

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES
Changing Lives
SINCE 1978



Brian Townsend, Participant, Disability Employment Services



Colleen, Volunteer, BEST Community Shed

Annual Report 2024/25

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

BEST acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our offices are located and where we conduct our business and live. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and emerging. BEST is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

As we reflect on the past year, I'm proud to share the journey we've taken together in pursuit of our mission: to develop and support independent, thriving, and resilient communities throughout regional New South Wales and Queensland.

This year marked a significant moment in our organisation's history with the retirement of our long-standing Chairperson, Jon Watts. Jon's contribution to BEST over his 44 years of service is remembered with deep gratitude and respect. His passion, positivity, and unwavering commitment to improving the communities within BEST's footprint will be long remembered and deeply missed.

It has also been a year of considerable challenge. The closure of our nursery operations was a difficult but necessary decision, driven by rising operational costs. Across our core services - Workforce Australia (WFA), Disability Employment Services (DES), and disability support - we've continued to face industry-wide pressures. Current funding models place ongoing strain on providers, while increasing costs, administrative and compliance burdens, and workforce shortages have impacted service delivery.

Despite these challenges, BEST has remained resilient. We've seen revenue growth and improvements to our performance metrics - clear indicators of the enormous amount of hard work and operational momentum across the organisation. I am incredibly proud of our team's continued dedication to delivering high-quality, person-centred support to those who rely on us. Their commitment reflects the values we hold dear: integrity, leadership by example, and a passion for making a difference.

I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to our CEO, Anna Watt, our executive team, and all staff across BEST for their continued efforts and contributions in a challenging landscape. I also wish to express my gratitude to our Board members for their ongoing support, guidance, and dedication to BEST's mission.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on our commitment to quality and compliance, deepening our impact, and continuing to build systems and services that empower communities to thrive independently. We are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and confident in our ability to meet them with integrity and excellence.

Together, we are shaping a future where regional communities are not only surviving - but flourishing.

Rachel McLennan
Chair



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

The past year has been tumultuous and uncertain. It was a year of major reform in employment services. However, we have tackled our challenges and overall have had a good year with some significant wins.

At the start of the year due to the government not extending Harvest Trail Services we had to cease those operations and offices. In addition, after extensive financial viability reviews, the difficult decision was made to cease our Nursery and Food Garden Services in December 2024.

Extensive effort with support from Mayvin Global Consultants went into our tender for 6 contracts under the new Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) contract, submitted in October 2024. The IEA was to replace Disability Employment Services (DES) from 1 July 2025. However, the tender results have been delayed, the DES contract has been extended until October 2025.

We were successful in our Workforce Australia (WFA) Licence Review, securing an unconditional extension through to 2027 (the end of the contract) which was the best possible outcome. This result reflects our commitment to quality, compliance and continuous improvement.

The BEST Community Shed remains a cornerstone of community support within Inverell and surrounds. The Shed donated over \$58,000 in donations to local groups during the year. We proudly celebrated volunteer, Ken Middleton being named Inverell Citizen of the Year.

Our people are at the core of our success. Initiatives such as the Leadership Conference, employee benefits review, and Health & Wellbeing Week reflect our commitment to creating a workplace where teams feel valued, supported, and empowered. In parallel, investment in corporate services is strengthening our systems and preparing us for future growth.

Across all programs, our teams have demonstrated resilience, compassion, and a deep commitment to community. Whether it's helping someone find their first job, supporting a child's education, or guiding a young person toward a brighter future, the work we do matters and it's changing lives every day. To our staff, customers, partners and employers - thank you. We are grateful for our strong and supportive relationships, together, we are building stronger communities, creating opportunities and shaping a better future.

As we move into the final year of our Strategic Plan, we will ensure that all goals are achieved, placing us in a good position to review our future and develop our next Strategic Plan. We shall remain focused on expanding our reach, strengthening our partnerships and community connections. We are committed to building on our successes, expanding opportunities and responding with agility to changes in government policy and funding. Most importantly, we will continue to place participants, customers, clients, and communities at the centre of our actions.

Anna Watt
Chief Executive Officer



THE BEST BOARD

*Amanda Green (since 2023), Andrew Simpson (since 2024),
Rachel McLennan (since 2022),
Peter Gaukroger (since 2010) and Les Moulds (since 1997)*



THE BEST EXECUTIVE TEAM

Andrew Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

Anna Watt, Chief Executive Officer

Roger Abbott, Chief Corporate Services Officer

Julie Sills, Chief Human Resources Officer and

Katrina Garrett, Chief Financial Officer.



ABOUT BEST

BEST Employment Ltd (BEST) is a not-for-profit company which provides a range of employment services throughout the New England North West (NENW) and Far West Orana regions of NSW and the Darling Downs and Granite Belt regions of Southern Queensland. Along with a range of community services, mostly in Inverell and New England North West.

Our skilled and passionate staff work hard to achieve our vision, delivering a high quality services that empower thousands of people each year to address employment, mental health, training and other welfare related needs. Our vast range of programs and services target people with a disability, jobseekers, employers, Indigenous community members, youth at risk and disadvantaged community members.

As a dynamic company based in regional Australia, BEST understands the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by rural communities. We actively pursue projects and collaborative partnerships that result in innovative solutions aimed at overcoming these challenges thereby building more resilient and sustainable communities.

As a Public Benevolent Institution and registered charity with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, BEST is committed to focusing efforts on initiatives that support disadvantaged and impoverished groups within the community. This framework enhances our operational capabilities and ensures that our projects align with our mission of providing aid and fostering positive change. Our initiatives include, but are not limited to:



BEST Employment is contracted to deliver Workforce Australia and Disability Employment Services (DES) on behalf of the Federal Government. We support Jobseekers registered through Services Australia, helping them to overcome barriers and get job-ready by providing career guidance, financial and practical assistance, training and skills development to achieve sustainable employment, as well as offering post-placement support. Both programs assist employers with hiring and supporting employees.



BEST Community Services provides support and referral pathways to local community members via multiple programs including: Indigenous programs, facilitating several programs that include Breakfast Club and Homework Centre for infants and primary-age school students and suspended students program; Several case management programs which include the Casework Support Program working with young offenders referred from Youth Justice; the Helping Hands Program that works with Indigenous youth at risk of incarceration; and Opportunity Pathways - Social Impact Investment assisting people in social housing to engage in education, training and employment with a view to access the private rental market and break generational cycles of unemployment and social housing support.



BEST Community Connections provides extensive services to people with disabilities, with a strong focus on person centred planning, inclusiveness and independence. We support people to make choices around how they want to live their life, their way, supporting people to have the best life possible.



BEST Community Shed in collaboration with local volunteers is a holistic social initiative, where community-donated clothing, furniture, homewares and other items are sold through a shopfront in Inverell. Proceeds are donated back to the local community. The Shed also offer a shower and laundry service for those sleeping rough or experiencing homelessness, as well as providing meals and offer welfare in the way of food vouchers two days per week.



BEST Nursery – We operated a fully functioning retail and production Nursery in Inverell, NSW until December 2024. The production division continues to propagate native trees/shrubs and grasses.



BEST Food Garden – We operated a community-focused garden which provided a safe place for people with a disability, the elderly, youth, volunteers and long-term unemployed jobseekers to learn new skills and participate in meaningful activities. Vegetables were propagated and harvested and delivered weekly free of charge to disadvantaged pension-aged, as well as to impoverished residents and Aboriginal Elders.

BEST VALUES



**WE ARE COMMITTED
TO PEOPLE**

Our commitment is to demonstrate a fundamental respect for people inside and outside our company and respect for the communities in which they live. People are our most important resource and advantage. It's through trust, respect, and empathy that our people, staff, and service users alike, grow and prosper.



**WE EXERCISE LEADERSHIP
BY EXAMPLE**

Strong leadership, of our teams and of ourselves, is vital for creating the infrastructure and environment that is necessary for our people to focus on their goals and achieve their potential.



WE MAINTAIN INTEGRITY

Our commitment is to always remain consistently open, honest, ethical, and genuine. We care about what we do and how we do it. We believe it is important to match words with outcomes.



**WE OPERATE WITH
PASSION AND POSITIVITY**

Passion and positivity are at the heart of our company. We are committed in mind and spirit, to always moving forward, whilst innovating and improving. We utilise this commitment to energise, engage and inspire others.



**WE STRIVE CONSISTENTLY
FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE**

We look to continuously improve what and how we do things, to remain focused on the achievement of business excellence in every business unit. We are committed to measuring the things that make a difference.

OUR VISION

BEST will develop and support independent, thriving, and resilient communities throughout regional NSW and QLD

PURPOSE

To provide inclusive services and supports to assist and empower people and communities to realise their full potential

GOALS

Deliver the BEST-in-class services in our chosen markets

Be an employer of choice with an engaged and capable workforce

Expand our reach and impact within our community

Broaden our employer and industry engagement

Diversify Revenue

PILLARS

CUSTOMER

Our service delivery is customer centric leading to deep and valuable partnerships with our customers, employers, and communities

PEOPLE

Our people are well led, engaged, capable and adaptable

DIGITALISATION

Our digital capability underpins service delivery to our customers

PERFORMANCE

Our business and governance processes are continuously improved, enhancing performance and quality

BEST FOOTPRINT

19 Offices and 19 Outreach locations



BEST SNAPSHOT

51,327

Total attended appointments
Workforce Australia

\$193,896

Investment in participants
Disability Employment Services

4,271

Total activity and employment
placements created
Workforce Australia

8,892

Total attended appointments
Disability Employment Services

1060

Staff support hours each week
Disability Services

102

Employment opportunities created
Disability Employment Services

80

Young People supported
Casework Support Program

125

Participants supported
*Opportunity Pathways – Social
Impact Program*

36

Clients supported
Domestic & Family Violence

\$58,600

Donations to the community
Social Enterprise

WORKFORCE AUSTRALIA

Workforce Australia is the Australian Government's employment services program, designed to help job seekers access meaningful work, develop skills, and build sustainable careers. Its goal is to empower individuals to participate fully in the workforce, supporting independence, confidence, and personal growth.

BEST delivers Workforce Australia services across the New England Northwest and Far West Orana Employment Regions with a focus on individualised support, and lasting outcomes. By connecting people with tailored pathways to employment, BEST helps participants overcome barriers, build capabilities, and achieve long-term success in the workforce.

Under our Workforce Australia contract we serviced approximately 7,000 participants across 32 regions, resulting in 2,254 placements - a 35% increase compared to the previous financial year. Of these placements, 1,787 participants successfully secured employment, reflecting the tangible impact of our efforts in communities ranging from major regional centres like Tamworth and Dubbo to smaller towns such as Bingara and Walcha.

Our placements spanned a diverse range of industries, including Sales Assistance, Commercial Cleaning, Construction, Disability Support, and Hospitality. Key employer partnerships with organisations such as Woolworths and Programmed Labour Hire have played a vital role in creating sustainable employment pathways.

We have also strengthened our training offerings, with increased participation in programs such as Career Transition Assistance, Self Employment Assistance Program, Local Jobs Program, Responsible Services of Alcohol, Traffic Control, digital literacy, and Civil Construction to name a few. These initiatives are equipping participants with the skills needed to thrive in a competitive job market.

In addition, we successfully passed our license review, securing an unconditional extension through to 2027 (the end of the contract), this was the best possible outcome. This result reflects our commitment to quality, compliance and continuous improvement.

During the year, the department underwent a structural realignment aimed at optimising workloads and enhancing consistency across teams. This change has supported improved service delivery and operational cohesion.

Our performance metrics have also shown encouraging progress. New England Northwest and Far West Orana regions improved from a low to a moderate rating. These developments signal strong momentum and a positive trajectory for both regions.

As we continue to refine our practices and expand our reach, we remain focused on delivering meaningful outcomes for participants and communities. The progress made this year lays a strong foundation for continued success, and we look forward to building on these achievements.

When Clint first walked into our Tenterfield office, he wasn't sure what the future held. He was looking for work and hoping for a fresh start. With the support of his Workforce Adviser and the incredible training provided by his employer, Humph 4 Tyres, Clint's life has taken a remarkable turn.

Clint is now thriving! Confidently working both in the workshop and out in the field, his employer describes him as "a completely different person" from when he first started, and the impact of this opportunity has been truly life changing.

Clint is full of gratitude for the support he received throughout his journey and we couldn't be prouder of how far he's come. His story is a powerful reminder of what can happen when opportunity meets determination and the right support.

Pictured below: Clint and Humph



After caring for his mother and being out of the workforce for some time, Greg returned with a strong desire to secure full-time work. Despite attending several interviews, he was left feeling discouraged after not receiving any offers. It was during a conversation with his Workforce Adviser that Greg's true aspirations came to light, he had long dreamed of starting his own handyman business. Recognising this, the Adviser guided Greg toward the Self-Employment Assistance program, a complementary service designed to support aspiring entrepreneurs.

This tailored approach went beyond traditional employment services. Greg was supported with access to office facilities, assistance with fuel costs, and help securing public liability insurance. He used this support to register his ABN, design promotional materials and build his business from the ground up. Today, Adhoc Handyman Services is thriving, with glowing reviews and steady work.

Greg's success is a testament to his dedication and the personalised support he received. His journey highlights how understanding individual aspirations and offering flexible, targeted services can lead to meaningful, long-term outcomes.

Workforce Adviser - Kerrie Greentree, Greg and CEO - Anna Watt



DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (DES)

Australia's DES, which BEST is proud to deliver, is designed to support individuals with a permanent disability in finding and maintaining employment. Our incredible DES team deliver services across 15 locations in the Employment Service Areas of Keepit, Gwydir Namoi NSW and Warwick QLD. Significant Disability reforms have been underway over the last two years as a result of the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission inquiry into violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with a disability.

The amazing DES team has adapted to a new Disability Quality Framework, new Performance Framework in addition to many other changes in the sector which have been rolled out nationally, ensuring the highest quality services are being delivered. Our teams can be proud that they have maintained the rating of "Meets Expectations" against both the Performance and Quality Frameworks.

On a daily basis, each team member passionately advocates on behalf of the participants who choose to engage in DES services to source or create employment opportunities which are well suited to the individual participants goals and health factors. Team members build strong community connections to partner with local support services, training providers and health professionals to achieve long term employment pathways.

Strong employer and stakeholder relationships are paramount to the team's success. Employers are supported by the DES team to build disability recruitment confidence and support employers with strategies to create inclusive workplaces. We offer ongoing support once our participants commence paid employment to see them and the employer succeed in the goal of long term employee retention. Our DES team take great pride in being able to help employers realise the amazing benefits of employing the local individuals who engage in our services.

Our ongoing engagement with Peak Body stakeholders, including Disability Employment Australia (DEA), Amplify Alliance, National Disability Services (NDS), and local community reference and advocacy groups over the last twelve months has ensured that we have been able to foster networks and collaborate with other disability providers and stakeholders to inform disability policy and access professional advice and resources.

In the last year, the team have celebrated on 158 different occasions one of our participants and their employers reaching the 3 month, 6 month and 12 month employment duration term with widespread community impacts seen.

DES providers Australia wide eagerly await tender announcements for the new Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) Contract which are expected soon. Our team have continued to focus on giving 100% to everything they do, demonstrating the dedication and BEST values alignment that shines brightly in the DES sector with the goal of expanding following BEST's tender submission in late 2024.

DES providers across Australia are eagerly awaiting tender announcements for the new Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) Contract, expected soon. BEST has submitted tenders for six Employment Service Areas (ESAs), aiming to deliver IEA services across our current footprint. These include existing ESAs Keepit, Gwydir Namoi, and Warwick as well as new ESAs in Far West, New England, and Orana.

The IEA program was originally scheduled to commence on 1 July 2025, but has been delayed to 1 November 2025 due to the federal election caretaker period. Consequently, the existing DES program has been extended from its original end date of 30 June 2025 to 31 October 2025, in order to ensure uninterrupted support for participants.

Despite these uncertainties, our DES team continues to give 100% to everything they do, consistently demonstrating the dedication and values alignment that distinguish BEST within the DES sector. This commitment positions us strongly for growth following our IEA tender submissions in late 2024.

Having been injured and losing a job that was the world to me I fully understand how a work accident or injury can turn your world upside down.

In 2013 I found myself crawling out of a hole from depression and needing to make a fresh start. At that point, I was determined to move forward and needed all of the assistance I could get. I struggled to find employment, (even with the assistance of my Agency), that would satisfy both my medical/physical ability and my determination to gain meaningful employment.

Hence why, when approached by John [BEST's DES Job Coach] for me to take on Jodie, I was thrilled that I could assist. The original plan was for me to teach Jodie as much as I possibly could, that would set her on a new path of discovery towards permanent employment.

We commenced our journey and within a very short time it became obvious to me that Jodie was a true treasure and would be a great asset to our company.

Recently I felt the need for more assistance in our growing business and asked John if he had anyone else, he could send my way. Then we had the pleasure of meeting Catherine, and like Jodie, Catherine is now part of our team.

These two ladies have proven that a disability is not necessarily a barrier and I am very pleased that BEST Employment sent them both my way. They are now very well loved members of our team.

Julie Clark

*Principal
Injule Property Management*

*Employer Julie Clark alongside
BEST DES participants
Jodie and Catherine*





A proud moment for the Gunnedah community as Joey (left), a long-time DES participant, celebrates a significant milestone in his career.

BEST has been working closely with Joey on and off since 2017 to identify employment opportunities in the local area which align to his interests and individual circumstances. Over the years, Joey has demonstrated resilience and determination while partnering with BEST to progress into employment, undertaking Training, Certifications and enhancing employability skills.

With the guidance and support of BEST, Joey expressed interest in completing a Traffic Control Course. Supported, successfully achieving his certification and opening new doors for his career progression. Following this, Joey and his job coaches explored various employment options suited to his skills and needs.

One such opportunity arose when a School Crossing Supervisor position became available. Recognising the potential fit, Joey, with the support of BEST, applied for the role and secured a casual position after BEST supported Joey with completing required Police Checks and ensuring all appropriate PPE and new employment requirements were smoothly navigated. Joey was able to celebrate being offered a permanent position, a testament to his commitment and enthusiasm in his role. Joey has gone from strength to strength having remained in his role for over 18 months, continuing to be supported by the BEST and his local employer. BEST look forward to their fortnightly meetings with Joey and enjoy him being able to inspire others who are progressing towards their goal of obtaining paid employment.

Partnering with our local community

DES team members Mark Cubis and Emily Rigney (right) representing BEST at the Goondiwindi Jobs Expo.

DES hosted a stall at the Headspace event themed "Dress for the job you want". BEST team member Linda Pratt (below) alongside one of the 270 community members who engaged in the hugely popular community event.



DES team members Linda Pratt, Kymberley Horn and Gloria Sommerville (pictured left) representing BEST at the Chamber Business Excellence Awards. Pictured with Mark Celledoni, President of Warwick Chamber of Commerce

Helping Hands

The Helping Hands program is funded by NIAA (National Indigenous Australia Agency) until 31 December 2027. This program is for Aboriginal young people who are at risk of incarceration or who have previously been incarcerated to help them overcome barriers, provide cultural education and offer referral pathways and advocacy.

Our caseworkers have very strong links to the local Aboriginal community and a wealth of knowledge on their cultural history. They have also completed RAGE (Re-navigating Angry and Guilty Emotions) facilitator training. This has given them the education, resources and training to deliver anger management programs to the young people they support.

Over the past 12 months the caseworkers have delivered an array of cultural activities for the young people, including didgeridoo workshops, fishing, weaving, visiting cultural sites on country and engaging with local Aboriginal Elders. Our caseworkers have supported 32 young people over the past 12 months and of the 32 young people supported, 26 of the participants have not re-offended.

Below is a breakdown of achievements during the reporting period:

- SMART goals set – 94
- SMART goals achieved – 69
- SMART goals still in progress – 25
- Percentage of goals achieved – 73%

Cultural goals/activities achieved:

- Didgeridoo design – 14
- Fishing – 9
- Weaving – 2
- Visits on Country – 2
- Cultural Art – 5
- Engaging with Elders from the local community – 7

Helping Hands caseworkers have completed training to provide Cell Support for young people and have provided this support on five occasions. Cell Support is when a caseworker goes to the local police station and provides support to young people who are being held in the local prison cells, while they are awaiting a bail hearing.

We also offer court support to our participants and have provided this support 25 times during the year.

Participant below supported to gain her Driver Licence



A young female client we have been supporting has had a lot to deal with at home for a young person. Her mum and stepdad separated, her mum kicked her out and she spent the next four months moving around with her stepdad while he tried to secure a permanent address. Despite all of this, she kept showing up and pushing through. She continued to attend Community College with our encouragement and support, has started learning life skills like cooking, has completed an anger management program and is learning cultural jewellery weaving. There have been times when she has opened up about her mental health struggle and her resilience and inner strength have been amazing.

Earlier in the year, she was finding it hard to attend her casual Saturday job and was worried she may lose it. With the support and encouragement of her caseworker and her stepdad, she went and spoke with her manager, letting her manager know what she had been dealing with and how much she wanted to continue to work. The maturity she showed was way beyond her 14 years and paid dividends as she is still employed there now with the potential to secure more shifts.

Aboriginal Weaving – Participant and Caseworker



*Participants learning life skills including:
cooking and budgeting, social inclusion – supporting to reengage with education.*





In December we exited a client due to incarceration. His life was off track with alcohol and substance abuse, domestic family violence and criminal behaviour. When he was released from incarceration, he was re-referred into our program.

During this time, he has engaged very well and is building a wonderful rapport with his caseworker. He has remained focused on improving his life. He is attending all his necessary appointments and court-ordered programs. He is engaging in designing a didgeridoo and mental health counselling, trying to get his life back on track. He thanks us at the end of every appointment and is appreciative of the support we provide.

Participant at the Didgeridoo workshop

Education and School Engagement (EASE)

The EASE program consists of both the Breakfast Club and the Homework Centre programs. The EASE program is funded by National Indigenous Australia Agency until 31 December 2028.

Breakfast Club

The Breakfast Club operates every school day at our South Inverell site. Children come in their school uniform and are provided breakfast before ensuring they get on the school bus. We provide a safe space where the children attending can relax and enjoy a nutritious breakfast before starting their day. Our staff provide support and encouragement around the importance of education through casual conversations during breakfast.

Over the reporting period our staff have provided 1,700 breakfast meals to children from the South Inverell area.

Homework Centre

The Homework Centre program is delivered from our South Inverell site every Monday and Wednesday afternoon, during the school term. Children are provided with afternoon tea and have access to, computers, educational games and mentoring, all in a safe and nurturing environment.

Our continued partnership with the University of Newcastle welcomes students who visit regularly to offer programs on a range of topics. These include study and employment opportunities, road safety and first aid. The children absolutely love these visits and are always curious to know more about the particular topics being presented.

The Homework Centre provided assistance to children on more than 1,100 occasions.

Visitors from the University of Newcastle with the children at the Homework Centre



Feedback

We seek regular feedback to ensure continuous improvement with our EASE programs. Feedback relates to program quality, satisfaction with staff, interactions with their children and if they would recommend the program to others.

Parents gave the following ratings for the Breakfast Club in our most recent collation of feedback:

- 92% of parents gave a rating of either good or great for all key areas mentioned
- 8% gave a rating of, average, for all key areas.

The following ratings were received for the Homework Centre in our most recent collation of feedback:

- 100% of parents gave a rating of either good or great for all key areas mentioned.

The EASE program is heavily supported by our local schools and has a strong and collaborative relationship with these key stakeholders, who are always willing to provide letters of support for the program and who provide us with resources they are no longer utilising.

Casework Support Program (CSP)

CSP is delivered on behalf of the NSW State Government, Department of Communities & Justice (DCJ) in order to offer support to young people being supervised in the community by Youth Justice. The program is aimed at assisting young people to achieve practical goals such as gaining employment or enrolling in education.

The program has undergone significant changes in the reporting period, with the majority of new contracts being awarded to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's) in order to meet 'Closing the Gap' targets. The 'Closing the Gap' campaign aims to address inequalities and promote better health and social outcomes for Indigenous communities. This change resulted in the loss of our service delivery areas in Moree in March, with Tamworth to cease at the end of September 2025. This is disappointing given that we were one of the top achievers in the State.

We continue to hold the contract for the Glen Innes and Armidale areas and continue to achieve high results in these areas. We are looking at alternative ways in which we can better support our communities in sites where we have not been able to continue with the program.

We were funded to deliver the program to 64 young people during the year, however, we have supported 80 young people, which equates to 125% of the KPI.

Achievements during the reporting period:

- SMART goals set – 369
- SMART goals achieved/mostly achieved– 229
- SMART goals withdrawn - 78
- SMART goals still in progress – 53
- Percentage of goals achieved – 96.2%

Tamworth CSP Participants at a Didgeridoo Workshop with Aboriginal Elders



Inverell CSP Participant assisted to gain his Basketball Coaching Certificate



Five CSP clients in Glen Innes have been enjoying attending cultural programs each Friday (day is flexible to account for Sorry Business) at Glen Innes Local Aboriginal Lands Council. The CEO, Elena Weatherall, has made the commitment to run this program on her day off and her knowledge and commitment has been amazing. We provide lunch for everyone at each session.

The clients participated in creating designs on possum skins through drawing or burning, burning designs into cutting boards and making clapsticks from blanks. They are currently working on a mural in the lobby of the Lands Council along with other community members. Elena has future plans to allow the boys to create a new feature garden at the front of the building and to incorporate activities with the Rangers at The Willows property. There are plans to extend this program to other young people.

Each of the boys have shown a commitment to attend the program and are often waiting for the bus to pick them up. They have a history of criminal activity together and this Program has given them an opportunity to relate to each other in a positive and pro-social manner. They have related recent incidents of saying “no” to other young people when requested to engage in criminal activity.

Participants at a Clapstick workshop



A young woman's journey in the CSP began some time ago and has been one of resilience and growth. Throughout this time, she has faced and overcome numerous life challenges, with consistent support from CSP, Youth Justice and Backtrack Armidale. This partnership has been instrumental in helping her build confidence, develop life skills and access psychosocial support.

Together, she and CSP worked on several key areas, including a health check with her local doctor, involvement in a boxing program at PCYC, and the creation of a resume. This foundation of support led to a successful application for a Crew Member position with Hungry Jacks Armidale. With guidance from CSP, she practiced interview skills, boosting her confidence and preparing her for success. She was eventually hired!

CSP also helped her navigate the practical steps of starting her job, including completing the necessary paperwork, applying for a Tax File Number, setting up a bank account and purchasing work boots. Throughout this process, numerous conversations took place around workplace behaviour and professionalism.

Now employed at Hungry Jacks, she is saving for her first car, marking an exciting new chapter in her life. CSP's continuous support has played a key role in her personal and professional development, and her accomplishments highlight her resilience and determination.

*CSP Caseworker - Shannon Murphy with Participant and
Youth Justice Caseworker - Cassie McLinden*



Domestic & Family Violence Program (DFV)

The Domestic & Family Violence Program (DFV) provides flexible assistance to address domestic and family violence in our communities. The program is also funded by NSW State Government, DCJ, and as with CSP, has undergone significant changes in funding, with our Moree and Tamworth services being reallocated to ACCOs in order to meet 'Closing the Gap' targets. This has again reinforced the need for us to look to alternative services and solutions for supporting our communities in these areas.

We have had 36 clients referred to the DFV program with the following achievements:

- Goals set - 182
- Goals achieved/mostly achieved - 121
- Goals withdrawn - 10
- Goals still in progress - 35
- Percentage of goals achieved - 88.3%

The DFV funding has been rolled over for a 12-month period, until 30 June 2026.

One of our DFV family workers noticed a pattern of grandparents raising their grandchildren who are being referred to the DFV program. These were mainly grandmothers, and many of them were struggling to address and cope with their grandchild's anti-social behaviour.

Our family worker provided intense support, education and advocacy to both the carer and the young person, and came up with the idea of linking these grandparents together to: exchange stories, provide support to each other and to have someone that understands them free of judgement to talk with.

With all parties involved giving their consent to be part of the gathering, our DFV family worker arranged a morning tea at a local coffee shop for everyone to meet. These women now meet fortnightly and are on the phone to each other regularly, supporting one another in order to see their grandchildren flourish.

DVF Caseworker – Kiel Frater with Clients at a cultural visit to “The Willows”, an Indigenous Protected Area near Glen Innes



Opportunity Pathways-Social Impact Investment

The Opportunity Pathways Social Impact Investment (OP-SII) Program was dual funded by both the Federal and State Governments. Unfortunately, after the election this year, both parties made the decision not to continue this program after 30 June 2025. Our caseworkers covered the New England area and were based at Wee Waa, Tamworth and Inverell.

This program worked with people connected to social housing, either having a tenancy in place or on a waiting list to access social housing. Our caseworkers worked intensively with participants to address barriers, provide training pathways and offer employment support. We have provided advocacy in a variety of areas and assisted with housing issues.

Below is a breakdown of OP-SII data:

- Participants supported - 125
- 13-week outcomes achieved - 24
- 13-week outcomes achieved by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Participants – 14
- 13-week outcomes achieved by Rent Choice Youth Participants – 5
- 13-week outcomes achieved by a Disability and/or Long-Term Illness participant – 13
- 13-week outcomes achieved by Females – 14
- 13-week outcomes achieved by Males – 10
- 26-week outcomes achieved - 16
- 26-week outcomes achieved by ATSI Participants – 9
- 26-week outcomes achieved by Rent Choice Youth Participants – 3
- 26-week outcomes achieved by a Disability and/or Long-Term Illness participant – 9
- 26-week outcomes achieved by Females – 10
- 26-week outcomes achieved by Males – 6

Centrelink Agent

We deliver a Centrelink Support contract, funded by Services Australia currently in place until 30 June 2026. The contract is offered annually and expected to continue through to 2027. The service is delivered from our Wee Waa office providing support to community members with Centrelink related issues. Our agent also supports people to access the self-service Centrelink site, helping them become self-sufficient in advocacy.

Our Centrelink Support staff member provides the Wee Waa community with so much support outside of the Centrelink Support role. Due to the Wee Waa community being isolated and having a lack of access to services, she is a conduit for them to gain support with other services outside the Wee Waa township.

BEST Community Shed

The BEST Community Shed continues to provide a fantastic service to the local community and surrounding area. The Shed is run by a group of 60 volunteers, who give their time to ensure people in our community have access to items of need in a friendly environment. The volunteers provide a safe and comfortable space, free of judgement for people to access affordable homewares, clothing, furniture and bric-a-brac.

This is just the beginning of the support they provide, which includes a shower and laundry service for those sleeping rough or experiencing homelessness, they provide meals to those who have nothing and offer welfare in the way of food vouchers two days per week.

The BEST Community Shed also has applications for funding available that are discussed and decided upon at monthly committee meetings.

To be eligible, you must be a local group, program or service and must not operate on a for-profit basis.

Donations made to the community totalled \$58,600 as follows:

Gilgai P&C	\$2,000
Inverell Golf Club	\$5,000
Inverell Pioneer Village	\$5,000
Inverell Rescue Squad	\$30,000
National Transport Museum	\$2,000
Northern Tablelands Wildlife Carers	\$5,000
Pathfinders Clothesline Project	\$3,000
The Dramamatics Group	\$2,000
The Filipino Community Group	\$4,600



BEST Community Shed donates \$2000 to the Dramamatics Group

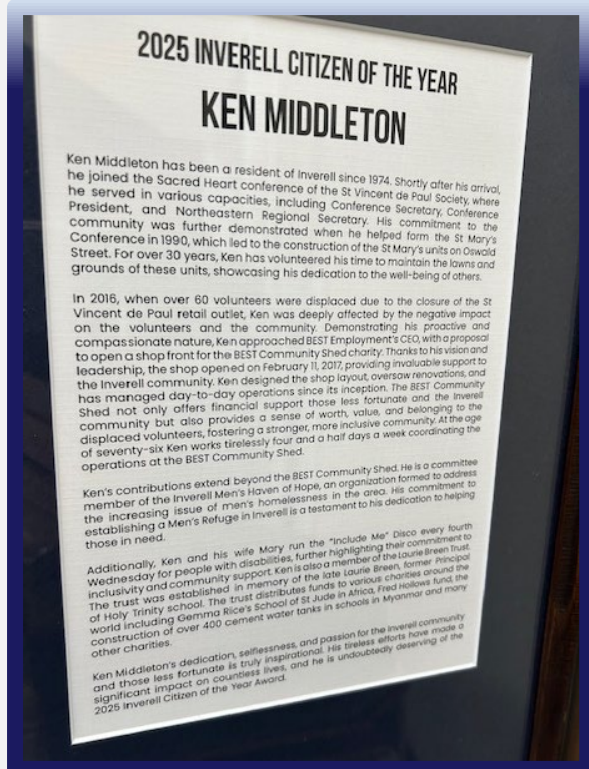
BEST Community Shed Volunteers donation to the Inverell Rescue Squad



Celebrating International Volunteers week in May 2025



BEST Community Shed Volunteer Ken Middleton was awarded 2025 Inverell Citizen of the Year for his contribution to the community, in particular the BEST Community Shed



Volunteers Narelle King, Veronica Farragher, Julie Coyle, Pat Donald and Libby Ryan pictured with Ken Middleton



BEST Nursery

The BEST Nursery and BEST Food Garden closed their doors on Friday, 6 December 2024. Since this time, we have held a monster garage sale to reduce stock on site and have undertaken a mammoth amount of cleanup work.

We are currently utilising the Burgess Street complex in order to fulfil a number of contracts. One of these is the Windemere project for Squadron Energy, which involved the collection of seeds from local properties and then germinate and grow them into tube stock. These trees will be planted out on the properties they were collected from to ensure the genetic link from the seeds are put back to the area they came from.

We have rented part of the site to the NSW Forestry Corporation Grafton Nursery for the hardening of their pine seedlings. This partnership has seen BEST provide location, equipment and site management, with NSW Forestry providing staff and horticultural expertise. Around 400,000 pine trees were trucked to Inverell in April and they will move them in approximately August 2025 for distribution and planting in state forests.



Seedlings and the Forestry pines



BEST Community Connections

BEST Community Connections has continued to ensure that Participant choice continues to be at the forefront of all that we do, ensuring that each individual receives tailored support that aligns with their goals, preferences and needs.

Staffing and Participant data for BEST Community Connections includes:

- 42 staff, 38 of which are Support Workers (18 Casual staff, 20 Permanent Part Time, 4 Full Time)
- Direct supports were provided to 73 Participants and Plan Management to 38 Participants
- Our staff provide over 1060 hours of support each week

The 2025–2026 Federal Budget has introduced several changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), with a focus on integrity and participant support. However, these changes have not addressed the growing financial pressures faced by service providers. This briefing outlines the key budget impacts and the implications for provider sustainability.

Some of the key announcements from the Budget include:

Funding Allocation

- \$175.4 million over four years to improve NDIS integrity and participant outcomes.
- \$364.5 million over five years to reform the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program.

Plan Funding Changes

- From May 2025, participant plans will shift to three-month funding periods, replacing annual lump sums.

The implications from the budget:

- No Increase in Service Pricing - Despite rising operational costs, there were no adjustments to pricing or indexation for core services, leaving providers with shrinking margins.
- Cash Flow and Administrative Burden - Shorter funding periods may lead to increased administrative workload and cash flow instability, particularly for providers with high service volumes.
- Strategic Uncertainty - The lack of long-term funding clarity makes it difficult for providers to plan staffing, service expansion, and infrastructure investment.

Other current national challenges include staffing, and locally there is a shortage of qualified and suitable candidates to fill essential roles within the NDIS sector. This impacts service capacity and timeliness of support delivery.

BEST continues to focus on the quality of service delivery to Participants and recently underwent a successful mid-term audit. From this, several areas for improvement were identified. The organisation has already begun implementing strategies to address these gaps, including:

- Structured workdays to enhance productivity and consistency
- Implementation of a new support plans tailored to Participant needs
- Comprehensive review of all documentation in collaboration with the Resource team
- Partnership with the quality team to establish and maintain internal audit processes
- Creating and maintaining a new roster system that meets Fair Work requirements

Regardless of the ongoing challenges within the NDIS sector and the constraints imposed by the Federal Budget, we remain steadfast in our commitment to delivering person-centred services.

This year, our Participants have enjoyed a wide range of events and activities that brought creativity and connection to our community. From themed celebrations like State of Origin Days, Christmas in July and Easter Craft Day, to meaningful moments such as the NAIDOC march and Mother's Day craft, there's been something for everyone to enjoy.

Participants attending the NAIDOC march; and Gail Hawes working on her NAIDOC art



Bridget Neilson and Jaimie Brown with their Easter egg baskets; and Justin Burnham with the Easter Egg raffle prize



Our Friday Fun Day group has been especially active, heading on exciting outings including:

- Warialda Indoor Sports Day
- Pickle Ball
- Fishing and golf at Copeton Dam
- Lunch and bushwalking at Cranky Rock
- Lawn bowls

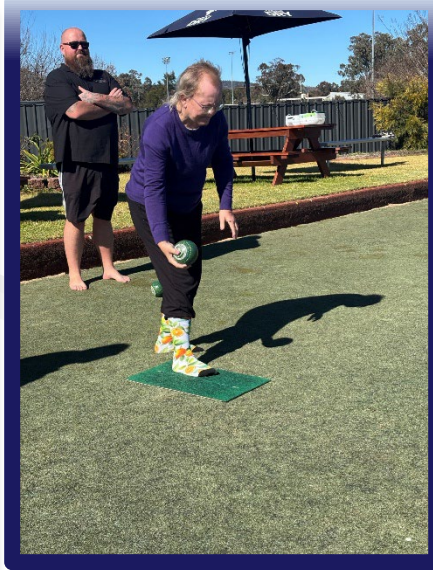
A big thanks to Support Workers, Christie and Grant, who are instrumental in arranging these days and all other support staff who are involved in assisting on the day.

These activities not only bring smiles but foster friendships, build confidence and strengthen our community bonds.

Participant Coordinator - Makayla Youll, with Thomas Simpson and Support Worker - Christie Wilson, State of Origin day



Support Worker Grant Cunningham with Cindy Smith; and Emily Schutz Having fun bowling



Participants and Support Workers – Warialda group outing



Riverside walk Emily Schutz, with Support Worker - Christie Wilson, Thomas Simpson and Bridget Neilson



Leadership Conference Overview

Our annual Leadership Conference was held from Monday, 9 December to Wednesday, 11 December in Tamworth. This year's theme, "Shifting Gears – Driving Performance Through People," reflected our ongoing commitment to empowering leaders to drive organisational success through their teams.

Twenty-four of our leaders gathered to participate in this three-day event, which featured keynote speaker Michael Crossland, renowned for his powerful storytelling and resilience. Michael's keynote, "The Power of Perspective," encouraged leaders to reframe challenges and foster a mindset of growth and possibility.

Throughout the conference, leaders engaged in a range of collaborative breakout sessions designed to explore innovative ways to lead high-performing teams, build accountability and strengthen workplace culture.

Leadership Team December 2024

Back: Julie Sills, Andrew Dyer, Judith Kent, Anna Watt, Rebecca May, Brenna Castro, Joanna Patch, Mitch Shaw, Belinda Barwick, Arjun Mathilakath Madathil, Sarah Taylor, Brendan Byrne, Maree Young, Jordan Daemon, Sonja James. Front: Katrina Garrett, Alynna Schutz, Heylee Williams, Kerrie Anne Dettmann, Peta Devine, Stacey Steadman, Emma Mozzell, Stephen Vile, Bonnie Gleeson.
Staff joining online: Cara Lightfoot and Simone Lewis



Conference Agenda Highlights:

- **CEO Address:** Opening remarks from the CEO provided direction and set the tone for the conference, outlining key strategic priorities for the year ahead.
- **Building Resilience:** This session focused on practical strategies to foster resilience in the workplace - a key competency in adapting to ongoing change and uncertainty.
- **The Importance of Culture:** Leaders explored how to cultivate and sustain a positive, cohesive culture as the foundation for long-term organisational success.

- **Employee Engagement Survey & Action Plan:** A detailed review of our latest Employee Engagement Survey, including key insights and a roadmap for targeted improvements.
- **Measuring Performance – KPIs & Development Plans:** This session explored the effective use of Key Performance Indicators and individual Development Plans to drive outcomes, support growth, and align performance with organisational goals.

Along with the structured sessions, leaders had the chance to have some fun and build stronger connections with one another - an important part of strengthening teamwork and collaboration.

Employee Benefits

At BEST, we remain committed to creating a supportive and rewarding workplace. We offer a range of employee benefits including:

- Flexible working arrangements
- Additional leave entitlements
- Our Excellence & Recognition Program, including Values Champions Awards
- Ongoing learning and development opportunities

A review of our benefits assessed their impact on attraction, retention, and employee satisfaction. Over the 12 months following implementation:

- Applications per advertised position increased by 36%
- Staff turnover declined
- 75% of employees reported enjoying the benefits during their 6-week check-in
- 81% appreciated the benefits at their 6-month check-in
- 69% said they would miss the benefits if they left BEST
- 82% mentioned the benefits as one of their favourite aspects of working at BEST during their exit interview.

These results highlight the tangible value our employee benefits program brings to the workplace experience.

Aligning People and Performance

We have made significant progress in aligning roles and performance expectations across the organisation:

- Position Descriptions for all roles were developed or reviewed and updated to reflect current responsibilities and expectations. These were formally rolled out to employees in early 2025.
- In collaboration with leaders, we developed meaningful Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) tailored to each role. These KPIs were introduced to guide performance conversations, track outcomes and support individual growth.

Health and Wellbeing Week

BEST continues to invest in the health and wellbeing of our people. This year, our annual Health and Wellbeing Week was centred around the 6 Ps of Organisational Health: Progress, Profitability, Productivity, Positivity, Purpose and Practice.

The week featured themed activities each day, encouraging employees to:

- Explore personal growth
- Strengthen social connections
- Build healthy habits
- Foster a positive mindset
- Reflect on their purpose
- Translate wellbeing into practical actions

Participation and feedback from the week reflected high levels of engagement, with many employees sharing that they felt more connected and motivated following the activities.

The past year has reinforced the importance of strong leadership, clear expectations and a workplace culture that values people. Through our continued focus on development, engagement and wellbeing, we are not only supporting our current workforce but shaping the kind of organisation we want to be in the future - one that is resilient, high-performing and aligned through a shared commitment to our people and our purpose.

Tamworth staff participating in Health and Wellbeing week activities



CORPORATE SERVICES

The Corporate Services division consists of marketing, information technology, data analytics, Psychology services, resources, quality and compliance functions.

Resource Management

Development of training resources and operational procedures have remained a focus of the Resource team. It is particularly pleasing to see the contribution and support the Resource team has made in developing operational procedures for BEST Community Services. The Resource team has also implemented an automated process for document reviews ensuring that operational documents are reviewed and updated on a scheduled basis.

Quality

BEST's commitment to the delivery of quality services is underpinned by our ongoing accreditation to the following standards:

- ISO 9001 Quality Management Systems
- National Standards for Disability Services
- NDIS Practice Standards
- ISO 27001 Information Security Management Systems

We eagerly await the DEWR review of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and the potential for revised audits or self-assessments to satisfy the requirements of the QAF.

Feedback from our stakeholders provides evidence of the quality of services delivered. Feedback received includes:

"Staff across all levels demonstrated a professional approach to service delivery". (BSI ISO 9001 Audit report May 2025)

"Excellent service and support, with very understanding personnel for individual needs." (Job seeker March 2025)

"I am very satisfied from the help and support I have received with overcoming my health barriers. The understanding of my problem means a lot to me, someone finally understands". (Job seeker March 2025)

The quality team also implemented a Continuous Improvement Group monthly meeting with senior leaders to review opportunities to improve our services.

Marketing

Marketing activities focused on enhancing brand visibility, community engagement and audience growth across multiple platforms. A key highlight was commencing the development of new website, focused towards creating a dynamic and user-friendly online presence that will encompass all of the services that we deliver. The website is in the final stages of development and due to go live in the first half of the new financial year.

Social media played a pivotal role in driving engagement and reach. A significant increase in posts across social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn has increased followers, likes and engagement. The initial results of our increased social media presence led to the development of a formal social media content calendar, aligning campaigns with key events such as NAIDOC Week, career expos and community initiatives. Commencing in July 2025, this project will increase BEST Employment's online visibility across all brands, improve brand awareness and engagement.

BEST branded merchandise was purchased and used to develop 'showbags' that could be used at community events and careers expos to increase engagement with target audiences. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive from recipients and staff.



Information Technology (IT)

Over the past 12 months, the IT team achieved several key milestones through the successful delivery of major projects. A significant milestone was the organisation-wide upgrade to Windows 11. This project involved implementing new security baselines and policies in alignment with Microsoft and Australian Signals Directorate best practice guidelines. These policies were thoroughly tested with a pilot group before the rollout commenced across all BEST Employment sites and divisions.

Another major milestone was the transition to a cloud-only environment. This was marked by the complete disconnection of our on-premises servers from the cloud, culminating in their decommissioning in July 2024. In addition, we implemented recommendations from third party security provider, Volkis to further enhance our IT security posture. Our increased security posture is reflected in our current Microsoft Secure Score of 84.18%, an increase of 11.71% over the 12 month period.

The IT department has supported cost reduction efforts by deferring several projects to 2027FY, including:

- Upgrading to Teams Premium and implementing a Level 2 spam filter (\$10,000)
- Procuring Fortinet virtual firewall licenses for remote users (\$22,000)

Additionally, an estimated \$13,000 in savings over three years will be realised by replacing existing Lifesize conference rooms with Logitech Teams Room systems.

Business Intelligence Analyst

Building on the success of last year's reporting suite, we expanded our BI solutions through further development of dashboards and automation tools. These included enhanced reporting for the Executive Team, greater visibility into contract performance and the delivery of real-time insights to support both operational and strategic priorities.

We broadened our reporting coverage to include Human Resources and Finance, while investing in the underlying data infrastructure by streamlining data pipelines, introducing API integrations (direct connections with software that reduce manual extraction of data), and reducing manual reporting tasks. This has enabled internal stakeholders to access more timely and reliable insights, freeing up staff to focus on value-adding work.

Looking ahead, our focus remains on deepening forecasting capabilities, strengthening data governance, and embedding BI tools more directly into everyday decision-making across all levels of the organisation.

Psychology

Our internal Psychologist, Craig Scott assisted 143 individuals, comprising of BEST Employment customers, staff and community members referred via services such as Medicare, Department of Veterans Affairs, WorkCover, NSW Victims Services, NDIS, Opportunity Pathways Program and BEST's Domestic and Family Violence Program.

Our Psychology services continues to provide timely, professional mental health support for both staff and clients, enhancing overall wellbeing, resilience and workplace culture. The value of our services is reflected in the positive feedback received from clients:

"Really, you have helped me beyond what I thought possible. I am so grateful for your time, teachings and techniques. My mind and soul are so much calmer"

"I would not be here if I hadn't sought your help"

"Before this I wasn't even able to go to the shop on my own to buy the simplest things"