



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

BEST Employment Ltd

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CEO'S ANNUAL REPORT

Employment Services

The first year of delivering our Workforce Australia contract has been one of great challenge and key learnings. Between changes in contract measurement and direction, vastly differing caseload numbers than initial forecasted figures, and inaccurate revenue forecasts; the first 12 months have been testing across our organisation, and for all providers. Despite these challenges we have ensured a streamlined and positive customer experience, and we have embraced the fluid nature of the contract. Our teams have been flexible and displayed exceptional ability to pivot across an everchanging landscape of contract direction and measurement. As we found our balance with the contract, and the Department found their balance in threshold reviews and changes; we also streamlined our processes and internal structure to maximize efficiencies and improve financial performance.

In the first 12 months of operations, we have achieved the below:

- Commenced 3,902 Customers and supported them in understanding a new contract and their new requirements.
- Placed 2,249 Customers into employment, 1,324 Customers into an activity, and 46 Customers into a Work for the Dole Activity.
- We navigated significant change in our leadership team, with the successful recruitment of new leaders to the business, navigating high turnover and successfully stabilising our staff retention.
- We implemented new leadership capability programs across the leadership team, with introduction of formal succession planning and allowing opportunity for future leaders to formally step up into acting leadership positions while leaders are on leave - setting a new standard within the organisation and building capacity across the team.
- We have completed a cultural reset for our teams.
- We attended countless community and employer engagement events, sponsored local events across the footprint, and built traction in new communities across Far West Orana while maintaining our presence in the New England North West Region.
- We maintained our relationships with Local Jobs Programs, NESAs and The Department - to remain a trusted leader representing integrity in the Employment Services Sector.

Whilst the first year of operations has been tumultuous, our teams have embraced each change with passion and positivity. Our leadership team has developed their capability and seen impressive professional growth, embodying our values each day. Key learnings have been adopted, and financial performance continues to improve. We enter FY 2023/2024 with a stabilised Leadership Team, an engaged workforce and clarity on Performance Measures from the Department. With this foundation we are confident we can move forward and improve performance across the contract.

Team Leadership meeting in Inverell



Assisting our customers to get into work



Disability Employment Services (DES):

DES Star Ratings continued to remain suspended, however DSS announced the resumption of four performance reports at the end of the Financial Year. These reports, whilst not as comprehensive as star ratings or previous percentile data, allowed us to end the Financial Year being able to review our performance levels in comparison to other providers. The team have closed out the year with a strong focus on positioning ourselves strongly for future DES Business in the lead up to contract end in 2025.

Our DES Manager and our HR Team tailored a range of recruitment practices and vacancy descriptions throughout the bulk recruitment period. Pleasingly these changes, in addition to extra support being provided to the DES team has resulted in quality new team members joining the BEST team who are proving to be well suited to the DES environment. Many of the DES team members recruited during the FY 2022-2023 have a disclosed disability themselves, this has lent itself to them being able to relate and empathise with the DES participants they service, in addition to them becoming a source of inspiration to their fellow team members.

A solid Leadership team has been formed within the DES Business Operations. Extensive training and coaching of team members has been a significant focus over the course of the year given so many DES team members were recruited during a short space of time. All indications point towards this team being able to get off to a tremendous start in the new Financial Year.

Our DES Manager and Deputy Employment Services Manager, commenced work with a consultant on a DES Pilot during the last Quarter of the Financial Year, with the view of demonstrating innovative servicing and performance approaches ahead of the DES reform and potential tender process. Some 160 DES participants were surveyed in order to inform the DES Pilot strategies, in addition to balancing the Department's Performance and Quality Framework elements.

BEST has engaged in many community and Department led events over the course of the year, not limited to the below:

- Department of Social Services and Jobs Australia DES Reforms Conference
- Disability Employment Australia 2023 Conference
- KPMG/Department of Social Services Quality Framework Consultation Workshops
- Narrabri Jobs Expo
- Warwick/Killarney Solar Farm Open Event
- Department of Human Services Quarterly Meetings
- Warwick Careers Expo
- New England North West Regional Advisory Council
- Goondiwindi Career, Skills and Opportunities Expo

Our team are adapting strategies and reviewing performance data to ensure we are well positioned for future business opportunities and growth should a tender be announced in 2024.

Harvest Trail Services (HTS):

Over the last year, our team commenced employer surveys - with 60 employers being surveyed in addition to valuable insights and feedback being obtained, a number of vacancies were secured. Our Harvest Team also represented BEST at many events throughout the year, including:

- Local Jobs Taskforce Monthly Meetings
- Granite Belt Vineyard Networking Events
- Department of Foreign Affairs Consultation Meetings
- Harvest Trail Information Service Provider Meetings and Lockyer Growers Association Gala Dinner.



Our Warwick and Stanthorpe teams



Community Services:

Helping Hands:

In the 2022/2023 financial year, the Helping Hands program was re-funded by NIAA (National Indigenous Australia Agency) for a further two years from 1 July 2023, this did come with an expected increase in client number KPI's. Two caseworkers delivering the program are Aboriginal community members with strong connections to culture and the local Aboriginal communities we work within. Our end of year reporting up to 30 June 2023, saw all our KPIs being met.

Casework Support Program (CSP):

Our CSP team continue to deliver to the highest of standards. Our CSP team has been praised from the hierarchy of Department of Communities & Justice (DCJ), for the consistent high-ranking service we provide. Not only did the CSP team exceed target numbers of referrals, but they also hold the highest number of Aboriginal clients in NSW. Our caseworkers located in Inverell, Moree, Tamworth and Armidale and staff cover the New England area. Caseworkers cover a vast area from their sites which include Tenterfield, Wee Waa, Gunnedah, Bingara, Quirindi, Boggabilla, Toomelah, Narrabri, Goondiwindi, Ashford, Tingha, Bundarra, Warialda, Manilla, Barraba and every village in between to continually achieve the high level of outcomes.

All meetings held at a management level have been positive. DCJ management have shown continual support, praise and satisfaction in our contract delivery.

Opportunity Pathways Social Impact Investment (OPSII):

The financial year has seen us move into the new contract Opportunity Pathways-Social Impact Investment (OPSII). It has been a year of that has produced many issues in service delivery of this program. Some of these barriers include:

- Program delivery from BEST Community Service staff.
- Key referring stakeholders not utilising the program.
- Dual funding bodies, both state and federal, do not communicate.
- Increased changes and demands from departmental sectors.

We have put measures in place to combat some of the above areas listed but other departmental challenges are out of our control. The Community Service Manager has met with the key referring stakeholder on several occasions to build the relationship and implement strategies to ensure we are targeting supporting the intended cohort by building a referral pathway between the services. This will continue into the future to ensure we are building our client capacity. Meetings have been had with the DCJ commissioning and planning officer for the OPSII contract to discuss these concerns, from this DCJ have also been involved in encouraging a referral pathway between the key referrer and BEST Community Services OPSII program.

Education and School Engagement (EASE):

The EASE program consists of the Breakfast Club, Homework Centre and Suspended Students program. All these programs are delivered from the Linking Together Centre to their usual high standard and supporting some of our most vulnerable community members. We have moved our delivery of the breakfast club program back to being onsite as it was originally, due to cost increases to delivering the program remotely via home delivery, but no increases to funding amounts, therefore this decision had to be made. We have 15-20 children attend our homework centre two afternoons per week and the schools are regularly referring young people to the suspended student program.

BEST Community Shed Shop:

The BEST Community Shed has, as always, been doing a fantastic job at supporting our disadvantaged community members and supporting services and groups in the area through their kind donations. In the 2022/2023 year the BEST Community Shed reached a milestone of over \$100,000 having been donated back to the Inverell and surrounding communities since they have opened. There are currently over 55 volunteers listed at the shop and this would all be impossible without them.

We will be moving to a more structured volunteer recruitment process in the future.

Linking Together Centre (LTC):

The Centre has Helping Hands Caseworkers, a CSP Caseworker and all EASE staff situated at the one location. The Centre is delivering EAPA (electricity vouchers), food vouchers, public access phone and computer and referral pathways to the South Inverell community and beyond. We have many services that are hiring the meeting facility to provide further

support to community members, which in turn builds the profile of the Centre. The LTC also provides a public access computer and phone for the community's use and community members are assisted with fax and photocopier use as required. As well as this, the Centre hosts a sewing group every Monday for any member of the community to join, with lunch provided along with all equipment needed to start sewing. IDFS also utilises the playgroup area three days per week to provide a supported playgroup to the South Inverell community.

Centrelink Agency:

We are successfully delivering the Centrelink Agent contract in Wee Waa, providing support for recipients in the Wee Waa community. Our Centrelink Agent does a terrific job supporting the Wee Waa community to meet mutual obligations, navigate self-help and ensure payments are being received. This service is vital to the Wee Waa community and offers a safe space to seek support. Sue has built a great relationship with community members and all that visit the service generally return.

Human Resources:

The beginning of the 2022/2023 financial year was an opportunity to embed the BEST culture within our new Workforce Australia team and to continue to foster this culture across all other business units. A large turnover of staff within the Employment Services area required a shift in strategy to look at ideas for increased retention and attraction.

The board's endorsement of BEST's 2023-2026 strategic plan saw the commencement of building a Leadership capability program that once finalised, will support new and emerging leaders to exceed in their roles in leading a team to achieve success. Following the endorsement, organisation redesign commenced and will be finalised in October 2023.

The HR team are excited to continue to support our people and leaders in building an engaged and capable workforce.

BEST Nursery, BEST Food Garden (BFG) and BEST Community Shed (BCS):

Within the financial year, we have seen the Nursery grow and advance. The Retail Nursery Team Leader and the team have continued to add changes and improvements that have certainly changed the way our customers see us and rate us. We get plenty of good reports from long-term customers and new customers. Our customers are excited to see the variety in our stock and the quality that we can provide.



Two major gardening days were held at the Nursery this year for garden clubs and were well attended and supported with good sales. Down to Earth Gardening Club had approximately 30 members attend.

Bare root orders for 2022 were very controlled and organised this year. We have noticed a change with our tree sales as more customers are trying to grow more fruit trees than ever before. We believe that the trend is a reaction from a combination of COVID where people were forced to lock down at home and gardening became a passion again, and reducing the amount of chemicals being used on our produce compared to the supermarket.

BEST Nursery was well represented at the 2022 Inverell Eat Drink Live day by our team and a huge congratulations to them all for their efforts. We also had an influx of customers to the BEST Nursery on the day and sales were a great reflection of this.

It was another successful year for the Pine hardening contract, with some 785,000 trees landing on the pad. After grading this year, we had 600,000 Trees. The pines grading crew is pictured below.

The Retail Nursery Team Leader has been working with Inverell's Ross Hill School and they have planted their mature trees (3 x Claret Ash Trees, 3 x Chinese Elms pictured).



Our BEST Community Shed workshop still runs quietly along with a handful of volunteers upcycling furniture and helping to keep our garden furniture and ornaments in good condition. A volunteer retired mechanic keeps our mowers, whipper snippers, rotary hoes all in good shape, as well as maintaining the tractor and forklift.

Our Work for the Dole Supervisor has had to navigate through a long period where Work for the Dole participants have been suspended from as early as 2020 due to fires, then COVID. The transition into Workforce Australia this financial year has limited the number of participants. Thankfully, our volunteers have made it possible to keep the food garden productive providing valuable food to the community. A big thank you goes out to our volunteers who give their time and effort so generously.

Our hard-working volunteers - Francis Tully, Alison Tully and Shane Hanel are pictured right.



An example of the BEST Food Garden donation veggie and produce bag



The BEST Food Garden held a gathering in February 2023 to mark the 'Harvest of our Show Pumpkins'. Some 35 clients attended a small morning tea and a photo shoot. Our spring plant was another well supported event.



Catherine Campbell Centre excursion to the BEST Nursery and BEST Food Garden



During the year, preschool children as well as participants from BEST Community Connections, Brighter Access and IAS have visited for a nursery and food garden tour. They participate in feeding the hens, checking and collecting eggs ready for deliveries. We thank Regional Australia Bank (RAB) who donated \$500 allowing us to purchase 35 new isa brown hens.

RAB sponsored hens



Business Excellence Unit:

The 2022-2023 financial year has proved to be extremely busy with much of the focus concentrated on supporting the implementation of Workforce Australia. Of particular note is the assistance provided to BEST's IT team and IT consultant to move BEST's corporate data from a server hosted environment to a cloud-based environment.

Internal staff training

Staff training has largely focussed on supporting new and existing staff in the delivery of Workforce Australia services. A significant amount of time has been invested to provide training and resources to staff in existing and new sites. This proved to be a challenging experience due to the lack of Department training resources and guidance material that could be accessed by the Trainers prior to the delivery of services. The challenge of implementation was compounded by the transition to a new Workforce Australia portal, replacing the previous ESS web that staff use to access the Departments jobseeker records.

Quality Management

BEST continues to maintain accreditation to standards as required for delivery of Workforce Australia, Disability Employment Services and National Disability Insurance Scheme services. A total of six external audits were completed by BSI Australia during the year.

The Departments of Employment Workplace Relations (DEWR) and Disability Social Services (DSS) continued to undertake compliance audit functions against the Workforce Australia and DES programs. DEWR completed ten Compliance and Program Integrity (CAPI) activities. DSS completed four assurance activities.

Marketing:

The past 12 months has been a growth and establishment year for the BEST brand; growing in our existing communities while making a name for ourselves in Far West Orana.

Our social media and website content has greatly improved with our social media champions, giving each site a chance to highlight their town/jobseekers/accomplishments. The response from our communities and staff has been positive and we will continue this initiative moving forward.

BEST has increased our attendance to more events across our region and it's been positively driven by our staff on the ground. Because of this, our request for promotional items has increased but in turn too, has our brand and awareness.



Paid advertising has been kept to a minimum with a focus on organic advertising, which has been working. We will continue down this path, using our resources and finances toward promotional items and jobseeker improvement.

Overall, Marketing has had an efficient year with finances, events and organisational branding, and we look forward to continuing down the current path of growth, organisation, brand awareness and success.

BEST on Social media

BEST Community Connections:

2022-2023 was again a challenging year for Connections, but one that saw us draw on lessons learned in 2021-2022 to consolidate existing services to ensure that a high quality service remains available to our communities.

Staffing (particularly in terms of availability, cost and wellbeing) has remained one of our biggest priorities in 2022-2023. Inverell remains a provider of choice for participants in the Inverell area (particularly for day programs) as well as for staff looking to enter the disability industry.

We have continued to follow our business plan for Tamworth, with a strong focus on attracting and retaining new referrals. Our caseload is slightly down on the beginning of 2023, but we have recently had a number of new referrals.

COVID still continues to impact all disability services due to restrictions on return to work following infection, however vaccination mandates for the industry have been eased. This has in some cases increased our options with regard to staffing, however we remain vigilant to infection and continue to observe all protocols in order to reduce infection and risk to participants and staff. Despite this during winter we have had a number of periods in which staff and participant numbers were depleted due to infection. Our Participant Coordinators have performed admirably in juggling rosters during these times to ensure that services for participants are not disrupted or cancelled. Promisingly, involvement in the community has returned to levels not seen since before COVID, with several very successful events being held or attended. Highlights have been participants and staff participating in the Lismore Lantern Parade as the only disability service represented, and recently a large Christmas in July gathering which saw most staff and participants come together.

Attendance at several industry events (eg DSC, NDS and NDIS leadership conferences/forums) has indicated that the industry is experiencing several challenges as a whole, particularly with regard to staffing, compliance and profitability. Despite this, confidence is high that proposed changes to the NDIA will result in improvements to program administration. There is however also some uncertainty, as there is a likelihood that program changes may come into effect following finalisation of Royal Commission findings.

Overall it has been a successful year for Connections, and we are confident that we have a model that provides for a high quality and profitable service.

One of the industry events attended during the year



BEST Community Connections Inverell team enjoying Christmas lunch 2022



Conclusion:

After a more than challenging financial year in so many regards, regardless, I still end this Annual Report with the most profound thanks and appreciation for every single BEST individual, and every single BEST Team and entity. The utter commitment and dedication demonstrated by all is quite simply inspiring, despite all challenges that arise. BEST is truly a magnificent organisation, far-reaching in its endeavours, and so profoundly committed to its Vision and Values. I also take this opportunity to proffer my hugest thanks to Chairperson Jon Watts and the BEST Board, for their oversight of our organisation, their support for myself and their commitment to all our communities.

I am writing this conclusion in September just prior to my retirement, and I would like to take this opportunity to formally welcome Anna Watt as BEST's incumbent CEO, and wish her every success with our organisation. I have operated in my role with the hugest of pride, passion and respect for our people, and I know Anna comes into her new role with the very same intent and commitment. Welcome to BEST and your exciting new future, Anna. I just know the BEST is yet to come.

Penny Alliston-Hall - Retiring CEO