

Research and Innovation

2022-23



About Able Australia

Established over 50 years ago, Able Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that provides personalised support for our clients through Day Services, Deafblind Services, Supported Independent Living, Specialist Disability Accommodation, Allied Health and Positive Behaviour Support Services, Community Support and Transport Services for seniors.

Able has grown from providing support to the deafblind community into an innovative and diverse organisation with varied service offerings. Able’s mission is to build on our heritage and support our clients to reach their potential. Our passionate and dedicated staff and volunteers proudly support our clients, guided by our values of Trust, Respect, Excellence and Kindness.

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Preface

“Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much” Helen Keller

Our approach to research and innovation is driven by our commitment to enhance the lives and outcomes of people with disability. To deliver Better days, every day, with and for our clients.

We achieve this through building strong and active partnerships with our clients, our communities (both nationally and internationally), our academic partners and service providers.

Our Focus is:

1. Using research and knowledge to improve evidence-based practice and thus the experience of people with disability
2. Supporting staff to improve their skills and approaches
3. Responding to changes in our regulatory and service environment; and
4. Developing partnerships with experts and industry.

It is through expanding the evidence base and knowledge in the disability sector that we will achieve real and measurable outcomes for all people living with disability, their families and communities.

Research and Innovation projects

For many years we have proudly been involved in various research and innovation projects partnering with clients, universities and other service providers. Such projects aim to provide positive impacts to people living with disability. Research and innovation projects are instrumental as we strive to increase our evidence based to improve the services.

Investing in research and innovation provides us with an invaluable opportunity to grow our knowledge in the areas of needs associated with disability and deafblindness, as well as accessible communication, assistive technology and much more.

Deafblind Technology Research Project	
Partner organisation:	Swinburne University
Funding source:	National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) ILC Grant
Project aim:	To evaluate the utility and adaptability of technology to support people with deafblindness. To assess and deliver appropriate technologies to people with deafblindness to achieve personally defined goals. The project involved recruiting people with deafblindness (both residential and community participants) and testing their use of assistive technology, over a period of time. It has been found that combining technologies with one another, one-to-one human support and recognising the unique needs of and attitudes towards technology have played a key role in better outcomes. Initial findings of the research were presented at the National Deafblind Conference and at the Australian Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Association (ARATA) Conference.

Individualised Supported Living (ISL)	
Partner organisation:	Araluen, The University of Melbourne
Funding source:	Nil (Able allocation: \$15,000)
Project aim:	The Individualised Supported Living (ISL) framework was developed with people with disabilities and their families. The ISL framework was created to evaluate individualised living situations for people with disability that works for them. There are various models of ISL, such as living alone, co-residency, host/family arrangements and relationships. The Individualised Supported Living (ISL) training evaluation project found that the ISL framework is relevant and valid for both people living in group homes, and for people with deafblindness. The project aimed to develop a training package, teaching people who work in the disability sector to be able to undertake an ISL assessment. The training involved seven trainees participating in an 8-week course, with approximately 40 hours of work.

Deafblind Communication Building professional competency in tactile communication	
Partner organisation:	Monash University – School of Research and Engagement, Australian Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Association (ARATA) Conference.
Funding source:	Australian Research Council
Project aim:	The objective of this project is to professionally develop deafblind support staff including communication guides, interpreters and disability support workers regarding how to communicate with clients using tactile communication. Evaluation of staff training based on research findings will be used to further improve training packages being developed. The Deafblind Professionals report has shown that professionals working with deafblind people face a number of similar challenges around the globe. The data paints a picture of a dedicated and experienced workforce that have overwhelmingly acquired their skills through on-the-job training and experience.

Communicating Health Information To People In Specialist Disability Accommodation	
Partner organisation:	Deakin University, Australian Group Supporting Communication Inclusion (AGOSCI)
Funding source:	Medical Research Futures Fund in partnership with Monash University
Project aim:	This project analysed how residents living in Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) access health information – specifically in relation to communicable diseases such as COVID-19. The project also aimed to identify any challenges or improvements to information accessibility that could be made in group homes. The project involved three data collection phases: 1. Staff interviews: These included interviews with residents and SDA support workers to establish current practice concerns. 2. Virtual house tours: For each SDA, a member of staff familiar with the environment (e.g. a support worker or house manager) completed a guided tour of the accommodation via video conference with the researchers. This was to observe resident and support workers engagement with COVID-19 public health information, and the communication strategies used to relay this information to residents. 3. Delphi study: A modified e-Delphi study with a sample of key stakeholders, including representatives from SDA service providers and relevant consumer advocacy organisations was undertaken, to establish a consensus around key communication priorities and recommended practices.
Outcomes:	• Final Project Report in the Inclusive Health Communication in Disability Accommodation.

Effectiveness Of Tailored Covid-19 Messages For Vulnerable Australians	
Partner organisation:	Expression Australia, Yooralla, Wallara and Enliven
Funding source:	Medical Research Futures Fund
Project aim:	1. Investigated tailored COVID-19 messaging for marginalised and vulnerable groups to improve access to information. For this purpose, a survey was created. A diverse range of groups were targeted, including people with disability, deaf and hard of hearing people. 2. Project outcomes: Presentation at Inclusive Health Communication Symposium, Deakin University and Journal Article: Effectiveness of tailored COVID-19 messages for vulnerable Australians: A study protocol

We innovate with new projects, new ways of doing things

Intergen Connections

This year, an Intergen Connections program was introduced in Queensland, connecting seniors with a Kindergarten by weekly visits. Launching in Raceview, Plainlands, Rosewood and Ipswich. Demand for the program is increasing and we plan to roll the project out to all three local government areas Able operates in.

This project aims to enrich the lives of our clients by fostering a sense of connection and understanding between generations with the potential to reduce social isolation among seniors and help pre-school aged children to develop empathy and social skills.



Lasting Letters

Launching this year, our Lasting Letters is a penpal activity program in which seniors get together with a morning tea, information session and write letters. The letters are mailed to their receivers who are socially isolated at home within the local area.

Lasting Letters addresses the social isolation of seniors while fostering meaningful connections within the community. The aim of the program is to enrich the lives of both writers and receivers.

Seniors Health Hub

We held a Seniors Health Hub in early 2023 to provide a central point for seniors to access health providers and information. Health providers on the day included Hearing Australia, Breast Screen Queensland, Bowel Screen, Dementia Australia, Meals on Wheels, CiMAS and Prime Performance Physio. Many of the providers provided free testing on the day and we plan to hold three similar events in the new year.

Managing COVID-19

COVID-19 continues to be a key driver in the way we innovate and adapt. As a result, we have developed a 'business as usual' approach that involves:

- Staff trained in COVID safe practices to ensure we can work in a COVID positive environment.
- Incident Command Centre roles translated into key task lists.
- Streamlined communication with State Government public health units.
- PPE stock regularly delivered to houses according to expected usage.
- QR codes tracking RAT usage to reduce administrative loads.
- Using various MS forms to automate data collation.

'Come and try' deafblind tech day at our day service in Northcote

A 'Come and Try' Day was held onsite at our Northcote Day Service. Clients and staff tried a range of assistive technology including smart glasses, technology to assist in the kitchen, smart home technology, and community access technology. This included an app to direct clients within buildings using haptic signals.



Heidelberg development

Plans were approved by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) in early 2023 for our Supported Independent Living home in Heidelberg, with construction currently underway. Clients visit the site frequently to assess progress.

As part of the project, the DFFH collaborated with our Deafblind Services Teams and Able's Deafblind advisor to ensure that all aspects of the design of the new home are designed with our Deafblind client needs in mind with a large component being assistive technology.

Clients and their families were heavily involved in the design process to ensure the house met the client's needs. The new home build is scheduled to be completed in 2024.

Better Days, Every Day

Better days, every day brings together a range of smaller projects under a single banner and integrates our model of care.

The key foundations underpinning the Better Days, Every Day framework are:

- To ensure each client's aspirations and experiences inform the way Able provides support for the client now and into the future (client voice).
- To optimise the primary relationship, being that between the client and their support worker/s. This relationship is key for client wellbeing and growth, as well as for staff satisfaction.

Better days, every day is based on a simple question - 'what can we do to make this day a better day for clients and staff?'

These concepts are used to direct actions in hearing the client voice, developing skilled and attuned staff, providing best practice active support to our clients, maximising communication opportunities for all clients, providing flexible programming options, implementing a 'Good to Great Homes' approach, providing clients with therapy interventions where required, commencing a leading practice behaviour support service and regularly reviewing and improving our physical environment and the resources we have within it.

Supervision

Key to implementing the suite of Better Days projects is creating an effective staffing base which will support the change. As such, Able has focused on models of staff supervision and support.

We continue to work with Monash University on a qualitative study which aims to explore supervision from the perspective of three key staffing groups in the disability workforce (disability support workers, team leaders and area managers) working with people with disability in supported accommodation services.



Student placements

In a bid to promote the disability sector as a future career option, we offer student placement to a range of allied health students including Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Art Therapy from a number of universities including Monash University, Swinburne University and Latrobe University.





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