

STAYING CONNECTED

EDITION FOUR, DECEMBER 2024



CEO MESSAGE

As we approach the end of 2024, I want to take this opportunity to reflect on what has been an incredible year for OC Connections. Together, we've achieved so much, thanks to the dedication of our participants, families, staff, and supporters.

This year, OC Connections celebrated some significant milestones. We were thrilled to win both the Not-for-Profit category and the Business of the Year Award at the Monash Business Awards, a testament to the impact of our social enterprise.



Our first group of employees completed the Dual Diploma of Leadership & Management and Competitive Systems & Practices with the Academy of Healthcare. Their innovative ideas, such as the wellness-focused staff room in Day Support, highlight the power of education in driving meaningful change.

In 2024, many of our participants made great strides toward achieving their goals. Whether in employment, social activities, or independent living, it's been inspiring to witness their journeys.

We also marked a significant milestone with the merger between OC Connections and TDT, bringing together two organisations with shared values and a commitment to creating opportunities for people living with disabilities.

Looking ahead to 2025, I'm excited to announce that the new activity schedule for Day Support will be rolled out. It features a variety of engaging programs designed to enhance skills, foster friendships, and promote independence. Additionally, the Clayton housing project continues to progress, with kitchens and bathrooms recently installed. This project will provide modern, accessible housing to support our residents' needs.

As we enter the festive season, I would like to thank each of you for being part of the OC Connections community. Your support makes everything we achieve possible. On behalf of everyone at OC Connections, I wish you a joyous Christmas and a safe, happy holiday break.

Here's to another year of opportunities, growth, and achievements in 2025!

Carol Berry
Chief Executive Officer
The Disability Trust



CELEBRATING STAFF GRADUATES IN LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

We are proud to announce that 10 of our employees have successfully graduated from the Dual Diploma of Leadership & Management (BSB50420) and Competitive Systems & Practices (MSS50322) with the Academy of Healthcare.

This comprehensive program, studied over 12 training sessions delivered in the workplace by the wonderful facilitator Maree O'Dwyer, equipped our team with advanced skills in leadership, management, and systems thinking.

With training scheduled one day per month, participants were able to balance their professional responsibilities while receiving ongoing support from industry experts.

The course covers a wide range of topics, including strategic leadership, continuous improvement, and effective team management, with a focus on developing competitive systems and practices. These skills enable participants to lead confidently, enhance operational efficiency, and foster positive workplace cultures.

Our graduates have already begun applying their knowledge in practical ways, including transforming our Day Support office by creating a wellness-focused staff room. This space is designed to promote rest, relaxation, and healthy habits, and offers employees a sanctuary to recharge and participate in wellness initiatives.

OC Connections is committed to investing in our workforce, and we are proud to offer further learning opportunities like this dual diploma. We believe that continued professional development is essential to strengthening our teams and enhancing the quality of the services we provide.

MARIA'S WORK EXPERIENCE AT ACCIONA

Meet Maria.

Maria is a Supported Employee of OC Connections Enterprises. Over the years, she's trialed several different areas of OCCE – including packing and assembly, car washing, and administration – until settling comfortably into our document management team.

Maria has such an eagerness to learn that when ACCIONA reached out to Nancy at OCCE with a new work experience opportunity for people with disability, Maria jumped on it. She sent in her expression of interest and, after shortlisting and touring the ACCIONA offices, she started her role with Alice in reception.

“First week was daunting, it was scary. Once I got to know everyone it was just like, okay, I feel really comfortable.”

Maria, OCCE Supported Employee

ACCIONA's work experience program was conducted alongside OCCE, ensuring that both Maria and the organisation had the support they needed if they faced any obstacles in the workplace.

Katrina, Maria's key worker, supported her initial training and integration into the offices, and was always one call away if she required any assistance during her placement.

But it was seamless, and Maria fit right in.

During her weeks at ACCIONA, Maria learned many new things from Alice, the Administration Officer who runs the reception desk.



They quickly built a strong rapport and worked well alongside each other, providing support to the construction and engineering teams in their day-to-day routines.

Carla, ACCIONA's Industry Capability and Inclusion Advisor, spoke on the success of the work experience program and Maria's development throughout her time with the organisation.

Carla says that Maria has “absolutely smashed it” in her role and has been receiving positive feedback from others on Maria's positive energy and improved confidence.

The success of this program has prompted conversations within the organisation on how to create more potentially long-term opportunities for people with disabilities, aiming to drive real change in the sector.

Programs like these are crucial in opening doors for people with disabilities who struggle to find employment regardless of their experience and capabilities.

OCC Enterprises is always seeking opportunities for growth and professional development for our Supported Employees, whether it be a short-term work experience program or a long-term Open Employment position.



HONOURING OC CONNECTIONS' LONG-SERVING EMPLOYEES

At OC Connections, we believe in recognising and celebrating the dedication of our employees who contribute to enriching the lives of the people we support.

Recently, we proudly honoured a group of exceptional individuals who have reached remarkable service milestones, marking 5, 10, 15, 20, and even 40 years of service with our organisation.

Each of these employees received a certificate to acknowledge their hard work, commitment, and the positive impact they've made on the lives of people living with disabilities.

Special congratulations go to Naureen Viriani and Michelle Jacobs, who have both served for 15 years, Theresa McNeil for 20 years of service, and Heather Day, who reached an extraordinary milestone of 40 years.

Heather Day's four decades of service are nothing short of inspiring. Her unwavering dedication to our supported employees and her role in helping them develop new skills and achieve their work goals, particularly through the wage assessment process, reflects her deep care and commitment. Over the years, she has built strong, trusted relationships with everyone she works with, and her loyalty and passion for her work shine brightly.

The award recipients all share common traits: their unwavering commitment, dedication, and hard work in enriching the lives of the people we serve. They bring grace, skill, and positivity to their roles, making a lasting impact on our organization and the community.

We thank each of them for their service, and we are proud to celebrate these incredible milestones together!

IN MEMORY OF SARAH SWALLOW



We are deeply saddened to share the news that in September, Sarah Swallow, a beloved resident of Allen Street, passed away after an illness. Sarah passed away peacefully at home, surrounded by her family.

She moved to Allen Street from her family home in 2019, and her presence was greatly admired by staff and fellow residents. She will be dearly missed.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Whitney Kendall and the team at Allen Street for their support of residents and staff, and especially for their care towards Sarah's mother and family.



IN MEMORY OF DONALD MUIR

It is with sadness that we report the passing of Donald Muir in October. Donald was a kind and gentle soul, who touched the lives of many within our community. Donald joined the OC Connections' community in 2001, moving to Allen Street. Over the years, he found new homes at George Street in 2011 and later at Delia Street in 2017, where he spent his days enjoying the company of his housemates.

Donald had an easy-going nature, often found relaxing, watching movies and TV, or catching up on memories through his cherished photo albums. He delighted in outings to the farm and was always ready for a game of catch or to rearrange his wardrobe - one of his favourite pastimes. Donald had a special fondness for music and loved attending discos and the Babba tribute show.

He will be remembered fondly as a true gentleman with a calm presence. May he rest in peace, forever in our hearts.

PHIL IS “EXPANDING HORIZONS” AT TAFE



When did you know what you wanted to do for a career? Phil, a Supported Employee at OCC Enterprises, is still figuring that out.

He echoes the sentiment of many that there are too many options to choose from, but at the same time, he's not sure he fits into any of those. As someone with a disability, it's hard to find ongoing employment in the open job market, but Phil is determined to find his place with the support of OCC Enterprises.

Phil has taken short courses in the past and has worked in several areas of OCC Enterprises including packing and assembly, administration and document management. He enjoys the variability of tasks, the flexibility of his workplace, and he fits comfortably into the social dynamic of the Supported Employment team, but sometimes he feels restless. He wants to try new things and he wants to find his passion.

Recently, Phil noticed a flyer on the OCCE bulletin board promoting a short course at Holmesglen TAFE on job seeker skills. With encouragement and advice from his key worker Meredith and manager Athena, Phil jumped into the new learning opportunity to refresh his knowledge and consider what his calling might be.

The two-day course, “Expanding Horizons”, workshopped planning pathways and practiced workplace communication and self-advocacy. He learned how to stand up for himself and use confident language such as “I know” the value of my abilities instead of “I believe” or “I think” that my abilities are valuable. The class worked on pitching their capabilities and interests, alongside formal resume building and writing cover letters.

TAFE is structured around many different learning styles, including group discussions, presentations from tutors, workshopping written components and watching educational videos. The variability allows for each student to learn in their different ways with the support of helpful teachers.

The overall aim of the course is to get people with disabilities job-ready and excited about their employment journey, while cultivating peer-support and social opportunities within the community. Students ate lunch as a group on both days, utilising their short time together to create long-term friendships. Phil stays in touch with some of his peers, following their progress on searching for the right job and encouraging them on their journey.

Phil learned a lot in the short course and feels reinvigorated to try new things.

“If you want to learn some new stuff, or stuff you already know but you just want bit of a refresher, just go for it. It may help you in finding a new path to what you want to do,” Phil advised.

Phil has ideas for what he wants to try next, including further education opportunities through TAFE and OCC Enterprises. He's interested in IT and Communications, sports, and literature, and is excited to work with his support systems at OCCE to try new pathways into potential open employment.



OC CONNECTIONS AT THE NATIONAL ROADS & TRAFFIC EXPO

In October, OC Connections had the exciting opportunity to exhibit at the National Roads & Traffic Expo for the first time! As Australia's largest event for the roads and traffic management industry, the expo brought together professionals from across the supply chain, including road designers, engineers, contractors, and government agencies.

At the event, we showcased our OC Eco T-Top Bollard®, a premiere eco-friendly product that's 100% recycled and locally made. The expo allowed us to highlight the environmental benefits of our bollard, which helps save fossil fuels, reduce waste, and provide sustainable, long-lasting solutions for traffic management.

We were proud to share how our innovative bollard is not only environmentally friendly but also supports social enterprise by creating meaningful employment opportunities.

The expo was an excellent platform for us to network with industry leaders, local governments, and transport agencies, strengthening connections and contributing to Australia's future infrastructure.





CELEBRATING OUR TEAM ON INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

At OC Connections, the International Day of People with Disability (IDPwD) is a powerful opportunity to celebrate inclusion, respect, and the incredible contributions of people within our community. This year's theme, "Amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future," highlights the importance of empowering individuals to lead, shape, and inspire.

At OC Connections, we see this theme brought to life daily by our exceptional team members, supported employees and volunteers, whose dedication and passion create positive change. Today, we proudly recognise individuals who are leading by example, driving inclusivity, and enriching our community.

★ Denis

Denis is a Team Leader in Independence, and consistently ensures our Day Support programs run smoothly, creating enriching experiences for participants. His support for both participants and staff sets a positive tone and fosters an environment where everyone feels valued.

★ Mark

Mark is a Supported Employee at OC Connections Enterprises. Mark's steadfast commitment to representing participant voices across multiple OCC committees has made a significant impact. His efforts ensure that the perspectives and needs of participants are heard and respected at every level of our organisation. Through his leadership, Mark amplifies the voices of others, ensuring they have a platform to be heard.

★ Phillip

Phillip plays a key role in the Employee Consultative and Wellbeing Committee, advocating for his colleagues and work area. His dedication promotes collaboration and care, fostering a culture where all team members feel supported and empowered to thrive.

★ Scott

Scott is an active advocate for the initiatives of the Employee Consultative and Wellbeing Committee. His leadership and enthusiasm help spread awareness and foster inclusivity, contributing to a positive workplace environment. Scott exemplifies what it means to champion the voices and initiatives that build a stronger, more inclusive future.

★ Allyson

Allyson's volunteer work at OC Connections demonstrates her exceptional commitment and initiative. Her dedication enriches our community and reflects the core values that define our organization. Allyson's contributions show how everyone, in any role, can lead by example and inspire meaningful change.

We congratulate Denis, Mark, Phillip, Scott, and Allyson for their remarkable contributions! Their passion and commitment embody this year's IDPwD theme and remind us all of the power of leadership in creating an inclusive and sustainable future. Together, we continue to build a community where everyone can lead, contribute, and thrive.