



# Annual Report 2010/11





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# who we are

## Who we are

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Able Australia is a disability services provider that delivers high quality services to people in Australia living with multiple disabilities, including deafblindness.

Our vision is to create a community where people with multiple disabilities including deafblindness are seen heard, respected, valued and connected.

Our mission is to reach out to people with multiple disabilities including deafblindness, supporting them in achieving self-fulfilment and connection with the greater community.

## Our values

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Able Australia's organisational values are:

### Passion

We are passionate about making a difference in other people's lives, the heritage of our organisation and the possibilities that the future holds.

### Purpose

We believe in what we do, applying our diverse skills, commitment and expertise in communication to connect people with the wider community.

### People

We value and respect the skills, compassion and rights of all people: the people we work with, the people we support and the people who generously support us.

## Our services

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Able Australia provides a range of services to people living with multiple disabilities, including:

- Able Living – Long term residential accommodation
- Able Respite – Short term respite accommodation
- Able Deafblind Services – Outreach community support for people living with deafblindness
- Able Lifestyle Choices – Community based day activities
- Ablelink – Adaptive communications facility
- Able Music Therapy – Community based music therapy service
- ableart – Art therapy program.

Able Australia derives funding from government and its own fundraising activities, including donations, raffles, trusts and foundations, corporate partnerships, bequests and events.

Able Australia operates services in Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

## Our patrons

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Able Australia's Patron Peter Hitchener, is a Melbourne based journalist and current Channel Nine News Presenter. Mr Hitchener has been Patron since 1998 and generously contributes his time to assist Able Australia.

Dr David Pitt is also a Patron and Life Governor of Able Australia. A founding member of Able Australia, Dr Pitt was responsible for the original calling together of families of deafblind children, which prompted the creation of The Deafblind Association.

# leadership team

Able Australia's leadership team comprises of nine members focused on the areas of corporate services and operations.



**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Celestine Hare**

Joined Able Australia in 1988



**Human Resources Manager**  
**Hazel Wetzler**

Joined Able Australia in 1998



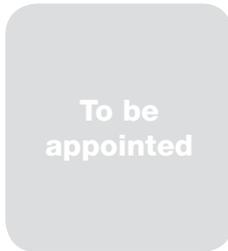
**Finance and Administration Manager**  
**David Ng**

Joined Able Australia in 1999



**Quality, OH&S and Risk Advisor**  
**Hugh Stern**

Joined Able Australia in 2011



**Marketing and Public Relations Manager**  
**Vacant**



**Tasmania Operations and Service Development Manager**  
**John Klug**

Joined Able Australia in 2009



**Victoria State Operations and Service Development Manager**  
**Sean Spencer**

Joined Able Australia in 2010



**Australian Capital Territory Operations Manager**  
**Luke Jones**

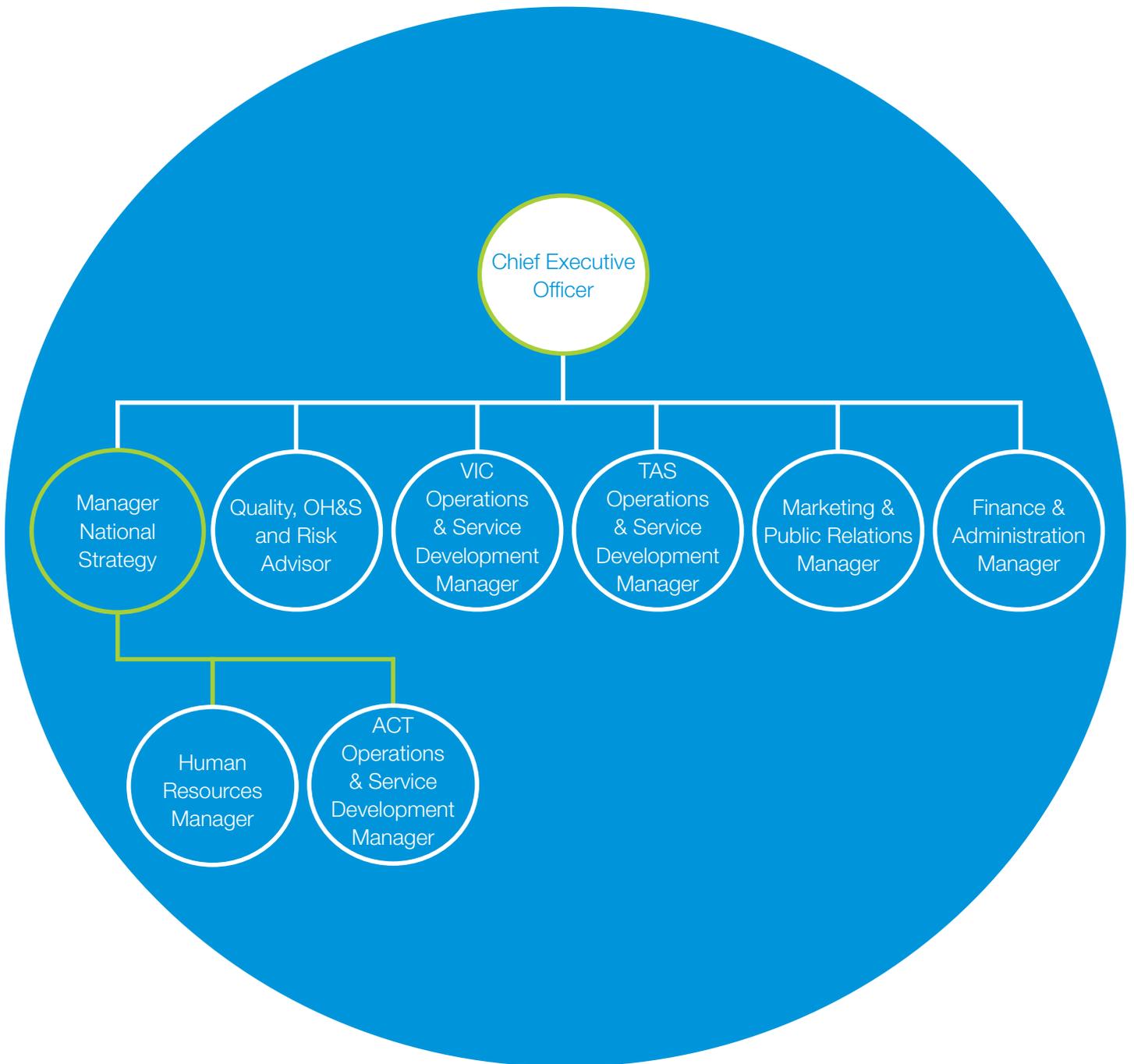
Joined Able Australia in 2011



**Manager National Strategy**  
**John Ballis**

Organisational structure

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# president and ceo's report

Over the past year Able Australia has continued to provide critical services to Australians living with multiple disabilities including deafblindness or vision and hearing impairment.

There were a number of significant achievements, many of which would not have been possible without the assistance of Able Australia's dedicated staff and supporters.

The 2010-11 financial year was very productive for Able Australia including extending services into the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and introducing Lifestyle Choices programs in Hobart and Launceston.

A number of successful events were run to raise awareness of Able Australia and to increase private donations for the programs. In particular, the Australian Charity Wine Auction was a huge success.

In late 2010 Able Australia won a tender for the provision of supported accommodation services across eight sites in the ACT from the Territory Government. This achievement will help establish our organisation as a leader of disability service provision in three regions.

In Victoria, Able Australia also succeeded in receiving approved provider status in February 2011 from the Transport Accident Commission (TAC). As a result, the organisation became eligible to provide Shared Support Accommodation and Community Day Programs to TAC clients. During the next financial year we look forward to the commencement of service provision to TAC clients.

In Hobart and Launceston, Able Australia introduced Lifestyle Choices. The new Hobart office opened in May 2011, which was refurbished to specifically meet the needs of Lifestyle Choices participants. This new facility is an important investment for the organisation to continue its growth in delivering innovative services to Tasmanians.

Continuous improvement is a priority in all that we do at Able Australia with the ultimate goal for 2012 being that all state operations meet the ISO 9001 standards as part of the organisation's commitment to the quality of service provision.

We continued to raise awareness of deafblindness through another successful Deafblind Awareness Week (DBAW) campaign. Able Australia seized the opportunity to highlight the needs of individuals living with deafblindness nationally and had great

success in securing high profile interviews. The 2011 campaign was supported by the release of the updated Access Economics report, which showed the prevalence of deafblindness is increasing.

Able Australia staff released a report in July 2011 about access to telecommunications for people with deafblindness. The findings revealed Australians with deafblindness are being marginalised because they cannot access basic technology such as mobiles, due to the cost involved in customising equipment for use.

Due to the significant growth Able Australia is currently experiencing it was considered the appropriate time to make adjustments to Able Australia's organisational structure.

A review was conducted that looked at the macro levels of the business and how the organisation could operate more efficiently. Three national business streams were recommended, e.g. service delivery and standards, corporate services and business development/marketing, to streamline planning, communication and service delivery.

The ongoing success of Able Australia is reliant on the generosity of our supporters and staff. On behalf of the Board and ourselves we would like to thank everyone involved with Able Australia for their work over the past year.

We remain committed to guiding Able Australia toward achieving its goals and upholding our mission to reach out to people with multiple disabilities so they can achieve self-fulfilment and connection to the community.

On behalf of the Board of Management we would like to thank all Able Australia staff most sincerely for their hard work and commitment throughout the 2010-11 financial year, which saw a period of rapid growth and expansion for the organisation.



Frank Harris  
**Acting President**



Celestine Hare  
**Chief Executive Officer**

# debbie prior award

Every year Able Australia presents a member of its staff with the Debbie Prior Award to recognise their dedication to improving the lives of the people we work with.

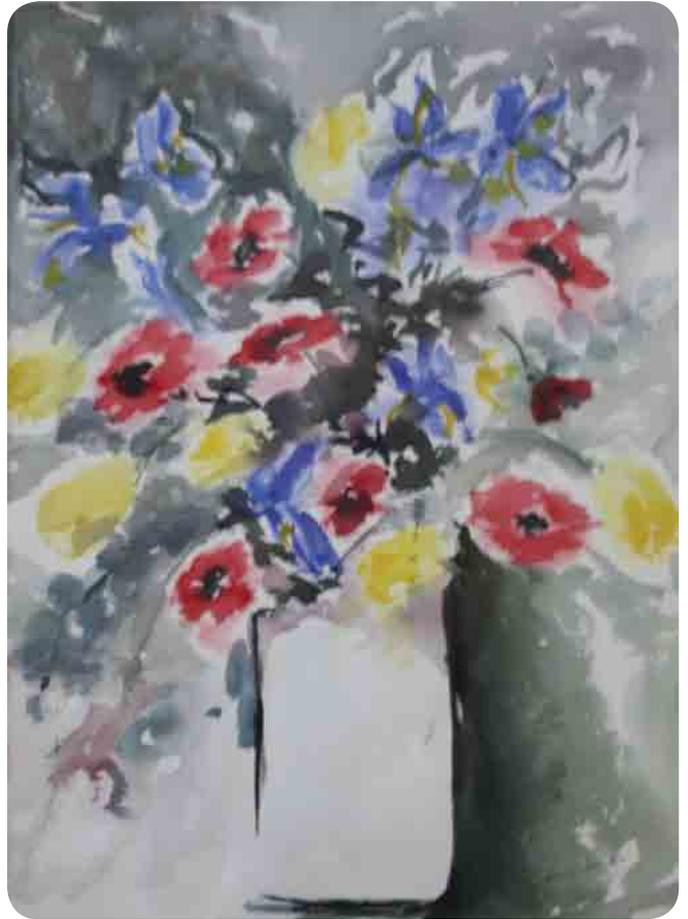
The award is given in memory of Debbie Prior who was employed by The Deafblind Association from 1985 until her death in December 1993. Debbie was initially employed as a Residential Care Worker, then became Residential Coordinator in March 1987.

Debbie was totally committed to the Association and to people with deafblindness. She gained a great knowledge of the entire field and had the ability, integrity and capacity for enormous hard work.

After her sudden death, it was determined that a fitting tribute should be made to represent Debbie's interest in people with deafblindness, the staff, training requirements and her interest in the Association.

The Debbie Prior Award is presented at the Annual General Meeting and the recipient is given a scholarship to be used for further professional development.

A watercolour painting (pictured right) also hangs in Able Australia's Victorian office in memory of Debbie Prior's contribution.





# staff

Able Australia worked to uphold its commitment to improve employee wellbeing in our workplace. The Employee Assistance Program is well established and employee assistance information is given to each employee on commencement of their employment.

Staff and Managers are also reminded regularly about the resources provided to improve wellbeing. Worksafe Health Checks were conducted during the year and will be an ongoing annual opportunity for staff.

In 2010-11 Able Australia took the opportunity to recognise members of staff for extended periods of service. This year certificates were awarded that recognised service periods ranging from two to twenty-three years.

The recognition of staff contributions is part of Able Australia's commitment to demonstrate its appreciation of the skills and energy its staff invest in their work.

The Online Induction program, which covers Able Australia's policies and procedures, continued to be a successful tool in the recruitment process. In total over one hundred people were inducted online in 2010-11. Able Australia's involvement with student placements was a successful initiative in 2010-11. Progressively we have accepted students who are studying Certificate IV in Disabilities that are seeking placements.

The placements have proven to be very successful with the students eventually obtaining permanent or casual employment with Able Australia. The staff hired with this qualification contribute invaluable current knowledge and training to our services.

There was high demand for courses such as Avoiding Stress and Coping with Burnout, Introduction to Mental Health and Predict and Respond to Aggressive/Challenging Behaviour. New courses were also introduced including: Palliative Care, Ageing and Disability, Professional Boundaries and Non Violent Crisis Intervention.

The launch of the new Able Australia website provided an opportunity for training calendars to be posted online. This led to enquiries from other organisations interested in sending staff to Able Australia courses or requesting a special course presentation.

As a result, the Training and Development Unit generated income through fees paid for training. External training offerings will continue to be a high priority in 2011/12.



# services

## Victoria

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Able Australia's Victorian team had the privilege of providing support and services to 736 clients in 2010-11. Their achievements during the year included a successful service relocation, the release of a research report and gaining approved provider status from the Transport Accident Commission (TAC).

In November 2010 Able Australia relocated the Southern Intensive Respite Support Service (SIRSS) from its temporary home at Bonbeach, to a refurbished residence in Dandenong North.

The feedback received from clients and their families about the new Dandenong North location was very positive. The Bonbeach property was demolished to make way for a purpose-built residence for TAC clients living with acquired brain and/or spinal cord injuries.

In 2010-11 Able Australia's Deafblind Services team were involved in a project funded by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). Through this partnership, research was conducted into the telecommunications needs of Australians with deafblindness.

The findings of the project were drafted into a report, Telecommunications and Deafblind Australians, which was launched at Able Australia's annual Friends and Family Fun Day. It is an important report that details the many difficulties the deafblind community have in accessing telecommunications.

During the year Able Australia's in-house interpreter in Victoria, Dennis Witcombe, received the prestigious Churchill Fellowship to study deafblind communications in Finland and the United States of America.

Dennis returned from the trip with new knowledge, including a form of deafblind communication known as Haptics. This form of communication is when interpreters form signs on a client's back giving them contextual information while they communicate with an individual or a group. Dennis is using the knowledge he gained to improve deafblind communication in Australia.

It is also important to note the efforts of the Victorian Lifestyle Choices team over the past year to develop their expertise in supporting very high-need clients. This included developing new and innovative ways

to support people who are part of a group where demand for services is increasing.

The combined effort of both staff and volunteers last year in supporting clients and their families was greatly appreciated.



# services

## Tasmania

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Able Australia's Tasmanian operation grew in 2010-11 with the staff base increasing to approximately 180 and the number of clients over 120.

Tasmania's accommodation services, which were introduced in 2006, have grown from one to seventeen residences. Over 130 staff operate our seventeen houses and provide high quality care to over sixty clients each day.

In March 2011 Lifestyle Choices programs were introduced in Launceston and Hobart. This required the recruitment of twenty additional staff to support the sixty new clients who took up the program.

The Lifestyle Choices program is based on a unique Community Access Model and through Able Australia has formed close partnerships with a range of partners including Campbell Page, Neighbourhood Houses and Police Citizens Youth Clubs.

These partners have provided fantastic support to help Able Australia change the lives of the people we work with in Tasmania.

In 2010-11 we also started working with a number of new organisations, including: National Australia Bank Volunteers, Vodafone Foundation, Royal Botanical Gardens, Launceston City Council, Glenorchy City Council and Brighton Council.

The success of the Lifestyle Choices program is a credit to the staff involved. They have worked tirelessly to offer a range of activities to our clients including swimming, tai chi, gardening and relaxation as well as art and music therapy. The freedom for clients to self-determine their activities is an important part of Able Australia's person-centred planning approach.

Last financial year Able Australia also finalised a number of operational accommodation arrangements. A new office in Hobart was opened and we also leased a new Launceston office. Long term leasing agreements were also finalised with Aurora Stadium, Eddie's Place and Campbell Page that will ensure continued accommodation for Able Australia services into the future.

Another significant achievement was the formation of Able Voice, a consumer participation committee. The committee provides direct access for Tasmanian consumers to the Able Australia Board and is an important feedback channel for our services.

## Australian Capital Territory

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In late 2010 Able Australia won a tender to provide accommodation support services to people living with disabilities across eight residences in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

From mid-October 2010 Able Australia staff worked to transition services from Disability ACT and a previous provider. This project also required the recruitment of permanent staff to provide this new service.

The position of State Operations and Service Development Manager is a crucial role that was successfully filled in June 2011. At the end of the financial year the ACT team had grown to over fifty staff.

The entry into service provision in the ACT gave Able Australia a more in-depth understanding of the systems and processes operating in this territory's disability sector.

Able Australia worked throughout 2010-11 to align operational policies and procedures more closely to the ACT environment.

Able Australia will be working to further consolidate its service offerings in the ACT in 2011/12 and build on the progress to date.

# quality

In 2010-11 the Quality Department prepared Able Australia for the implementation of the state specific Quality Frameworks in Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

Compliance with the Quality Frameworks is mandatory and serves as an important tool in Able Australia's continued efforts to improve services.

All services will go through periodic external auditing to ensure compliance with the specific Quality Framework applicable in each state, as well as the quality management system standard ISO 9001:2008.

A key achievement in 2010-11 was Able Australia's work to develop and begin implementing a Risk Management Framework. This framework will allow Able Australia to realise potential opportunities whilst managing adverse effects.

Able Australia changed certification agency to Health and Disability Auditing Australia (HDAA) which now oversees all our external auditing.

Following a successful audit conducted by HDAA, Able Australia maintained certification to ISO 9001:2008, which is an internationally recognised standard for quality management systems.

This is a great achievement and serves as an acknowledgement to staff and stakeholders that Able Australia is doing a superior job for the people it supports.

The ISO certification enables Able Australia to develop as an organisation and strengthens our commitment to continuously improving the services provided.

# fundraising and trusts

In 2010-11 Able Australia's fundraising program was reviewed, with its systems analysed and tested against industry standards in the interests of best practice.

Steps were taken in 2010-11 to strengthen fundraising programs with new options tested that we hope will grow Able Australia's fundraising portfolio.

The most significant achievement of Able Australia's fundraising program in 2010-11 was the establishment of an online fundraising strategy that generated over \$19,000 in new income. The income exceeded staffing costs by \$3,000, a huge achievement in its first year of operation.

Able Australia's fundraising was extended into Tasmania during the 2010-11 financial year through the introduction of a raffle and direct mail strategies.

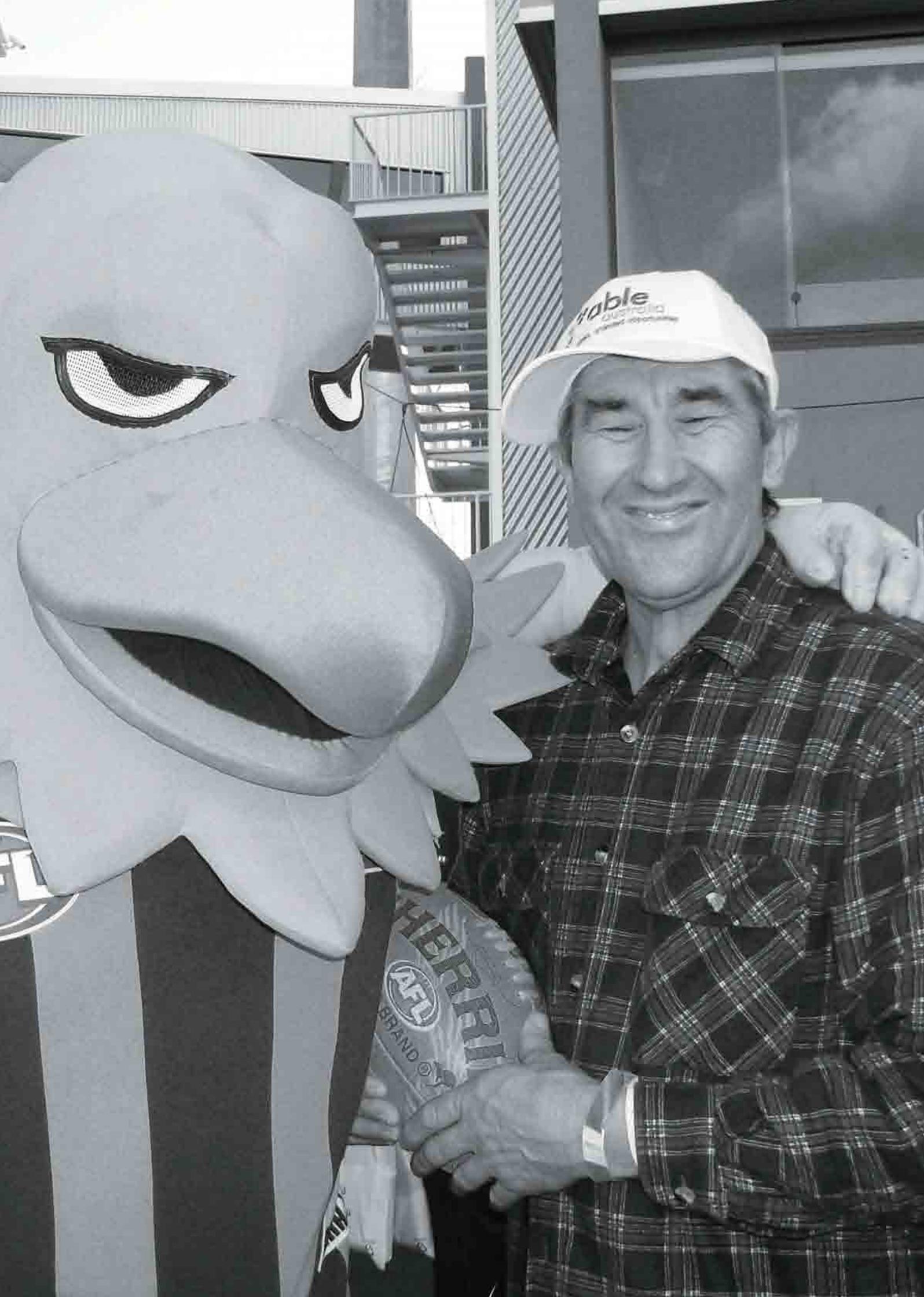
The raffle allowed Able Australia to enter this market and adopt a new successful ticket sales mechanism. A direct mail program was also conducted in Tasmania, which exceeded costs marginally without including ask material in any of the letters.

Able Australia received a number of grants from philanthropic trusts and foundations that enabled us to run new programs and purchase equipment during the 2010-11 financial year.

This generous funding helped with various initiatives, including:

- Deafblind Recreation Program
- Annual Deafblind Camp
- Able Day on the Bay
- Deafblind Telecommunications research project
- Peer to peer Braille training
- Healthy eating program
- Art and music therapy
- Sensory garden
- Exercise equipment.





# marketing and events

The marketing and events team worked tirelessly in 2010-11 to promote Able Australia's important work through events, publications, videos and the media.

Able Australia held six major events, published two reports, launched social networking accounts and unveiled a new website.

The largest event was The Australian Charity Wine Auction, which was re-launched in October 2010 and provided a black-tie evening for 200 guests. Over 125 auction items, including donated wine and other prizes, received bids during the night.

Con the Fruiterer, also known as actor Mark Mitchell, acted as the Master of Ceremonies for the evening. The menu was specially created by the chefs at Leonda by the Yarra, matched with donated wine from Peter Lehmann of the Barossa.

The ableart exhibition was again a great success for Able Australia. The exhibition was held in the Melbourne Central Shopping Centre in October 2010. The exhibition drew on the incredible talents of the people Able Australia works with, who were mentored by Art Therapist Ellen Michel. Able Australia was very grateful to the Freehills Foundation for supporting the event.

In March 2011, Able Australia launched its new website, which gave online communication a fresh, new look. The team continues to work on the website to improve accessibility and ensure the content is up to date.

As part of the website launch Able Australia also activated Twitter and Facebook accounts. These social media tools allow Able Australia to connect in yet another way with the community and promote our services.

Able Australia launched a new event called 'ablephoto', a photography competition for people with deafblindness in June 2011. Forty-five entries were received and the four winners were announced at the launch in Federation Square, Melbourne. This competition was a Victorian first and we hope to build on this success in 2012.

In Tasmania, Able Australia had the opportunity to be Hawthorn Football Club's charity partner for their Launceston game against the Gold Coast Suns on 18 June 2011. Our volunteers were able to collect donations at the game and two Able Australia clients who are Hawks fans were given the chance to meet players.

Deafblind Awareness Week (DBAW) in 2011 was a major campaign for Able Australia with a lot of effort invested in generating awareness through Australian media outlets.

Our Chief Executive Officer Celestine Hare gave countless interviews to promote the plight of people with deafblindness and to spread the message that Able Australia needs more funds to carry out its critical work with the incidence of deafblindness, or vision and hearing impairment, rapidly increasing.

As part of this year's DBAW campaign Able Australia also released the updated report Access Economics completed last year on deafblindness. The statistics in this report were an important tool when it came to communicating the scale of deafblindness.

As in previous years Able Australia also held its annual Friends and Family Fun Day as part of DBAW. The day offered activities and staff also used it as an opportunity to launch a report on telecommunications and deafblindness.



# volunteers

Since the recommencement of Able Australia's volunteer program during 2010, volunteer numbers have steadily grown.

People in the community wishing to contribute their skills and time have done so with great enthusiasm.

Able Australia continued to receive interest from people with specialised skills, such as photography and physiotherapy, as well as people with a background in direct care. We also had a number of students studying Auslan and Deaf Studies volunteer their time and knowledge to assist the deafblind community.

The volunteer workforce was very active in Tasmania, with approximately 400 people assisting with programs, events and services during the year. Tasmanian volunteers were sourced through Neighbourhood Houses, schools and youth groups.

Victoria's volunteers numbered approximately 150 in 2010-11 and the majority of these volunteers approached Able Australia after hearing about other volunteers' experiences with our organisation.

Able Australia's Victorian volunteers made a significant contribution to our events, including the annual Deafblind Camp, ableart exhibition, The Australian Charity Wine Auction and Able Day on the Bay.

Able Australia found advertising through the internet a successful method for finding volunteers to assist us with our important work.

Corporate volunteering will also be a primary focus for Able Australia over the next year as a way to connect us with the wider community and raise awareness.

Volunteers play a crucial role in supporting Able Australia's work, whether they are assisting with respite, deafblind services or a garden makeover.

The contribution of volunteers enables Able Australia to improve the lives of people living with multiple disabilities, including deafblindness.

# supporters

The critical work of Able Australia would not be possible without assistance from our generous supporters.

We would like to extend our thanks to all our individual donors for their contribution.

We would also like to recognise the following corporate sponsors and trusts for their support during the 2010-11 financial year.

## Corporate sponsors

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Alberto Landscaping  
Anittel  
Apple Marketing Group Pty Ltd  
Aurora Stadium Management  
Australia Post  
Brighton Council  
Brooks High School Tasmania  
Bunnings  
Campbell Page  
Chitra's Closet  
Degani Bakery Cafe  
Digital Camera Warehouse  
Freehills  
Glenorchy City Council  
Glenorchy Football Club  
Harvey Norman  
Hawthorn Football Club  
Hewlett Packard  
Hydro Tasmania  
Launceston City Council  
Mona  
National Australia Bank  
Orchestra Victoria  
Peter Lehmann Wines  
Royal Botanical Gardens  
Stillwell Motor Group  
St. Vincent De Paul  
Tasmanian Commercial Loans

## Corporate sponsors continued

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Tasmanian Cricket Association  
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery  
Tek Print & Design  
Vodafone Foundation  
Voss Photography  
Woolworths Limited

## Trusts

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ANZ Trustees  
Australian Communications Consumer Action Network  
Brighton City Council  
City of Monash  
Deafness Foundation  
Freehills Foundation  
Freemasons  
State Trustees  
Tasmanian Community Fund  
Transport Accident Commission



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**TASMANIA**

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**Launceston**

59D Amy Road  
Newstead TAS 7250

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F (03) 6343 5988

**AUSTRALIAN  
CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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