



 Royal Rehab Group
EMPOWERING INDEPENDENCE

2025 Annual Report



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Royal Rehab Group acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters, and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Message from our Chairman and CEO

As Chairman and CEO of Royal Rehab Group, we are proud to present this year's Annual Report. Our vision for a world without limits for people living with disability, injury, or illness, guides everything we do, from the services we deliver to the innovations we pursue, and it remains at the heart of our purpose.

Resilience in a time of change

This year has been one of both challenge and progress. The health and disability sectors have faced significant pressures, including sector reform, economic constraints, workforce shortages, and increasing community need. Despite this complex environment, Royal Rehab Group has remained focused on what matters most: delivering high-quality care and supporting the people and communities we serve.

Our teams have met challenges with resilience, professionalism, and innovation. Highlights from the year include achieving short-notice hospital accreditation with no non-conformities and going live with the payroll functionality of Dayforce, our new workforce platform. While full Human Capital Management functionality is still being implemented, this milestone is already improving the experience of thousands of staff and represents a major step toward replacing complexity with clarity.

In a time of change, a combination of purpose, agility, and dedication has allowed us to continue moving forward with confidence and momentum. As we reflect on the year past, we remain committed to our vision and excited for the opportunities ahead.

Laying strong foundations

We know that delivering exceptional care relies on more than frontline expertise; it requires the systems, partnerships, and leadership to back it.

That's why we continue to strengthen our organisation from the inside out. The rollout of Dayforce is a key part of this effort. Once fully implemented, it will provide a single, trusted platform to support and empower our workforce, helping our people spend less time on administration and more time on what matters most: providing outstanding care.

Our large-scale dysphagia and CPR training initiative reached more than 400 frontline staff and is an example of collaboration across teams and disciplines, with a lasting impact on client safety.

Importantly, we also grew our reach. Through our merger with Precision Health Care in Dubbo, New South Wales, we expanded high-quality allied health services to regional communities. And by opening a new Royal Rehab LifeWorks hub at Ryde-Eastwood Leagues Club, we're bringing therapy closer to where people live and connect.

Honouring legacy, inspiring tomorrow

This year we celebrated 125 years since Royal Rehab was founded by Susan Schardt, a visionary who believed in dignity and independence for all, at a time when few others did.

Susan's legacy lives on in every service we provide and every life we help enhance. From the success of our 125th Anniversary Gala to the unveiling of a Heritage NSW Blue Plaque in her honour, we have taken the time to reflect, celebrate, and recommit to our purpose.

It was also a year of powerful personal stories, like Alex, a former intern at Sargood on Collaroy who now helps to lead the same program that empowered him. Or Darcy and Ameera, whose journeys from local community members to international athletes were made possible through the support of the Royal Rehab Foundation.

Looking ahead

We enter the year ahead with optimism, grounded by a 125-year legacy of service and commitment.

We are deeply grateful to our staff, partners, clients, and supporters who power our shared vision to break down barriers and build a more inclusive future for all.

Together, we're not just responding to change – we're helping shape what comes next. An organisation not defined by limitations, but by possibility.

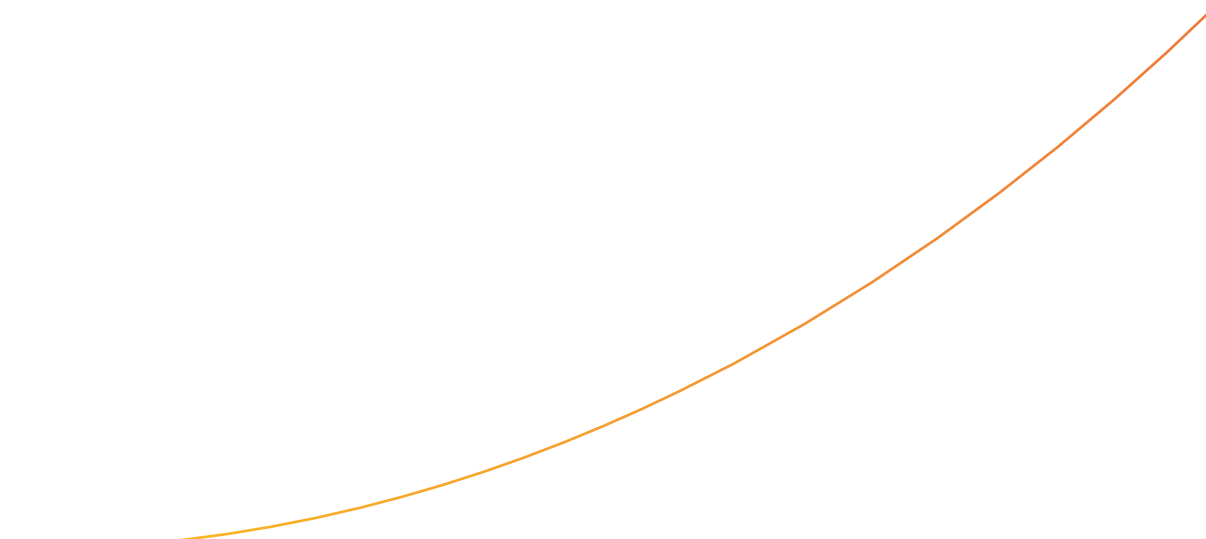
Tony Staveley AM
Chairman

Matthew Mackay
Chief Executive Officer



Highlights





A sustainable future

This year, as we marked 125 years of service, we continued to build a strong, sustainable future. In this section, we highlight initiatives and achievements that reflect our ongoing commitment to innovation, quality care, and greater access, all in support of the people and communities we serve.

Hospital accreditation

In December 2024 and January 2025, our hospital sites, Royal Rehab Ryde, Royal Rehab Private Ryde, and Royal Rehab Private Petersham, underwent short-notice assessments against the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards. The results were outstanding, with Royal Rehab Ryde and Royal Rehab Private Ryde meeting every criterion with no non-conformities, an achievement shared by only a small number of hospitals.

Short-notice accreditation is a true test of consistent, everyday excellence in safety and quality. This result reflects the high standard of patient-centred care delivered across all our hospitals and the dedication of our teams in embedding robust practices into daily operations. It demonstrates our readiness to meet rigorous standards at any time.

Assessors highlighted a number of key strengths, including structured care delivery, strong clinical governance, and meaningful staff engagement, all of which contribute to safe, effective, and high-quality care. These outcomes reinforce Royal Rehab Group's broader commitment to strengthen systems, support our people, and enhance outcomes for the individuals and communities we serve.

This achievement is a testament to our culture of accountability, collaboration, and excellence. Most importantly, it highlights our ongoing focus on delivering safe, effective care that meets the evolving needs of our clients.

“Excellence in care doesn't happen by chance. It's the result of dedicated people working together to make a real difference.”

TROY TRGETARIC, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HOSPITALS

Dayforce launch

This year, we strengthened our digital foundations to support Royal Rehab Group's broader ambition: empowering our people and delivering better outcomes for every customer we serve.

A major milestone was the successful launch of our integrated payroll system through the Dayforce platform, a significant technology investment designed to simplify processes, improve data access, and create a more seamless working environment for our workforce across the Group.

While we have gone live with payroll, the full Human Capital Management functionality is still being implemented. Once complete, Dayforce will replace multiple legacy HR and payroll systems and provide a single, trusted source of truth for employee information. This will enhance collaboration, improve accuracy and transparency, and give leaders and staff real-time insights to make faster, more informed decisions that benefit our customers and services.

The project was driven by the need for greater consistency following our merger with disability provider Breakthru three years ago. Managing multiple systems had created unnecessary complexity. By implementing a unified platform, we aim to support our people more effectively, reducing administrative burden and freeing them to focus on what matters most: delivering high-quality care and support.

The payroll system went live following thousands of test scenarios to ensure it could handle the full range of employment conditions across the organisation. This milestone already simplifies everyday tasks, and the upcoming Human Capital Management functionality will take this a step further.

Dayforce is a key part of our broader ambition to embed smart, people-centred technology across the organisation. By investing in systems that improve visibility and enable proactive workforce management, we are creating an environment where our staff are empowered to do their best work, and where our customers ultimately receive better, more responsive care.

Dysphagia and CPR training

At Royal Rehab Group, client safety is more than a standard; it is a shared commitment that unites our people and our purpose.

This year, we undertook a major training initiative to strengthen the capability of our disability support teams in two critical areas: managing dysphagia (swallowing disorders), which can pose serious health risks if not properly supported, and delivering effective CPR in emergency situations.

Led by Royal Rehab Group's Executive Manager, Learning and Development, Rachel Steele, each session delivered best-practice training in both dysphagia management and CPR.

Kate Makin, Professional Leader, Speech Pathology, along with the speech pathology team at Royal Rehab Ryde, guided participants through recognising signs of swallowing difficulties, modifying food and fluid textures, and implementing safe, person-centred mealtime strategies.

To complement this, Breakthru College facilitators provided hands-on CPR and choking response training, ensuring our disability support staff are prepared to act swiftly in emergency situations.

A total of 42 sessions were held across Ryde, Campbelltown, and Macquarie Fields, with over 400 staff taking part. Participants included disability support workers from Breakthru's Home and Living team, community services staff from Rydalmere, and managers from across the organisation.

This large-scale project was successfully delivered through strong collaboration across the Group, led by the Breakthru Disability Education Team, Royal Rehab Ryde Speech Pathologists, and Breakthru College first aid facilitators.

Thanks to this combined effort, the program is now regarded as a benchmark and stands as a model of our ongoing commitment to safe, high-quality, person-centred training. Most importantly, it ensures that every client is supported by someone who is informed, confident, and prepared.



Sargood internship program

Launched in 2023, Sargood Foundation commenced the fully funded Internship Program, created to support people with spinal cord injury in returning to the workforce. The program's impact has been significant, benefiting both the individuals involved and the organisation as a whole.

Alex Richter, the program's first intern, has since transitioned into a Project Officer role at Sargood on Collaroy. Bringing creativity, innovation, and lived experience, Alex plays a crucial role in shaping programs and activities that are practical, empowering, and engaging.

In his role, Alex designs and develops assistive technologies such as 3D-printed mobility accessories and adaptive gaming devices. He's also introduced inclusive activities like an indoor 4WD remote-control track, created to suit people with a wide range of functional needs. These initiatives directly reflect Royal Rehab Group's strategic focus on delivering personalised experiences that promote independence and wellbeing.

Beyond program development, Alex provides vital peer support. He leads adaptive gaming sessions, drone demonstrations, and offers practical advice to guests on equipment use, travel, and daily living. He now also coordinates the internship program itself, overseeing recruitment and mentoring new interns, with a fourth participant currently in place.



Alex's journey demonstrates how a program designed to create opportunities can also deliver real organisational value, deepening peer connections, enhancing service relevance, and enriching the customer experience.

Through the generous support of Sargood Foundation, this internship program at Sargood on Collaroy is not only creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability, but also driving experience-led innovation that enhances our services and enriches the communities we serve.

Precision Health Care joins Royal Rehab Group

In July 2024, Precision Health Care became part of Royal Rehab Group, marking an exciting step in our mission to improve access to high-quality health services in regional communities.

Based in Dubbo, New South Wales, Precision Health Care is a trusted provider of physiotherapy, exercise physiology, and rehabilitation services with strong local connections. By joining forces, we are combining local knowledge with national expertise to deliver care that is both personalised and far-reaching.

This partnership reflects Royal Rehab Group's broader objective to deliver exceptional care and support wherever it is needed, and reinforces our ongoing commitment to building strong, responsive services in collaboration with the communities we serve.

The Precision Health Care team now benefits from expanded clinical resources, shared systems, and enhanced professional development opportunities, while continuing to deliver the personalised, community-focused care they are known for.

Together, we are co-designing services that meet local needs, investing in workforce growth, and strengthening health and wellness programs across the region.

Royal Rehab LifeWorks at Ryde-Eastwood Leagues Club

In April 2025, Royal Rehab LifeWorks opened a new satellite service at Ryde-Eastwood Leagues Club, offering physiotherapy and massage therapy to club members and the broader community.

This partnership connects Royal Rehab Group with more than 40,000 club members, offering them easier access to our wide range of services, including our state-of-the-art rehabilitation hub in Ryde, to hospital care and disability supports across Sydney.

The new site also lays the groundwork for deeper collaboration with Ryde-Eastwood Leagues Club, which is evolving to meet the needs of a growing, retirement focused community with a strong interest in health and wellbeing.

The success of the model highlights the potential for future hubs in leagues clubs and other community settings, bringing high-quality allied health services closer to where people live and work.



Engagement with government

At Royal Rehab Group, we know that delivering world-class healthcare and disability support depends not only on the expertise of our teams, but also on the strength, sustainability, and design of the systems that underpin everything we do. That's why we continue to champion a future where policy, funding, and frontline service delivery are aligned to drive equitable access, innovation, and better outcomes for people living with disability or recovering from illness or injury.

Over the past year, we have deepened our engagement with government and sector stakeholders at all levels, sharing insights and contributing to discussions that shape the future of healthcare and disability support in Australia. Our advocacy has focused on key priorities including regional outreach, investment in innovation, workforce development, and sustainable funding models. Through these efforts, we aim to ensure that policy reflects the realities of frontline service delivery and the voices of the people we serve.

A highlight of our engagement has been hosting a series of government and political leaders at our sites. These visits provided an opportunity to showcase our programs, people, and technology-driven innovations that are enhancing outcomes and promoting greater independence for our clients. Visitors included:

- The Hon. Ryan Park MP, Minister for Health and Minister for Regional Health
- Jerome Laxale MP, Federal Member for Bennelong
- Jordan Lane MP, Shadow Minister for Health and Member for Ryde
- The Hon. Anthony Roberts MP, Member for Lane Cove
- The Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Minister for Social Services
- Kellie Sloane MP, NSW Shadow Minister for Health
- Gurmesh Singh MP, Shadow Minister for Regional Health and Member for Coffs Harbour
- A global delegation of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Network, facilitated by Liesl Tesch AM MP, NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Disability Inclusion

Each visit reinforced the importance of collaboration in shaping inclusive, innovative, and sustainable rehabilitation and disability services.



The discussions explored shared priorities around system design, workforce development, and improving access to care.

On a national level, our CEO, Matt Mackay, continues to represent Royal Rehab Group in sector-wide conversations, engaging with policymakers and departmental representatives in Canberra on workforce planning, sector sustainability, and the role of technology in care delivery. These interactions ensure that the realities and opportunities of frontline services are incorporated into broader strategic planning and system development.

Looking ahead, Royal Rehab Group remains committed to contributing to the long-term strength of the healthcare and disability sectors. By sharing what works, exploring new partnerships, and supporting system improvements, we continue to influence policy and shape services that benefit the people and communities we serve. Through ongoing engagement with decision-makers and sector partners, we are helping to build a more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable future for rehabilitation and disability services in Australia.





Honouring the past, building for the future

125 Year anniversary

This year, Royal Rehab proudly marked 125 years since its founding. A milestone that celebrates our enduring commitment to supporting people to live with greater independence, dignity, and purpose.

It was a moment to reflect on our journey, honour the people who have shaped our story, and pay tribute to our founder, Susan Schardt, whose vision laid the foundations for the work we continue to do today.

A night of support and celebration

To commemorate this milestone, we hosted a Charity Gala Dinner at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, bringing together friends, supporters, and partners for an evening dedicated to raising funds for life-changing adaptive technologies.

Hosted by long-time supporter and performer Monica Trapaga, the night featured a fireside conversation with Royal Rehab Foundation Chair Marilyn Speiser and two clients, one living with Parkinson's disease and the other recovering from a spinal cord injury. Both shared how access to technology and expert, multidisciplinary care had helped them regain confidence and independence.

The event successfully raised vital funds to support the purchase of assistive technologies that will continue to make a meaningful difference in people's lives.

Recognising a legacy of compassion and leadership

In October 2024, we proudly unveiled a Blue Plaque in honour of our founder Susan Schardt as part of the New South Wales Government's state-wide heritage initiative. The Blue Plaque program celebrates individuals and events that have shaped the state's history by installing commemorative plaques at publicly accessible locations. It aims to connect communities with their local heritage and highlight the people and stories that have enriched the fabric of New South Wales.

The unveiling ceremony was led by Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales and patron of Royal Rehab Group, and was attended by Royal Rehab Group Board members, staff, clients, and community members.

Susan Schardt was a passionate and pioneering advocate for people with disability at a time when support and awareness was absent. Even through the hardship of the Great Depression, she worked tirelessly to raise funds and expand services, laying the foundations for the values and direction that continues to guide Royal Rehab Group today.

“It is a wonderful way to recognise an incredible woman. Susan Schardt's compassion, leadership, and fierce advocacy paved the way for the inclusive and person-centred care we strive for today.”

TONY STAVELEY AM, ROYAL REHAB GROUP CHAIRMAN

The journey continues

Marking 125 years is not only a celebration of our past but also a commitment to the future.

While the world has changed since Susan Schardt laid the foundations of Royal Rehab, our purpose remains constant. We continue to support people to live the life they choose, with dignity, independence, and the right support behind them.

As we look ahead, we do so with determination, guided by compassion, collaboration and innovation. Drawing strength from our legacy, our people, and our partners, we are ready to meet evolving community needs and shape a future that is more inclusive, empowering, and full of possibility.

Royal Rehab Foundation

The Royal Rehab Foundation exists to support people when other funding options fall short. It provides practical assistance that helps individuals access the therapies, equipment, and services they need to live with greater independence, dignity, and confidence.

In the past year, the Foundation awarded more than \$50,000 in grants to clients facing financial hardship. This support covered a wide range of needs, from mobility aids and adaptive technology to funding opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach.

But more than financial assistance, the Foundation delivers belief. It says yes to potential, yes to goals, and yes to the idea that everyone deserves a fair chance. Whether it's helping someone access rehabilitation, reintegrate into the community after a hospital stay, build the skills to live more independently, or pursue excellence in sport, the Foundation is there to help people with disability to live life to the fullest.

Here are two stories that reflect what this support can make possible.

Darcy's story: From local courts to the Special Olympics

Darcy first picked up a basketball in primary school, and from that moment he was hooked. He loved the speed, the teamwork, and the thrill of seeing the ball swish through the net. Like many kids, he dreamed of one day wearing the green and gold for Australia.

As he moved through high school, that dream began to feel out of reach. Opportunities to play in an inclusive setting were rare, and the path forward was not clear. Still, Darcy refused to let go of his love for the game. He joined a local basketball competition where his determination, positive attitude, and natural talent quickly stood out.

His big break came when he was selected to represent New South Wales at the Ivor Burge MBE Championships, Australia's premier basketball event for athletes with an intellectual disability.





The opportunity was thrilling, but the costs were daunting. Registration fees, travel costs, and uniforms all added up.

With encouragement from his Employment Support Worker Corrina Down at Breakthru, Darcy applied for a Royal Rehab Foundation grant. The funding helped cover expenses, and with that support, Darcy stepped onto the court.

In the opening game, he made his mark by scoring seven points, including a memorable three-pointer, helping his team to victory. The experience fuelled his confidence and sparked an even bigger dream.

In 2025, that dream became reality when Darcy proudly pulled on an Australian jersey and competed at the Special Olympics. His journey from local courts to the international stage is a testament to his perseverance, passion, and the power of support from community and organisations like Royal Rehab.

Darcy's story reminds us that with determination and the right opportunities, dreams that once seemed out of reach can become extraordinary achievements.

“Playing for Australia was a dream come true. Getting that support meant everything and helped me believe in myself.”

DARCY

Ameera's story: A Paralympic dream realised

In 2016, Ameera's son encouraged her to try archery. Living with multiple sclerosis, she had been facing the physical and sclerosis (MS), challenges that come with the condition. Archery gave her a renewed sense of purpose and control. What began as a way to reconnect with herself quickly became a passion.

Over the following years, Ameera trained hard and progressed through the ranks. Her goal was to compete at the Paralympic Games and to show her son, and others, that MS did not mean giving up on your dreams.

As she prepared for the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, she hit a setback. The wheels on her wheelchair were more than six years old and needed replacing so she could compete safely.

The cost was high, and it was going to be difficult to make it happen.

With help from her occupational therapist at Royal Rehab LifeWorks Penrith, Ameera applied for a Royal Rehab Foundation grant. The funding came through in time to buy the new wheels she needed before heading to Paris.

Ameera made her Paralympic debut in the Women's Individual Compound Open and the Mixed Team Compound events, reaching the quarter-finals.

Her journey shows the impact of perseverance, careful planning, and practical support. By competing at this level, she demonstrates that living with MS does not mean giving up, and she continues to pursue her sport with focus, dedication, and skill.





Help us make a lasting impact

Darcy and Ameera's stories are just a glimpse of the difference the Royal Rehab Foundation makes in our community. Every grant supports someone's journey, a goal, or a life-changing moment. None of this would be possible without the generosity of our donors, whose support helps people take the next step towards the life they want.

There are many meaningful ways you can get involved:



One-time donations

Make an immediate impact by funding therapy sessions, mobility aids, or adaptive equipment for someone in need.



Recurring donations

Monthly or annual contributions provide a dependable source of funding that helps us plan and grow our programs sustainably.



Corporate sponsorships

Partner with us through sponsorships or matching gifts to show your organisation's commitment to social responsibility and support life-changing work.



In-kind donations

Gifts of equipment, technology, or services, like volunteering your time, allow us to stretch every dollar further and support more people.



Event sponsorship

Sponsor one of our fundraising events, such as community runs or charity luncheons, to boost visibility for your business while backing a great cause.



Tribute donations

Honour a loved one or mark a special occasion by donating in their name. It's a meaningful gesture that creates a lasting legacy.



Bequests

Leave a legacy of compassion through a gift in your will. You can choose to donate a specific amount, a portion of your estate, or particular assets.



Fundraise your way

Join one of our fundraising events or create your own, whether it's a bake sale, concert, or sporting challenge. Share your story, rally your community, and inspire others to give.

Your support of the Royal Rehab Foundation allows us to reach more people with the care, equipment, and therapies they need to live fuller, more independent lives.

Please be aware that the Foundation does not fund business expenses such as salaries or wages, nor does it cover items and services already available through other channels.



At a glance

Royal Rehab Ryde Public Services



Brain Injury Unit patients

58 PATIENT ADMISSIONS
49 COMMUNITY REHABILITATION
85 SPECIALIST BRAIN INJURY OUTPATIENTS



99

Multi-disciplinary clinic outpatients

82 PATIENT ADMISSIONS
68 VOCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES
619 COMMUNITY REHABILITATION SERVICES



Spinal Injury Unit patients

295 OUTREACH SERVICES
88 SPECIALIST OUTPATIENT SERVICES

Royal Rehab Private Ryde



831

Total patients supported

349 PATIENT ADMISSIONS
482 DAY REHABILITATION PATIENTS

Royal Rehab Private Petersham



813

Total patients supported

468 PATIENT ADMISSIONS
345 DAY REHABILITATION PATIENTS

Royal Rehab LifeWorks



3,559

Total number of clients supported across our Royal Rehab LifeWorks locations

Sargood on Collaroy



759

Total guests

96 FIRST TIME GUESTS
87% RETURN RATE

Precision Health Care



3,057

Clients supported

FNQ Health and Fitness



1,046

Clients supported

Breakthru Community Services



2,224

Customers supported

Disability Employment Services



862

Clients supported

Breakthru Home and Living Services



112

Clients supported

Family Mental Health Support Services



669

Families supported

Pathways Homelessness Program



39

Clients supported

Breakthru College



1,190

Students enrolled

Breaking Grounds



37

Work experience students



43,146

Hot drinks sold

Royal Rehab Foundation

\$136,471

Total donations amount



158

Total donors



256

Total donations



23

Total beneficiaries



49

Grants distributed

\$272,738

Grants distributed

A woman with Down syndrome, wearing a red shirt and blue pants, is kneeling and holding a small black and white dog. She is smiling and looking at the camera. The background is a blue wall with some decorative elements. The text "Our services" is overlaid in white.

Our services

Our services

At Royal Rehab Group, we deliver a wide range of person-centred health and disability services across hospitals, clinics, and community settings. We also provide targeted education programs that build the skills and expertise of staff across the sectors we serve. Through these services, we aim to support individuals to achieve greater independence, wellbeing, and quality of life.

Breakthru

Breakthru is Royal Rehab Group's dedicated disability services division, supporting people across Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria to live with greater independence, connection, and purpose.

Through a broad range of tailored services, Breakthru helps individuals develop everyday skills, access safe and supported accommodation, engage with their communities, and achieve their personal goals.

Our experienced teams work closely with each participant to ensure support is personalised and aligned with their aspirations.

Key areas of support include:

- **Supported Independent Living (SIL)**

Assistance with daily living tasks such as personal care, cooking, and household routines to support independence at home.

- **Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA)**

Purpose-built homes designed for people with high support needs, promoting safety, accessibility, and autonomy.

- **Respite and Short-Term Accommodation**

Planned or emergency short stays that offer support in a safe, comfortable environment.

- **Support Coordination**

Helping participants understand and manage their NDIS plans, connect with providers, and navigate complex service systems.

- **Social and Community Participation**

Encouraging meaningful involvement in community life through supported activities and new experiences.



- **Psychosocial Recovery Coaching**

Support from professionals with lived experience to empower individuals with psychosocial disability in achieving their recovery goals.

- **Employment Support**

Including School Leaver Employment Supports, Finding and Keeping a Job, and Disability Employment Services, all aimed at building confidence, skills, and pathways to meaningful work.

- **Family Mental Health Support Services**

Early intervention programs for children and families at risk of developing mental health challenges.



Royal Rehab LifeWorks

Royal Rehab LifeWorks provides personalised allied health and rehabilitation services, supporting people to regain function, improve mobility, and build confidence in everyday life. Whether individuals are recovering from injury or illness, managing a chronic condition, or living with disability, Royal Rehab LifeWorks offers expert, evidence-based support tailored to individual goals and circumstances.

With multiple centres across the eastern states of Australia, Royal Rehab LifeWorks delivers flexible, accessible services that reflect the specific needs of each local community. Services are offered in-centre, in the home, in the community, and via telehealth, ensuring a responsive and inclusive approach to care.

At Ryde, services are delivered within the purpose-built Advanced Technology Centre – home to over 25 of the world's most advanced rehabilitation technologies, including robotic exoskeletons, body weight support systems, and virtual reality tools. This centre specialises in neurological rehabilitation, combining cutting-edge technology with the clinical expertise of allied health professionals to improve outcomes and expand possibilities. In addition to physiotherapy, occupational therapy, exercise physiology, and dietetics, the site offers specialised programs such as sexuality support, addressing important yet often overlooked areas of wellbeing.

In Cairns, Royal Rehab LifeWorks provides general allied health services alongside targeted, evidence-based exercise programs led by experienced clinicians to promote recovery and support long-term independence.

Centres in Petersham, Penrith, Brisbane, Townsville, and Melbourne deliver a range of rehabilitation, wellbeing and disability support programs that reflect the diverse needs of their local communities, while the Collaroy hub, based at Sargood on Collaroy, focuses on specialist allied health services delivered in a welcoming and community-centred environment.

In early 2025, a new satellite hub was established at Ryde-Eastwood Leagues Club, offering physiotherapy and massage therapy to club members, guests, and the surrounding community.

Across all locations Royal Rehab LifeWorks remains committed to delivering person-centred, high-quality care that empowers people to live more independently, with improved wellbeing and quality of life.

FNQ Health and Fitness

FNQ Health and Fitness, operating in Atherton, provides community-based allied health, fitness, and wellbeing services designed to support lifelong health and functional independence.

A team of accredited exercise physiologists partners with local doctors and healthcare professionals to deliver tailored exercise and rehabilitation programs, focusing on chronic disease management, injury recovery, general fitness, and lifestyle enhancement.

Services operate under multiple funding frameworks, including Medicare, DVA, WorkCover, NDIS, and Integrated Living programs, ensuring accessible, evidence-based care for a diverse client cohort.

FNQ Health and Fitness is a leading provider of the PD Warrior initiative in the region, a specialist Parkinson's program facilitated by a senior exercise physiologist. The program focuses on neuro-retraining to enhance movement, motivation, and community engagement for people living with Parkinson's disease.

Through its integrated model of clinical exercise, rehabilitation, and preventive health, FNQ Health and Fitness contributes significantly to improved health outcomes and community wellbeing in Far North Queensland.

Precision Health Care

Precision Health Care is a multidisciplinary allied health service based in the heart of Dubbo, delivering physiotherapy, exercise physiology, clinical Pilates, and group-based programs to the local community and surrounding regions.

With a focus on evidence-based practice and person-centred care, the team works with individuals of all ages to support recovery, improve function, and promote long-term health and wellbeing. Services are delivered in a purpose-built facility featuring a fully equipped gym, Pilates studio, private consultation rooms, and accessible amenities.

Royal Rehab Ryde

Royal Rehab Ryde delivers a comprehensive range of publicly funded rehabilitation programs for individuals following illness or injury. These services include specialist inpatient care for brain and spinal cord injuries, clinician-led home-based services, transitional aged care programs, and community and outpatient therapy options.



These integrated services, delivered by specialist rehabilitation physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals, operate under public health funding and Medicare, ensuring accessible, coordinated, and quality-driven rehabilitation pathways for the Northern Sydney community.

Programs are tailored to individual needs and include one-on-one clinical sessions or specialised group classes, such as post-joint replacement rehabilitation, arthritis management (GLA:D), and mobility and strength training for older adults. The approach is collaborative and goal-oriented, supporting people living with chronic conditions, recovering from injury or surgery, or seeking to maintain independence and quality of life.

Precision Health Care plays a key role in improving access to high-quality allied health services in Dubbo and surrounds, contributing to stronger, healthier community through its integrated and responsive model of care.

Key service areas include:

- **Brain Injury Unit**

Provides expert inpatient rehabilitation for traumatic brain injury. Treatment is tailored by a multidisciplinary team using purpose-built facilities, including gym space, hydrotherapy pool, therapeutic gardens, and adaptive equipment.

- **Spinal Injury Unit**

One of only two dedicated units in New South Wales, delivering specialist inpatient rehabilitation for spinal cord injury. Care includes goal-setting, functional training, and support for long-term management.

- **Community Rehabilitation (BICRT)**

Continuation of rehabilitation care after discharge, offering home, community, and clinic-based support to enable ongoing recovery post-TBI.

- **Public Outpatient Clinics**

Provide individual and group allied health interventions such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, and hydrotherapy, for individuals managing chronic or acute conditions via publicly funded programs.

- **Home-Based Rehabilitation**

Short-term, multidisciplinary therapy is provided in patients' homes after hospital discharge, supporting recovery from neurological conditions, orthopaedic surgery, and chronic illness exacerbations.

- **Transitional Aged Care**

Offers time-limited allied health rehabilitation for older adults transitioning from hospital and programs designed to reduce fall risk in community settings.



Royal Rehab Private Ryde

Royal Rehab Private Ryde is a purpose-built rehabilitation hospital dedicated to delivering high-quality, patient-centred care with a strong focus on clinical excellence and outcomes.

The hospital offers both inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation programs, providing comprehensive support for a range of conditions including stroke, Parkinson's disease, brain injury, spinal cord injury, multiple sclerosis, orthopaedic conditions, reconditioning, and post-operative recovery.

Each program is led by specialist rehabilitation physicians and delivered in collaboration with a multidisciplinary team. This team includes allied health professionals in physiotherapy, exercise physiology, occupational therapy, speech pathology, dietetics, psychology, as well as nursing and social work, ensuring a coordinated and evidence-based approach tailored to individual needs.

The centre features 24 private rooms with ensuites, a purpose-designed gym, hydrotherapy pool, café, outdoor recreation areas, and access to the state-of-the-art Advanced Technology Centre equipped with more than 25 cutting-edge rehab technologies, including robotic exoskeletons and virtual reality systems.

These facilities support comprehensive rehabilitation pathways and focus on improving mobility, independence, and overall quality of life.

The hospital maintains full accreditation under the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (NSQHS) and is committed to safe, high-quality care.

Royal Rehab Private Petersham

Royal Rehab Private Petersham is a 37 bed private rehabilitation hospital located in Sydney's Inner West. Formerly MetroRehab Hospital, it has been operating for over 30 years and officially became part of Royal Rehab Group in 2019, aligning with the organisation's commitment to clinical excellence.

The hospital offers both inpatient and day rehabilitation programs, serving patients recovering from neurological conditions such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, brain injury, spinal cord injury, and multiple sclerosis, as well as those needing orthopaedic rehabilitation, reconditioning, cancer recovery, and postoperative support.

Specialist rehabilitation physicians lead each patient's care and work closely with a multidisciplinary clinical team, including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, exercise physiologists, speech pathologists, dietitians, psychologists, rehabilitation nurses, and social workers, to deliver carefully tailored, evidence-based programs.

Royal Rehab Private Petersham is fully accredited under the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (NSQHS) and features purpose-designed amenities such as a hydrotherapy pool, specialised gym space, private rooms, and comprehensive allied health services, all aimed at supporting patient recovery and enhancing their quality of life.



Sargood on Collaroy

Sargood on Collaroy is an award-winning, fully accessible facility purpose-built for people with spinal cord injury.

Recognised as a global leader in supported short-term accommodation, Sargood on Collaroy provides a unique environment where individuals can access specialised equipment, facilities, and clinical support. Each stay is designed to be both supportive and enriching, offering opportunities to build independence, learn new skills, and enhance overall wellbeing.

A wide range of adaptive activities are available as part of the program, including options like yoga, painting, trail bike riding, surfing, drone flying and more, all designed to support physical and emotional wellbeing in a safe, inclusive setting.

Sargood on Collaroy is proudly operated by Royal Rehab Group, in partnership with the Sargood Foundation, icare and a private benefactor, with a shared commitment to delivering innovative, person-centred support for people living with spinal cord injury.



Breakthru College

Breakthru College is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) dedicated to providing nationally recognised qualifications and accredited short courses in healthcare and community services. Specialising in disability support, aged care, mental health, and allied health assistance training, the college offers flexible learning options, including face-to-face, blended, and online delivery, to accommodate the diverse needs of students across Australia.

As part of Royal Rehab Group, Breakthru College leverages over 25 years of industry experience to deliver training that is both practical and aligned with current sector demands.

Courses such as the Certificate III and IV in Individual Support, Certificate IV in Disability Support, and Certificate IV in Mental Health are designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge required to excel in the community services sector.

The college is committed to fostering inclusive learning environments and supporting students from diverse backgrounds, including those facing personal challenges. Through personalised support and career guidance, Breakthru College empowers individuals to pursue meaningful careers, contributing to the wellbeing and independence of those they support.



Breaking Grounds Café

Breaking Grounds is more than just a café, it's a welcoming Central Coast destination that celebrates inclusivity and community.

Purposefully designed with accessibility in mind, the café features adjustable benches, accessible cutlery, quiet zones, and step-free entryways, all thoughtfully integrated to ensure everyone feels comfortable and included.

Patrons enjoy high-quality coffee and delicious food made from locally sourced ingredients; all served in a warm, friendly atmosphere.

But what truly sets Breaking Grounds apart is its commitment to creating real opportunities. By offering employment and training to people with disability, the café is not only inclusive in design, it's inclusive in action.





Customers

Customers

Every story is unique, yet the people we support share a common thread in their sense of purpose, steady progress, and confidence that with the right support there is always a way forward.

Holding the line with MND

At just 26 years old, Adeel Jaffery is living with motor neuron disease (MND), a rare and progressive neurological condition. Diagnosed three years ago after first noticing symptoms the year before, he continues to face the challenges of this condition with quiet determination and a focus on holding onto the life he loves.

Born in Pakistan and raised in Australia from the age of two, Adeel was partway through a Visual Communication Design degree at the University of Technology Sydney when his health began to change. Now living in Penrith with his family, he makes time for the things that bring him joy, whether that is losing himself in a good book or journeying through the worlds of Pokémon, Zelda and Animal Crossing on his Nintendo Switch.

In the early days following his diagnosis, Adeel received care through the public health system while waiting for his NDIS funding to be approved. When it came time to choose a long-term provider, his father searched for a service that truly understood the complexities of MND. That search led them to Royal Rehab LifeWorks Ryde.

“*The familiarity with MND and the use of technology really stood out to us.*”

ADEEL

Adeel began his rehabilitation with physiotherapy under senior physiotherapist Joel Chan and later added occupational therapy with senior occupational therapist Jessica Beauman. Today, he attends physiotherapy twice a week and occupational therapy once a week, working toward goals such as maintaining strength and mobility, improving fine motor skills and managing muscle tightness.

Advanced rehabilitation technology plays a big role in his program. The EksoNR exoskeleton helps him walk safely with support, which he finds far more comfortable than being physically assisted. The Diego aids shoulder movement, while the Amadeo focuses on finger and hand control through repetitive and engaging activities.

Despite the nature of MND, Adeel has seen stability in his mobility. “I see that as a real achievement,” he says.

What Adeel values most is the way his therapists work in sync. Joel and Jess share insights and adapt each session to his needs, ensuring therapy remains targeted and effective.

Beyond the clinical results, Adeel treasures the atmosphere at Royal Rehab LifeWorks, describing it as “a glimmer of hope,” and appreciates the way therapy helps him continue doing the things he enjoys.

While MND brings many unknowns, Adeel draws strength from the consistency of his care team and the progress he continues to make.





The long road home

When Alicia Dankiw set out to visit a friend in Thirroul in February 2024, she could never have imagined how dramatically her life was about to change. Driving along Bulli Pass, her car was struck by a truck, a devastating accident that left her with both a spinal cord injury and a brain injury.

Alicia was airlifted to St George Hospital, but by the next day, she was transferred to Royal North Shore Hospital for urgent surgery. She spent two weeks in ICU on a breathing tube and remained in hospital until May 2024 before transferring to Royal Rehab Ryde's Brain Injury Unit to begin the long journey of rehabilitation.

Her injuries had affected her mobility, communication, and cognition. "In the beginning, I spoke in numbers," she says. "It was frustrating when people didn't understand me."

With the help of speech therapy, she slowly regained her ability to communicate, celebrating each small step forward.

Occupational therapy focused on everyday routines like making lunch and using the kitchen. Tasks were broken into small, achievable steps, helping her gradually rebuild confidence. Physiotherapy became part of her daily life and helped her regain strength and movement. "I especially loved the bike – good for my body and my head," she says.

Recreational therapy opened up new experiences. Alicia started kayaking in the pool before progressing to sailing in Manly with Invictus boats.

She even had the chance to take the helm, calling it "incredible." She also tried tandem biking, which she hopes to continue back home in Canberra.

The technology at Royal Rehab Ryde left a lasting impression. Alicia used the Pablo device to work on her hand movement and was fascinated by other advanced equipment she saw in action.

Her nine months at Royal Rehab were about far more than therapy. "The staff were amazing," Alicia says. "They never judged me, and nothing was ever too much trouble." She valued how the whole team worked toward the same goals and encouraged her to get out into the community, helping her rediscover the joy of everyday activities.

Now back in Canberra with her daughters, aged 12 and 10, Alicia is settling into a new house that suits her needs. She continues with local rehabilitation and uses her Royal Rehab discharge notes to guide her therapy team. She is not yet able to return to her role as a psychologist specialising in crisis support, but hopes to do so in some way in the future. "Being a patient has taught me so much," she says.

She also wants to keep up the activities that brought her joy during rehab, like adaptive biking, kayaking, and sailing.

Alicia draws inspiration from the people she met at Royal Rehab and hopes to return one day for the Wall of Fame, an annual event where former brain injury patients are invited to share their stories and are honoured by the Royal Rehab community.

“ Royal Rehab gave me more than just therapy, they helped me find my strength and rebuild my confidence. ”

ALICIA

Not just steps, but a statement

When Craig Johnson was diagnosed with Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) in August 2024, everything shifted. FND affects how the brain sends and receives signals, which can lead to distressing symptoms such as movement and speech difficulties. For Craig, the diagnosis came after months of uncertainty, hospital stays, and mounting concern.

At one stage, scans even suggested he may have had a stroke, something he only discovered later. The seriousness of his condition became clear when doctors told him he needed to head straight to emergency care. The months that followed tested his resilience.

After six months in hospital, Craig was finally discharged in early 2025. He was relieved to be back home, but he knew that returning to everyday life would take time and support. He remained determined to regain as much independence as possible.

That's when he was introduced to Royal Rehab LifeWorks Brisbane.

Craig began therapy with Exercise Physiologist Jessica Cadenhead and Speech Pathologist Lauren Hafner. Together, they designed a personalised program that supports both the physical and communication challenges of FND. With their guidance, Craig is now working toward meaningful goals that give him a greater sense of control over his progress.



One of those goals is to walk to the letterbox using a walker. It may seem like a small task, but for Craig it represents something much bigger – the chance to reclaim daily routines and reconnect with normal life.

What stands out most for Craig is the connection he shares with his therapy team. He speaks with genuine appreciation for Jessica and Lauren, noting the empathy and encouragement they bring to every session.

“ They don't just treat me like a patient, they care about me as a person, and that makes all the difference. ”

CRAIG

While challenges remain, Craig is looking ahead with hope. With the ongoing support of the Royal Rehab LifeWorks Brisbane team, he is moving forward, rebuilding his confidence, and discovering joy in the small yet powerful moments that make up everyday life.

It's game on

Ava Refaat was just nine months old when she was diagnosed with a rare cancer called neuroblastoma. Her treatment was intense, involving chemotherapy and surgery to remove a tumour in her chest that extended along her spinal cord. As she grew, Ava came to rely on a wheelchair.

When Ava was seven, her mum Christine discovered Sargood on Collaroy and signed her up for the first kids' camp. The experience opened up a whole new world. For the first time, Ava met other children who truly understood what life with a spinal cord injury was like. She felt seen, accepted, and free to be herself.

At Kids camp, Ava saw people doing things she hadn't thought possible. It inspired her to try new activities and believe in her own abilities. She discovered wheelchair tennis and, after winning her first competition at camp, quickly developed a passion for the sport. Ava now trains with a private coach, and dreams of one day reaching the Paralympics. She also tried adaptive surfing, kayaking, and sailing, each activity giving her a sense of freedom and achievement.

The team at Sargood made every moment of Ava's camp special, cheering her on and helping her feel included and confident. During one stay, they even arranged a trial of the Klaxon electric wheelchair attachment. With NDIS support, her family was able to get one, giving Ava a whole new level of independence. Today, she travels to school hand-in-hand with her sister, keeping up with ease and enjoying the journey together.

Sargood wasn't just for Ava. Her siblings made friends at camp too, helping the whole family feel part of something bigger.

Christine says the team's kindness and care made Sargood truly special. She describes it as a place of respect, not pity, where everyone is treated with dignity.

The family visits at least once a year and plans to coordinate future stays with other families they've met at camp.

For Ava, Sargood is more than a camp; it's a place to grow, take on new challenges, and feel understood.

Ava's story shows how resilience, community, and inclusive spaces can open doors and change lives.





Airborne spirit, unshakable strength

Flying had been a big part of Glenn Collins' life for more than three decades. He first took to the skies in 1992, funding his pilot training while juggling full-time work. Over the years, his passion for aviation led him into competition aerobatics and joining a formation flying team. It was during one of those flights at the Avalon Airshow on 28 March 2025 that everything changed.

Glenn has no memory of the crash itself. He was performing a manoeuvre he had executed hundreds of times before – a triple avalanche – when suddenly, something went catastrophically wrong. His plane came down in an area lined with live pyrotechnics. With fuel leaking into the cockpit, the pyrotechnics crew were first on the scene, pulling him from the wreckage before medical teams arrived.

Glenn was airlifted to The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, where he was placed in an induced coma for three days. He spent five weeks there in total, including 10 days in intensive care before moving to the trauma ward. He was later transferred to Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney, where he remained in the trauma ward for another six weeks. Once stable, Glenn was admitted to the Spinal Injury Unit at Royal Rehab Ryde to begin the next stage of his recovery.

Rehabilitation has been tough, but Glenn approaches it with grit and focus. His days are full and structured, guided by a multidisciplinary team that keeps him moving forward. He tackles daily physiotherapy and occupational therapy, checks in with a dietitian every fortnight, and has discovered a competitive streak in wheelchair basketball.

Outside of scheduled sessions, he pushes himself with personal cardio goals, often clocking laps around the onsite duck pond as a way to measure his own progress and clear his head.



“ *It's just such a relief not being in a hospital. This is a proper rehab facility, and a really nice one at that. I've got a balcony, a great outdoor area, and the freedom to get around on my own. That independence means everything.* ”

GLENN

Throughout his journey, Glenn has drawn strength from his devoted wife Tracey, his children, grandchild, and a close-knit support network. Tracey has been his anchor – managing appointments, advocating for his care, and offering encouragement when he needs it most. He admits progress can feel slow, but it's consistent, and he sees the difference.

Looking ahead, Glenn is working closely with the Royal Rehab Ryde team on discharge planning and setting future goals. With the support of the In-Voc vocational rehabilitation service, he is focused on returning to work to support his family and maintain the lifestyle they've built together.

Glenn is also getting ready for a short stay at Sargood on Collaroy, a purpose-built short-term accommodation and respite facility known for activities like adaptive surfing. 'I'm excited to explore everything Sargood has to offer,' he says with a smile. A surfer in his younger days, Glenn isn't quite ready to hit the waves again, but step by step, he's quietly working toward that goal.



Scent-sationally bright

Esther Harding loves the little things that make her days feel good. A morning usually starts with coffee and breakfast, followed by a shower, a spritz of her favourite perfume, and a check-in with her support team to see what's planned. Some days that means physiotherapy, some days it is shopping or social outings, and some days it is just spending time playing games with her housemates.

She also has a fondness for little comforts, like having her nails done, enjoying the air-conditioning, and surrounding herself with music - both listening to it and recalling her days playing piano, flute, and violin, as well as singing in a band.

Esther's bright and bubbly personality is infectious. She loves making people smile, giving compliments, and checking that everyone around her is feeling good. One of her favourite memories is from Christmas a few years ago when she invited housemates who didn't have family visiting to join her for lunch. She made sure everyone felt included and celebrated. It was classic Esther, full of heart and care.

Her support team has loved watching Esther embrace new experiences, gaining confidence while keeping the bright, caring personality that makes her so special.



Music and concerts bring her another kind of joy. With support from her team, she has ticked off bucket-list events like Elton John's farewell and Coldplay, and she is already planning her next adventures. Friday outings to community activities are another highlight, combining her love of food, friends, and new experiences.

Esther's story is a reminder that joy comes in the everyday, in good company, favourite routines, and the little things that make life sparkle.

“ I love the people who live here with me and the staff who support me. Having my own space makes me a happy girl every day. ”

ESTHER



Detours can lead somewhere great

Three years ago, when Jasper Daniels first connected with Breakthru, he was full of hope and ready for change. He was working in after-school care, but deep down, he knew it wasn't where he truly belonged. Just as he began exploring new paths, life threw him a curveball. A sudden ankle injury put everything on hold. It could have been a full stop, but Jasper chose to see it as a detour.

Fuelled by his lifelong love for animals, Jasper used the time to rethink his direction. In September 2023, he proudly completed a Certificate II in Animal Care. Encouraged by that achievement, he went on to pursue a Certificate III in Wildlife through TAFE. But the course demands became overwhelming, and by March 2024, he made the difficult decision to step back.

That didn't mean giving up. It meant choosing a new path with purpose.

This time, he turned his focus to community services, a field where his empathy and resilience could truly make a difference. He enrolled in a Certificate III course with Yes Employment, supported every step of the way by Amy O'Rourke, Employment Support Worker, and Lachlan White, Team Leader at Breakthru. Their encouragement helped him push through the tough moments and stay committed.

By late-2024, Jasper graduated with his certificate, an achievement that once felt out of reach. Now, he is exploring meaningful roles in community services. He has also stepped into a new position as a peer mentor at Breakthru, offering support to others who are navigating their own journeys.

“*Having people believe in me and support me made all the difference. It gave me the confidence to keep going when things felt tough.*”

JASPER

Jasper's story is still unfolding. He has taken on volunteer work, contributed to the 2025 National Parra Archery Tournament, joined community projects, and, most importantly, discovered what he is truly capable of. With a heart for helping and a renewed belief in himself, Jasper is ready for whatever comes next. His journey is proof that even the unexpected paths can lead somewhere incredible.



From retail to real impact

Leigh Brown spent over three decades working in retail, including 19 years at Bunnings. But while her days were full, something was missing. She was ready for a new direction.

"I wanted to do something that truly mattered," Leigh reflects. "Now that I'm here, it's probably the best decision I've ever made."

Encouraged by a friend, Leigh enrolled in a Certificate III in Individual Support through Breakthru College. She joined the program several weeks after it had commenced but quickly made-up ground, driven by a deep desire to make a difference. "Our trainer, Ann, was amazing," Leigh shares. "She made me feel supported from the start."

Ann remembers Leigh as a quiet achiever. "She came in later than the others, but you'd never know. She was focused, passionate, and always willing to go the extra mile."

That dedication caught the attention of Linda, a Breakthru manager who visited the class. After a brief conversation, Linda recognised Leigh's potential and encouraged her to explore a role with Breakthru.

Not long after, Leigh began her new career as a support worker, working with young people in the School Leaver Employment Support (SLES) program. Her presence quickly became an asset, not only to the clients she supported but to Breakthru's broader purpose of fostering independence, connection, and confidence.

Linda agrees. "Leigh goes beyond the role. She sees each person's potential and creates the space for it to grow. Her impact on our clients and team culture is remarkable."

One of Leigh's early collaborations was with Jake, a young man with a passion for gardening. Together, they launched the Breakthru Nursery, a small plant business that now gives back to the SLES program and provides a platform for skills-building, creativity, and pride.



Leigh's commitment has not gone unnoticed. In 2024, she was named a finalist for North Queensland's Support Worker of the Year, placing her among the top three out of more than 900 nominees from across the state.

Leigh continues to build her skills, recently completing her Certificate IV in Disability and starting AUSLAN training to better support clients with hearing difficulties.

For Leigh, every day brings something new, but one thing remains constant: the sense of meaning her role brings.

“ Every day, I get to help someone take a step forward. That's what keeps me going. ”

LEIGH



Riding the waves of possibility

After a motorbike accident in 2015 left Lee Ferrier with a spinal cord injury, the road ahead was filled with uncertainty. But just months into his recovery, the ocean came calling. Through Royal Rehab Ryde's beach access program, Lee returned to the water, and to a part of himself he thought he'd lost.

That day, he met Sebastian, a staff member who helped him back onto a surfboard for the first time since his injury. For Lee, it wasn't just about catching a wave, it was about rediscovering freedom, adrenaline, and joy. It was the start of something big.

What began as a tentative paddle out turned into a lifelong passion. Adaptive surfing quickly became more than a hobby. It became a lifeline.

Over the years, Lee has built an impressive career in adaptive surfing, becoming a four-time Australian Champion, with his latest title at Byron Bay in 2024. That year, he also took second at the Adaptive Surf Pro Byron Bay, the first Australian stop of the international pro series, and previously represented Australia at the ISA World Para Surfing Championships in California, finishing fifth.

And in a full-circle moment, Sebastian, the person who helped him take that very first post-injury wave all those years ago, is back by his side, supporting him on the beach and in competition.

That sense of connection, resilience, and momentum carries through every part of Lee's life. When he's not in the water, he's on the trails, competing in adaptive mountain biking and staying active year-round. The thrill, the challenge, and the camaraderie all mirror what he's found in the surf, and he's passionate about introducing others to that same sense of freedom through peer mentoring and support.

In 2024, Lee took on a new challenge, a 12-week paid internship at Sargood on Collaroy, supported by the Sargood Foundation. The program is designed to support people with spinal cord injury as they navigate the often complex return to work.

Lee has wasted no time making his mark. Drawing on his practical mindset, problem-solving skills, and lived experience, he's developed an innovative hands-on project: an accessible workshop where guests can learn to maintain their own wheelchairs and equipment.

From fixing flat tyres to tightening brakes, the sessions are all about building confidence, capability, and independence, especially for those newly adjusting to life with a spinal cord injury.

The success of the program has meant that Lee now has an ongoing role at Sargood, where he supports everything from adaptive equipment maintenance to recreational activities and peer mentoring.

“It's a space where people can learn how to look after their gear. Even just the basics. So, if something goes wrong, they're not stuck. It's practical, empowering stuff.”

LEE

Whether he's helping someone fix their wheelchair or coaching them through their first surf session, Lee leads by example, showing what's possible when resilience meets opportunity.

“I've been in the chair for 10 years. I've travelled overseas, competed, given just about everything a go. Now I get to pass that on. Not just to show people what's possible, but to help them believe it for themselves.”

Breaking past limits

At 19, Nioka Bush comes alive when she's being creative. Whether she's sketching, singing, or exploring new artistic ideas, she thrives on self-expression and loves giving her all. But when she first joined Breakthru's School Leaver Employment Supports program in Dubbo, her confidence was low, and stepping into new environments felt intimidating.

"I was shy and worried about meeting new people and whether I'd be able to form connections," Nioka recalls. Having had disappointing experiences with school placements, she also feared facing rejection again.

With guidance from her mentor Brad Croxon and the Breakthru Dubbo team, Nioka gradually began to find her stride. One-on-one mentoring sessions helped her set goals, reflect on her strengths, and gain a clearer sense of direction. Group programs offered a safe space to build practical skills and improve communication, while drama workshops became her stage to perform without pressure and just be herself. Social lunches brought together her love of food with the opportunity to meet new friends.

Brad has watched her transformation with pride. "Nioka's confidence, self-esteem, and self-belief have grown tremendously. She no longer feels she has to 'mask' who she is. She speaks her mind, advocates for herself, and embraces new opportunities."



A key turning point came through work experience in childcare. Nioka quickly felt at home in the nurturing environment, supporting children as they learned and played. She felt a surge of pride when she mastered tasks she had once doubted, like changing a nappy. Volunteering at a local school added another layer of growth, letting her encourage kindergarten students with their reading and see the impact of her support firsthand.

These experiences have sparked a strong interest in early childhood education. Nioka is now looking ahead to formal training and the possibility of building a career in childcare, while remaining open to exploring other opportunities that align with her creativity and strengths.

Reflecting on her journey so far, Nioka sums it up simply: "It's made HEEEEAAAPPPSS of difference."

Brad agrees wholeheartedly. "Nioka has built strong friendships, developed her independence, and discovered her strengths. She has so much to offer, and the future looks incredibly bright."





On the tarmac, not in the hangar

At 70, Rob Ahmet brings a lifetime of experience, humour and resilience to every therapy session at Royal Rehab LifeWorks Cairns. A former aircraft maintenance engineer, Rob spent more than 40 years in a demanding profession before retiring to Cairns, where he navigates the challenges of living with multiple sclerosis (MS), a condition he was first diagnosed with in 1999.

For more than a decade, Rob's MS had been in remission. But around 2015, symptoms began returning and the reality of the condition hit home. While walking up the stairs to board an aircraft during a work shift, he found himself struggling. It was his final day at work, and the experience marked a turning point that prompted him to seek the support he needed.

Getting started was not easy. Rob's initial NDIS application was rejected, and it took further testing and documentation before he could finally access funding. His first therapy experience left him feeling disconnected and unsupported, often facing out of pocket costs despite being under the scheme. That changed when his support coordinator recommended Royal Rehab LifeWorks.

From his first meeting with Allied Health Manager Josh Huxley, Rob knew he was in the right place. Since then, he has become a regular, attending hydrotherapy twice a week and a group exercise class tailored to his needs. His goals are to maintain mobility, manage his weight, stay active and continue to travel, including an upcoming overseas holiday he is looking forward to with his wife.

Rob credits the team at Royal Rehab LifeWorks Cairns with helping him maintain his independence and slow the progression of his MS symptoms.

"Whether I like it or not, I'm stuck with my condition. I've seen people go downhill with MS quite quickly. I'm not at that stage and I believe that's because of the support I've had from Royal Rehab LifeWorks," he says.

It's not just the therapy that keeps Rob coming back. It's the sense of welcome and support he feels every time he walks through the door. He also loves the little things, such as the playful banter, the genuine care from the team, and even the small gesture of someone making him a coffee when he arrives early. These moments are what make him feel part of the community.

"I try not to take life too seriously. You can't afford to. Life is too short. I love that I can come into Royal Rehab LifeWorks and have a laugh and some friendly banter with the team while still getting professional care and support."

ROB

With his trademark humour and optimism, Rob continues to show how the right support, delivered with warmth and connection, can make a real difference.





United for Patricia

In October 2024, Dr Patricia Azarias arrived at Royal Rehab Private Ryde after major pelvic surgery. She was still recovering from infection and faced the challenge of learning to walk again. Wanting only “the best,” she and her husband chose Royal Rehab Private Ryde to guide her through this next stage of recovery.

Over the next five weeks, Patricia became a familiar face in the hospital gym and therapy rooms. With encouragement from the physiotherapy and occupational therapy teams, whom she describes as “firm but kind” and “outstanding,” she steadily rebuilt her strength and confidence.

Each milestone felt like a small victory. She progressed from walkers to crutches, stood up from a chair 30 times without help, and practised everyday tasks such as making tea and moving safely around her home.

Her memories of Royal Rehab extend far beyond therapy. She speaks warmly of the nurses, doctors, and night staff who supported her at every step, praising the teamwork across the whole service.

There were lighter moments too, like a Friday afternoon when patients with walkers and crutches turned the gym into a dance floor to YMCA by The Village People.

She also found joy in the gardens, where her husband would wheel her around. “Good for the soul,” she says of those moments in the fresh air.

When she was discharged in November, Patricia left not only with stronger legs but also with a sense of pride and friendships she continues to cherish.

Having served as the Head of Internal Audit at the United Nations and once being the most senior Australian in the UN, she knows what it takes for an organisation to run well. Her verdict on Royal Rehab is clear – she calls Royal Rehab Private Ryde one of the best-run facilities in Australia, if not the world.

“**If you're going to design the ideal rehab facility, this would be it. I made friends, I laughed, I danced to YMCA in the gym, it was joyful. If you want a headline: I was so lucky.**”

PATRICIA



Rising early, rising strong

At Wholegreen Bakery's Alexandria kitchen, the air is filled with the smell of fresh pastry, warm bread, and early morning focus. Among trays of gluten free treats and the steady hum of production, two Breakthru Disability Employment Services clients, Andrew and Tan, are now essential members of the team.

Their stories are about more than employment. They're about opportunity, inclusion, and what happens when people are given the right environment to thrive.

Andrew's story

When Andrew Guo first started at Wholegreen, the commercial kitchen felt big and unfamiliar. He joined the team just two days a week, gradually learning the routines with the help of Laurelle, the Production Manager, and a team that welcomed him with encouragement.

These days, Andrew is in the kitchen most of the week, arriving at 8am to check the task board before diving into a wide range of duties, from glazing pastries and filling pies to packing orders and assembling cake boxes.

One small but thoughtful accommodation stands out. The team worked around Andrew's strong dislike of olives, helping him avoid dishes that might make him uncomfortable. It's a simple adjustment, but it reflects a culture of respect and support.

"I never thought I'd be working in a bakery," Andrew says with a grin. "But now I look forward to it. I feel like I'm good at something, and that means a lot."

Tan's story

Tan Si joined the Wholegreen team more recently, bringing with him years of experience as a cabinet maker and former bakery owner in Marrickville. Despite being new to the Australian workforce and still learning English, Tan's confidence and sharp practical skills speak for themselves.



Working three days a week, sometimes four shorter shifts, Tan has quickly become a go-to team member, focused, efficient, and incredibly capable. He's built strong connections within the bakery, always up for a friendly chat and often the one putting on 80s and 90s hits, especially Celine Dion.

"I like coming here. Everyone is kind. It feels comfortable," he says modestly, his pride showing more in his work than his words.

Creating a place where everyone can rise

At Wholegreen Bakery, hiring people with disability isn't a program, it's a practice grounded in their core values of inclusion, quality, and community. Grace Mendieta, Managing Director, sees the relationship with Breakthru as a natural extension of what the business already stands for.

“Working with Breakthru has been a really positive experience. The support has been excellent, and it's clear they genuinely care about matching the right people with the right roles.”

GRACE

For Andrew, Tan, and the Wholegreen team, success isn't just about perfect pastries. It's found in the small wins, the confidence that builds over time, and the sense of pride that comes from being part of something real. Because when people are supported to show up as themselves, to be seen, valued, and included, everyone rises.



A ruff guide to belonging

Every Thursday at Fur Mum Pet Care in Townsville, the air buzzes with excitement as a group of Breakthru clients arrive. They're ready to roll up their sleeves, learn new skills, and share some much-needed love with the dogs who call this place home.

It all began when Katrina, a support worker, brought her client Blaire along to see if there were any hands-on opportunities. Jen and Holly, who run the pet care service, welcomed them warmly, opening the door to what has become a strong and lasting partnership.

Three years on, Breakthru clients have become an essential part of Fur Mum's weekly rhythm. They dig in the garden, prepare fun enrichment activities for the dogs, tidy the play areas, or simply sit quietly to comfort the animals. Every person brings their own spark to the day, creating a space full of energy and care.

Blaire, who was shy at first, has grown in confidence and now plays an important role helping new clients feel welcome. Jake has found his place as the resident gardener, and Jayce arrives each week with a bright smile and boundless enthusiasm. The dogs respond too. Some of the more anxious ones visibly relax just from spending time with the clients.

Jen puts it simply: "These Thursdays have become something we all look forward to. The positivity the Breakthru clients bring is felt by everyone – the team, the dogs, and even our customers."

For Blaire, the experience goes beyond just helping out.

“ It just feels good to be part of something. ”

BLAIRE

This partnership between Fur Mum and Breakthru is more than just a weekly routine. Built on trust and a shared love of animals, it's become a welcoming community where everyone, whether on two legs or four, can feel at home, make a difference, and truly belong.



A young woman with dark hair, smiling, stands in a gym. She is wearing a black polo shirt and black pants. To her left is a rack of dumbbells with weights in yellow, blue, and purple. The background is a blurred gym environment. The text "Our people" is overlaid in white on a purple background.

Our people

Our people

Behind every service, every innovation, and every achievement are individuals whose dedication makes a real difference. Their stories reflect a workforce driven not only by skill and expertise, but also by compassion and a deep commitment to those we support. Together, they embody the Royal Rehab Group values and create an environment where possibility and progress thrive.

The hands that build home

Sue Kimber has been a steady, caring presence at Royal Rehab Group for 15 years. She has worked across several disability homes and has been part of the team at Hilda Street since it opened in December 2010, where she now leads as Team Leader at Breakthru.

Over the years, Sue has taken on many roles, from Support Worker to Team Leader, Service Manager, and Champion Trainer. She briefly tried management but quickly realised she felt most fulfilled working hands-on with her team and clients.

As Team Leader, Sue supports clients with everything from daily living and personal care to emotional support and community involvement. She helps with meal preparation, grocery shopping, medical appointments, and medication management. She also keeps detailed records, develops support plans, and works closely with allied health professionals.

Sue leads a diverse team and manages audits covering medication, workplace safety, cleaning, finance, and first aid. In her Champion Trainer role, she loves sharing what she knows and helping others build their skills.

What keeps Sue motivated is seeing the difference she makes every day. She's supported clients to reach goals they once thought out of reach; like a client recovering from a serious injury who is now back at work and more confident in their independence. "Every little win matters," she says.

Beyond the day-to-day, Sue brings joy to Hilda Street by organising special events like birthdays, Christmas celebrations, high teas, and inter-house gatherings. "These moments bring everyone together. It feels like family," she explains.

Sue's passion for disability support runs deep. With a cousin who has cerebral palsy and a grandson who

had multiple disabilities and sadly passed away four years ago, Sue feels a personal connection to the work.

What makes it all worthwhile for Sue is seeing clients smile and knowing she's played a part in their happiness. "When you hear someone laugh or see their face light up, that's the best reward."

Though honoured to receive the Support Worker of the Year award, Sue is quick to share the credit. "That award belongs to my whole team. We all care deeply and give our best every day to help clients live their best lives."

Sue's story is one of quiet strength, genuine care, and a deep commitment to building a community where everyone belongs.



**“ I want to help create
where everyone feels
and supported, especially those
don't have family support ”**

SUE KIMBER, TEAM LEADER

How to build a life, not just a résumé

When Johann Aracan joined Breakthru in 2017, he couldn't have imagined how much his career would be shaped by helping young people take their first steps into working life.

Starting out in Disability Employment Services, Johann soon discovered what inspired him most: supporting young adults through the School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) program. By mid-2018, with encouragement from General Manager Susan McInerney, he took on the challenge of building SLES at Breakthru Parramatta. It was more than a new role. It marked the beginning of something that would transform the futures of countless young people.

Since then, Johann's journey at Breakthru has taken him through roles in support coordination and leadership. SLES has always been where his heart lies. Today, as an Employment Support Worker, he coordinates SLES programs across Parramatta and Blacktown, working closely with his team to create engaging, tailored plans for groups and individuals alike.

Johann has helped create an environment where participants feel safe to be themselves, where trying something new is encouraged, and where friendships often outlast the program. He loves hearing clients chat in their group messages long after the sessions have ended. To him, those conversations are proof that the program is helping them build a life, not just a résumé.

Over the years, Johann has celebrated many milestones with his clients. Some have completed TAFE courses, others have landed retail jobs or joined Service NSW, and a few have even returned to the disability sector as Support Workers themselves.

For Johann, Breakthru's person-centred approach is not just a slogan but a daily reality. Leadership trusts him to bring his passion, skills, and creativity to the role and gives him the freedom to focus on what matters most, equipping young people with the tools and confidence to shape their own futures.

Looking ahead, Johann hopes to see the SLES program at Parramatta recognised across the industry for its creativity, innovation, and impact.

His goal is for local schools and organisations to seek out Breakthru as a trusted partner in helping students take their first steps into working life and into life itself.



“ I am so proud to help create an environment that encourages self-expression and fosters positive, lasting relationships. Seeing customers achieve their goals, from study to paid work, reminds me every day why I am in this role. ”

JOHANN ARACAN, SUPPORT WORKER

When every second counts

For Donna Phillips, every training session is more than a compliance exercise. It is a chance to equip people with the skills and confidence to act when it matters most.

With more than 20 years' experience as a paramedic at New South Wales Ambulance, Donna made the decision to pursue a new path, one that would still allow her to be of service to others.

After completing a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, she discovered a passion for education and a new way to make a difference. "I didn't mind what job I did," Donna shares. "I just knew I wanted to help people. I kept saying yes to new opportunities, and they led me here."

Now a dedicated in-house First Aid and CPR Trainer at Breakthru College, Royal Rehab Group's registered training organisation, Donna plays a key role in building capability and promoting safety across Royal Rehab Group.

Recently, she teamed up with Rachel Steele, Executive Manager Learning and Development, and Kate Mankin, Speech Pathology Professional Leader at Royal Rehab Ryde, to deliver essential CPR training as part of combined dysphagia and CPR workshops, reaching over 400 disability support staff across the organisation.

What makes her sessions stand out is their relevance and relatability, especially for disability support workers. Donna adapts her training to real-world scenarios, such as demonstrating how to safely assist someone out of a wheelchair during CPR.

"I love making the training interesting and hands-on," Donna says. "I want people to walk away feeling like they really could save someone's life."

Donna's commitment reflects Royal Rehab Group's broader focus on quality, safety, and person-centred

care. Through education that empowers, she is helping to create a more confident and capable workforce – one that is better equipped to support the people we serve every day.

Looking ahead, Donna is excited to continue expanding first aid and CPR education across the organisation.



“ For me, the reward is knowing that the knowledge I share might make all the difference one day. ”

DONNA PHILLIPS, TRAINING PROGRAM COORDINATOR AND
FIRST AID TRAINER

The pathway to home and beyond

When Deborah Williams joined Breakthru in 2020 as a Support Worker, she quickly realised she had found her calling. "From the first day, I felt like I'd found my place, a job where I could really make a difference," she says.

Her decision to work in the disability sector came from a deep desire to help people overcome challenges and barriers. Her dedication and passion soon led her into leadership roles, first as a Team Leader and then as a Transition Coordinator.

In 2024, Deborah took on the role of Service Manager. She now leads a team that helps clients live independently, maintain their health, and stay connected with their communities, providing care tailored to each person's needs.

One of her proudest achievements is helping clients move into their "forever home," – safe, independent living spaces that truly fit their lives. "Seeing someone settle into a home they love, where they can be themselves is incredibly rewarding," Deborah shares.

She has built strong, trusting relationships with clients and families, which she says is the heart of great support. "It's about more than just services. It's about respect, trust, and really listening."

Deborah values Breakthru's supportive culture, where everyone is encouraged to grow and be part of something meaningful.

"We all want to see the people we support succeed. That shared passion makes every day worthwhile."

Looking ahead, Deborah is excited about continuing to learn and grow within Breakthru and Royal Rehab Group. She is ready to help build new programs and reach even more people. "I want to be part of shaping services that really empower clients, helping them live their best lives on their terms."



“ I love seeing clients grow in confidence and know that I've played a part in their journey. ”

DEBORAH WILLIAMS, SERVICE MANAGER

Strengthening connections that matter

For Kate Makin, Speech Pathology Professional Leader at Royal Rehab Ryde, rehabilitation is not just a career; it is a calling grounded in connection, compassion, and a deep belief in the power of human dignity.

Kate's journey with Royal Rehab began many years ago as a student on placement. It was at this time that she discovered a passion for rehabilitation, which led her through paediatrics before bringing her back to Ryde as a junior speech pathologist. She has never looked back.

In the 28 years since, Kate has become a cornerstone of the organisation. From inpatient and community roles to leadership positions, research, and mentoring, she has shaped the speech pathology service with dedication. Today, she leads the Ryde Speech Pathology team and plays a key role in allied health leadership.

At the heart of Kate's work is a simple but profound belief that communication is more than speech. It is connection, identity, and autonomy.

One story that stays with her is that of a man recovering from a stroke. He arrived unable to swallow, not even his own saliva, and was reliant on PEG feeding. Through months of rehabilitation using targeted exercises, biofeedback, and guided food trials, he slowly regained the ability to eat. Eventually, he was able to enjoy his favourite foods again, lasagne and a good cup of coffee.

"Seeing the joy on his face as he sipped his first real coffee is a moment that reminds you why this work matters," says Kate.

Beyond clinical work, Kate is a passionate advocate for education and service improvement.

This year, she designed and delivered hands-on dysphagia training for frontline disability support workers alongside Rachel Steele, Royal Rehab Group Executive Manager of Learning and Organisational Development, and the Breakthru team.

The sessions, focused on swallowing safety and mealtime dignity, were met with glowing feedback and helped boost confidence across the board.

Kate is also leading the early implementation of a new swallowing assessment tool at Royal Rehab. She has championed this initiative to further elevate care and outcomes.

She is the first to credit her team. "I work with an exceptional group of dedicated professionals," she says. But the truth is, Kate herself is exceptional, a quiet force of leadership, warmth, and integrity. Her legacy is written not only in years of service but in the lives, voices, and meals restored one connection at a time.



“ It is a privilege to support people and their families as they navigate life after a significant injury or illness. Every person's story is different, and our intervention and support needs to honour that. ”

KATE MAKIN, SPEECH PATHOLOGY PROFESSIONAL LEADER

Lighting the way in spinal care

For nearly 40 years, Rita Cusmiani has been a steady, compassionate presence in spinal cord injury care. From hospital wards to rehabilitation units and now at Sargood on Collaroy, Rita's career has been all about helping people rediscover what's possible when faced with life's toughest challenges.

When Rita started her journey back in 1986 at the Royal North Shore Spinal Injury Unit, she wasn't quite sure if spinal care was her path. But it didn't take long for her to feel at home. Drawn by the team spirit and the chance to build deep, meaningful relationships with patients and their families, Rita embraced the full spectrum of spinal care, from acute hospital care and inpatient rehabilitation to community support.

She made history at Moorong Spinal Unit by becoming their very first Clinical Nurse Consultant and later returned Royal North Shore Hospital to that role. Juggling part-time roles while raising her children, Rita developed a valuable perspective, supporting people at every stage of their recovery journey.

In 2017, when Sargood on Collaroy first opened its doors, Rita was invited to train the initial team of guest attendants. It wasn't long before her expertise was in such demand that she was asked to stay on to provide nursing care for guests with complex needs. Since then, Rita has become an indispensable part of the Sargood family.

Today, she oversees clinical care and training, mentors new staff, and works closely with guests on sensitive areas like bladder and bowel care, pressure management, sexuality and carer education. Rita's approach is refreshingly simple: instead of saying "no," she asks, "How can we make this work?". That mindset has transformed lives.

One guest, who arrived needing full assistance, has regained independence in bladder and bowel care, dressing themselves, and more, to the point of traveling solo overseas to Paris and the United States, milestones that once felt impossible.

Rita's advocacy extends well beyond direct care. Recognising how time-consuming routines were limiting some guests, she championed colostomy education and awareness as a liberating option.

In 2023, she delivered a national presentation at the Australian and New Zealand Spinal Cord Society (ANZSCoS) conference, helping to shift the perspective of spinal units across the country and encouraging open discussions about colostomy as part of the care continuum.

Since then, she has built a peer support network where guests can share their stories openly. Her impact has been so profound that people travel from far and wide just to see her.

For Rita, Sargood is more than a centre, it's a bridge between rehabilitation and real life. She treasures the guest-led, evolving approach that meets people where they are and she sees every guest, especially those with complex needs, as a teacher who enriches her own learning and growth.



“The learning never stops and that's what makes this place so special.”

RITA CUSMIANI, CLINICAL NURSE CONSULTANT

Finding voice through rehab

For Shareen Fairley, speech pathology brings together everything she loves – language, science, health, and teaching. Her early career in hospitals and private practice gave her a solid foundation, but it was in rehabilitation that she found her calling. What drew her in was the chance to form real, lasting connections with clients and walk alongside them as they made meaningful progress.

Since joining Royal Rehab LifeWorks Cairns in early 2023, Shareen has embraced the opportunity to offer tailored, ongoing therapy that truly makes a difference. With six years of experience under her belt, she brings clinical expertise, creativity, and a deep commitment to person-centred care to every session.

Shareen was drawn to Royal Rehab LifeWorks for its supportive culture and openness to new ideas. She thrives in the collaborative environment, where different disciplines come together to create the best possible outcomes for clients. Just as importantly, she's been encouraged to develop programs that respond to the specific needs of the Cairns community.

And develop she has. Shareen has played a leading role in launching several initiatives, including SPEAK OUT!, a group therapy program designed for people with Parkinson's disease and similar conditions – the first of its kind in the region. She also established an Aphasia Therapy Group, where participants connect with peers, practise communication, and build confidence in a supportive setting.

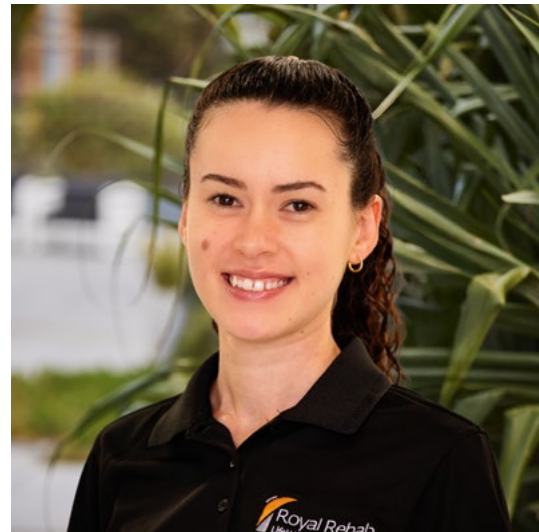
Collaboration is at the heart of her work. Shareen contributes to monthly multidisciplinary meetings to ensure care is coordinated and holistic. She also facilitates sessions for the Queensland Health-funded STEPS program, supporting people with brain injuries as they work toward personal goals.

One of the things she values most about her role is access to emerging technologies. Tools like eye-gaze communication systems are not only available but championed at Royal Rehab LifeWorks, allowing Shareen to deliver personalised solutions for clients with complex needs. She recalls helping a client with motor neurone disease access an eye-gaze device in time to reconnect with his son.

That moment, made possible through swift advocacy and the right technology, became a treasured memory for the client and his family.

Over the years, Shareen has seen the field evolve, particularly in the way clinicians support people with swallowing difficulties. Today, there's a stronger emphasis on client choice, with therapists offering expert advice while enabling individuals to make decisions that feel right for them. Assistive technology, once niche, is now more integrated and accessible, opening up new possibilities for connection and independence.

For Shareen, it's about more than therapy. It's about helping people find their voice, sometimes literally, and supporting them as they rebuild confidence, strengthen relationships, and reclaim a sense of control. One word, one voice, one goal at a time.



“It is a privilege to support people and their families as they navigate life after a significant injury or illness. Every person's story is different, and our intervention and support needs to honour that.”

SHAREEN FAIRLEY, SPEECH PATHOLOGIST

Solving problems, celebrating wins

Brooke Thorsen has always wanted to make a difference. After graduating with first-class honours from the University of Queensland in 2017, she began her career in aged care, learning how to support people with dignity and independence. In 2019, she moved into disability services during the early NDIS rollout and quickly found her calling helping people with progressive conditions regain control of their lives.

In 2023, Brooke joined Royal Rehab LifeWorks Brisbane, drawn to its neurological focus and person-centred approach. “It felt like stepping into a place where the client truly comes first,” she says.

Brooke thrives on seeing the difference her work can make. “I love helping people achieve what matters most to them. That is what keeps me going,” she explains. She tailors therapy to each person and celebrates every milestone, no matter how small.

Her days are varied, from paperwork and planning to home visits, equipment trials, and builder consultations. She jokes that she has to be part detective, part therapist, and part project manager in a single day. Her energy and focus are backed by a strong team, ensuring clients get the right supports when they need them.

One of her most rewarding cases involved a woman with multiple sclerosis. Initially referred for a vehicle modification, Brooke quickly identified broader needs. Over 12 months, she coordinated wheelchairs, home modifications, and bathroom aids. The client, once housebound, can now leave home confidently and engage in daily life, milestones Brooke celebrates alongside her clients.

Brooke has seen how occupational therapy has evolved with the NDIS. Therapists are now stronger advocates, clearer communicators, and collaborators, working closely with clients and support teams to secure the right outcomes.

What keeps her motivated is seeing clients reclaim independence, even small wins. “It’s so rewarding when a client tells me they’ve made it out into the community again, even just once, after months of being stuck at home,” she says.

For Brooke, every small victory is a reminder of why she does this work, helping people adapt to their condition with dignity, confidence, and hope.



“ Sometimes it’s the little things, a cup of coffee at a café or a short walk in the park, that make the biggest difference. ”

BROOKE THORSEN, SENIOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

Research



Tackling sleep apnoea in spinal cord injury rehab

A good night's sleep is essential for health and recovery, but for people with a spinal cord injury (SCI), sleep is often disrupted by obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA). This condition can cause daytime fatigue, limiting participation in rehabilitation, and is linked to long-term health risks including stroke, heart attack, type 2 diabetes, and reduced life expectancy.

At Royal Rehab Ryde, options to screen and treat inpatients for OSA were limited. Recognising the high prevalence of this condition among people with SCI, our team set out to develop a better approach. The primary goal was to adapt, implement, and evaluate a rehabilitation-led model for managing OSA in an SCI rehabilitation centre in Australia, with secondary objectives to identify local barriers and deliver tailored interventions.

The project began when Dr Gerard Weber, Medical Director and Senior Staff Specialist at Royal Rehab, heard Dr Marnie Graco, physiotherapist and implementation scientist from the Institute for Breathing and Sleep in Melbourne, present her international work on OSA management in SCI rehab units. Inspired by her expertise, Gerard approached Dr Graco to explore how a similar approach could be implemented at Royal Rehab Ryde.

Together, Dr Graco and the multidisciplinary team at Royal Rehab Ryde, including Dr Weber, Clinical Associate Professor Julie Pryor, Director of Research, and Jacqui Curran, registered nurse, designed a rehabilitation-led model of care, with support from Royal North Shore Hospital Respiratory Physician, Dr David Joffe. A multidisciplinary advisory group, including local and interstate sleep specialists and people with lived experience of SCI and OSA, was central to the project, helping shape the model, address challenges, and guide implementation.

The team used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the model. Clinical data of patients who were screened and treated for OSA were collected to assess reach and effectiveness of the new care model and interviews were conducted with staff and patients to assess acceptability, implementation, and sustainability. This allowed a comprehensive understanding of how the new practice could be integrated into routine care.

Over a 12-month pilot, the results were clear: OSA screening and management can be embedded into everyday SCI rehabilitation. Today, all Royal Rehab Ryde inpatients with SCI at T6 and above, and any with lower-level SCI with symptoms or risk factors are routinely screened, and treatment trials are offered when needed. Clinicians are consolidating this practice and establishing clear referral pathways to ensure it remains sustainable.

This research demonstrates how clinician-led initiatives, supported by robust evaluation, can improve patient care while generating knowledge that benefits the wider clinical and research community. The findings have already been published in two articles and presented at multiple conferences, highlighting the broader impact of this work.

Most importantly, the beneficiaries are our patients, who now have access to routine OSA screening, helping them engage more fully in rehabilitation and supporting their overall health during recovery.

Meet the team behind the research

The success of our sleep apnoea project showcases how Royal Rehab Group invests in its people by fostering partnerships, building research skills, driving innovation, and translating findings into better patient outcomes.



Dr Gerard Weber

Medical Director and Senior Staff Specialist, Spinal Injuries Unit

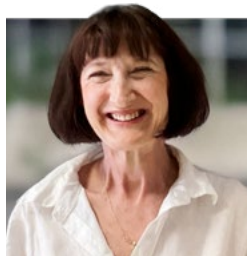
With over 22 years at Royal Rehab's Spinal Injury Unit, Gerard has led numerous clinical initiatives. Inspired by Dr Graco's work overseas, he initiated discussions that sparked the OSA screening project. Gerard's clinical insight and leadership were critical to adapting the approach for Royal Rehab patients.



Clinical Associate Professor Julie Pryor

Director of Research

Julie leads Royal Rehab Group's research strategy, fostering a culture that encourages clinician-led projects. Her guidance has been pivotal in mentoring the team, building internal research capability, and ensuring projects generate robust evidence that can influence practice both locally and nationally.



Jacqui Curran

Registered Nurse, Spinal Injuries Unit

Jacqui has been with Royal Rehab Ryde for more than 30 years. She has been instrumental in testing patients for obstructive sleep apnoea, supporting Continuous Positive Airway Pressure trials, and mentoring staff. Jacqui's dedication to patient care and staff education exemplifies the culture of continuous learning and professional development within Royal Rehab.



Dr Marnie Graco

Physiotherapist and implementation scientist

As a clinician researcher, Marnie works to improve care for people with neuromuscular conditions, with a focus on sleep and breathing treatments. She completed her PhD at the University of Melbourne in 2019 and now investigates new models of care while mentoring health professionals to translate research into better patient outcomes.



Journal articles published

12



Conference presentations

24

Journal articles

Pearce L., Pryor J., Redhead J., Sherrington C., Hassett L. (2024). Advanced Technology in a Real-World Rehabilitation Setting: Longitudinal Observational Study on Clinician Adoption and Implementation. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*;26, e60374.

Kivunja, S., Gullick, J., **Pryor, J** & River, J. (2024). Exploring 'Personhood' as the basis for understanding social processes in traumatic brain injury. Accepted poster abstracts for the 26th International Nursing Philosophy Conference in association with IPONS: Re-imagining a nursing ecosystem in an uncertain world. The University of Sydney, Australia, 27-29 September 2023. *Nursing Philosophy*, 25(4), e12495. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12495>.

Baker, M. J., **Pryor, J.** & Fisher, M. J. (2024). Assessing and managing risk: a primary activity of male nurses working in inpatient rehabilitation. *JARNA*, 26(2), 15-24.

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Jones, K., **Pryor, J.** & Best, M. (2024). An exploration of spirituality and spiritual care with rehabilitation inpatients. *Disability & Rehabilitation*, 47(13), 3367-3374.

Kahlon, R. K., Fisher, M. J. & **Pryor, J.** (2024). Nurses providing supportive-educative care when working with rehabilitation inpatients: a literature review. *JARNA*, 26(3), 22-39.

Simpson, G. K., Gillett, L., Koh, E. S., Walker, A. J., **Hanna, J.**, Trad, W. & Whiting, D. L. (2025). The Strategy Use Measure (SUM): A new tool to evaluate the use of compensatory behavioural strategies for cognitive, emotional and behavioural impairments after acquired brain injury. *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation*, 35(9), 1805-1827.

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Wolford, L., **Arratia, V.**, Behn, N., & Power, E. (2025). The impact of acquired communication impairments on sexuality and intimacy: A scoping review. *International journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 60(2), e70023.

McKechnie, D. (2025). Determining clinically significant patient change with effect sizes: considerations for clinicians and researchers. *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 42(2), 43-53.

McKechnie, D., & Fisher, M. J. (2025). Exploring methods in health research part 1: sampling and sampling techniques. *JARNA*, 27(1), 14-23.

McKechnie, D., & Fisher, M. J. (2025). Exploring methods in health research part 2: power and power analysis. *JARNA*, 27(2), 2-9.

Other publications

McCarry A. (2025). Member of working party for the significant rewrite of the Dysphagia Practice Guideline for the Speech Pathology Association of Australia.

Oral in person conference presentations

Pryor, J., Saravanan, K., **Weber, G.,** Phyland, T., Joffe, D., Berlowitz, D. J. & Graco, M. Implementing rehabilitation-led management of obstructive sleep apnoea in an inpatient spinal cord injury rehabilitation service: results of a mixed methods evaluation. International Spinal Cord Society 63rd Annual Scientific Meeting, Antwerp Belgium, 23-25 September 2024.

Pearce, L., Hassett, L., **Redhead, J.,** Sherrington, C. & **Pryor, J.** A glimpse into technology use in rehabilitation. Smart Strokes, Gold Coast 30 August 2024.

Mock, S, Van den Berg, M., Barr, C. & **Pryor, J.** Cardiorespiratory Intensity during home-based physiotherapy in post-stroke rehab. Smart Strokes, Gold Coast, 30 August 2024.

Pearce, L. & Hassett, L. Implementing technology in Australian public and private rehabilitation settings: barriers and facilitators for adoption and implementation. The Westmead Association Hospital Week (invited speaker), Sydney 22 August 2024.

Pryor, J. (Keynote speaker) What is rehabilitation. ARNA 33rd conference. Gold Coast. 17&18 October 2024.

Pryor, J. & Kennedy. C. (Keynote speakers) What is nursing's relationship with rehabilitation. ARNA 33rd conference. Gold Coast. 17&18 October 2024.

Davenport, A., Stretton, C. & **Pryor, J.** Nurse coaching in rehabilitation. ARNA 33rd conference. Gold Coast. 17&18 October 2024.

McKechnie, D. Celebrating Rehab: The discharge ceremony. ARNA 33rd conference. Gold Coast. 17&18 October 2024.

Pearce, L., Pryor, J., Redhead, J., Sherrington, C. & Hassett, L. Unpacking the complexity of implementing robotic technology for multiple disciplines: A mixed methods study. American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine, Dallas, TX, USA, November 2024.

Harper, R. & Pryor, J. Measuring Readiness to return to work in an early intervention vocational rehabilitation service. ANZSCoS, Fremantle November 2024.

Wilson, A., Bradely, B. & Stacey, S. Is gaming for everyone? ANZSCoS, Fremantle, 27-29 November 2024.

Kearney, D., Ho, M., Redhead, J. & Pryor, J. Advanced technology in community rehabilitation. ANZSCoS, Fremantle, November 2024.

Pizzolato, C., Galea, M., Saxby, D. & **Redhead, J.** Emerging technologies for recovery after spinal cord injury. Sports Medicine Association, Melbourne 17 Oct 2024.

Stafford, Q., **Williams, N** & Armstrong, M. Stepping On: Falls Prevention for Priority Populations in Social Housing. NSW Falls Forum, 2nd May 2025.

Virtual oral conference presentations

Pelagio, I. Tech-Driven Triumph: Uniting Minds and Machines in Neurorehabilitation ACI Rehabilitation, Spinal Cord Injury and Brain Injury Rehabilitation Forum, Sept 2024.

Ben, M. An innovative model for screening for Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA) in people living with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) in rural and regional NSW ACI Rehabilitation, Spinal Cord Injury and Brain Injury Rehabilitation Forum Sept 2024.

Bradley, B. Lockdowns to Data: How we increased our service for weekend Recreational Therapy. Australian Recreational Therapy National Conference. 26 & 27 September 2024.

Critchley, T. Rec and Tech. Australian Recreational Therapy National Conference. 26 & 27 September 2024.

Arratia, V. Is addressing sexuality part of nursing's role? New Zealand Nurses Symposium. 23rd May 2025.

Posters

McKechnie, D. Celebrating Rehab: The Wall of Fame. ARNA National Conference, Gold Coast, 17&18 October 2024.

Beauman, J., Snowden, N., Abraham, V. & **Redhead, J.,** A case comparison integrating robotic technology with and without electromyography for upper limb therapy post stroke. RMSANZ, Christchurch, New Zealand July 2025.

Bradshaw, J., Best, M., Jones, K. & **Pryor, J.,** Factors influencing human flourishing in the Traumatic Brain Injury population within the first two years after injury: A Systematic review of Literature. IBIA Conference, Canada, May 2025.

English, A. & McCarry, A. Pet Therapy in Action (virtual poster). 10th International Conference on Social Work in Health & Mental Health. Melbourne. 19-22 November 2024.

Ben, M. Early and intensive Motor Training for people with spinal cord injury (the SCI-MT trial): Was the intervention delivered as intended? World Physiotherapy Congress, Japan, May 2025.



Leadership

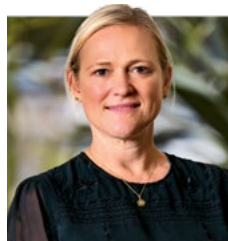
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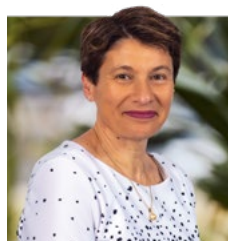
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MBBS BA FRACGP FAFRM
FFPMANZCA GAICD

Director



Clara Cutajar

BBUS CA GAICD

Director



Paul Billingham

MBA (AGSM) FCA GAICD RITF

Director



Greg Anderson

ACA CA

Director



Katrina Williams

BEC LLB GAICD

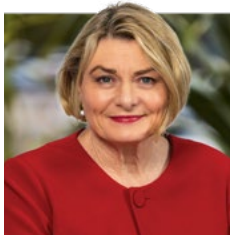
Director



Alex Gillan

BBUS(IT) GAICD

Director



Jane Spring AM

BEC(HONS) LLB MPA FAICD
FGIA FIPAA

Director

Senior Executives



Matt Mackay
Chief Executive Officer



Denise Thomas
Chief Operating Officer



Phil Dibley
Chief People Officer



Glen Stoddart
Chief Financial Officer

“ Through innovation and a focus on people, we strive to shape a future where our services empower individuals, support communities, and make a meaningful difference for generations to come. ”



Special thanks

We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who makes our work possible.

To our patrons, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales, and Mr Dennis Wilson, your ongoing support and advocacy mean a great deal to us.

To our partners and donors, your generosity and commitment help us reach further, think bigger, and achieve more. We're grateful for the shared vision and collaboration you bring.

To the individuals and families who choose our services, your journeys drive our commitment to delivering the highest quality care and support.

And to our incredible staff, thank you. Your commitment, skill and care are what make everything possible. The work you do matters deeply, and we are proud to have you on the team.

Together, we're building something stronger for the future. A future where every person has the opportunity to thrive.





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