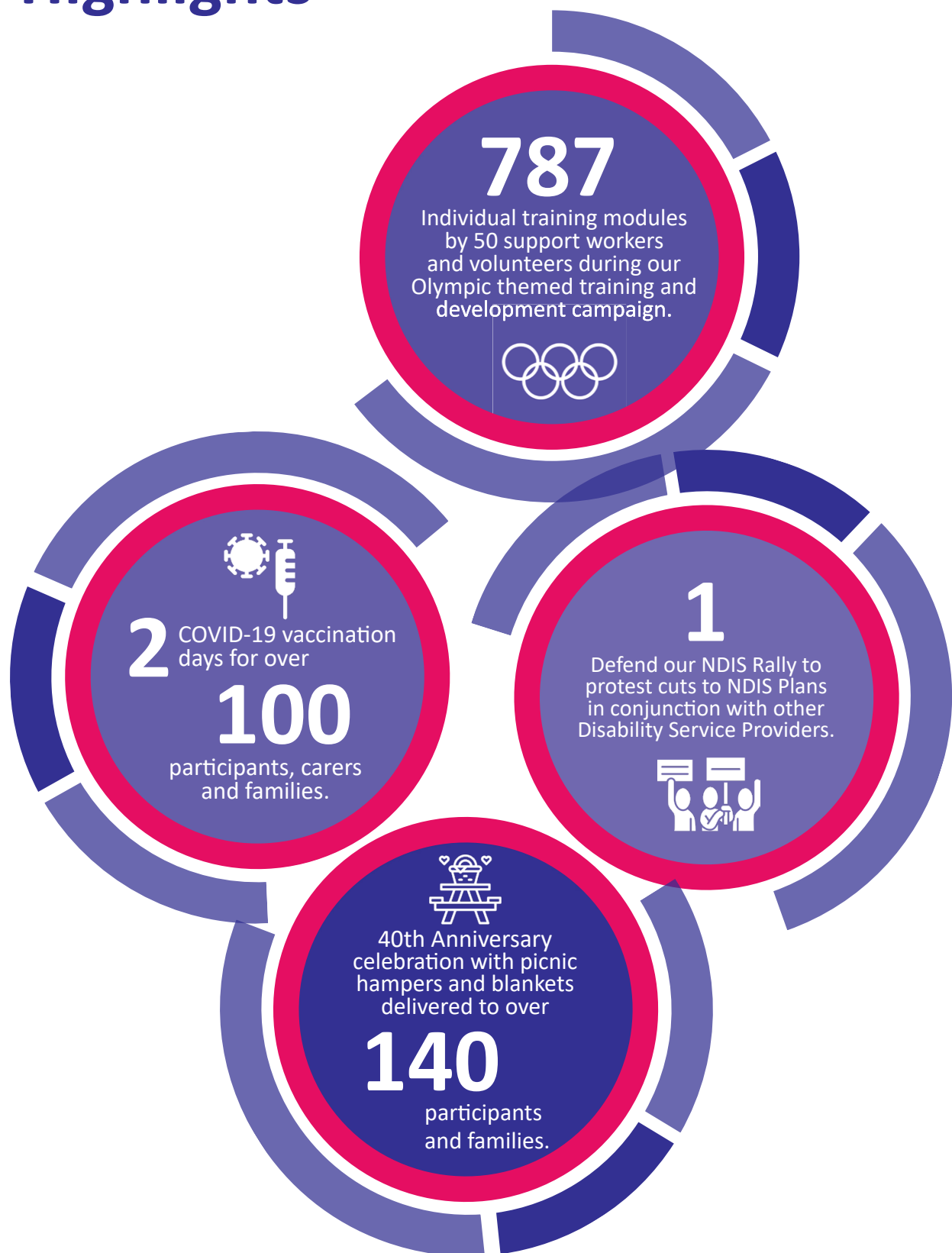


Interchange illawarra



2021/2022
ANNUAL REPORT

Highlights



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Acknowledgement of Country

Australia is a land with a proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage. Interchange Illawarra celebrates and respects these people as the First Australians.

We acknowledge their unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land and waters as we all strive for respect and equality in disability care.

About Us

For over 40 years Interchange Illawarra has proudly delivered support to people with disabilities and their families. What started as a small organisation has grown into a well-known, reliable provider currently supporting over 240 families.

Interchange Illawarra has an unwavering commitment to create opportunities for the people who choose us as their provider. To us, supporting people goes beyond physical wellbeing to include nurturing new friendships, discovering new talents and abilities. We are incredibly flexible with our programs to ensure they are always engaging, relevant and enjoyable.

We now employ over 150 dedicated Support Workers but no matter how much we grow we promise that our heart and values will always remain the same. At Interchange Illawarra we offer more than just support - to us, the most important thing is connection and living your best life.



Our Services



Coordination of Supports

Assisting people with disabilities, their families and carers to identify goals and aspirations they may have to live a meaningful life.



Daily Living Assistance

Offering support to people with disabilities to increase independence in their own homes.



Community Inclusion

The choice of assistance during activities and outings, pursuing personal interests or hobbies or going on a holiday independent of family members, 1:1 or in an individual or a group setting.



Parent/Carer Support

Developing opportunities for parents and carers to participate in the local community, foster relationships and strengthen informal networks.

Management Team



Jake Pearson
Chief Executive Officer

Jake has been the CEO of Interchange for over four years. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce, Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, as well as completing studies in Case Management, Community Services Coordination and the AICD Company Directors training course.

Jake is also a committee member on the International Short Breaks Association Board and a Director on the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music Board.



Amanda Maslowski
Business Services Manager

Amanda has extensive experience in the banking sector and small business management, particularly with not-for-profit organisations.

Amanda holds an Advanced Diploma in Accountancy and a Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability) and has worked at Interchange Illawarra for over nine years.



Michael Corby
Social Support Manager

Michael has been involved in disability support for over 20 years, initially as a volunteer and casual support worker, while studying for a Degree in Communications.

Michael also holds a Diploma of Community Services Coordination and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. He has a wealth of experience including roles as a Training Coordinator for people with a disability and teaching roles with TAFE Community Services department.

Board of Directors



Susan Wallis - Chairperson



Peter Andrews - Treasurer



Lorraine Diaz - Secretary



John Kennedy - Director



Nathan McEwan - Director



David Richardson - Director



Bruce Rowles - Director



Dot Vassallo - Director



Chairperson's Report

Joining the board in 2008, and entrusted with the role of Chairperson in 2012, I am feeling sentimental and nostalgic in my tenth term as Chairperson, and it seems fitting to look back on some of the change and innovations I have witnessed for the small giant that is Interchange Illawarra.

In early December 2012, not long before I was first appointed to the role, The Hon Julia Gillard MP, our 27th Prime Minister, introduced the legislation to establish the NDIS into Parliament in what she described as one of her proudest moments in public life. In March 2013, the legislation passed, and the NDIS Act 2013 was created.

Having taken part in the Every Australian Counts campaign, alongside my daughter Gracie, this was a proud and promising day. My dear friend and colleague, Ms. Alison Byrnes, then a senior adviser to the Hon. Sharon Bird MP and now the Member for Cunningham herself, arranged for the Hon. Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Disability Reform to sign a copy of the legislation in recognition of our contribution, and this copy is filed in the Interchange library as part of our rich history.

Under the leadership of previous CEO, Glenda Pearce, and supported by Jake Pearson as Operations Manager, Interchange Illawarra undertook financial modelling and business transformation to prepare our team and the families we support for this development.

Glenda and Jake contracted Steve Beard, Consultant - Disability Sector and Executive Support, to assist in the planning and transition, and this proved to be one of the best decisions as it ensured we were as prepared as possible. We will always be thankful for his support.

We were honoured to hear Andrew Gibson, Every Australian Counts (EAC) Campaign Community Educator, speak at our 2015 Annual General Meeting, and share that of all the organisations he had visited across the country on behalf of the EAC, Interchange Illawarra was the most prepared he had come across. It was a proud day for our whole team and a good sign of the impact we would create in the years to come.

When the NDIS rolled out for the rest of NSW, commencing on the 1st July 2017, Glenda was my support person when I met with the Local Area coordinator in one of the very first interviews in the area to plan my late daughter Gracie's first NDIS plan.

Much has happened since then, and the NDIS continues to be a work in progress, but it is time to turn my attention to these last 12 months for Interchange.

This last year, once again, COVID-19 has continued to impact not only our country, organisation, and workers, but most devastating, people with disabilities and their families supported by Interchange Illawarra across the region.

I would like to acknowledge the loyalty and support of our amazing workforce, who continue to provide quality and essential care across Illawarra, often at the risk of their own health and safety, wearing necessary but uncomfortable PPE to ensure people with disabilities received the support they rely upon.

In particular, I am immensely grateful for the leadership of CEO, Jake Pearson, supported by Business Manager, Amanda Maslowski. They have once again managed with compassion and care, and responded to all challenges with bravery and integrity. I know I speak for the entire Board of Directors when I say that their ongoing commitment is what allows us all to sleep a little easier at night, and govern with confidence.



One of my personal highlights this year, was our partnership with Vax the Illawarra, as a sponsoring ambassador of a homegrown

campaign to make the Illawarra and Shoalhaven Australia's first region to be 80% fully vaccinated. A little rusty and out of practice, I was proud to represent Interchange and create a video in Auslan for the local Deaf community, encouraging them to roll up their sleeves and keep us all safe.

December was a huge month for our organisation. We purchased a new property in Church Street Wollongong, which will be the site of our new office and social centre, to set us up for another 10 years of growth and impact. We look forward to sharing more about this project in the coming months.

We also celebrated our 40th Anniversary as an organisation with an online picnic complete with entertainment and a guest appearance by friend of Interchange and good sport, Mr. Paul Scully MP for Wollongong.

The greatest privilege I have each year is the opportunity to thank and recognise the collective Interchange Illawarra team. I may be biased, but I think you'd be hard pushed to find a better and more cooperative Board of Directors and Executive Team in the not-for-profit sector. Peter Andrews, David Richardson and Nathan McEwan have again stepped up in their respective committees and roles, and John Kennedy is a diligent stand-in when I have been unavailable for chairing duties. Lorraine Diaz, Dot Vassallo and Bruce Rowles are essential and valuable team members and I am grateful for the diversity of background and perspectives you bring to the Board.

Administration personnel and Support Coordinators have gone above and beyond this year as they have every other, and your loyalty and enthusiasm for supporting the people who choose Interchange Illawarra to assist them to lead ordinary lives does not go unnoticed.

In a competitive and challenging labour market, I appreciate the Support Workers and Volunteers who choose Interchange as their employer of choice, providing quality and compassionate yet professional care each and every shift.

Last but never least, I continue to be humbled by the confidence and trust of people with disabilities, their families and carers who choose Interchange Illawarra for their NDIS funded support. It is only for you and with you that we continue to operate, and to you all I offer my greatest thanks and best wishes. I look forward to a healthy and successful, and less eventful 2022-2023.



CEO's Report

When preparing to write the CEO's report, I found it somewhat confronting to find a way to articulate how Interchange and the community at large has navigated through arguably the most challenging year in living memory. No report detailing the year 2021-2022 can start without acknowledging the devastating social and economic impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust upon Australia and the rest of the world.

The financial year started with increasing COVID-19 cases leading to the harshest community lockdown restrictions ever implemented commencing late July, and lasting four months until the end of October 2021. During this time our centres were ordered to close, and the remaining service delivery options available to participants were subject to significant additional restrictions as set out by the ever-changing Public Health Orders. As we had done so often in the lockdown in the previous year, we transitioned to 1:1 and online supports wherever possible, to attempt to keep people connected and help maintain their mental wellbeing.

As an organisation we sought to support participants, their families and our dedicated workforce through a period of incredible uncertainty, social isolation and economic hardship. As a result, we decided to run a Training and Development campaign again this year to offer Support Workers and volunteers the opportunity

to use their spare time to build upon their skills and knowledge, related to supporting people with disabilities. The campaign was designed to coincide with the Tokyo Olympics Games and had an Olympic theme. The initiative benefited both workers and Interchange Illawarra as a whole, and acted as an effective way to engage with workers and acknowledge the difficulty of the current environment. Workforce engagement was better than expected and feedback suggested that our workforce was pleased that we had taken the time to engage them in a productive and fun manner during lockdown. 787 individual training modules were completed by over 50 support workers and volunteers.

In September, Interchange Illawarra partnered with the Illawarra Disability Alliance (IDA) and ASPEN Health to run a Pfizer vaccination hub for over 100 Interchange participants, carers and families, and our workforce. The two vaccination days were highly successful and we managed to facilitate the vaccine to many people who, for varied reasons, could not access mainstream vaccination offerings. A variety of innovative solutions were implemented, including vaccination from within vehicles.



Interchange also joined the #vaxtheillawarra campaign as a sponsoring ambassador to promote vaccination take up in the general community and facilitate positive media coverage regarding the vaccine.

To complement these initiatives, we launched our Vax for Cash campaign, offering casual support workers and volunteers \$100 for submitting their second dose vaccination certificates. We were the first disability organisation to offer this bonus, and our success led to other organisations following our lead.

In December 2021, New South Wales faced a wave of new community COVID-19 infections as part of the worldwide emergence of the Omicron variant. Record high numbers of infection rates in Wollongong led to dozens of participants and workers contracting the virus, and just as many again entering isolation as close contacts.

This caused significant disruption to our service delivery and affected participants and carers willingness to engage with regular supports. Our staff provided support to people in isolation wearing full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the first time since the pandemic began and we increased our training efforts and PPE stockpile to meet the new and ever-changing demands being placed on all concerned.

This included the newly approved use of Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) which were needed to complement the over stretched PCR testing facilities and protocols.

Thankfully the story of 2021-22 is not solely focused on our COVID-19 pandemic response.

In December we purchased a new property on Church Street in Wollongong. This will give us some opportunities to enhance our service provision.

December was also the month we held our first (and with eased restrictions prevailing our last!) online End of Year Party. This year's celebration recognised our 40th Anniversary and we arranged entertainment, had local politicians and well-known local personalities attend as special guests and delivered picnic hampers to participants and our workforce.

In April we worked with our Illawarra Disability Alliance (IDA) partner organisations, to arrange a rally in Wollongong as part of the NDS/Every Australia Counts National Day of Action. All not-for-Profit IDA members were represented with over 200 people present on the day. The objective was to create public awareness and political pressure ahead of the Federal election surrounding issues plaguing the scheme, in particular the widespread unjustified cuts to participant plans. Advocacy continues to be a genuine focus at Interchange Illawarra.





Partnerships/Networks and Alliances

Working in partnership with other agencies continues to be a priority for Interchange Illawarra. The strength of our well-developed relationships provides the opportunity to support a greater number of people with disabilities to access value added activities, and to foster opportunities for community inclusion initiatives.

We have key partnerships with:

- Illawarra Disability Alliance Members
- Community Industry Group
- Good360 Australia
- ASPECT
- Greenacres Disability Services
- TAFE Illawarra
- IRT
- Big Fat Smile
- Women Illawarra

Donations and Sponsorships

Interchange Illawarra is always appreciative of donations received. These valued contributions provide opportunities to people with disabilities, their families, and their carers, that would not be otherwise available. In particular, donations to Interchange fund health and wellbeing activities for carers, as these activities are no longer funded under the NDIS.

Interchange Illawarra acknowledges the donations and sponsorships received throughout the 2021-22 year from:

- Illawarra Quota Inc.
- Henry and Maureen Crawford
- Heard McEwan Lawyers
- Webb Financial
- SWA Financial Services
- Rotary Club of Illawarra Sunrise
- HLB Judd Mann
- Money Quest Wollongong
- RAMS Home loans



Staff Update

Over the past 12 months, all staff and volunteers at Interchange have continued to support participants and their families with high quality and person-centred support in an ever changing and challenging environment.

In September 2021, we welcomed Ashleigh Bell to the Accounts team and she quickly proved to be an invaluable member of our broader Administration team. In June 2022 we welcomed Catherine Windle to the Customer Engagement role and sadly, back in July 2021 Sarah Galvin resigned. We wish her well for the future and know she will be greatly missed.

Acknowledgements

Throughout the year, various people and organisations worked in collaboration with Interchange Illawarra. These relationships are extremely valued and are vital to the ongoing support for people with disabilities, their families and carers.

These include:

- Interchange Illawarra Carers Sub-Committee
- Good360 Australia
- Paul Davies from Paul Davies Digital Co.
- Ross Boyd from RB Computing
- ASPECT South Coast School for Children with Autism
- Big Fat Smile
- Staff of National Disability Insurance Agency and NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
- TAFE Illawarra

In a most challenging and extraordinary year I'd like to thank our wonderful Board of Directors for providing clear and sensible guidance and for trusting the executive team and the entire workforce to deliver our Mission to the people we are here to serve. Ever-changing rules and restrictions have made Governance challenging, and taking a considered approach to Governance, based on sound strategic initiatives and operational reporting has led to the best possible outcomes we could have hoped for this financial year.

Our Chairperson, Susan Wallis, has continued to lead the Board through challenging times and her leadership style has brought out the very best in our dedicated and experienced Directors. It's important to note that our Board of Directors share their considerable knowledge, skills and time on a volunteer basis. I thank each and every Director for their contribution to Interchange Illawarra.

Our staff have worked under a second year of immense pressure. The team has again pulled together to provide support not only to participants, their families and the direct workforce, but also to each other. I will continue to tell anyone who will listen that I'm convinced we have the best workforce in the business. To Amanda, Maria, Michael, Pam, Tanya, Leanne M, Tracey, Emma, Kylie, Brooke, Leanne D, Marney, Leonie, Ash, Kade and Cat – I sincerely thank you for your continued hard work throughout the year.

Without Support Workers and Volunteers there could be no Interchange. Our direct workforce has operated under extremely challenging conditions and I thank them for continuing with ongoing passion and commitment to the people we support.

Lastly, thank you needs to go to people with disabilities, their families and their carers for sharing their lives, and continuing to choose Interchange Illawarra as their preferred service provider.

The 2021-22 year has turned out to be a year like no other. We have demonstrated high levels of adaptability and reliance and I am proud of the way our organisation has responded to the challenges presented. I look forward to supporting people with disabilities and their carers to live enriched and meaningful lives in 2022-23.

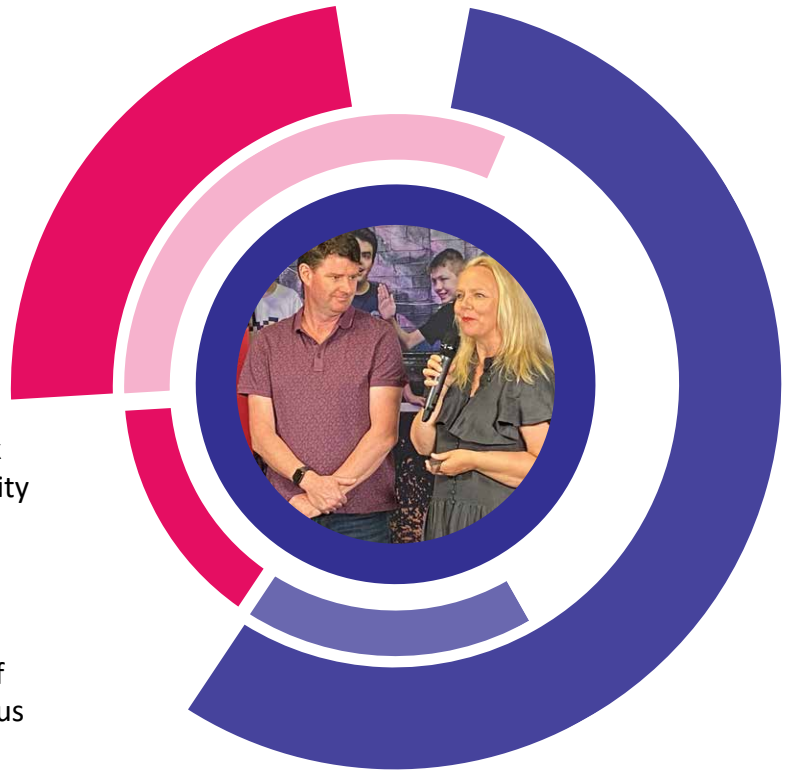


40 years of serving the community

Interchange Illawarra was excited to mark 40 years of serving the Illawarra community on Friday 3 December 2021.

With the uncertainty around large gatherings due to COVID-19, especially for our vulnerable community, 40 years of service was celebrated with a simultaneous picnic. We invited participants, their families, carers, volunteers and Support Workers to hold their own picnic at home, or in a park, while watching our online entertainment and celebration activities.

Participants were provided with a 'Party Bag' prior to the event with instructions not to open it until they were given the signal. Although we would have liked to celebrate in person, the event was a success and we look forward to the next 40 years!



Workforce Team Report



The workforce at Interchange Illawarra is made up of paid Support Workers and a small group of Volunteers. We aim to provide high quality, flexible and responsive supports to people with disabilities, their families and carers.

Our recruitment strategy needed to be flexible due to COVID-19 lockdowns and the subsequent disruptions, however we were still able to recruit a number of new Support Workers during the year. We have continued to refine our recruitment and selection processes and have invested in a new training program with a disability focus.

Our orientation program will be upgraded in the coming year and will capture all the information and training required for our workforce to do their jobs safely. We continue to comply with any changes to practice standards to meet our obligations.

Interchange Illawarra now has a dedicated training expert who organises our specialty training sessions on a quarterly basis. They also ensure compliance with NDIA practice standards. Interchange's specialty training topics are delivered by Registered Nurses and highly skilled Interchange teaching staff. Our new e-training program allows support workers to access up to 60 different packages covering a variety of support needs.

These form part of our mandatory training program and are accessible on an as needed basis and as a component of our staff professional development pathway.

Our Workforce Team continue to develop new and innovative ways to communicate with our workforce and these have been well received by Support Workers. They help us to engage effectively when there are changes to legislation or updates within Interchange Illawarra.

Valuable feedback from carers and participants reveals that our workforce is regarded as well-trained individuals who can perform their duties in a professional manner, and are responsive to the needs of carers and people with disabilities. We aim to maintain this level of satisfaction by setting high standards during our recruitment process and offering further training opportunities.

We look forward to working with new and existing members of our valued direct workforce in the coming year.

**Emma Robinson and Brooke Nigro
Workforce Team**



Kemira Respite House

Interchange Illawarra has continued to provide Respite and Independent Living Skills Support at Kemira House, in 2021-2022. This is the sixth year that Interchange and Greenacres Disability Services have successfully shared the use of the respite house located on the grounds of IRT in Kanahooka.

The 2021-2022 financial year began with New South Wales in lockdown and as such, IRT suspended access to the Kemira site. This, in turn, meant our fortnightly 'Girls' and 'Boys' Weekends Away and Club Josie gatherings for Kemira residents had to be suspended as well.

By October 2021, as restrictions began to ease, Interchange Illawarra submitted their updated Pandemic Policy and Outbreak Management Policy and IRT reinstated access to the property. This allowed our Weekends Away to resume so staff could provide respite and daily living support for young adults with ageing carers, much to the relief of participants, carers and staff alike!

Whilst staying at Kemira House, participants have an opportunity to socialise, participate in new experiences, form lasting friendships with their peers, practice independent living skills and enjoy some time away from their carers. Some participants are also using this opportunity as preparation for the next step of moving into independent/semi-independent living.

Friendships have developed within the groups and these regular getaways allow participants to maintain the relationships that have been built over the last six years of the program. This time also offers their carers some much-needed time out from their caring role.

The Josie's Club social support group was able to recommence in March 2022, after the reopening of the community centre, and is now once again being enjoyed by Kemira residents on a fortnightly basis. The residents organise their own timetable of activities and have had some lovely dinners in the centre and out in the community, as well as craft, cooking and games nights.

We look forward this coming year to a full 12 month period without any extended interruptions to our Kemira programs.

Tracey Groatz
Kemira Coordinator



Saturplay

The Saturplay program continued to operate, albeit with disruptions to service and ongoing limitations due to the COVID-19 Pandemic in late 2021.

Saturplay, like all of our programs, has adapted to meet the changing recommendations for safety to ensure participants and their families, as well the workforce remain safe during uncertain times. An additional challenge has been disruptions to service due to limitations of access to our usual venue the South Coast School for Children with Autism (ASPECT) school at Corrimal. ASPECT continues its ongoing relationship with Interchange Illawarra in providing this venue and facilities for our use, however it is undergoing a much needed facelift with new buildings, playgrounds and amenities. This venue is very important to our program as many of our participants start their school career at this site which assists our participants to feel safe within a familiar and purpose built environment.

The expected timeframe for these major renovations has been extended due to many factors including high volumes of rain and flooding events. However, the end result will be a site which is even better equipped with facilities to support the needs of participants.

As is the hallmark of Interchange Illawarra we have adapted, reducing our days offered to fortnightly in line with program demand and where possible offering alternative support to participants when the school site is inaccessible. With support of participants' families and our knowledge of how best to support participants we have been able to modify the program to meet individual needs in order to continue to provide access to community participation while responding dynamically to changing COVID-19 restrictions.

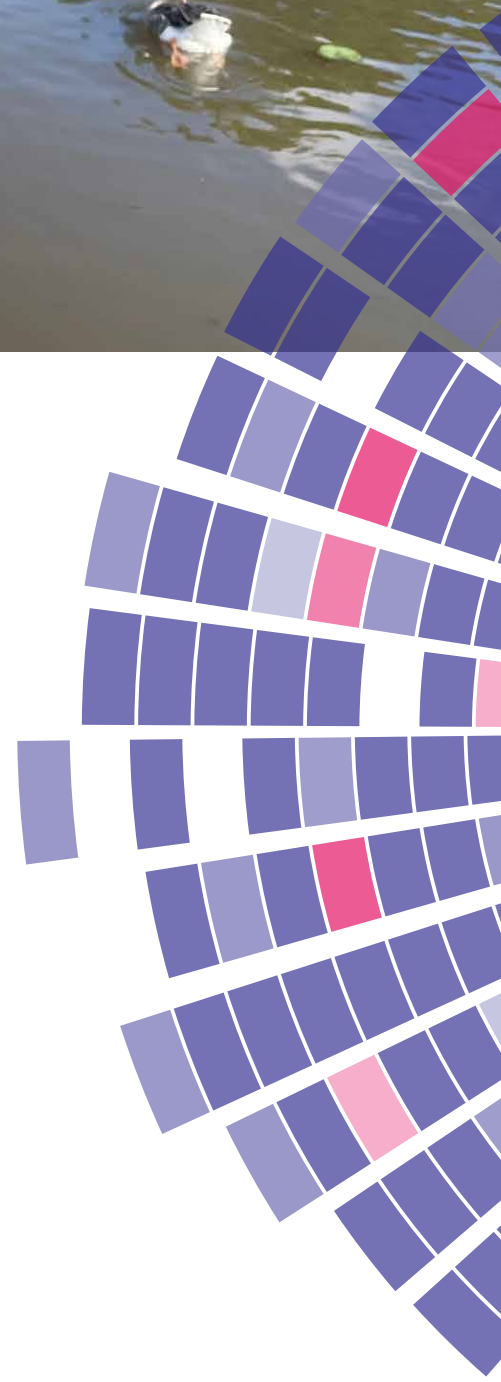
The Saturplay program continues to be supported by many long term staff whose commitment, knowledge and passion for quality individualised service for participants has not been dampened by the challenges of the past two years. I am proud of the staff of Saturplay those who remain with us, as well as those who have left the program over the last year, with some staff moving on to full time work in the disability sector, roles in special education, parenthood, international travel and tertiary study. I thank all of the staff for their motivation and ability to calmly support participants to meet social and communication goals.



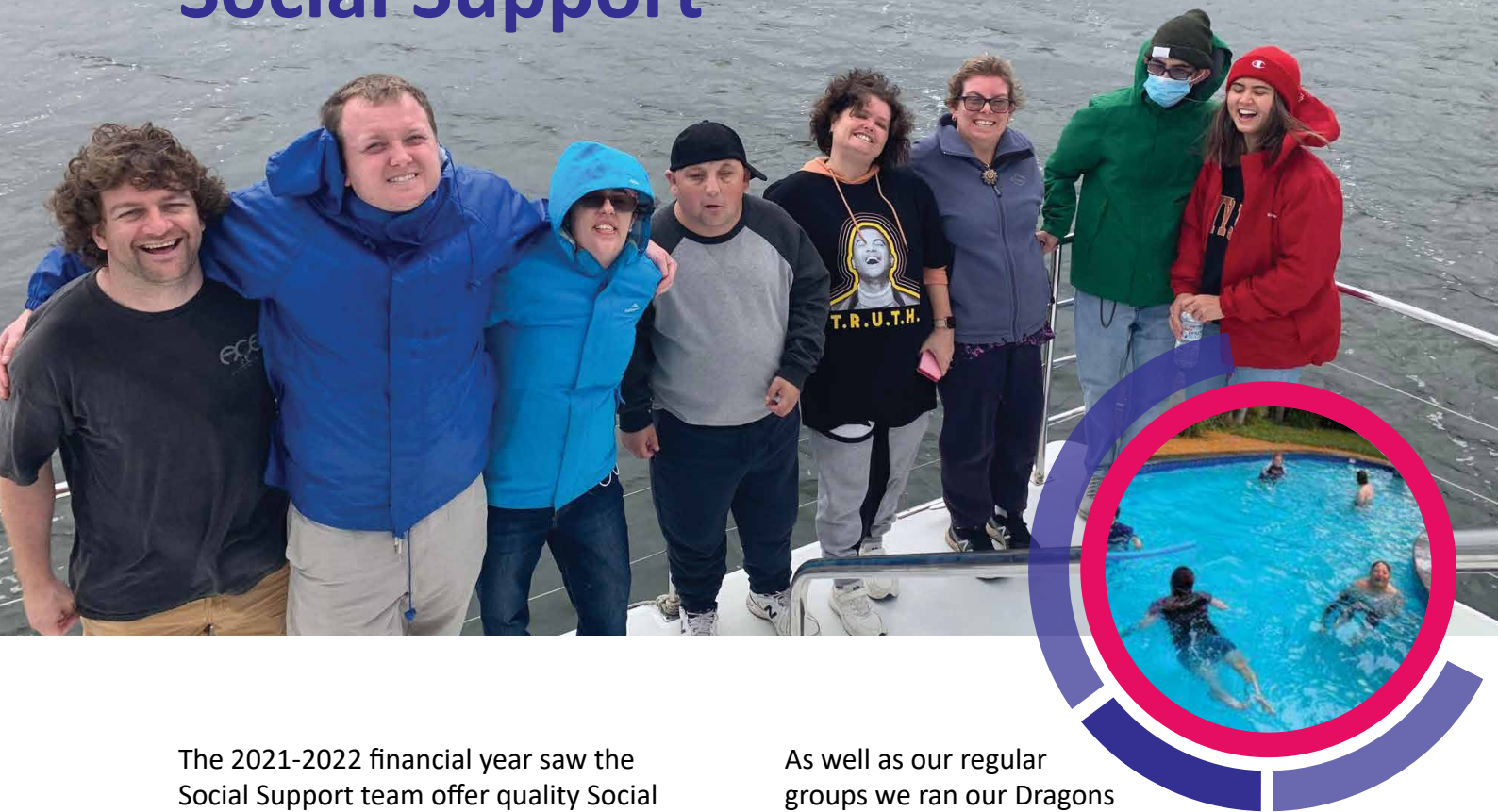
Together with the team of Saturplay staff I would like to acknowledge the efforts of participants who have had to show a new level of flexibility and coping skills as we navigate unavoidable changes with our program delivery. Your trust in our staff to support you through the challenges of change and your capacity to grow and demonstrate new skills and resilience is nothing short of amazing. We are excited to continue to provide this program to help participants build skills, develop friendships and find new interests.

As I move into the 22nd year of coordinating this program I reflect on what a privilege it is to work with the many participants and their families as well as the staff who have informed my work and helped me to continually develop my skills through your insight and shared experiences. I continue to look forward to leading this program into the future.

Leanne Micallef
Saturplay Program Coordinator



Social Support



The 2021-2022 financial year saw the Social Support team offer quality Social Support options to existing participants. We were also excited to welcome some new participants to the Social Support family.

We offered both centre based and community access social groups to participants during the year with the group structure remaining unchanged. Groups we offered include Social Support Weekdays, Social Support Saturdays, Weekends Away, Saturday Club North and South, Kiama Group, Social Support South, Youth Group, TGIF, and School Holidays. We provided support to participants across a number of age groups and serviced the three local local government areas of the Illawarra.

The most popular activities this year were Flipout for the younger groups and Ten Pin Bowling for the older groups.

As well as our regular groups we ran our Dragons and Hawks programs for our local sports fanatics. The Hawks had another strong year and made the playoffs again. The Dragons were unfortunately not as successful but participants love to support their team regardless and really enjoy the buzz and excitement of home games at WIN Stadium.

We thank the St. George Illawarra Dragons and Illawarra Hawks for their continued partnerships with our Social Support programs. The participants of these programs are an integral part of the local supporter community and the partnerships we have with the Dragons and Hawks is important in ensuring they can continue to be part of the action and support their teams.

Our Weekends Away and Short Holiday programs offered short term accommodation to participants and respite to their carers. Participants can stay at our respite cottage in Evans Street, Wollongong for the weekend with a group of their friends from the program. It gives the participants a chance to increase their independence, practice their daily living skills, spend time away from their primary carers and maintain their informal supports.

Short Holidays, as always, were popular during the year. Our holiday groups visited Racecourse Beach, Port Macquarie, Mudgee, Sydney and the Blue Mountains with holidays to a Farm-stay and the Gold Coast coming up very soon. A great time was had on each and every one of these short holidays.

With the safety of all involved in our Social Support programs being so important to us we have continued to implement measures to manage the risks of COVID-19 during this time. Contactless temperature checks upon arrival at groups and additional cleaning and sanitising procedures continue. As always, we will follow the relevant health advice and do everything that we can to keep everyone safe.



All in all, the 2021-2022 financial year was a successful one for Interchange’s Social Support program. I would like to extend a massive thank you to all the participants, families and Support Workers involved in the Social Support programs. We have some exciting plans in the works for 2022-2023 financial year and I am looking forward to seeing what the next 12 months will bring.

Michael Corby
Social Support Manager



Carers' Health and Wellbeing



As we have done for all of our 40 plus years in operation, Interchange Illawarra has continued to offer Carer Health and Wellbeing activities for the carers of registered Interchange participants. The organisation has a proud history of providing holistic support that benefits both the person with a disability and the members of their household.

Research shows that the health, wellbeing and success of people with disabilities is directly related to the wellbeing of their carers, both from a physical and mental health perspective. Caring for a person with a disability can be exhausting, isolating and create significant social and financial disadvantage.

Health and wellbeing activities are designed to offer carers opportunities to connect with each other. We do this by organising and facilitating various programs, workshops and events free of charge to those people in our community that always put themselves last.

Our support planners take responsibility to arrange an event throughout the year, giving carers not only the opportunity to enjoy enriching activities with fellow Carers, but also the chance to get to better know our office staff.



Due to COVID-19 restrictions imposed for part of the year, our offerings were modified to suit the rules at the time. We hosted our traditional Carers luncheon at the Cabbage Tree Hotel to celebrate Carers Week in October 2021. In March 2022, a group enjoyed a Wine Tour in the lovely Shoalhaven area and in May 2022 we got creative with a Renoir and Rosé evening at Ratha's Place Café.

We are all looking forward to more activities in the year ahead.



MyTime Wollongong

The MyTime project is funded by The Department of Social Services (DSS) and is provided in partnership with the Parenting Research Centre, Playgroup NSW, Interchange Illawarra, TAFE Illawarra and Big Fat Smile. This program is about assisting families who care for children 0-16 years of age to develop social networks, enjoy some time out and provide children who have additional needs and chronic illness an opportunity to socialise with other children.

MyTime continued to be well attended with parents and carers enjoying the opportunity to have a two hour break to chat with others. This supported playgroup initiative is the only one of its kind Australia wide where TAFE Child Care students have a practical opportunity to work with, and better understand, children with disabilities in a social learning environment for the child and siblings. Over the years many of the childcare students have developed a passion for supporting children with a disability and have registered to volunteer at Interchange and work in the disability sector.

Unfortunately, we needed to suspend our face to face sessions again in the middle of 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions. Carers were supported instead through the sharing of information and activities via email and the use of a Facebook group for families. In the latter part of 2021, we were able to transition to a local play centre to facilitate face to face interaction consistent with the COVID-19 restrictions at that time.

As community restrictions lifted, we returned to our sessions at the TAFE Wollongong campus with our wonderful TAFE students. It is always heartening to see the delight of group members when the group meets together after an absence. The online support offered fills a gap, but the real value of MyTime is the connections made by the families involved. Carers support each other and share their knowledge with each other.

At the end of June 2022, we were awarded the contract to run MyTime Wollongong for another 12 months. It was recognised that our group has provided consistent support to families during the interrupted year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

We are excited for the year ahead, supporting families as they start the adventure that caring can be.

Kylie White
MyTime Coordinator





Interchange Illawarra
Flexibility is our Strength



02 4227 1079 | info@interchangeillawarra.org | 81 Kenny Street, Wollongong, NSW, 2500