

ANNUAL REVIEW 2025



UNISSONDISABILITY.ORG.AU

UNISSON | **100**
DISABILITY | YEARS
of heart

Acknowledgement of Country

Unisson Disability respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the land we now call Australia.

We recognise and respect their continuing spiritual connection to land, sea and community and acknowledge their stories, traditions and living cultures.

We value the cultural contributions of Indigenous peoples and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

We further acknowledge the cultural contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability and reaffirm our vision of a world where every person is welcomed.

CONTENTS

WELCOME

4	Statement from Alex Gelman
5	Statement from Steve Gregg
6	Statement from CEO
8	Who we are + Vision and Values
9	Finding the ‘Yes’

SUMMARY

10	Financial Year Overview
11	Unisson Snapshot
12-17	Service Highlights and Key Events
18	Leadership and Governance
19	Enhancing Service Quality

CLIENT STORIES

20-21	Josh’s story
22-23	Demara’s story
24-25	Declan’s story
26	Acknowledgment and Thank You
28	Connect with us



STATEMENT FROM ALEX GELMAN UNISSON DISABILITY CHAIR

As we step into Unisson’s next century of service, I am both proud and humbled to reflect on where we have come from and where we are headed. Reaching our centenary in 2024 was a remarkable milestone, celebrating 100 years of dedication, resilience, and commitment to people living with disability. Now, as we move into our next chapter, our focus is firmly on building and strengthening our core services, ensuring quality, sustainability, and remaining committed to those we support.

Since the introduction of the NDIS, providers across the sector have navigated both opportunities and challenges. The scheme has brought real benefits, expanding choice and control for people with disability, raising expectations for service quality, and encouraging providers to innovate and adapt. At the same time, it has presented significant pressures, particularly in the areas of funding and compliance.

This past year has not been without its difficulties. The financial pressures facing our sector, driven by diminishing and at times unfair and unpredictable NDIA pricing, have been significant. Yet, despite these headwinds, Unisson has remained buoyant. Our focus on financial sustainability continues to guide us, ensuring that we remain strong and well-positioned to serve our clients long into the future.

I am confident in the strength and dedication of Unisson’s leadership team, who continue to adapt to sector changes with clarity and purpose. Importantly, they never lose sight of what matters most: the quality of support provided to our clients and the trust placed in us by families and the wider community.

At the heart of everything we do are the people we support and their families. Even in challenging times, we remain committed to walking alongside them, with heart. Our incredible team has continued to deliver outstanding support, helping clients live life to the fullest and reminding us why our work matters so deeply.

Thank you to our participants, their families, our dedicated staff, and the wider Unisson community. It is through your trust, partnership, and strong commitment that Unisson continues to thrive.



STATEMENT FROM STEVE GREGG CHAIR OF THE LORNA HODGKINSON FOUNDATION

In 2025, the Lorna Hodgkinson Foundation has remained committed in its support of Unisson’s work to strengthen Supported Independent Living. Our focus has been on ensuring that every home is fit for purpose, providing safety, comfort, and a genuine sense of belonging for the people who live there.

A key milestone this year was funding the purchase of four beautiful new homes for groups of long-standing Unisson clients. These homes offer stability, certainty, and peace of mind for residents and their families, while directly supporting Unisson’s ongoing efforts to enhance Supported Independent Living.

The Foundation was also honoured to fund Unisson’s centenary celebration, a historic event at the Sydney Opera House. This special evening brought together long-standing clients, their families, and loyal supporters to reflect on a century of impact. It was especially meaningful to celebrate in the very venue where several Unisson clients, as young adults, were featured in the award-winning 1980 documentary *Stepping Out*, a powerful full-circle moment.

Sound financial stewardship continues to guide our work. By growing and carefully managing the Foundation’s investment portfolio, we are securing a sustainable future that enables us to provide reliable, ongoing support to Unisson as it navigates the complexities of the NDIS and continues to invest in quality homes and services.

I remain deeply committed to the Foundation’s mission and to our enduring partnership with Unisson. Together, we are ensuring that people with disability not only have homes that meet their needs today, but also the assurance that these homes will remain safe, welcoming places for many years to come.



CEO MESSAGE SUMMARY

LEE CARPENTER

CEO

This year, we continued our transformational work, strengthening our foundations while positioning Unisson to thrive in a changing disability sector. At the heart of this transformation is a commitment to ensuring our clients, their families, and our staff are supported by an organisation that is strong, agile, and ready for the future.

One of the most significant moments of the year was celebrating Unisson's 100-year milestone at the iconic Sydney Opera House. It was a night of reflection and deep admiration for our people. Many of our long-standing clients and their families joined us, reminding us of the lasting relationships and trust built over generations. At my table was Gloria, a Direct Support Professional who has been with Unisson for over 30 years, a powerful example of the commitment and heart that defines our community.

We also made great strides in our **Supported Independent Living Strengthening** project. This year, we moved away from homes no longer fit for purpose and invested in properties designed to meet the needs of our current and future clients. We have strategically partnered with SDA providers who share our vision and will help us bring to life new homes, designed with care and purpose to enhance quality of life.

In November, we welcomed Mike Churchman as our new Chief Financial Officer. Mike is a seasoned executive with deep experience in the disability sector. His appointment has strengthened our leadership team and brought fresh perspective to our financial stewardship. This year we refined our executive structure, transitioning to a smaller, more focused team. This rightsizing ensures our management approach reflects the scale of our organisation and provides clear alignment with our strategic priorities.

Beyond these internal changes, Unisson has played an active role in shaping the future of the NDIS through our membership in Alliance 20, a respected group of disability service providers advocating for system-wide improvements.



Together, we are standing up for:

Sustainability of the NDIS: advocating for clearer eligibility and greater transparency in how funds are used, so the scheme remains fair and effective for all Australians.

Fairness and Equity: ensuring transparent planning and equitable access to supports, especially for people with complex needs.

Pricing and Provider Sustainability: pushing for pricing that reflects the true cost of quality service delivery and rewards providers who deliver excellence.

Workforce and Employment: creating better pay structures, stronger career pathways, and more employment opportunities for people with disability.

Disability Housing: highlighting the urgent need for accessible, appropriate housing, and calling for faster processes and greater investment to meet diverse needs.

Together, these milestones reflect our ongoing transformation, strengthening Unisson internally, while also driving change externally. As I look ahead, I do so with confidence, knowing that our century-long legacy, our passionate people, and our bold vision for the future will ensure Unisson continues to be a place where clients, families, and staff feel supported, valued, and free to live life their way.



WHO WE ARE

Founded a century ago by Dr. Lorna Hodgkinson, a woman ahead of her time, Unisson Disability began as a pioneering institution dedicated to transforming the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Today, we proudly support clients across Northern and Western Sydney, the Central Coast, and the Hunter regions of NSW. While we have adapted to meet an ever-evolving world, we remain deeply committed to enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities.

At Unisson, we are a community dedicated to the power of human connections. We take the time to understand each person's unique story, build on common ground, and create meaningful interactions. Our approach is centred on finding the 'yes' to possibilities, being authentic, and making every connection memorable. Our strong commitment to our clients drives us to continuously improve and innovate, ensuring that we deliver the highest standard of support.

OUR VISION AND VALUES

Our **VISION** is a world where every person is welcomed, celebrated for their unique contributions, and embraced for who they are. In the disability sector, this vision is not just aspirational, it is fundamental. By fostering inclusivity and creating environments where everyone feels valued, we support individuals with disabilities to thrive and participate fully in society. This approach drives our work, guiding us to build supportive communities, develop tailored services, and advocate for policies that reflect our commitment.

Our **VALUES** embody this vision and shape every aspect of what we do:



GENEROSITY

We give our hearts and minds in an effort to understand others.



INCLUSION

We celebrate diversity and seek to ensure everyone is valued and respected.



COURAGE

We are brave in our intent to be authentic and advocate for what is right.



CREATIVITY

We work together to find the 'YES' and encourage new ways of doing and thinking.

At Unisson, we believe in a more inclusive world for people with disabilities and work daily to make this vision a reality.

Our philosophy

FINDING THE 'YES'

inspires us to embrace challenges, think creatively, and build opportunities for those we support. It is this commitment to generosity, inclusion, courage, and creativity that continues to drive us forward.

FINANCIAL YEAR OVERVIEW

Michael Churchman
CFO



Our focus continues to be centred on sustainability, balancing the high-quality, person-centred support with the imperative of operating in a financially prudent manner as the sector evolves. Clients remain at the heart of everything we do and they are front of mind as we focus, in particular, on staff training and properties.

In line with our strategic plan, we are working on the following:



WORKFORCE OPTIMISATION

A significant proportion of costs related to support work that needs to be appropriate for client cohort needs and funding. This matching of support, funding and client needs has had a significant impact on the viability of shared living. This work is being done in lockstep with a drive on staff training that is enhanced with our partnership with

PROPERTY IS BEING CLOSELY REVIEWED

The Foundation continues to sell, replace, and upgrade properties to ensure the portfolio is contemporary for current clients and attractive for future ones. Partnerships with SDA housing organisations are being progressed to build a pipeline of new properties and clients.



EFFICIENT OVERHEADS ARE AN IMPERATIVE

There has been a streamlining of backoffice functions to ensure the overheads are rightsized for both the size of the organisation and the funding envelope. This has been achieved with a parallel review of processes across the organisation aimed at optimising operational efficiency.

FOLLOWING THE 100-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

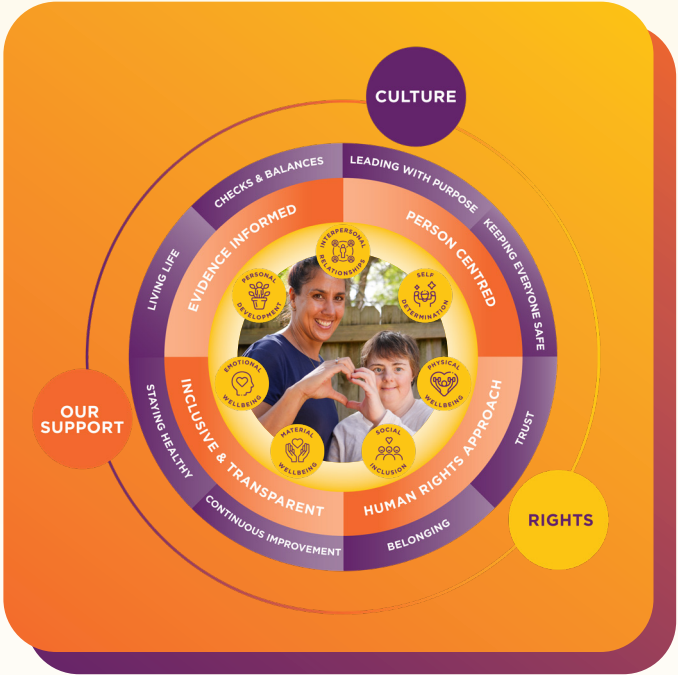
Unisson's second century starts with a firm focus on sustainability. We are committed to building on our strong foundation and continuing to adapt to the evolving needs of our clients and the disability sector.



UNISSON SNAPSHOT



SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY EVENTS

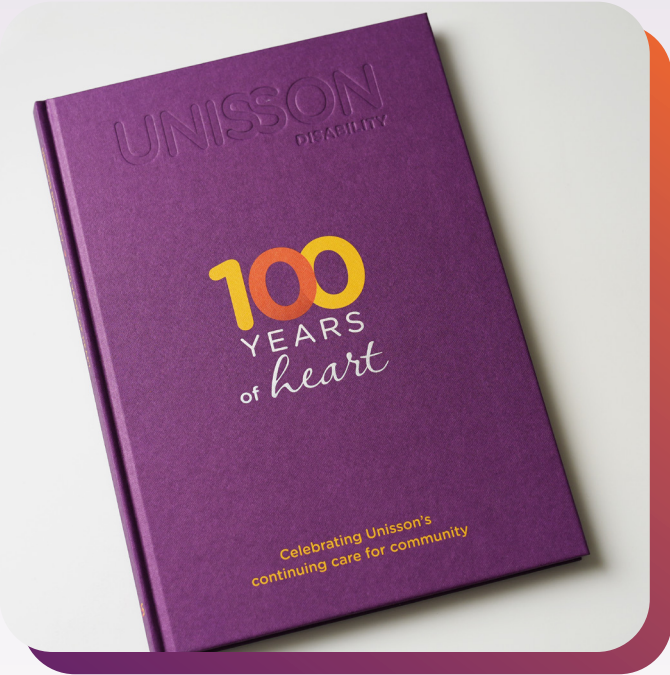


LAUNCHED OUR PRACTICE AND QUALITY FRAMEWORK

With a strong focus on quality and client outcomes, we launched our new **Practice and Quality Framework**, the foundation that now guides everything we do. This framework ensures every service we provide is consistently delivered to the highest standard and centred on what matters most to our clients.

13 YEARS OF INSIGHTFUL RESEARCH

In our 13th year as an active participant in La Trobe University's long-running longitudinal study, we continue to deepen our understanding of **Active Support** and its positive impact on people with intellectual disability living in shared homes.



100 YEARS CELEBRATION & BOOK LAUNCH

We celebrated our centenary with the release of 100 Years, a beautifully curated collection of stories, memories and historic moments that shaped who Unisson Disability is today. The book honours a century of supporting people with disability to live life their way and is filled with inspiring reflections that invite readers to take action. A heartfelt thank-you to everyone who contributed their voices and memories to create such a remarkable keepsake.



*Click here
to see the
celebration.*



PURCHASED NEW HOMES

The Lorna Hodgkinson Foundation purchased four beautiful homes for Unisson's long-standing clients, strengthening our Supported Independent Living initiatives. These homes provide lasting safety, comfort and a true sense of belonging, ensuring clients feel secure and well supported for years to come.



ANNUAL CLIENT SURVEY

Our annual client survey confirmed what matters most: **clients and families value the support and heart of our teams**. Families spoke of the peace of mind they feel knowing their loved one is in good hands with people who genuinely care. This year we introduced a more **accessible and inclusive survey format**, making it easier for every client voice to be heard. The feedback not only celebrates our strengths but also highlights opportunities that will help shape Unisson's next strategic direction.





GROUNDWORKS EXPANDS TO THE CENTRAL COAST

Our social-enterprise gardening service, **GroundWorks**, branched out to the Central Coast this year, welcoming **new gardeners** to the Unisson community. This exciting milestone creates opportunities for more supported employees to join the team and will help gardens across the region look **greener and more vibrant** for years to come.

GROUND
WORKS



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

We celebrated with a **vibrant community fun day on the Central Coast**, drawing more than **180 participants** and a host of local organisations. From a **petting zoo and silent disco to inclusive yoga**, the event was packed with free activities that brought people of all abilities together. The success of the day has inspired us to go **even bigger next year**, welcoming even more people to honour and celebrate this important occasion.



*Click here
to see the
celebration.*



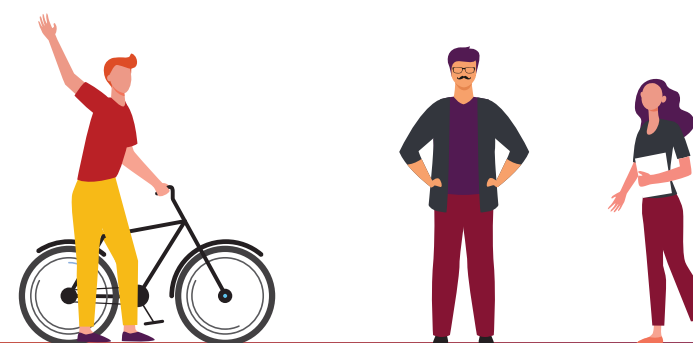
ST IVES RENOVATIONS COMPLETED

Clients and staff are back at **St Ives**, enjoying freshly refurbished facilities that feature a **beautiful kitchen and a vibrant new garden**. The welcoming space provides the perfect backdrop for activities between community outings. A big thank-you to our **GroundWorks team**, whose hard work helped the garden flourish and brought the new space to life.



SUCCESSFUL TENDER OPENS NEW OPPORTUNITIES

We were **selected as the preferred support provider** for a beautiful **Vera Living Specialist Disability Accommodation home** on the Central Coast. This successful tender meant clients and families could choose their provider—and they chose **Unisson**. The result: we welcomed a **new client into our community** and expanded our portfolio of quality homes, continuing our commitment to creating outstanding living options for people with disability.





CLIENT REFERENCE GROUP LAUNCHED

Strengthening our commitment to client-led services, we introduced Client Reference Groups, a key step toward a more inclusive co-design process.

Clients from both community services and supported employment came together for the first time to share ideas and shape services around their needs and aspirations. The group will meet monthly, ensuring feedback flows directly into action.

As Deputy General Manager Anthony Conigilio shared, "I look forward to listening to their ideas and improvements for us to take action." This is just the beginning of many client-driven initiatives at Unisson.



A STUDIO COMMUNITY EXHIBITION

In September, the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery came to life with colour, texture and heart through A Studio Community, a shared exhibition by artists from Unisson's Blue Apple Art Studios and Studio ARTES.

This was the first time the two studios collaborated, bringing together an inspiring collection of artworks that celebrated inclusion, community and self-expression. Each piece told a story, reflecting the artists' unique perspectives and creative journeys.



**BLUE
APPLE**

ART STUDIOS

"‘A Studio Community’ showcased the diverse and dynamic work of both studios and the genuine and colourful creativity of our artists."

Heidi Ferguson,
Arts Coordinator,
Blue Apple
Art Studios

"I liked seeing everyone's work on display in the gallery. I felt very proud."

Kay Hughes,
Artist

"It was such a high standard of work."

Kylie Page,
Artist

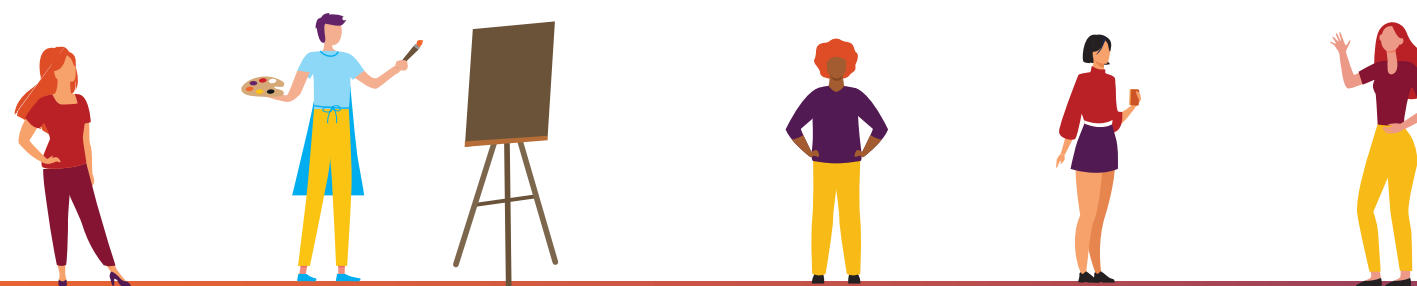
The exhibition featured a range of mediums, from bold abstract paintings to intricate sculptures, showcasing the diversity and talent of the artists. Many Unisson clients proudly exhibited their work, sharing their creativity and passion with the wider community.

The exhibition was a resounding success, drawing visitors, families and art lovers who came together to appreciate the beauty of inclusive art.

It was a true celebration of what's possible when creativity, collaboration and community come together.



Click here
to see the
exhibition.



LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

2025 has been a year of strong, strategic leadership, strengthening Unisson’s operating model and deepening engagement across the organisation. A renewed emphasis on Active Support and Practice Leadership has been a defining focus, ensuring our clients remain at the heart of everything we do.

Our senior management structure has been streamlined to be more focused and coherent, with work programs aligned directly to strategic priorities and supported by clear KPIs to track delivery.

This year, significant progress has also been made in strengthening compliance and assurance. Key achievements include:

- Enhancements to risk management frameworks.
- Strengthened incident management process.
- Delivery of client-specific training aligned to individual risk and support plans.
- Strengthened client service agreements process.

These initiatives have enhanced our governance maturity, provided greater confidence that we are meeting legislative and compliance expectations, and reinforced our commitment to delivering safe, high-quality care and support.



ENHANCING SERVICE QUALITY, LA TROBE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH



Helen Emmerson
CPO

Since 2013, Unisson has participated in La Trobe University’s long-running **Quality of Support in Accommodation Services** study. This research examines the quality of life outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities living in supported accommodation. It looks closely at how people are **engaged in daily life**, the **quality of Active Support** provided, and the strength of **Frontline Practice Leadership**. Unisson gains valuable, independent insights that help us continually improve the way we support people with disabilities, and our staff.

2024 KEY FINDINGS IN COMPARISON TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The 2024 results show Unisson performing above the national sample across many measures.

ENGAGEMENT: Unisson clients were engaged in meaningful activities **71% of the time**, well above the study’s **average of 55%**. Social engagement grew significantly, while passive activities such as watching TV decreased. Engagement levels, were notably more varied with clients than in previous years, highlighting the importance of tailored approaches.

ACTIVE SUPPORT QUALITY: Unisson’s **Active Support Measure (ASM) average was 57%**, above the national average. Encouragingly, **38% of people received good Active Support**, compared to 24% across the study. This reflects our commitment to evidence-based support that is shown to provide better quality of life outcomes for clients.

FRONTLINE PRACTICE LEADERSHIP: Our **Practice Leadership score averaged 2.93**, again above the sector benchmark of 2.65. Team Leaders demonstrated strong understanding of their leadership role and reported challenges with time and organisational systems. Team Leaders were shown to be modelling effective practices and giving constructive feedback. We see further opportunity to lift skills, systems and processes for leaders across all teams.

BUILDING ON OUR STRONG FOUNDATION

Overall, the study confirms that **Unisson continues to outperform sector averages in engagement and quality of support**, affirming the dedication and skill of our staff and leaders. At the same time, it highlights areas where we must focus to sustain excellence. In response, Unisson has set out a **renewed quality agenda** that embeds Active Support and Practice Leadership into everyday practice.

ACTIVE SUPPORT: We are strengthening Active Support through regular refresher training for direct support professionals and team leaders whilst managers will ensure skills stay current. Team meetings will routinely include client reviews, Active Support reflections and recognition of outstanding support.

PRACTICE LEADERSHIP: We are enhancing practice leadership by providing targeted development through Every Moment Has Potential learning modules, updated guides, and an ongoing Community of Practice. Senior leaders will maintain a focus on practice leadership, with managers increasing their presence on site to observe and give feedback.

Through these initiatives, **Unisson will continue to lead with heart and evidence**, ensuring people with disability experience meaningful engagement, strong relationships, and truly person-led support every day.

JOSH'S STORY: RIDING TOWARDS FREEDOM WITH SCOTT BY HIS SIDE

Josh is the kind of person who doesn't just dream, he builds. At 27, with a love for bikes and a drive to do things his way, he's spent the last few years creating a life that truly reflects who he is.

For the past eight years, he's been supported by Unisson through our Supported Living service. But this story isn't about support in the traditional sense. It's about choice, passion, and a young man determined to create his own road forward, one ride at a time. And riding alongside him? Scott, his long-time support worker and mate.

Josh's journey started with a mobility scooter. Like many young people, he wanted more freedom to get to social groups and catch up with friends. So, he did what any determined rider would do, he made it his own. With Scott learning right beside him, Josh kitted out his scooter with fog lights, LED strips, and speakers so he could ride safely (and to his favourite tunes) at night.

But that was just the beginning.

From scooters to e-bikes to petrol-powered machines, Josh's love for bikes took off. He saved up for every new ride himself, researched modifications, and learned what worked through experience. His confidence grew with every bump, turn, and upgrade.

Soon he was riding to Coles to volunteer, gaining work experience and building connections. With Scott's steady encouragement, Josh pushed his goals even further, modifying an off-road petrol bike into a fully electric, road-legal machine. He even became the first person his instructors had ever seen to get a learner's licence on an electric bike.

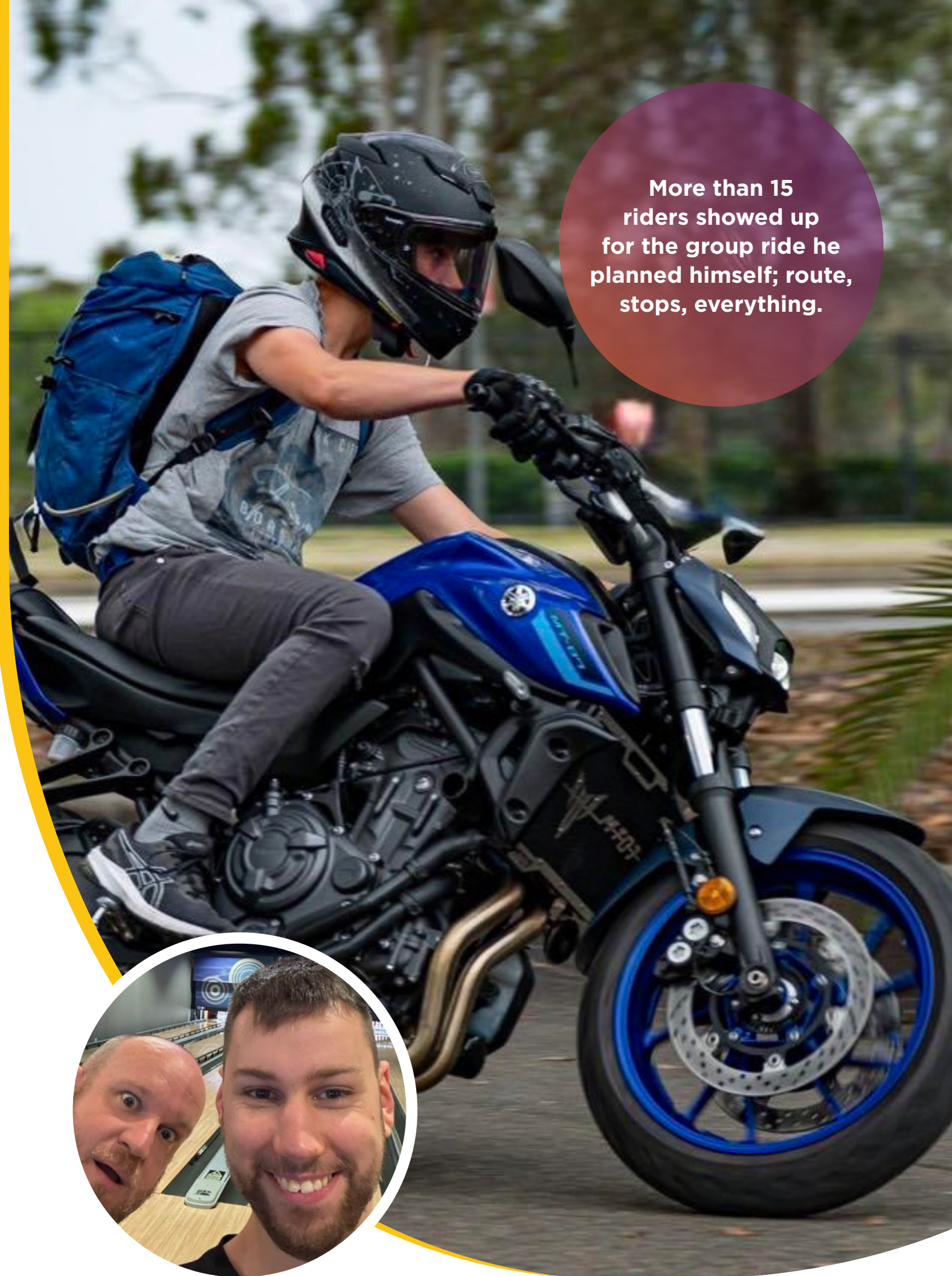
And he didn't stop there.

Josh bought and sold bikes, switched between petrol and electric, and picked up new skills with every ride. He eventually got his full motorbike licence and, by then, was doing all the mods himself and sending Scott photos along the way like any proud mate would.

But Josh's biggest moment came when he decided to share his love for riding with others. He went door to door at local bike shops, shared invites on social media, and rallied the community. More than 15 riders showed up for the group ride he planned himself; route, stops, everything. It was a day of connection, shared passion, and proof of what happens when someone has the freedom and encouragement to follow their spark.

Through it all, Scott never led the way, he simply walked (and rode) beside Josh, offering support without stepping in front. Because this journey? Every decision, every challenge, every win, it's all Josh.

More than 15 riders showed up for the group ride he planned himself; route, stops, everything.



WE'RE EXCITED TO SHARE THE VIBRANT AND JOYFUL STORY OF DEE.

Dee has been part of our Unisson community for almost four years and from the moment you meet her, her personality immediately shines through! She lives life fully and never lets CP get in the way of her dreams.

Recently, Dee and her housemates moved into a beautiful Supported Independent Living (SIL) home better suited to their support needs and lifestyle. A chic, welcoming space that's not only more accessible but also gives everyone the room and comfort to live life their way.

"Me, Annie and Mel live together in a big house," Dee says with a smile. "It's a better house. More space... I love it."

One of her favourite spaces in the new dig? Her living room! It's where she masters the art of relaxation, crafts up a storm, and watches her favourite movies. It's her personal chill zone, and yes, she's got better taste in movies than most of us!

Dee's not just about cozy movie nights. She's out there making the most out of life—dancing like nobody's watching, chopping it up in karate, and going out with friends. "I like dancing," she beams. "And karate... and going out with my boyfriend."

Her energy is limitless, and thanks to her support squad, Nicki and Nik, she's always ready to rock and roll. Their support, warm approach and genuine connection with Dee make all the difference — helping her feel confident and ready to take on each day.

Dee's story is a reminder that feeling comfortable, heard, and supported are what truly shape a good life. It's about having the right environment and people by your side.

At Unisson, this is what support looks like — creating spaces where people feel safe, valued and truly seen. Where they have real choice, comfort and support to live life their way.

"Me, Annie and Mel live together in a big house, It's a better house. More space... I love it."

Dee



DECLAN'S STORY: FROM GROUND WORKS TO OPEN EMPLOYMENT.

When Declan first joined Ground Works, he came in with a clear goal in mind: to build up his skills, grow his confidence, and one day secure a job in open employment. He knew it wouldn't happen overnight, but he was ready to put in the work, and the Ground Works team was right there beside him from the start.

Over the next three years, Declan showed up, gave it his all, and steadily developed his gardening techniques and professional skills. With the encouragement and guidance of Liam, Brian and Bryce, he gained not only practical experience but also a strong sense of purpose and direction. The transformation was clear, Declan wasn't just learning how to do the job, he was learning to believe in his own ability to do it well.

Fast forward to today, and Declan has achieved what he set out to do. He's now working with a highly respected gardening company on the Northern Beaches, an exciting new chapter that reflects how far he's come.

Declan's final day at Ground Works was filled with emotion, smiles, and a few tears. It marked the end of a chapter, but not the end of the connection. The Ground Works team couldn't be prouder and will always be cheering him on from the sidelines. It's never really goodbye when you're part of the Unisson community.



*Click here
to watch Declan's
interview.*

Declan wasn't just learning how to do the job, he was learning to believe in his own ability to do it well.



ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND THANK YOU

We would like to extend our appreciation and thanks to everyone who has contributed to Unisson's success this year. To our incredible staff, who embody our values of generosity, inclusion, courage, and creativity every day, thank you for your constant dedication to providing high-quality, person-centered care. Your commitment to finding the 'YES' in every situation is what makes Unisson such a special place for our clients and their families. To our clients and their families, we are deeply grateful for the trust you place in us. Your stories, resilience, and courage inspire us to continually improve and innovate, ensuring we meet your needs in every way possible. To our partners and stakeholders, including our Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) providers, industry colleagues, and the broader community, your collaboration and support have been invaluable in helping us reach new heights this year.

It always starts
with heart.



CONNECT WITH US



1300 266 222



hello@unisson.org.au



unissondisability.org.au

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



/unissondisability



@unissondisability



@Unisson Disability

CORPORATE SUPPORT OFFICE

Level 1, 108-114 George Street
Hornsby, NSW 2077

REGISTERED NDIS PROVIDER

ABN: 28 613 272 772
ACN: 613 272 772
NDIS Provider Number: 14707640

All images and film footage
are used with consent.
01032023ALL