpers.

Fundraisers

We held a number of fundraisers this year, including:

- Good Friday Appeal
- Footy Colours Day
- Jeans for Genes Day
- Do it for Dolly Day

Garden Groups

Our garden groups have been volunteering at the Long Gully Community Garden and attending monthly DIY classes at Bunnings in Kangaroo Flat.

Radio Phoenix FM

This year, two groups have been delivering live radio. When the groups are not on air, they are working hard planning for the next live show.

Sports

Our Health and Fitness groups have been participating in fortnightly community lawn bowling at the Eaglehawk Bowls Club and Basketball/Netball at Red Energy Arena Bendigo. For the third year, groups have been attending Balloon Football which is organised by Scope Bendigo who have worked with us to ensure that all participants and staff are welcomed and join in the fun together.

Extended Hours Activities

We offer up to four extended hours activities each month, with up to two provided. These have been well attended by participants who have given us very positive feedback about the sessions. The activities provided over the past 12 months included:

- An open mic night, hosted by DONUT Studios
- The Out of this World Ball, also hosted by DONUT studios
- A basketball match, seeing the Australian Boomers vs Korea
- The Electric Wonderland light and sound show in Bendigo
- Seeing Grease the Musical in Melbourne

Individualised Supports

Distinctive Options in Bendigo provides a vast array of Individualised Support services, including in-house respite supports. We support participants to attend various community events which offer opportunities to engage with the community.

Our staff continue to support participants to achieve their goals. This year, some of our participant's achievements included:

- Moved out of home and into their own accommodation
- Increased independence and life skills
- Obtained a Learner Permit
- Overcame community anxiety
- Increased social life
- Improved personal care
- Gained employment
- Engaged in local sporting teams
- Engaged in future studies and qualifications



Brittany, Nick and Riely broadcast news, sports and music on Phoenix FM Radio in Bendigo.



Melanie Mays

Sunbury

During the period of Elena Cotchin's maternity leave, I had the privilege of stepping in to keep her role active and ensure continuity at Sunbury. This past year has seen significant advancements and notable events that have contributed to our growth.

Transition to Apportioned Pricing

One of the major milestones achieved during my tenure was the transition to apportioned pricing. This change brought about a new structure in the way we charge and invoice group supports. For the first time, we introduced non face-to-face supports and centre capital costs. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) also categorised hourly ratio charges into three distinct categories. This transition required extensive collaboration with families, whose patience and cooperation were invaluable as we rolled out these new arrangements across all our sites.

Technological Integration

Our community leaders have been proactive in integrating technology to enhance accessibility. We have been working with Céрге, an app designed to help organisations and venues provide tailored services to those with disabilities. Stephanie's review of the Ascot Vale Leisure Centre highlighted the positive impact of this collaboration.



Participants in the MasterChef program make sushi.

Community Engagement and Events

Sunbury groups have always been deeply involved in community representation and engagement. This year, our service proudly represented Distinctive Options at the Anzac Day ceremony. We also forged a new partnership with the local golf club, which now provides weekly supports for an all-abilities golf program.

In another significant event, our tennis team had the honour of visiting Government House to meet the Governor, Margaret Gardner. The team also participated in the Walk Run Roll event at the Botanical Gardens, organised by Reclink, further showcasing our commitment to inclusive activities.

Kitchen Grand Opening and Culinary Excellence

One of the standout moments of the year was the grand opening of our industrial kitchen. This event was attended by participants of our MasterChef program, staff, coordinators, family members, and distinguished guests including Distinctive Options' CEO, Ernie Metcalf and BK the Project Manager. The kitchen hosted the 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM), with meals prepared by our talented MasterChef team.

Partnership and Community Support

We had the pleasure of welcoming various visitors. In August, Acting Senior Sergeant Jason Kok and Senior Constable Kim McKeown from the Sunbury Police Station visited our Rights and Responsibilities (R&R) network to discuss cyber safety, community safety, and pathways to becoming a police officer.

Our Sunbury Handyman crew, always industrious, installed pavers at the Sunbury Train Station under the guidance of Lyn from Bunnings Warehouse in Sunbury. They also designed and built a water play board with materials donated by Bunnings, which was presented to Cathy at Sunbury Neighbourhood House for the enjoyment of children attending various programs there.

Fundraising and Awareness Campaigns

Sunbury Groups have been active in running various events, including R U OK? Day, Melbourne Cup Day, and the Good Friday Appeal, where our Rights and Responsibilities group raised a total of \$10,236. Additionally, our efforts in the MND Big Freeze event raised \$200, further demonstrating our commitment to supporting important causes.

In May, we warmly welcomed Elena Cotchin back to her role, concluding a dynamic and productive year in Sunbury. It has been a rewarding experience coordinating groups and I hope to be back one day!



Caitlin enjoys the Pampering program in Sunbury.



Deborah Ford

Independent Living Supports

In 2023, we settled into our new office space in Macedon Street. The ILS team is supported by a large team of passionate and dedicated support workers who deliver direct support in our participant's homes and in the community. Here's a closer look at our accomplishments and initiatives.

Streamlined Processes

Our team made substantial progress in refining processes, focusing on improving rostering and the participant intake process. By addressing these key areas, we enhanced operational efficiency and better managed the demands of our ever-changing and growing participant base.

Participant Intake

This year, we successfully onboarded 11 new participants. Our streamlined intake process and rostering functions have made the process of integrating new ILS individuals smooth and efficient.

SIL Home Project

The ILS team have been working alongside Mel Mays and Rick Dunn with the upcoming implementation of SIL (Supported Independent Living). The ILS team will be overseeing the management of direct supports and will manage the day-to-day running of the homes. ILS involvement will ensure that our participants receive the necessary support and services in a structured and effective manner.



Ryan enjoys All-Abilities golf where he connects with the community to expand his social network.

Monthly Staff Dinners

Recognising the importance of staff morale and the need to interact with other team members for staff who work with participants on a one-to-one basis, we implemented a monthly staff dinner. This initiative has not only fostered a supportive and collaborative networking environment but has also provided a platform for informal discussions and team building.

Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) Grant Application and Management

ILS have played a pivotal role in assisting with the application for the CHSP Grant. The grant is an entry-level support service for older Australians (65 years and older) to assist them to maintain their independence and to live safely in their homes for longer. The application was completed and submitted at the end May 2024 and we are now awaiting approval for funding to begin the project of delivery of direct supports. ILS will oversee the planning and management of supports related to this project, ensuring compliant and effective service delivery.

ILS Newsletter

To enhance communication and keep staff and management informed, we introduced the ILS newsletter. This publication serves as a valuable tool for sharing updates, achievements, and important information with the ILS team. The feedback regarding the newsletter from management and support staff has been very positive, with the team reporting that they feel more informed and valued.

The team's overarching objective has been to ensure consistency and efficiency in handling enquiries and intakes, streamlining staffing and rostering processes, and continually improving departmental procedures, which will steadily grow our business. These efforts are collectively contributing to a more organised and responsive service delivery model. With the upcoming implementation of SIL houses, and possible entry into Aged Care services, the team looks forward to future progress on these exciting projects.



ILS support workers and coordinators enjoy a meal together every month to connect and learn from each other's experiences.



Melanie East

DO Travel

Introduced in 2023, DO Travel was created to provide supported respite options for participants and their families. Our tailored respite journeys, whether local, interstate, or customised, are thoughtfully designed to meet the individual goals and needs of each participant. We believe that every individual deserves the opportunity to explore, discover, and live life to the fullest, regardless of the obstacles they may face.

Our mission is clear: to offer inclusive, supportive, and enriching experiences that empower individuals to step beyond their daily routines, experience new environments, refresh their perspectives, and build confidence and life skills away from their regular support networks.

Our respite journeys are purposefully crafted to focus on several key areas of personal development, including daily living skills and social and community participation. Our supports encourage participants to practice essential skills like meal preparation and household tasks such as laundry, dishwashing, and general cleaning. From a social and community perspective, our travel options give participants the opportunity to engage in travel training and build new social connections. They are supported to get involved in different communities and explore new places while creating memorable experiences beyond their daily routines.



Tammy and Molly brave the surf on the Great Ocean Road.

This year, our participants ventured to a variety of destinations. Notable trips included:

- Geelong, where participants attended the annual Having a Say Conference and explored the sunny Surf Coast.
- Sydney, where participants journeyed to iconic landmarks and engaged in unique experiences.
- Gold Coast, where we have established strong relationships with accommodation providers, offering an ideal setting for skill development programs and travel training, including visits to theme parks, beaches and local shops via public transport.
- Northern Territory, where three participants received a culturally immersive experience. These young men had the opportunity to learn about the land, engage with local traditions, and share unforgettable moments with members of the community.
- An extended journey for a group of friends to visit their best friend who had relocated. This experience allowed them to reconnect and spend meaningful time together while trying new activities. The journey provided them with the opportunity to gain confidence, build independence, and enjoy quality time away from their families. This trip fostered personal growth and strengthened their bonds, making it an unforgettable and enriching experience.

Other destinations visited this year included Queenscliff, Tasmania, Ballarat, Echuca and Bendigo.

Our staff have observed remarkable growth in participants throughout our respite journeys. Many participants showed significant improvement in their ability to manage daily tasks.

From meal preparation and personal care to navigating new environments, they embraced the opportunity to practice these skills outside of their usual support systems. Away from familiar routines, participants were encouraged to think on their feet and solve everyday challenges independently. They became more confident in making decisions, interacting with new people, and trying new activities.

The benefits are not limited to participants. For families, our respite experiences offer a much-needed break from daily routines, helping to prevent burnout while supporting the wellbeing of both participants and caregivers.

Looking ahead, we remain passionate about creating new respite opportunities for those who need it most. In the coming year, we will focus on building further community connections, enhancing involvement, and fostering skill development through enriching, offsite experiences. We are excited to continue watching the growth and joy our respite journeys bring to participants, families, and our team.



Barry, Lochie and Robert look and listen for koalas at Wildlife Wonders.



Jackson Hetherington

Brimbank

This was a year of growth for the team here at Distinctive Options Brimbank. After finally moving in and having renovations completed, we were fully equipped to be able to utilise our new space to its full potential and offer a variety of new programs and activities.

We saw a range of events organised by our newly introduced Rights and Responsibilities (R&R) network, including:

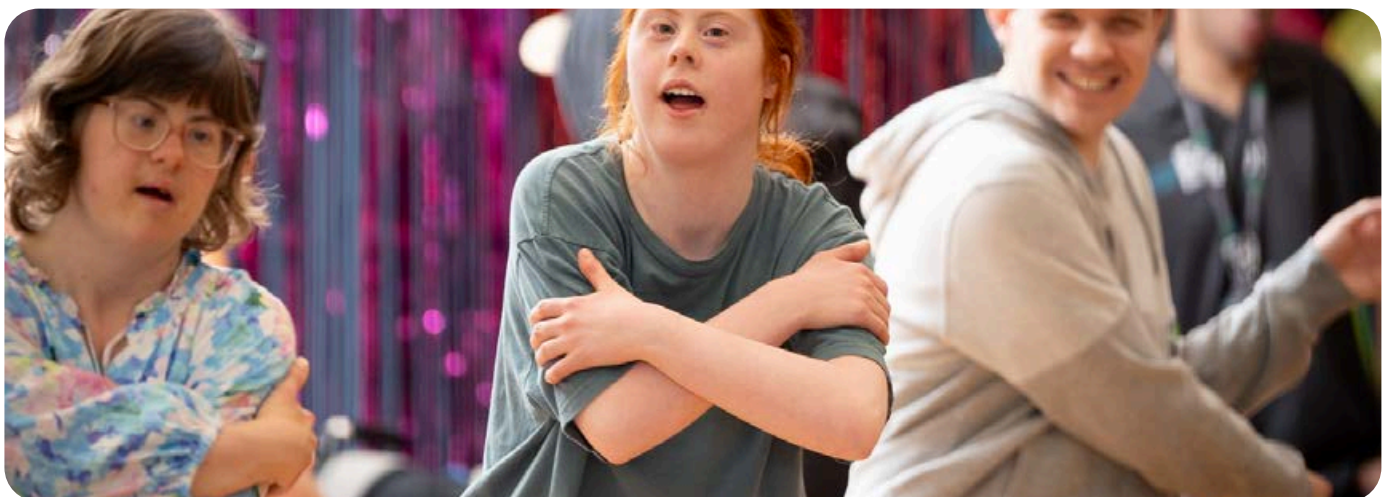
- International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD)
- Footy Colours Day
- FreezeMND

Each of these events were brought together by our small yet passionate R&R team who are constantly coming up with new ideas for their service.

Brimbank enjoyed a year of excitement, opportunity and change, with several Brimbank participants attending various supported holidays through the help of the DO Travel team. We are constantly developing ways to expose our participants to new life experiences and become a part of their local communities even more than they already are.

Here at Brimbank, we were very proud to be able to offer several new programs, including Animal Planet, Bike Ed, Getin2Golf and our Rec, Set, Go! programs. These take place in the Brimbank community and build on community partnerships in the world around us.

With the introduction of a School Leavers Education Support (SLES) program here at Brimbank, the window is well and truly open for even more growth and opportunity within our local community, including the potential for our own work-ready skills program. Bring on 2025!



Sarah, Chelsea and Joel let loose at a hip hop dance class at Brimbank Sports and Aquatic Centre.

Governance

A Story Every Second



Vanessa

“I have been coming to Noweyung for many years. Some days I work at Banksia Fine Foods making delicious jams and chutneys and at the cafe.

Other days I come to programs at Noweyung. My two favourites are Colour Gang and Yackety Yak radio.

My paintings are very detailed and admired by many people. Noweyung staff supported me to have my paintings displayed at a Café in Lakes Entrance. I am selling lots of my paintings which is exciting.”

04

Board of Directors



MBA BComp (InfoSys)
GAICD

Alistair Lloyd

Chairperson

Alistair is an independent Director and an ex officio member of all Committees.

Alistair has extensive information systems, program delivery and strategy implementation experience, with over three decades in corporate and public sector roles, including with National Foods and the Department of Education. He is a Director with Breast Screen Victoria, and previously served as Executive Director with ESTA/Triple Zero Victoria. Alistair now leads his own technology and business practice and is a founding Director of digital medical services business. He is passionate about transformation and change, service design, people leadership and creativity.



BA, Dip PR

Alicia Kokocinski

Deputy Chairperson

Alicia is an independent Director and Chair of the Development & Fundraising Committee.

Originally a journalist, Alicia is the General Manager of Marketing and Communications at Equity Trustees, Australia's leading trustee company. She has a proven track record in media, digital marketing, communications, and market research, especially in complex and highly regulated environments, as well as government and social justice campaigns. She has previously managed her own successful consulting business specialising largely in the legal sector where she worked with peak bodies and associations, the courts and leading law firms. Alicia has also worked in the not-for-profit sector on complex education and behaviour change campaigns which have focused on homelessness, cancer, safe sex, illicit drug use, nutrition, and volunteering.



BCom, JD, GAICD

Simon McKenzie

Simon is a former Board Chair who is an independent Director and member of the Governance & Risk Committee.

Simon is an admitted lawyer with a commerce degree and is a graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. He is the former Public Transport Ombudsman, a role which helps people resolve disputes about public transport issues including accessibility. Simon is currently the Chief Executive Officer of Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission. He brings solid experience in dispute resolution, stakeholder engagement, customer advocacy, company operations and regulatory affairs. He has a record of accomplishment in team management and leadership through organisational change.



BBus, CA, CHCIO

John Papatheohari

John is an independent Director and Chair of the Audit & Finance Committee.

John has eleven years of experience as an IT and digital transformation executive across private and public health. He has assumed Chief Information Officer roles over the past six years, having previously led the Health Shared Services entity for the Victorian Department of Health. John made the transition to the private industry after 26 years as a Management Consultant, leading regional practices and having spent over 12 years in various overseas postings. He is a Board member of both Benalla Health and Mallee Track Health & Community Service, a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and is a Chisholm Institute Board Sub-Committee member. John is currently General Manager IT & Digital for the College of Intensive Care Medicine. He brings enthusiasm for governance, financial management, risk management and digital adoption.



LLB, RMIA, MBA, BA,
GradCertIA

Sunayana Tonks

Sunayana is a non-independent Director who has a lived family disability experience. She is Chair of the Governance & Risk Committee.

Sunayana is a highly qualified internal auditor with over 15 years of broad experience in managing and advising on compliance and risk obligations across various organisations. She is passionate about ensuring regulatory obligations and risks are considered in everyday decision making. Sunayana has a Bachelor of Law which included learning on disability and NDIS law. She brings her own personal experience as a parent to a child with Autism. She is also a Board advisor of an independent school.



MBA, GAICD

Natalie Frazer

Natalie is an independent Director and member of the Audit & Finance Committee.

Natalie has consistently delivered challenging agendas and improved results through leading businesses in financial services and professional services. She has more than 20 years' experience in general management, operations, risks, sales, marketing, acquisitions and business transformation across financial services, professional services, and IT sectors.



MBA, GAICD

Tanya Khan

Tanya is an independent Director and member of the Development & Fundraising Committee.

Tanya has extensive legal and leadership experience in private, public, and for-purpose organisations with domestic and international operations. She has strong expertise in governance, strategy, business management and operations, law, board reporting and liaison, stakeholder relationship development, service design and delivery, advocacy, compliance, and risk management.



BBus, CA

Areeb Ovais

Areeb is an independent Director and member of the Development & Fundraising Committee.

Areeb brings lived experience of a physical disability. He is a chartered accountant who has extensive expertise in financial services, plus developed skills in diversity and inclusion. Areeb is passionate about integrating people into the workforce and supporting them to participate fully in society. He also brings experience gained from being a Treasurer for a national not-for-profit charity.



BCom, CA

Rebecca Senior

Rebecca is an independent Director and member of the Audit & Finance Committee.

Rebecca brings a wealth of experience and skills as a strategic senior finance leader with a passion for transformation. She has over 20 years in rewarding and challenging senior roles, with a focus on driving best practice financial oversight and governance across organisations.

Former Directors

Kalma Rathouski joined the Board in March 2015 and her final term expired at the 2023 AGM. She served as Board Chair and Deputy Chair, as well as being a Committee Chair during her time in office.

Derek Jones joined the Board in February 2016 and resigned during his final term at the 2023 AGM. He served as a Committee Chair during his time as a Board Director.

Mark Wiegerink joined the Board in April 2022 and resigned at the 2023 AGM.

The Board thanks each former Director for their contributions to Distinctive Options.

Corporate Governance

Distinctive Options is a company limited by guarantee, incorporated under the Corporations Act 2001, and a registered charity under the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Act 2012. Ultimate responsibility for the organisation rests with the Board of Directors.

The Board reviews and updates the organisation's Constitution at least every five years through guidance, advice, and expertise from our legal representatives. The Constitution was last updated and revised in March 2023.

Governance Standards

Registered charities under the ACNC must comply with 6 Governance Standards.

Standard 1: Purpose and Not-for-profit Nature

Compliance to Standard 1 is demonstrated through Distinctive Options' Constitution which outlines the organisation's purpose and not-for-profit nature. As part of our mission to enhance people's lives, Distinctive Options continues to expand its range of support services and employment options to people with disability.

Standard 2: Accountability to Members

For Standard 2, Distinctive Options is accountable to its members and stakeholders through transparent, high-quality reporting, through inclusive strategic planning sessions, through our AGM and other member/stakeholder forums, and through a range of other mechanisms used from time to time.

Standard 3: Compliance with Australian Laws

Ensuring there are no breaches reported or investigated against relevant Australian laws associated with the organisation's operations provides assurance Distinctive Options meets Standard 3. The Company Secretary completes annual compliance to mandatory ACNC reporting requirements on behalf of the Board.

Standard 4: Suitability of Responsible People

Compliance with Standard 4 is achieved through all Directors being screened by an external recruiting firm, then each new candidate applying for and meeting NDIS Worker Screening requirements. The Company Secretary undertakes another annual screening process for Directors through ASIC's company register to ensure no candidate is listed as a banned or a disqualified person.

In line with company law, all Directors must have a current Director Identification Number to hold a Board position, provided through the Australian Business Registry Services via an application and screening process. For key management listed as Responsible People with the ACNC, appropriate probity checks are completed by the Board for the CEO and by the CEO for other managers. Additionally, NDIS Worker Screening proof is required. External quality auditors regularly review this information to ensure compliance against the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's standards.

Standard 5: Duties of Responsible People

To ensure compliance with Standard 5, and to meet accepted best practice, Director's roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are specified in the organisation's Governance Charter and Constitution. Key management roles are responsible and accountable as per their position descriptions, Balanced Scorecard targets and the organisation's Delegation Policy. Additionally, the Board Chair conducts regular reviews of Director effectiveness.

Standard 6: Maintaining and Enhancing Public Trust and Confidence in the Australian Not-for-profit Sector

To enhance public trust and confidence as per Standard 6, Distinctive Options prides itself on the excellent reputation it has developed and maintained over many years. The organisation consciously strives to achieve this through its quality annual reporting, by growing and enhancing its reputation both in the community and with our partners for our level of quality services and employment options, as well as from regular feedback and information provided by key stakeholders.

As a company limited by guarantee, Distinctive Options also monitors governance requirements listed under the Australian Institute of Company Directors' Not-for-Profit Governance Principles. Updated in April 2024, these eight principles closely align with the ACNC standards.



The success of Banksia Fine Foods exemplifies the importance of sound business practice within the not-for-profit sector.

Accountability

As the governing body, the Board is accountable to:

- The members of Distinctive Options
- The community
- Relevant government funding bodies, including the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Commonwealth Government's Department of Health and Aged Care
- The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
- The laws (as amended) relating to the Charities Act, Corporations Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, Disability Services Act, Disability Discrimination Act, Privacy Act, and industrial relations requirements

Board Meetings

Under the Constitution, the Board must hold a minimum of 9 meetings per year. Usually, no Board meetings are scheduled in January, July or December, with additional meetings held as required. The Board met 10 times during the year. The CEO and management team attend some Board meetings, allowing them to present operational and financial information to the Board as required. Board agendas are developed by the CEO/Company Secretary in consultation with the Chairperson. Management disseminates the minutes, generally within a week of meetings being held.



Support worker Marion and Blake attended the International Day Of People With Disability event at Brimbank.

Attendance at Board Meetings

	Eligible	Attended	Rate %
Alistair Lloyd	10	9	90.0
Alicia Kokocinski	10	8	80.0
Simon McKenzie	10	9	90.0
John Papatheohari	10	10	100.0
Sunayana Tonks	10	7	70.0
Natalie Frazer	7	5	71.4
Tanya Khan	7	6	85.7
Areeb Ovais	7	6	85.7
Rebecca Senior	7	7	100.0
Kalma Rathouski (Retired)	6	5	83.3
Derek Jones (Resigned)	6	6	100.0
Mark Wiegerink (Resigned)	6	2	33.3
CEO/Company Secretary	10	10	100.0

The median attendance by Directors at Board meetings was 85.7%, in line with best practice. Board meeting attendance is expected to be a minimum of 67% per annum, in line with international and Australian benchmarks, except where an individual Director has approved leave.

Board Members

Each Board member volunteers their time to Distinctive Options. They receive no remuneration for their services but may receive reimbursement for reasonable costs incurred due to Board activities. The Constitution provides an indemnity to the Directors and specifies that:

- There must be a minimum of five Board Directors, and each Director must be eligible to be a member. All membership fees must be paid annually.
- No employees, including the CEO, can be a director of the company.
- Directors are appointed for up to three terms of three years each.
- Membership expires at the ninth Annual General Meeting (AGM) following their appointment to the Board.

Year	Members
2019-20	8
2020-21	9
2021-22	10
2022-23	8
2023-24	9

In line with best practice principles, a majority of Distinctive Options' Board members are independent directors. An independent director is someone who can be broadly defined as a non-executive director who is not a member of management and who is free from any business or other relationship that could materially interfere (or be perceived to materially interfere) with the independent exercise of that director's judgment. The Board actively encourages gender diversity for all Director appointments.

Board Review and Development

The Board periodically reviews its own performance for its development and quality assurance, including a review of the Board's skill matrix to assess any gaps and to inform the process for identifying new Directors to bring into the organisation. Ongoing governance reviews, including the ACNC's annual Self-Evaluation for Charities, may also form part of the review and development processes. Another source of review is keeping up to date on Board-related issues, particularly for not-for-profit organisations, as advised by the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Director Terms

Current Directors

Director	Appointment	Max Term Expires
Simon McKenzie	27 March 2018	AGM 2026
Alistair Lloyd	23 March 2021	AGM 2030
John Papatheohari	23 March 2021	AGM 2030
Alicia Kokocinski	12 April 2022	AGM 2031
Sunayana Tonks	12 April 2022	AGM 2031
Natalie Frazer	31 October 2023	AGM 2032
Tanya Khan	31 October 2023	AGM 2032
Areeb Ovais	31 October 2023	AGM 2032
Rebecca Senior	31 October 2023	AGM 2032

Retired Directors

Director	Appointment	Retired
Kalma Rathouski	16 March 2015	AGM 2023
Derek Jones	23 February 2016	AGM 2023
Mark Wiegerink	26 April 2022	AGM 2023

Director Renominations

Four new Directors were recruited to fill Board vacancies. These Directors formally had their first 3-year terms ratified by members at the November 2023 AGM.

Governance Charter

Board members must comply with the relevant laws and codes of conduct. They must act with integrity, good faith, fairness and honesty. They are required to be diligent, attend meetings and devote sufficient time to preparing for meetings. Each Director is aware of the Governance Charter that describes ethical practice, conflicts of interest, code of conduct and confidentiality. Conflicts of interest are a standing agenda item and must be declared, recorded and responded to in accordance with the Charter. The CEO as Company Secretary maintains a register of conflicts of interest. Directors must also complete a Confidentiality Agreement as part of their induction to the Board. There were no identified breaches or corruption reported or investigated this year.

External quality auditors regularly review this information to ensure compliance against the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's standards.

The Chairperson

The Chairperson is responsible for ensuring that the Board provides high quality governance and vision to Distinctive Options, that meetings are effective, that members are skilled, and that matters are considered in a timely and transparent manner.

The Board elects the Chairperson annually at its first meeting following the AGM. The Board elected Alistair Lloyd as Board Chairperson at the 2023 AGM for his first term.

Independent Advice

The Board accesses independent advice from several sources and for a variety of reasons:

- For financial matters and accounting standard changes, advice was sought from our financial auditors.
- For insurance matters, advice was sought from AON, our Workcover insurers, and from other insurers.
- For industrial relations and legal, advice was sought from Workplace Legal and Moores Legal Service.
- For risk management, advice was sought from Seward Dawson and our peak body, NDS.
- For mergers and acquisitions, advice was sought from Moores, Seward Dawson, the NDIA's Provider Engagement and Practice Branch, and Crowe Australia.

Management Responsibility

The Board formally delegates responsibility for daily operations to the CEO and the Management Team. The CEO is the Board-appointed Company Secretary and Public Officer for Distinctive Options.

Board Committees

The Board operates Committees that concentrate on and develop expertise in specific areas, ensuring that the full Board can concentrate on the big picture issues. Each Committee has a Terms of Reference, reviewed annually. They meet regularly to discuss relevant issues and provide recommendations to the Board for consideration. Management also attends Committee meetings where appropriate. Detailed below are a description of these Committees and their activities.

Audit & Finance Committee

The core roles of the Audit & Finance Committee are to monitor and review the organisation’s financial performance and financial risks, the annual financial audit, including liaising with the financial auditors, and the organisation’s investment strategy. The Committee reports monthly to the Board and works closely with the Manager Corporate Services to ensure proper financial management throughout the organisation.

Meeting Attendance	
John Papatheohari (Chair)	9 out of 10
Natalie Frazer	4 out of 5
Derek Jones	5 out of 5
Alicia Kokocinski	4 out of 5
Rebecca Senior	5 out of 5
Sunayana Tonks	3 out of 5
Ernie Metcalf (CEO)	8 out of 10
Christine Meilak (MCS)	10 out of 10

Governance & Risk Committee

The Governance & Risk Committee is responsible for reviewing governance and risk documents, overseeing the appointment and recruitment of Directors, holding the CEO accountable for implementing risk and business plans, ensuring the Board has a succession plan in place, ensuring regular evaluations of Board performance and reviewing external quality assurance reports. The Committee reports to the Board after each meeting.

Meeting Attendance	
Sunayana Tonks (Chair)	4 out of 4
Alistair Lloyd	2 out of 2
Simon McKenzie	3 out of 4
Areeb Ovais	2 out of 2
Ernie Metcalf (CEO)	4 out of 4
Christine Meilak (MCS)	4 out of 4

Development & Fundraising Committee

The Development & Fundraising Committee is responsible for reviewing business, marketing and fundraising strategies and plans, reviewing and acting upon participant and supporter feedback surveys, and monitoring the Strategic Marketing Plan. The Committee reports to the Board after each meeting.

Meeting Attendance	
Alicia Kokocinski (Chair)	3 out of 3
Tanya Khan	1 out of 1
Skev Seremetis (independent external member)	3 out of 3
Mark Wiegerink (independent external member)	2 out of 3
Ernie Metcalf (CEO)	1 out of 3
Rick Dunn (EMSS)	3 out of 3
Paul Pearman (BDM)	3 out of 3

Project Control Group Committee

The temporary Project Control Group Committee was charged with developing a comprehensive due diligence report with management on the possible acquisition of Noweyung in Bairnsdale. This is in line with the Strategic Plan relating to inorganic growth. The Board officially wound up this Committee in February 2024 following the completion of its work.

Meeting Attendance	
John Papatheohari (Chair)	9 out of 9
Alicia Kokocinski	7 out of 9
Alistair Lloyd	8 out of 9
Kalma Rathouski	2 out of 5
Ernie Metcalf (CEO)	9 out of 9
Rick Dunn (EMSS)	4 out of 9
Christine Meilak (MCS)	9 out of 9
Paul Pearman (BDM)	4 out of 9

People and Culture

A Story Every Second



Benji

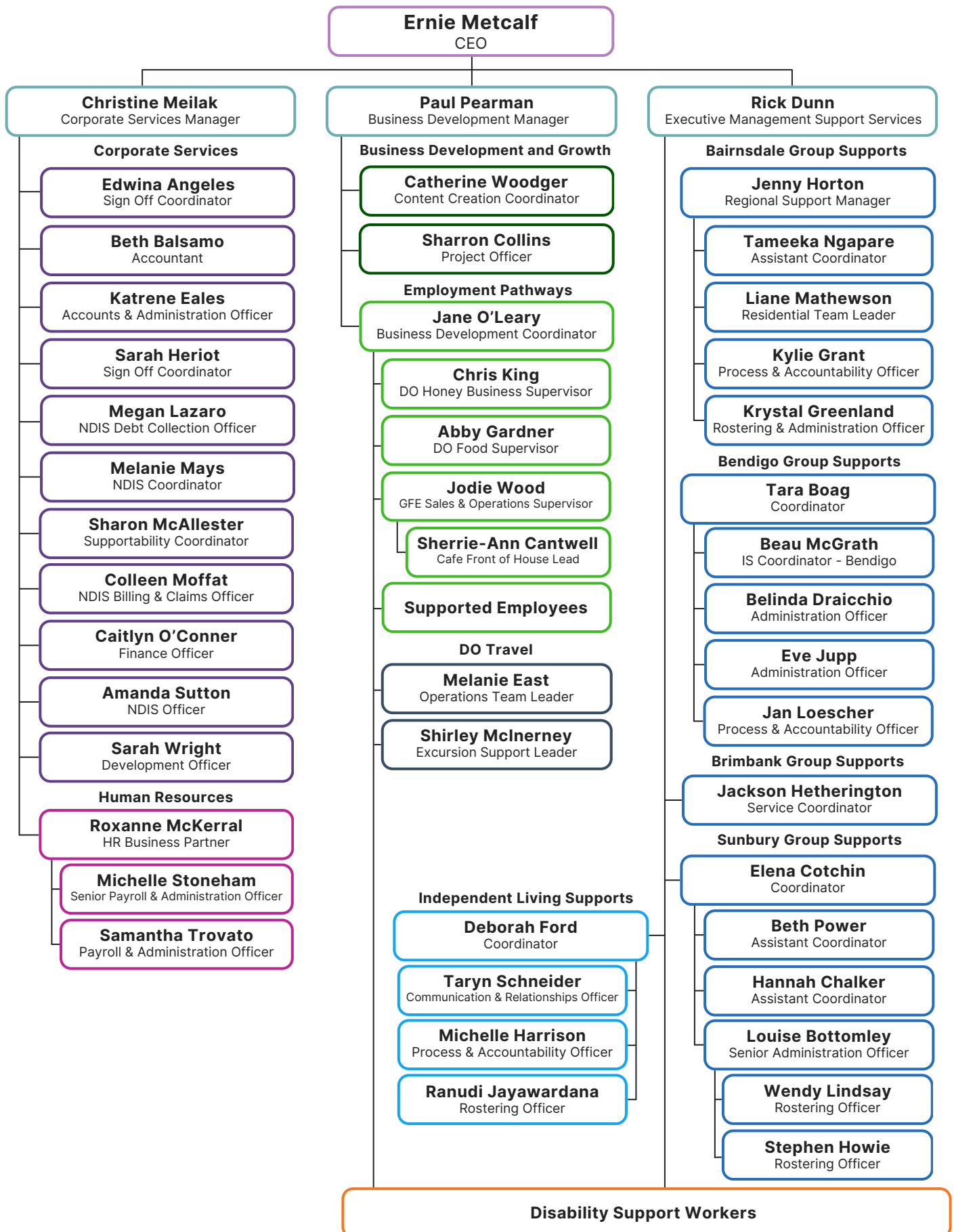
“I never thought I’d be able to make rice paper rolls at the DO Food Project Cafe, but my confidence has grown and now I make these every week as part of my job there.

I’ve also learned how to communicate well with customers, help with end-of-day cash summaries and understand how the business works.

Because of this experience, I’ve been offered additional work at a local bakery in Sunbury with a view to transition into open employment.”

05

Organisation Chart





Manager Corporate Services Report

Christine Meilak

As I reflect on the past 12 months, it's hard to believe how swiftly time has flown by since I took on my role within the Corporate Services team. This year has been marked by outstanding accomplishments and significant growth, both personally and professionally. I am proud to lead a team that consistently exemplifies dedication, creativity and collaboration in all our endeavours. In the fiscal year 2023-2024, the Corporate Services team made significant strides in enhancing operational efficiency and supporting our organisation's strategic objectives. This overview highlights our key accomplishments and outlines upcoming projects that will further drive our mission.

Noweyung Acquisition

The successful acquisition of Noweyung marks a significant milestone in expanding our services and strengthening our community support in Bairnsdale. Through this process, we have combined resources, expertise and shared values to enhance the quality of care and opportunities provided to participants.

Introduction of Financial Plan Management

As part of the acquisition, Distinctive Options has taken over financial plan management services, ensuring a seamless transition for participants and their families. As part of our commitment to improving efficiency, we have introduced a new software system designed to streamline processes, making it easier for participants and their families to manage their plans.

Implementation of SharePoint

To support our growing organisational needs, we successfully implemented SharePoint as our primary collaboration platform. By implementing SharePoint, we have created a centralised platform where staff can securely access, share and collaborate on documents and projects in real-time.

This has significantly improved workflow efficiency, reduced duplication and ensured that all team members have the most up-to-date information. SharePoint has become a vital tool within the organisation, promoting transparency and fostering a culture of collaboration.

Christine Meilak joined Distinctive Options in March 2023 as Manager Corporate Services. She brings a wealth of experience from managing teams over the past 19 years, holding a Bachelor of Business. Christine specialises in delivering high-quality leadership and oversight in evaluating, allocating and managing human, physical and financial resources. Christine is responsible for cultivating and strengthening strong relationships with key stakeholders and providing informed recommendations for system advancements, coaching and training on all business systems. She leads the development and deployment of a comprehensive strategic business plan aligned to financial and organisational objectives. She is directly accountable to the CEO for the performance of corporate services.

Upcoming Projects

As we look ahead, we are excited to announce several key initiatives aimed at further advancing our operational capabilities.

Integration with Software Systems

Distinctive Options is committed to integrating software systems to enhance its operations. By connecting our various platforms currently used for finance, payroll and participant management, we can reduce manual processes and minimise errors. This integration will enable more streamlined workflows and improved reporting.

HR System Upgrade

Distinctive Options is planning to upgrade our HR and payroll system to improve efficiency and reduce the need for manual intervention. Our current processes involve several manual steps that are time-consuming. By upgrading to a more advanced and automated system, we aim to streamline payroll processing, enhance accuracy in employee records, and simplify tasks such as leave management and timesheet approvals. This will not only reduce administrative burden but also allow our HR and payroll teams to focus on more strategic initiatives, ultimately improving operational performance and employee satisfaction.

Throughout this journey, I have been continually impressed by the talent and commitment of our Corporate Services team. Their hard work and collaborative spirit have been instrumental in achieving our goals. I am grateful to work alongside such a dedicated group of professionals who not only meet challenges head-on but also inspire each other to reach new heights.

I firmly believe that investing in our people is key to our success. This year, we have focused on professional development initiatives that empower our team members to grow and excel in their roles. By prioritising training and continuous learning, we are equipping our staff with the tools they need to innovate and lead.

The achievements of the 2023-2024 fiscal year have set a strong foundation for continued growth and success moving forward. Our focus on strategic initiatives, technological advancements and organisational integration will enable us to navigate future challenges effectively and seize new opportunities. We look forward to the coming year, confident that our Corporate Services team will continue to drive excellence across the organisation.



Left to right back row: Christine, Amanda, Angela, Roxanne, Colleen, Melanie, Katrene and Sarah.

Left to right front row: Sarah, Michelle, Edwina and Beth.



Business Development Manager Report

Paul Pearman

Following a transformative year in 2022/23, Distinctive Options Pathways continued to expand its reach and deepen its impact through purposeful social enterprises, empowering initiatives, and vital partnerships. The past year, marked by tremendous growth, underscored our unwavering commitment to fostering inclusivity and creating employment pathways for people with disability. We've seen new enterprises bloom, impactful collaborations take shape, and increased opportunities for skill development that will sustain meaningful employment and community integration for years to come.

Growth and Innovation in DO Honey

Building on the foundational success of DO Honey, this past year brought another productive harvest and the addition of more seasonal staff members who joined our existing beekeeping team. The original 32 hives in Sunbury and Wildwood were meticulously maintained by a growing team whose passion for beekeeping continues to fuel our honey production. With increased demand, DO Honey further diversified its offerings, including premium seasonal blends. We continued to provide training to employees, which has proven invaluable in fostering both skill development and a deep sense of achievement, as many of our team members now take pride in mastering the art of sustainable beekeeping.

Empowering Connections at the DO Food Project Café

The DO Food Project Café in Gisborne has grown beyond a workplace; it has become a cherished gathering space that embodies inclusion, respect, and community spirit. As the café has continued to thrive, so has our team of supported employees whose roles have diversified to include catering, menu development, and front-of-house service. The successful integration of the café into the Macedon Ranges Health building has also brought new catering opportunities for local events, further showcasing the incredible skills of our team members and reinforcing the DO Food Project as an invaluable community hub. A special mention to Abby Gardener, whose dedication over the past two years has seen the café space grow from an idea into an important community pillar.

Paul Pearman joined Distinctive Options in October 2021. He oversees all new social enterprise business initiatives within Distinctive Options Pathways. In addition, Paul is responsible for the organisation's brand positioning, presentation, partnerships, donations, grants, and bequests. A people-driven, values-based leader, Paul has a wealth of experience leading small to large businesses for over twenty years across multiple industries. Paul holds a postgraduate certificate in Cybersecurity Management. He is an advocate for the community and a purpose-driven collaborator. He is directly accountable to the CEO for the performance of business development and supported employment options.

Sustaining Beauty with the Goodwill Gardener

Goodwill Gardener has continued its mission to beautify public and private spaces across Sunbury and beyond while providing employees with hands-on skills in garden maintenance. The past year saw Goodwill Gardener take on more partnerships with local organisations, further embedding the enterprise within the community. The team, led by Christopher King, has grown in both size and expertise, meeting increasing demand for services from clients in the Sunbury, Gisborne, and Woodend areas.

Among Goodwill Gardener's most impactful collaborations were projects with Sunbury Primary School and Rosenthal Estate. Sunbury Primary School now has a wonderful Australian Native Garden that symbolises and promotes inclusivity. The enterprise's work with Winslow Constructors on the Sunbury Road Project continued, empowering our supported employees to connect with residents and raise awareness about community improvements.

Developing Future Talent through My Life Skills

My Life Skills expanded its vocational training programs, reaching a broader audience and providing pathways to work for those not yet ready for mainstream or social enterprise employment. Our SLES (School Leaver Employment Supports) program, delivered in partnership with Melton Specialist School, provided 13 weeks of impactful training for students. This training has equipped these young individuals with valuable skills, enabling them to explore a wide range of future employment opportunities.

The program's success has not only strengthened our partnerships with local schools like Sacred Heart College in Kyneton and Bairnsdale Special School but also reaffirmed our commitment to developing life skills and independence. With the growth of My Life Skills, we are proud to have established a nurturing environment that encourages exploration, skill-building and personal growth.

Expanding Horizons through DO Travel

DO Travel, our respite travel arm, made unforgettable travel experiences accessible to over 100 participants this year, allowing them to enjoy structured, supportive trips across Victoria, the Gold Coast, the Northern Territory, and Far North Queensland. By connecting participants with natural and cultural experiences, DO Travel has created memorable journeys that enrich lives and foster lifelong friendships. For more information on this wonderful initiative, see Melanie East's wonderful report in this year's annual report.

Brewing Community Connections at Brew Crew Café

Formerly known as Noweyung Café, the Brew Crew Café has seamlessly integrated into the Distinctive Options family, offering a welcoming, inclusive space in the heart of Bairnsdale. Brew Crew provides a variety of quality food and beverage options, all prepared and served by a dedicated team of supported employees. Since taking over operations of the Brew Crew Café, we have been able to enhance job roles and training opportunities in hospitality, empowering more individuals to gain experience in food service, customer interaction, and barista skills.

Brew Crew Café has quickly become a popular spot among locals and visitors alike, not just for its offerings but for the atmosphere of inclusivity and empowerment that it embodies. By fostering confidence, teamwork, and independence among our employees, Brew Crew Café has become a vital part of the Bairnsdale community, providing pathways to meaningful work and connection.

Elevating Quality with Banksia Fine Foods

We were thrilled to expand our enterprise portfolio to produce artisan food products. Banksia Fine Foods, well-known across Gippsland, specialises in small-batch sauces, jams, and chutneys, providing a unique blend of local flavours and high-quality ingredients. This addition has created a new dimension within our social enterprises, focusing on culinary production and the growing demand for premium, locally sourced products.

Banksia Fine Foods offers valuable skills training in food preparation, safety, and quality control, giving supported employees the chance to develop specialised expertise in the food production industry. The popularity of Banksia's products aligns with our mission to create enterprises that support skill development and contribute to sustainable local economies. Banksia Fine Foods most recently was a finalist in the 2024 Gippsland Business Awards, which places Banksia Fine Foods amongst the cream of the crop of food and wine producers in the Gippsland region. A special mention to Jodie Wood, the Gippsland Enterprise Supervisor, who has done a stellar job in leading operations across Brew Crew Café and Banksia Fine Foods.



DO Honey is produced by Distinctive Options' supported employees.

A Story Every Second

This year, we celebrate the extraordinary impact of Catherine Woodger, whose dedication and empathy have brought countless stories to life through A Story Every Second. Catherine envisioned this initiative as a way to capture and honour the richness of each person's experiences, recognising that even the smallest moments hold deep meaning for those we support. Her work has transformed these moments into powerful narratives of resilience, joy, and connection that are at the heart of Distinctive Options.

More than just a project, A Story Every Second has become a testament to the unique journeys of each individual in our community, amplifying voices and preserving memories that might otherwise go unnoticed. Thanks to Catherine's vision, we are reminded daily of the value in every experience, however small. We eagerly look forward to seeing how A Story Every Second will continue to grow in the coming year, inspired by Catherine's enduring commitment to celebrating every story and every individual.

Focus on People

I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank my incredible team at Distinctive Options Pathways. It is my aim that the environment we create together fosters a sense of ownership, responsibility, contribution, and growth for everyone involved. This exceptional team has been unwavering in their commitment to expanding our social enterprise initiatives, enabling us to create meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability across the communities we serve.

A special acknowledgment goes to Jane O'Leary, whose dedication to our participants throughout Distinctive Options exemplifies her character and commitment. Her work has been invaluable in advancing our mission and supporting those we are here to serve. Thank you all for your passion and hard work.

A Vision for the Future: Looking Ahead

As we look to 2024/25, our goal is to build on the past year's successes and continue dismantling barriers to employment for people with disability. Our enterprises, from DO Honey and the Food Project Café to Goodwill Gardener and DO Travel, will continue to grow as pillars of community engagement, skill development, and economic opportunity. We aim to establish deeper partnerships and, ultimately, cultivate an environment where diverse abilities are seen as an asset. Through resilience, collaboration, and innovation, Distinctive Options Pathways remains steadfast in its mission to empower individuals, create inclusive employment, and support vibrant, welcoming communities. Together, we are shaping a future where everyone has the opportunity to contribute, thrive, and be celebrated for their unique talents.



Executive Manager Support Services Report

Rick Dunn

The theme of this year's Annual Report prompts some reflection on what is meant when we talk about The Distinctive Options Way. I'm not talking here of the buzzwords, slogans and catch-phrases that permeate the current landscape of disability support and support providers. Rather I reflect on what is at the core of exceptional disability practice.

Great disability support is fundamentally about 'listening' and 'acting', rather than posing as experts with all of the answers. Listening demands that we put our egos and professional-armour to one side and acknowledge that individuals fundamentally have the most intimate and comprehensive understanding of their own experiences, feelings and needs, and therefore it is they who must be central in making decisions about their lives.

This is not the same as saying 'everyone gets everything they want all of the time', for none of us enjoy that privilege. Rather, it is about listening to feedback with intent and empathy, acknowledging the legitimacy of people's thoughts and feelings, and working collaboratively to seek agreeable actions, solutions and resolutions.

The overlay of industrial obligations, Occupational Health and Safety regulations, policies and procedures, as well as the endlessly complex and evolving rules imposed on us all by the NDIA and the NDIS Quality & Safeguarding Commission sometimes makes this a mutually frustrating and time-consuming endeavour.

At all levels within the organisation we remain determined to listen to the voices of our stakeholders, to canvass and acknowledge their concerns and opinions and to change, adapt and act wherever and however possible to bring to life the wants, needs and aspirations of each and every participant.

Rick is responsible for a variety of key management tasks at Distinctive Options, including operations management, strategic advice and general oversight of each of the support service areas of the organisation. Rick is directly accountable to the CEO for the performance of support services. He is a member of our peak body's NDIS Issues and Sector Reform Committee, NDS National Quality and Safeguarding Community of Practice, Disability Day Services Community of Practice and Victorian In-Home Supports Providers Community of Practice. He is also the Community Co-opted Member of School Council for Sunbury & Macedon Ranges Specialist School. Rick holds qualifications in Education and Education Psychology, Business Management (Community Services), Project Management and Human Resource Management.

Rights & Responsibilities Networks

Distinctive Options' first-ever Rights & Responsibilities Network (known then as the Sunbury Client Council) was formed in 1989, well before the notions of participant agency and service ownership became core provider benchmarks under the NDIS. At that time, this was seen as a uniquely progressive, even revolutionary, service initiative. Our R&R Networks are the key means through which the power of self-advocacy and service ownership are embedded across the organisation as a fundamental participant right. The form and function of our R&R Networks saw Independent Auditors rate this as an example of 'sector best practice' during our 2024 NDIS Certification Audit.

Network communication with and feedback to management as well as to the Board provides critical insights and advice from a participant perspective so that services are truly responsive and shaped, to the greatest extent possible, by those who receive them.

Our R&R Networks meet regularly at our Sunbury, Bendigo, Brimbank and Bairnsdale locations. Topical issues associated with individual, organisational and sector-wide concerns are tabled and discussed by participant members with a view to influencing and informing decision-makers.

R&R members also provide further representation as members of various external disability sector and local government committees, where their expertise contributes to lively debate and helps shape policy and action beyond Distinctive Options.

There were more than 50 R&R Network meetings held across the organisation this financial year.



Kiara, Lochie and Stefan enjoy networking with disability advocates at the Having A Say Conference in Geelong.

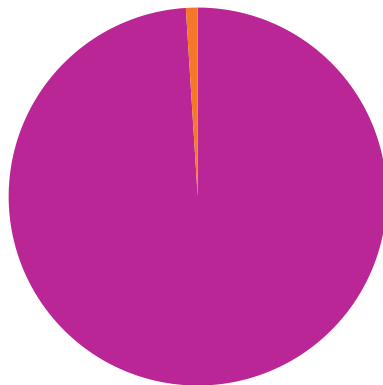
Satisfaction Surveys

Distinctive Options first implemented an annual Participant Satisfaction Survey in 2009, once again well ahead of the curve and preceding the advent of the NDIS. Working with VALID (Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability), the first survey was framed around the rights of participants to feel safe and well-supported in meaningful activities. We have implemented a Participant Satisfaction Survey every year since.

The most recent survey was held in June 2024 and was completed by a record 71 service users who responded to 37 questions and statements. An overall Satisfaction Score of 93.2% was recorded for this survey based on participant responses. As always, the feedback provided was insightful and challenging. The following charts show responses to some critical issues canvassed in the 2024 survey.

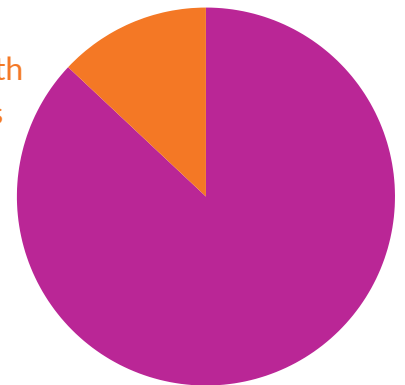
I like Distinctive Options

Yes 99%
No 1%



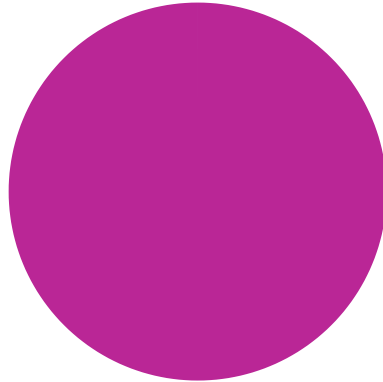
I have a big say about what I do with Distinctive Options

Yes 87%
No 13%



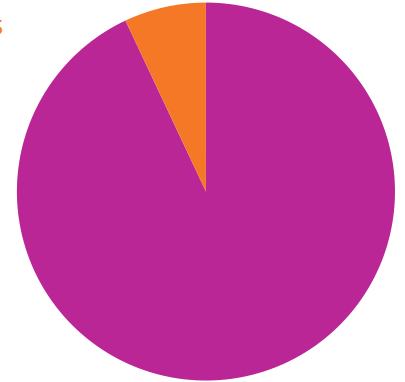
I feel safe with Distinctive Options

Yes 100%
No 0%



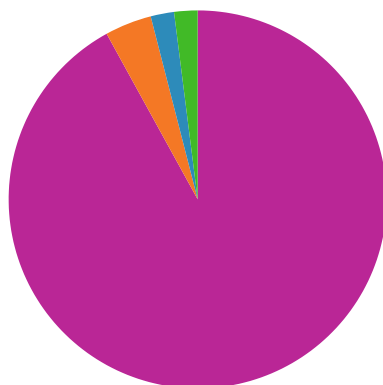
Distinctive Options helps me to meet my goals

Yes 93%
No 7%



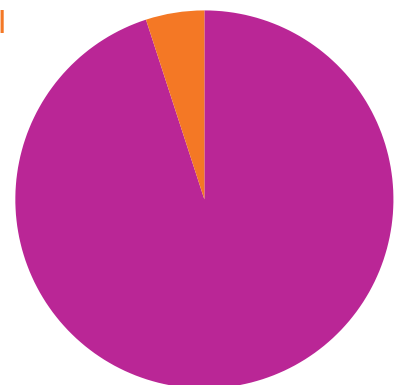
Staff treat me with respect

Yes 92%
Most of the time 4%
Some of the time 2%
No 2%



I would feel safe if I had to make a complaint

Yes 95%
No 5%



In 2018, Distinctive Options initiated an annual Participant Family Member & Supporter Survey to invite feedback from those who share in our commitment to provide disability support of the highest quality and with optimal individual and social impact.

These annual surveys provide a stakeholder perspective on what Distinctive Options does well, but also areas where we could improve. The feedback is always fulsome, thoughtful, direct, and sometimes confronting, providing us with insights as to how things are 'experienced', rather than 'delivered'. The feedback from these surveys is considered at all levels within the organisation, leading to genuine continuous improvement in systems, processes, customer service, disability practice and overall service delivery.

The creation of our Supported Employment and Pathways program providing real vocational training and employment opportunities, our Extended Hours Activities that provide community-based social opportunities after hours and on weekends, Respite and Supported Holiday opportunities delivered via DO Travel, and our soon-to-be-realised Supported Independent Living houses in Sunbury are but some of the initiatives that were created based on the feedback received via these surveys.



Chelsea enjoys the social connections as much as the skills development activities at Distinctive Options.

Final Thoughts

The many contributions to this year's Annual Report reflect the genuine passion, care and skill that underpin the hard work and great support services delivered to participants in 2023/2024. I continue to marvel at the resilience and persistence of our Service Leaders and Disability Support Workers who remain focused on their work and always with participants at the heart of their efforts. They continue to carry themselves with endless dedication and grace.

While 'perpetual change' has been a constant feature (and frustration) of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, we can expect the rate and breadth of change to accelerate while the scheme's governors grapple with the 222 recommendations made in the final report of the Disability Royal Commission. At a time of obvious sector instability and uncertainty, we can only hope that any proposed changes are well planned and executed with a mind to the already significant challenges faced by providers who seek only to deliver excellent disability support.

On behalf of Support Services, I extend our thanks to members of the Board who dedicate their time and expertise to oversee and share in all that we do to make a positive difference in the lives of our participants and to their families and supporters in turn.

I particularly acknowledge and express our gratitude to our Chief Executive Officer Ernie whose rare blend of business acumen coupled with a deep commitment to the people at the centre of our mission has led the organisation through a period of unprecedented aspiration and growth. His leadership, wisdom, pragmatism and tenacity will not easily be replaced. Thanks and congratulations Ernie!

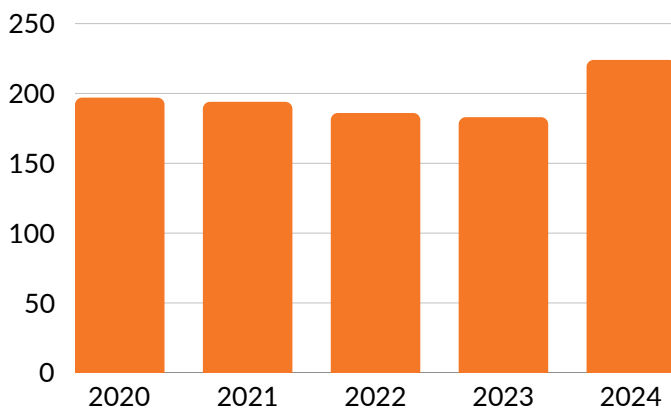
Our Staff

Demographics

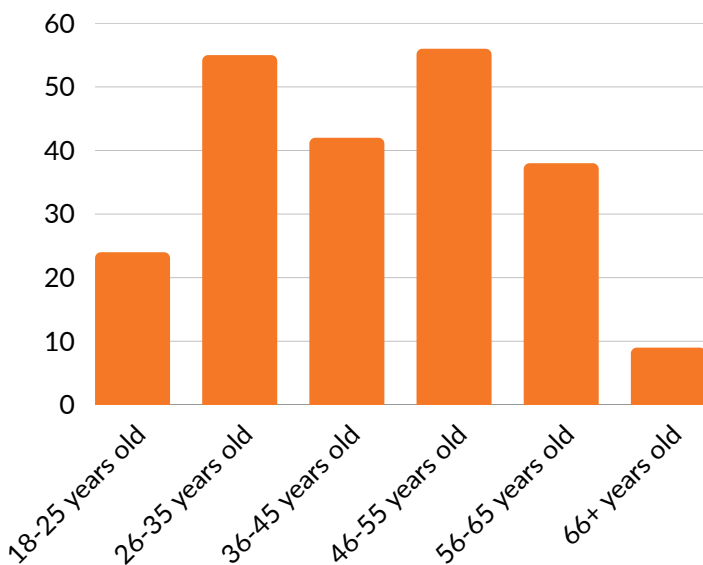
Following the acquisition of Noweyung, total staff numbers increased from 183 to 224. This total equates to a full time equivalent of 146.9 as at the end of June 2024.

Staff statistics provide an indicator of the workforce's demographics.

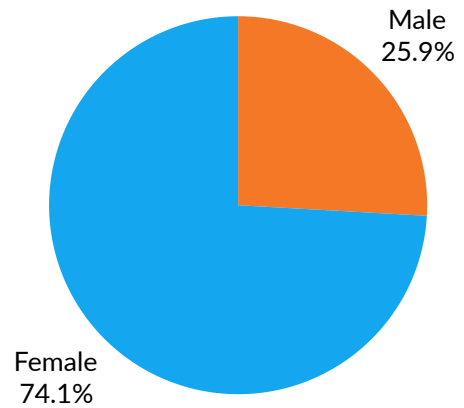
Total Employees



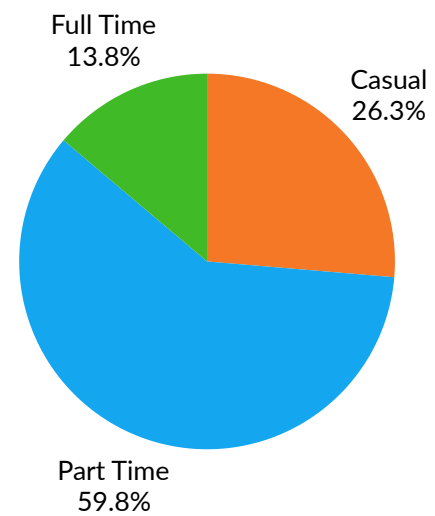
Age



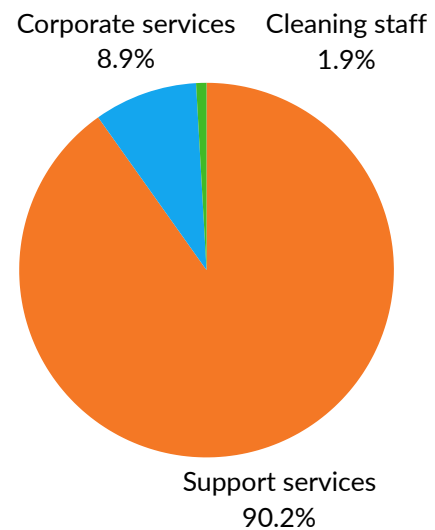
Gender



Employment Status



Operational Area



Employment Conditions

As with other sectors, recruitment of suitable staff, along with maintaining our workforce, remains an issue for all providers. Retention and recruitment are further impacted by other external factors beyond our industry's control, including wage growth in aged care. Ongoing issues around the modern award used by our sector means recruiting and retaining a more flexible pool of casual employees is not sustainable, despite the benefits of a casualised workforce for participants and organisations.

The modern Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award (SCHADS) 2010 covers most employees, except for the management team who are on personal contracts and staff working in supported employment businesses. Salary rates for employees under the SCHADS Award increased in line with an annual Fair Work Australia determination. Looking into the short-term future, the latest announcement from Fair Work indicates a minimum rate increase for the Award in 2024-2025. They have also flagged some future wage concessions for the disability sector.

Flexible working arrangements are available to employees, including flexible hours and the possibility of working from home. Working conditions include the opportunity to move from full time to part time employment, plus any other reasonable arrangement that benefits both the organisation and individual.

Distinctive Options paid Superannuation on salaries as per legislation. Our organisation is under the Victorian Portable Long Service Leave (PLSL) Scheme and pays into the Scheme each quarter. The PLSL Scheme allows staff to take their long service leave entitlements with them if they change jobs but remain in the community services industry. Salary sacrifice is available to staff according to Fringe Benefits guidelines for charities. AccessPay externally administers not-for-profit charitable sector salary sacrifice for Distinctive Options.

Supported employment staff conditions are as per the Supported Employment Services Award (SES) 2020.



Darren and support worker Lisa at the International Day of People with Disability event in Brimbank.

Induction and Orientation

Distinctive Options offers a structured induction and orientation program to all new employees and volunteers. This helps to ensure a seamless transition into the organisation and aims to provide a robust introduction into our workplace practices and structures. The induction and orientation process includes learning about OH&S, our client management system, several Codes of Conduct, Zero Tolerance, incident management and much more. All new staff, managers and Directors need to complete the NDIS Module 'Quality, Safety and You' as part of their induction. This is a requirement of the NDIS Commission and provides an engaging explanation of responsibilities under the NDIS Code of Conduct.

Probity

Distinctive Options undertakes probity checks to ensure the safety of all participants. NDIS screening compliance requirements are in place for all employees and the Board of Directors. Any person who provides support to participants under the age of 18 must also hold a Working With Children Check.

Equal Employment

Distinctive Options provides equal opportunity in employment to people without discrimination based on personal characteristics protected under state and federal legislation, including age, disability, gender identity, parental status, race, religion, and sexual orientation.

Supervision and Mentoring

An essential component of our employee performance management framework is supervision and mentoring. These practices ensure that employees have ongoing opportunities to discuss their workplace performance and any issues or challenges that they are facing. Formal and informal supervision and monitoring occurs either directly with the line manager or in a group setting. This year we have focused on developing a consistent approach to our annual performance reviews. This included developing a Culture Assessment for our Managers and Leaders.

Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment

Distinctive Options is committed to providing a workplace free from discrimination, sexual harassment and bullying. Clear information and processes around reporting and responding are provided to all employees within the Human Resources Procedure. Behaviour that constitutes discrimination, harassment or bullying will never be tolerated at Distinctive Options and any person found to have engaged in these behaviours will face disciplinary action which may include dismissal.

Professional Development

Distinctive Options is committed to offering the best ongoing learning and development to all staff for them to gain or strengthen their skills to deliver their roles with confidence. One hundred and seventy-eight (79.5%) staff members undertook training during the year. Our organisation continues to offer external training on essential qualifications, such as First Aid, CPR and Fire Warden Training to maintain a skilled workforce.

The professional development completed by staff this year included:

- Abuse and Neglect
- Communication
- Complaints and Reportable Incidents
- COVID-19 and Disability Services
- Diabetes
- Effective Progress Notes
- Emergency and Disaster Management
- Epilepsy
- Fire Safety and Prevention in the Home
- Guide to Safe Medication Management
- Infection Control
- Introduction to Mental Illness
- Keeping Safe at Work
- Manual Handling
- Mealtime and Dysphagia Management
- Positive Behaviour Support
- PPE for Disability Support Professionals
- Professional Boundaries
- Seizure Management
- Sexuality and Relationships
- Waste Management
- Workplace Bullying and Harassment
- Workplace Fire Safety and Prevention

Staff are encouraged to apply for external training opportunities that interest them and are relevant to their role. The organisation also supports employees to complete a Certificate IV or higher in disability by subsidising the cost of training in most cases and offering opportunities for student placements. The annual training budget ensures staff can access multiple professional development opportunities, promoting Distinctive Options as an employer of choice.

Staff Milestones

We congratulate Sharon McAllester on her milestone of 30 years of service and express our thanks for her dedication, versatility, adaptability and commitment to delivering quality services for the organisation.



Sharon McAllester

Staff Survey

In May 2024, employees were invited to participate in a voluntary and confidential employee engagement survey. 33% of staff across the organisation participated.

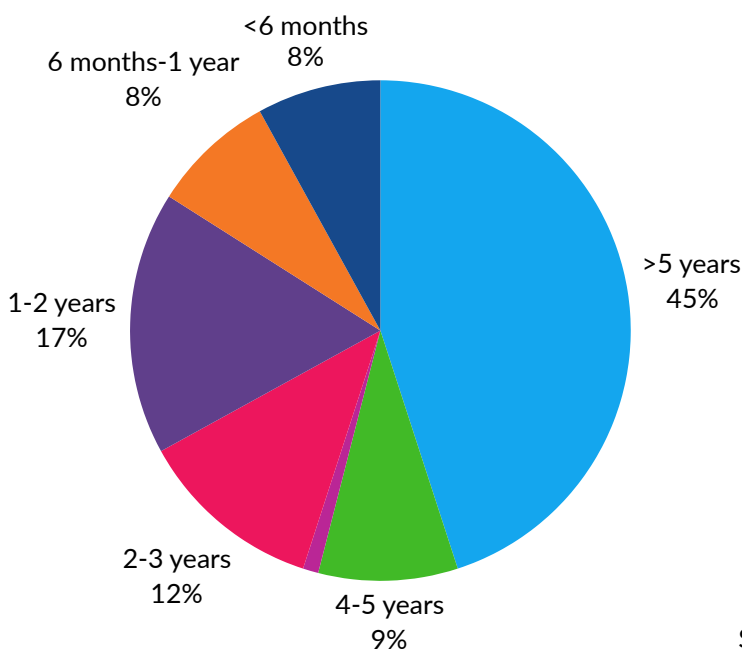
Pleasingly, the vast majority of staff responses indicate that over 84% of staff intend to remain part of the organisation for a number of years, with 45% planning on staying at least 5 years. Staff retention is important as this helps us succeed and be sustainable as an organisation. The cost of replacing employees can be an expensive exercise with advertising, interviewing, onboarding and training. A high turnover can disrupt the services we provide to our participants and can have an impact on staff morale.

Questions relating to culture, engagement and leadership showed that the majority of employees feel that their immediate manager treats them with respect.

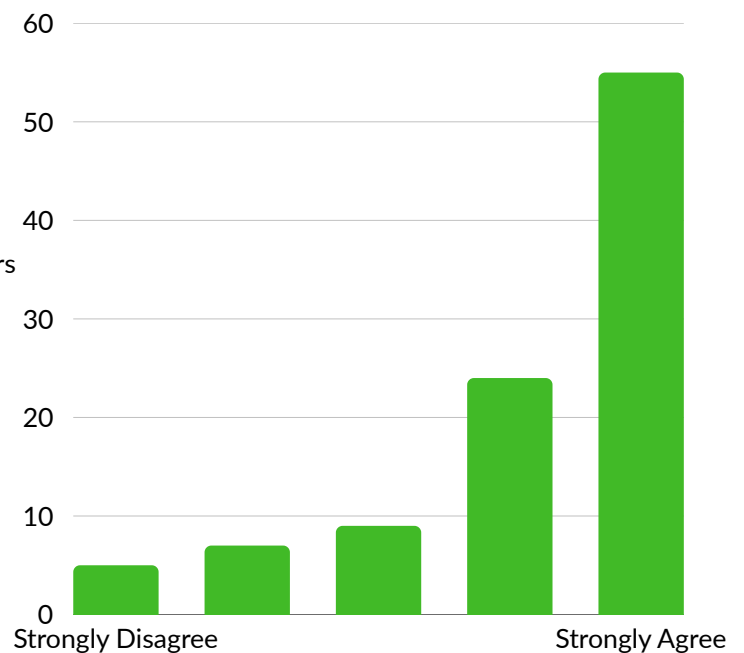
The next financial year will see the implementation of the following:

- New Annual Performance Review templates for all staff
- Improvements and enhancements to the SupportAbility platform
- Rollout of the SupportAbility Mobile App
- Removal of duplication of timesheet completion
- Implementation of a new HR system
- Development of a 12-month training plan for Disability Support Workers
- Implementation of the Flare Benefits platform with access to everyday savings on 500+ of Australia's most-loved brands

How long do you intend to remain at Distinctive Options?



Does your immediate manager treat you with respect?



Quality and Safety

A Story Every Second



Lochie

"I joined the volunteering program a few years ago. We volunteer every week at Vinnies Op Shop.

At first I was only working out the back, but now I also help stock the shelves. I have learnt how to safely use the pricing gun to attach price tags to items. I'm learning to use the register so I can start serving customers.

The reason I like to volunteer at Vinnies is because I get to make new friends and learn new skills including how to keep a job."

06

Operating Environment

Standards

The NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission imposes a range of standards on registered disability service providers. The NDIS Practice Standards consist of a core module and several supplementary modules that may apply according to the types of supports and services NDIS providers deliver.

The core module covers:

- Rights and responsibilities
- Provider governance and operational management
- Provision of supports
- Provision of supports environment

The supplementary modules that Distinctive Options delivers are:

- High intensity daily personal activities
- Implementing behaviour support plans

Distinctive Options is also subject to the Victorian Child Safe Standards required by the Commission for Children and Young People. These aim to protect children through the implementation of processes that prevent child abuse and ensure organisations effectively respond to and report allegations of child abuse.



**NDIS Quality
and Safeguards
Commission**

Accreditations

Distinctive Options is required to comply with standards, service delivery contracts and legislative obligations from federal bodies. For NDIS requirements, the organisation must adhere to the NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission's practice standards. Distinctive Options continues to undertake the required quality assurance processes through regular independent audits conducted by Assured Auditing (formerly Community Audits Australia) against these practice standards.

Our last compliance audit was completed in April 2024 and Distinctive Options achieved the result of 'Rating 2 - Conformity', as well as achieving 'Rating 3 - Best Practice' for some standards.

Additionally, as a registered NDIS service provider, the NDIA from time to time audits our billing functions to ensure compliance with their price guide. Each audit conducted this year confirmed Distinctive Options was compliant against the mandatory funding price guide.



COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Continuous Improvement

Important components of our Quality Management System (QMS) are regular audits and ongoing continuous improvements. Internal auditing processes are in place to ensure that the organisation is compliant with all quality requirements, including the NDIS Practice Standards and the Child Safe Standards. Audits are prioritised according to risk and conducted across all areas of the organisation, including governance, finance, operations, systems, processes, and controls. We conducted 15 internal audits this year across a range of areas including quality management, participant safety, risk management, incidents, complaints and staff inductions. We also had an external audit. When potential improvements are discovered, they are discussed with senior management and implemented across the organisation. Continuous improvements identified are communicated to staff via email and discussed at staff meetings.

Research and Development

Members of the executive management team actively participate in a variety of partnerships and networks that contribute to our research and development. These opportunities allow us to stay well informed of the latest updates occurring across the disability sector throughout Australia and internationally.

From a governance continuous improvement perspective, membership with Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) provide further research and development opportunities via best practices for the Board to consider and discuss.

As Company Secretary/Public Officer, the CEO is Distinctive Options' registered representative for the ACNC and AICD. Some Directors are members of AICD, and all are registered as responsible officers on the ACNC website. The CEO is a member of the Harvard Business Review (HBR). Membership with the HBR brings leaders together to share their opinions on current management, business issues and best practice research findings.

Formerly the International Initiative for Disability Leadership, the renamed Global Leadership Exchange (GLE) is a forum that brings together mental health and disability leaders from across the world to discuss best practice models and innovations. Member countries include Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, Slovakia, Sweden, the USA, and Wales. Distinctive Options managers are members of the GLE.

Distinctive Options' CEO is a member of a CEO Collaboration Group, comprising 110 members from disability service providers operating throughout Australia.

An active relationship with our peak body, National Disability Services, allows management to discuss and review specific sector issues with our peers. The CEO is Distinctive Options' nominated representative and the EMSS is a member on some of the NDS sector committees.

The EMSS is an active member of DSC. DSC provides an alternative perspective on a range of sector issues for members as an independent service.

Government Issues and Policies

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) provides funding for participants and supported employees through its insurance scheme. A small percentage of participant funding comes from the Commonwealth Government's Department of Health and Aged Care for a Continuity of Support program for people with disability aged 65+. Distinctive Options has individual service agreements with all participants and supported employees. We undertake regular monitoring and evaluation, including through internal reviews and audits. The management team works diligently throughout the year to ensure that the organisation is compliant and meets all legislative requirements.

Environmental Responsibility and Sustainability

We have a goal to integrate sustainable development into all our activities and are committed to minimising our impact on the environment. To support this, some of the measures we have implemented at Distinctive Options are:

- Conserving natural resources by reusing and recycling, including recycling toner cartridges, double-sided printing and using electronic communication where possible
- Using energy responsibly
- Working with suppliers who promote sound environmental practices
- Supporting participants to act in an environmentally responsible manner
- Investing only in ethical and environmentally-safe investments

Privacy

Distinctive Options is compliant with the following privacy legislation: Privacy Act 1988 (Cth), Information Privacy Act 2000, Health Records Act 2001, and the Australian Privacy Principles 2014. We also act according to the Notifiable Data Breaches scheme and NDIS requirements including the Code of Conduct and the Practice Standards. We treat all individuals with dignity and respect, maintaining the confidentiality of all employees, volunteers, and participant information. No privacy breaches occurred this year.



DO Honey products include beeswax wraps, lip balms and natural candles.

Risk Management

Risk management is a key component for delivering quality disability services at Distinctive Options. The Board monitors core strategic risks monthly, and at least annually they review with management the effectiveness of the systems of risk management and internal controls, conducting a robust assessment of the principal risks affecting the organisation in line with the organisation's risk appetite.

Risks are assessed and quantified in terms of impact and likelihood of occurrence, both before and after controls are applied. Assessing the gross risk before control mitigation allows Distinctive Options to review the relative impact of existing controls. This means we can avoid wasting resources on mitigating controls and actions which have a negligible impact.



Lyndon restores a lawnmower engine in Bairnsdale's Mechanical Workshop program.

Detailed reporting processes from management to the Board occur monthly, quarterly, and annually as part of the risk management process. These reports focus on performance towards strategic objectives and the budget, ensuring that any potential risks are identified and managed at the earliest opportunity.

Risk Appetite

Risk appetite is the level of risk that the organisation is prepared to take in pursuit of its objectives. Delivery of core functions and business strategy involves risk, and the risk appetite is the level of risk the Board and management are willing to accept to achieve these objectives.

The risk appetite, including a quantifiable risk tolerance level and risk controls, provides guidance to managers. Underpinning Distinctive Options' risk decisions is an expected requirement to allocate scarce resources prudently and efficiently to its various functions whilst accepting accountability to various stakeholders.

Distinctive Options acknowledges and recognises that its appetite for risks varies according to the activity or opportunity undertaken. Our acceptance of risk is subject to always ensuring that the potential benefits and risks are fully understood before developments are authorised. Understanding and defining our risk appetite assists in decision making across the organisation. Distinctive Options' risk appetite relates to the classes of risks detailed on the following page.

Zero Risk Appetite

- Abuse or neglect of participants or supported employees.
- Bullying or harassment towards any staff members, directors, or volunteers.
- The misuse of information from platforms and software, or cybersecurity hacks resulting in breaches of privacy.
- Any fundraising activities which in any way diminishes or negatively portrays the abilities of participants.
- Bribery or other forms of corruption, or fraud by individuals.

Moderate Risk Appetite

- Participant and supported employee movement between services.
- Supporting, developing, and using the skills and potential of staff to create an agile, high performing, and engaged workforce.
- Director vacancies filled by candidates who have required skills.
- Fundraising activities that contribute to brand awareness and grow cash reserves.
- Growth through innovation, expansion and development of existing services, supports or businesses.

Low Risk Appetite

- Activities or decisions that will compromise our reputation, ethics, brand, culture or credibility.
- Non-availability of systems.
- Accepting lower margins from NDIS mandatory pricing, provided profitability and cash flow can be maintained.
- Any activity that does not support ACNC charity or NDIS regulatory compliance.
- Any activity that does not support other mandatory legal or regulatory compliance.
- Any risks which could impact on competitiveness, efficiency and long-term financial sustainability.
- The approach to short-term investments.

High Risk Appetite

- Volatility in long-term investments and average returns sustained.
- Growth through mergers or acquisitions that add value to the organisation.

Occupational Health and Safety

Distinctive Options is committed to providing a safe environment for all staff, supported employees, participants, and visitors in alignment with the Commonwealth government's Work Health and Safety Act 2011. Our HR Business Partner oversees Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) to ensure ongoing OH&S compliance across the organisation. The HR Business Partner role works closely with OH&S Officers throughout the organisation, ensuring dedicated attention to each location's safety needs. A schedule outlines the OH&S practices of the organisation, including meetings, electrical test and tag, emergency evacuation drills and first aid/spill kit checks.

Strict processes are in place for fleet management and machine use, and first aid training is provided to staff across the organisation as required. Management and HR continue to promote staff awareness of the importance of vaccination and protecting participants from communicable diseases. Staff members are encouraged to access reimbursement for eligible vaccinations. Close monitoring of potential hazards or near misses meant Distinctive Options was able to keep on top of any OH&S issues to ensure workplace injuries were minimised. This year, hazards and near misses consisted of 43 COVID cases, 6 minor hazards and 1 near miss.

OHS Measure	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Lost time	570 hours	0 hours	0 hours	61 hours	475.8 hours
Lost-time injuries	1	0	0	1	3
Reportable Workcover injuries	6	4	1	3	3
Serious injuries	0	0	0	0	0
Manual handling injuries	0	0	0	2	0
Hazards or near misses	12	38	22	19	50

Financial statements

A Story Every Second



Bethany

“I’m involved in many activities in the local Bairnsdale community.

One of the roles I have enjoyed has been volunteering with Meals On Wheels with support from staff here at Distinctive Options Noweyung.

It feels good to help others and builds my confidence and skills too.”

07

Independent Audit Report

Auditors Independence Declaration

I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, during the year ended 30 June 2024 there have been no contraventions of:

- a) the auditor independence requirements of the 60-40 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* in relation to the audit; and
- b) any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.


Seward Dawson


Matthew Crouch
Partner

Blackburn
Dated: 7 February 2025

Independent Audit Report

Report on the Audit of the Financial Report

Opinion

We have audited the accompanying financial report, being a general purpose - simplified disclosure financial report of Distinctive Options Ltd, which comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2024, the statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income, the statement of changes in equity and the statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of material accounting policies, and Directors' Declaration.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial report presents fairly, in all material respects, including:

- (i) giving a true and fair view of the Company's financial position as at 30 June 2024 and of its financial performance for the year ended; and
- (ii) complying with Australian Accounting Standards - Simplified Disclosure Standard and Division 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2022*.

Basis of Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report section of our report. We are independent of the Company in accordance with the auditor independence requirements of Division 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* and the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's *APES 110 Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants* (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Independent Audit Report

Responsibilities of Management and Those Charged with Governance

The board are responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards - Simplified Disclosure Standard and Division 60 of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* and for such internal control as they determine is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view and is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the board is responsible for assessing the Company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the board either intends to liquidate the Company or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial report.

As part of an audit in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards, we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Company's internal control.

Independent Audit Report

As part of an audit in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards, we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the directors.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Company's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial report or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Company to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial report, including the disclosures, and whether the financial report represents the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with the directors regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.


Saward Dawson


Matthew Crouch

Blackburn VIC

Dated: 7 February 2025

Director's Declaration

Principal Activities

Distinctive Options' principal activities are to provide viable and sustainable disability support services to people in line with the organisation's Constitution and as a registered public benevolent institution (charity) and a deductible gift recipient.

Short and Long-Term Objectives

Under Distinctive Options' strategic plan, its short and long-term objectives centre on the strategic intent to grow our service supports to assist and empower people with disabilities, helping them to achieve their potential to gain equality and inclusion in the community.

Strategy for Achieving the Objectives

Distinctive Options' strategy for achieving the objectives are contained within the organisation's Strategic Plan around four key pillars: targeted growth, industry exemplar, engagement model, and values and purpose.

Performance Measures

Distinctive Options uses a Balanced Scorecard to measure operational performance against the strategic objectives. A summary of the results from the Balanced Scorecard is contained within the Annual Report. Some of these performance measures are based around maintaining and growing Distinctive Options' competitive advantage.

Members' Guarantee

Distinctive Options is a company limited by guarantee.

In the event of, and for the purpose of, winding up of the company, the amount capable of being called up from each member and any person or association who ceased to be a member in the year prior to winding up is limited to \$20 for members, subject to the provisions of the company's constitution. For June 30, 2024, the collective liability of members was \$180 for 9 members (2023: \$160).

Board of Directors

Details and skills relating to each Director are included in the Annual Report in the Governance section.

Company Secretary

The CEO is the appointed company secretary and public officer for Distinctive Options.

Meetings of Directors

During the year ended June 30th, the Board held 36 meetings of Directors, including Special and Committee meetings. Each Director's attendance at meetings is recorded in the Governance section of the Annual Report. Board meetings are held on the final Wednesday of each month, commencing at 7pm. The majority of Board meetings were conducted online via Zoom.

Auditor's Independence Declaration

The lead auditor's independence declaration for the year ended 30 June 2024 is included.

Directors' Declaration

In the opinion of the Directors of Distinctive Options Ltd:

- a) The financial statements and notes of Distinctive Options are in accordance with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012, including:
 - i) Giving a true and fair view of its financial position as at 30 June 2024 and of its performance for the financial year ended on that date; and
 - ii) Complying with Australian Accounting Standards - Simplified Disclosure Standard (including the Australian Accounting Interpretations) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012; and
- b) There are reasonable grounds to believe that Distinctive Options Ltd will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable.

Signed in accordance with a resolution of the Directors.


Director


Director

Dated this 28 day of January 2025

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

For the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
Operating activities			
Revenue and other income	3	15,211,603	11,176,656
Employee benefit expenses		(14,269,483)	(10,120,943)
Other expenses		(469,111)	(410,474)
Client program costs		(494,960)	(176,285)
Amoritisation expenses - leases		(393,787)	(360,613)
Computer expenses	10	(321,797)	(229,101)
Depreciation and amoritisation expense		(251,580)	(176,713)
Rental expense		(123,982)	(91,804)
Interest expense - leases		(89,891)	(68,991)
Telephone costs		(52,397)	(37,863)
Consultancy fees		(51,973)	(12,680)
Subscriptions		(47,291)	(31,011)
Board costs		(40,393)	(3,712)
Motor vehicle expenses		(7,180)	(65,062)
Repairs and maintenance		(33,554)	(20,303)
Printing		(21,679)	(17,316)
Training		(17,766)	(91,543)
Equipment leases		(15,604)	(14,132)
Cost of sales		(3,817)	(4,836)
Surplus/(deficit) for the year from operations		(1,494,642)	(756,906)
Investing activities			
Investing revenue	3	287,883	253,210
Other non-operating income			
Gain on takeover of Noweyung	3	112,635	-
Surplus/(deficit) for the year from non-operating income		400,518	253,210
Total surplus/(deficit) for the year		(1,094,124)	(503,696)
Other comprehensive income		-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year		(1,094,124)	(503,696)

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Statement of Financial Position

As At 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
ASSETS			
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	6	883,655	1,700,723
Trade and other receivables	7	1,149,248	817,439
Financial assets	8	3,043,902	3,211,881
Other assets	9	70,927	17,236
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		5,147,732	5,747,279
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Right of use assets		1,391,529	1,169,084
Plant and equipment		861,811	765,333
Intangible assets		68,112	118,112
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		2,321,452	2,052,529
TOTAL ASSETS	10 11 12	7,569,184	7,799,808
LIABILITIES			
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Lease liabilities	10	380,234	335,702
Trade and other payables	13	868,995	922,159
Provisions	14	1,381,440	802,364
Other liabilities	15	28,007	-
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		2,658,676	2,060,225
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Lease liabilities	10	1,057,514	948,417
Provisions	14	83,030	27,078
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		1,140,544	975,495
TOTAL LIABILITIES		3,799,220	3,035,720
NET ASSETS		3,669,964	4,764,088
EQUITY			
Retained earnings		3,669,964	4,764,088
TOTAL EQUITY		3,669,964	4,764,088

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Statement of Cash Flow

For the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES:			
Receipts from customers, government and other funding		14,943,613	11,614,344
Payments to suppliers and employees		(15,495,459)	(11,027,197)
Interest received		26,814	3,279
Dividends received		133,233	149,626
Interest paid		68,130	(68,991)
Net cash provided by/(used in) operating activities	21	<u>(323,669)</u>	<u>671,061</u>
CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES:			
Proceeds from sale of property, plant and equipment		-	89,269
Payment for plant, equipment and computer software		(298,056)	(602,966)
Redemption/(placement) of term deposits		375,751	(629)
Net purchase of investments		(108,491)	(103,086)
Net cash used by investing activities		<u>(30,769)</u>	<u>(617,412)</u>
CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES:			
Lease payments		(462,603)	(341,751)
Net cash provided by/(used in) financing activities		<u>(462,603)</u>	<u>(341,751)</u>
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents held		(817,068)	(288,102)
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of year		<u>1,700,723</u>	<u>1,988,825</u>
Cash and cash equivalents at end of financial year	6	<u><u>883,655</u></u>	<u><u>1,700,723</u></u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Statement of Changes in Equity

For the Year Ended 30 June 2024

2024

	Retained Earnings \$	Total \$
Balance at 1 July 2023	4,764,088	4,764,088
Deficit for the year	(1,094,124)	(1,094,124)
Balance at 30 June 2024	<u>3,669,964</u>	<u>3,669,964</u>

2023

	Retained Earnings \$	Total \$
Balance at 1 July 2022	5,267,783	5,267,783
Deficit for the year	(503,696)	(503,696)
Balance at 30 June 2023	<u>4,764,088</u>	<u>4,764,088</u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Appendices

A Story Every Second



Ashlee

“Being in the garden is my favourite part of the week.

I enjoy taking home the fruits of my labour. The vegetables are delicious and I take flowers to plant in my garden at home.

I even like feeding the worms to make the natural fertiliser. ”

Glossary

Accreditation	Validation that an organisation meets NDIS quality and safeguards standards
ACNC	The governing body for all registered charities
Balanced Scorecard	Framework for measuring performance against strategic goals
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction for which a response or resolution is expected
Continuous Improvement	A structured ongoing effort to improve processes and services
Governance	The system by which an organisation is controlled, operates, and is held to account
Incident	Acts, omissions, or events that occur in connection with support delivery that have or could have caused harm
NDIA	The Agency which implements and oversees the NDIS
NDIS	The funding provided by the Australian Government to people with a significant and permanent disability
NDS	The Australian disability sector's peak body
Participant	A person who receives disability supports
Provider	A person or organisation that provides supports to people with disability under the NDIS
R&R Network	A group who aims to develop and promote individual rights and responsibilities
Risk Management	A process used to identify, assess and treat risks to the organisation
Sector	The organisations providing disability supports and the peak bodies that represent them
Standards	Specific requirements about how an organisation should function
Strategy	An organisation's plan for achieving its vision
Workers	Employees, contractors and volunteers engaged by a provider

Abbreviations

ABN	Australian Business Number
ACN	Australian Company Number
ACNC	Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
AICD	Australian Institute of Company Directors
AGM	Annual General Meeting
BDM	Business Development Manager
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EMSS	Executive Manager Support Services
HR	Human Resources
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MCS	Manager Corporate Services
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NDS	National Disability Services
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
QMS	Quality Management System
R&R	Rights and Responsibilities

Index

Audit report	90	History	15
Balance sheet	96	Human rights	16
Balanced scorecard	21	Occupational health and safety	88
Board of directors	52	Organisation chart	66
Cash flow	98	Privacy	85
Chief executive officer	07	Professional development	80
Committees	63	Purpose	14
Compliments	19	Research	84
Continuous improvement	84	Rights and responsibilities network	17
Director's declaration	94	Risk management	86
Donors	104	Service reports	39
Employees	77	Staff	77
Environment	85	Stakeholders	18
Equal employment	79	Strategic objectives	21
Feedback	18	Values	14
Financial performance	30	Vision	14
Governance	56	Volunteers	16

Thank You

Service Agreement Providers

- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- National Disability Insurance Agency

Grant Providers

- Brimbank City Council
- Hume City Council
- Rosenthal Estate

Donors and In-Kind Supporters

- Amcal Pharmacy Bairnsdale
- Angus Robertson (Volunteer)
- Animal Aid Bairnsdale
- Bairnsdale Aquatic Centre
- Bairnsdale Archery Club
- Bairnsdale Bowls Club
- Bairnsdale Library
- Bairnsdale Neighbourhood House
- Bairnsdale Regional Health Services
- Bairnsdale RSL
- Ball Court Hotel Sunbury
- Batteryland
- Bendigo City Council
- Bendigo Highlands FM Radio
- Bendigo TAFE
- Boardman Stadium Sunbury
- Brimbank City Council
- Bunnings Bairnsdale
- Bunnings Kangaroo Flat
- Bunnings Sunbury
- Chemist Warehouse Bairnsdale
- Church on the Hill Bendigo
- Community Plus
- Cultivating Community Melbourne
- Dahlsens Bairnsdale
- Debbie Gray (Volunteer)
- Eagle Pizza Bendigo
- Eaglehawk Bowling Club
- East Gippsland Art Gallery
- Every Australian Counts
- Foodbank
- Gippsland Disability Advocacy Group
- Good Shepherd
- Goonawarra Golf Club
- Great Supa Bendigo
- Gurri Wanyarra Health Centre
- Headspace
- Hume City Council
- Hume Libraries
- IDance
- Jakhard Labels
- Josh Bull & Jarrod Bell (Councillors)
- Kaye Beal (Volunteer)
- Kyneton Caring Community
- Kyneton Community House
- Kyneton Sports & Aquatic Centre
- Limitless Fitness
- Long Gully Community Garden Centre
- Parks Victoria
- Paul Millet – TF & A Millet Pty Ltd (Rosenthal Estate)
- Paynesville Neighbourhood Centre
- Pheonix FM
- PJT Test & Tag
- Public Transport Victoria
- Reclink
- Red Energy Arena Bendigo
- REG FM Bairnsdale
- Robert Burke (Electrician) Bairnsdale
- RSPCA Bendigo
- Salvation Army Op Shop Long Gully
- Salvation Army Op Shop Bairnsdale
- SES Sunbury Unit
- South Gisborne Tennis Club
- St Albans Library
- St Marys Anglican Church Sunbury
- St Vinnies Sunbury
- Sunbury Aquatic Centre
- Sunbury Bowling Club
- Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health
- Sunbury Football Social Club
- Sunbury Men's Shed
- Sunbury Pony Club
- Sunbury Radio 3NRG
- Sunbury Social Club
- Sunbury Tennis Club
- Sunbury United Sporting Club
- Sunspec Citizens Advocacy
- The Gatehouse Sunbury
- The Zone Bendigo
- Trellly's Outdoor Bendigo
- Victorian Electoral Commission
- Woolworths Bairnsdale
- Wurth Bairnsdale



Get Involved

MAKE A DONATION

Every donation we receive is an investment in providing great services to people with disability. As a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) organisation, all donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible. Donations can be made online at distinctiveoptions.com.au.

LEAVE A BEQUEST

You can choose to leave a bequest to Distinctive Options in your Will. This legacy provides a significant contribution to the work that we do in the community and helps to secure the future of Distinctive Options. Call us today on 03 9740 7100 for more information or contact your local solicitor.

WORK WITH US

Distinctive Options offers staff exceptional opportunities to develop their career in the disability sector and to gain problem solving skills and innovative practice experience. We offer a supportive team environment and flexible work hours. Register your interest to work with us at distinctiveoptions.com.au/get-involved/work-with-us.

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

Distinctive Options values the contributions of volunteers to support the work that we do. You can play a significant role in improving the lives of people with disability by sharing your time and skills. We are always seeking volunteers to work directly with our participants and to support our community and fundraising activities. Apply to volunteer at distinctiveoptions.com.au/volunteer-application-form.

SPREAD THE WORD

If you like what you read in this report, please let other people know about us and the services and options that we provide.



Distinctive Options In Life

Head Office

40 Macedon Street, Sunbury VIC 3429
03 9740 7100

www.distinctiveoptions.com.au 

info@d-o.com.au 

[@distinctiveoptions](https://www.facebook.com/distinctiveoptions) 