

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**30 JULY 2010**

**‘ABILITY AWARENESS WEEK’ IS 2-8 AUGUST**  
**Celebrating ‘ability’ and creating a level playing field for life...’**

Ability Awareness Week, a state-wide community initiative of Ability Options will be launched at ANZ Stadium on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> August by The Hon Bill Shorten MP Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services; Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction.

With the announcement yesterday by Prime Minister Julia Gillard recommitting to a 10-year national disability strategy including support for the inquiry into a National Disability Insurance Scheme and increased government support for people with disabilities in areas including early intervention, employment and those who have ageing parents, Ability Options CEO Matt Donnelly welcomed the announcement.

“As one of the largest Disability Employment Service providers in NSW, we welcome this announcement. The government clearly has its eye on the ball for people with disabilities.

“By supporting initiatives that allow people with a disability to gain meaningful employment in the open market, the benefits to the individual, their family and the community are enormous.

“Recent research published in the journal Public Library of Science Medicines by researchers at Brigham Young University in Utah shows that isolation is a significant factor impacting negatively on over-all health and wellbeing.

“Many people with a disability experience isolation. We also know that by getting a job you love not only contributes to building self esteem but also builds resilience, independence and importantly, reduces the sense of isolation that people with a disability may feel,” Mr Donnelly said.

“Through launching Ability Awareness Week, a celebration that everyone has ‘abilities’, we aim to promote equality and independence while fostering understanding and acceptance of people with disabilities throughout the wider community of NSW, and build a stronger connection between people with a disability and their own communities,” he said.

With Ability Options services being provided for clients throughout the state, Ability Awareness Week is designed to encourage everyone in the NSW community to join together to create a level playing field for people of all abilities and help break down the barriers faced by people with a disability.

“Ability Awareness Week is about celebrating ‘ability’ and helping the wider community to understand that people with disabilities are like everyone else. They make their own decisions, make fabulous employees and contribute to society in the same way that we all do. By acknowledging that we all have strengths and weaknesses, goals, dreams and abilities too, we are breaking down barriers and opening up opportunities for people to connect with each other,” Mr Donnelly said.

Beau Champion of South Sydney Rabbitohs, (campaign partner) is the voice of the campaign. Featuring along-side Ability Options client Adam Budzinski, Beau is delighted to support this initiative

saying, "As a community, we can all do so much to help create a level playing field for people like my mate Adam.

"It's about recognising that no matter who we are, no matter what we do, we all have abilities too and during Ability Awareness Week, we want people to think about what they can do to help create a level playing field for life."

Established for more than 30 years, Ability Options is a statewide organisation dedicated to working with people with disabilities in the areas of lifestyle, accommodation, employment, well-being and independent living.

Ability Options provides excellence in services for people with disabilities, promoting independence and providing support to make independence an achievable goal while at the same time, improving the quality of life for people with disabilities enabling them to have empowerment over their own lives and the opportunity to achieve their goals.

Australia's internationally recognised Professor Trevor Parmenter formerly Foundation Chair of Developmental Disability Studies in the Sydney Medical School and Director of the Centre for Disability Studies at the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney, supported this initiative saying; "Ability Options is recapturing the sense of excitement we experienced in the 1980s which saw the passing of the landmark Disability Services Act. Its wide range of support initiatives is helping to empower people with a disability to take greater control of their lives; to enable them to attain their rightful place as full citizens in a community which respects and values their innate abilities."






Mr Donnelly said, "Ability Awareness Week is about creating a level playing field for life. It's about fostering understanding and acceptance for people with disabilities in the wider community, so that everyone can be respected for their abilities and have a fair go, just like everyone else."

To help create a level playing field for life for people with disabilities throughout NSW, or to make a donation please contact Ability Options by calling: 02 88 111 777 or by visiting: [www.abilityoptions.org.au](http://www.abilityoptions.org.au)

**I think, I feel, I do. I have abilities too. I am just like you.**

**ENDS**

**We are able to offer a number of interview opportunities with spokespersons including:**

-  Matt Donnelly, CEO, Ability Options Limited
-  Anne McElduff, Director, Ability Options Limited
-  Nicola Hayhoe, Senior Manager, Ability Options Limited
-  Professor Trevor Parmenter AO PhD
-  **Inspirational client success stories in multiple NSW communities**

**Media enquiries including interviews with spokespersons, photographs and inspirational client stories, please contact:**

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## JOURNALIST NOTES



### ABOUT ABILITY OPTIONS

For more than 30 years Ability Options have provided a range of support options for people with disabilities and is recognised for the quality of its' services, ensuring people with disabilities have better opportunities to enhance their lifestyles and achieve their goals.

With the focus on lifestyle, accommodation, employment, well-being and independent living, the services Ability Options provides are tailored to meet the needs of individuals living throughout NSW.

For detailed information on all Ability Options programs visit: [www.abilityoptions.org.au](http://www.abilityoptions.org.au)

#### Ability Options Provides Support For:

- Individuals
- Families with children with disabilities
- Families to work with their son or daughter, friends and their local community to plan and design programs that will meet their needs and create greater resilience allowing people to live their lives with confidence and resilience
- New parents who have a son or daughter with a disability to create plans to give them an early start in life
- Long term accommodation assistance enabling people to live fulfilling lives in their local communities

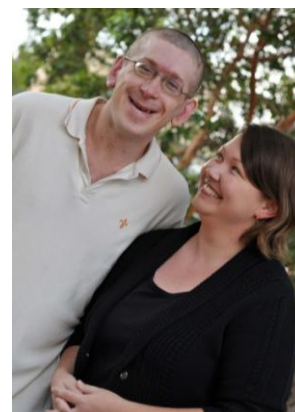
#### Ability Options Services Include:

- **Employment** – Offering high success rates in assisting people to get the job of their choice in the open market
- **Community Lifestyles** - Case Management and Self Management programs promoting independent, quality lifestyles
- **Wholesale Nursery** - Provide employment and training opportunities

### ABILITY OPTIONS EMPLOYMENT

Ability Options Employment is one of the largest Disability Employment Services in New South Wales with 6 full time offices and 4 part-time centres in NSW. Ability Options Employment is dedicated to finding sustainable jobs for people with disabilities. We provide employment, training and long-term job support services to 1,650 job seekers throughout the state.

We have the commitment and tools to match people with the right skills and experience to the requirements of employers. Ability Options Employment is at the forefront of providing quality Disability Employment Services to Australians. As a recognised leader in our field, we provide job seekers with advice and assistance to help them find a job.



We also work toward *'Halving the education and work opportunity gap between indigenous and non-indigenous young people. Having now begun the process of accepting our shared responsibility for past failures, we now need to focus on developing our joint capacity for success.'* **Ass Prof. Dodson**

## COMMUNITY LIFESTYLES

Community Lifestyles provides a range of programs and services including Self Managed, Supported Living, Case management, Community Access and Respite services. All programs and services focus on increasing the abilities and skills of each individual allowing people to contribute and become valued members of the community. Ability Options provides five core programs:

- Self Management Services
- Case Management
- Supported Living
- Community Access Program
- Respite Services



## WHOLESALE NURSERY

Ability Options has a leading wholesale nursery located in the Penrith region. It uses modern growing techniques in the production methods, specialising in the growing of quality “potted colour” annuals.

Wholesale Nursery was originally established in 1995 with two clear and equal objectives: to operate and trade successfully as a fully commercial model delivering financial returns to the organisation and; to achieve this through the employment of people with disabilities while valuing the role of each employee in contributing to the commercial success of the business.

Today, the Wholesale Nursery is a respected supplier to consumer outlets. Our most significant achievement is that our customers now look to the “Hylites” brand of potted colour as a benchmark for quality.

All our employees are vital members of our team and by focusing on our employee’s abilities, not disabilities, we have built a reputation in the industry as a quality plant supplier. The Nursery is accredited under the Nursery Industry Australia (NIASA) Guidelines and fully accredited for all 12 Commonwealth Disability Standards for the employment of people with disabilities.

We provide work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships, supporting school programs and community activities.



## **CAMPAIGN SPOKESPERSONS**

### **Matt Donnelly, Chief Executive Officer, Ability Options Limited**

Matt has been employed in the disability services sector for the past 16 years and has held a range of management and senior management roles within the industry. Matt has extensive experience managing state and commonwealth-funded programs including accommodation services, open employment, Australian Disability Enterprises, post school programs, respite and allied health services.

In his current role, Matt is overseeing one of the largest disability open employment programs in NSW, with more than 2000 clients. Matt employs more than 500 staff across Sydney and NSW.

Matt is an advocate for sustainable Self Managed Service Delivery (SMSD) and Ability Options was instrumental in developing the SMSD program under his leadership by delivering pilots for these services across NSW in partnership with people with a disability and their families. Matt also supports the reform of OHS legislation to reduce the burden of insurance on community organisations and the introduction of lifetime funding guarantees for Australians who are born with or acquire a disability.

Matt holds a Masters of Management from UTS Sydney specialising in the management of community organisations and has undergraduate qualifications in Arts. He is also a member of the Australian Institute of Management and the Australian Human Resource Institute.

### **Anne McElduff, Director, Ability Options Limited**

A Director since 1997, Ms McElduff was employed for ten years as a high school teacher specialising in children with special needs. She joined TAFE in 1993 working with students with an intellectual disability. In 1995, she was appointed as a disability consultant for students with a psychiatric disability.

### **Nicola Hayhoe, Senior Manager, Ability Options Limited**

Nicola has been working in disability services for 16 years with a focus on supported living and individualised service delivery. Nicola has completed a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Social Policy.

As Ability Options Research Officer Nicola has a key responsibility to research new directions and initiatives to fulfil on the organisation's vision. This includes ensuring that people with a disability are amongst those who drive change and the strategic direction of the organisation; supporting innovation and best practice in service delivery and organisational accountability; and supporting the organisation's business development activities.

**Trevor R. Parmenter, AM PhD**  
**Professor Emeritus, University of Sydney, Australia**

Trevor R. Parmenter, AM BA PhD FACE FAAIDD FIASSID FASSID, is Professor Emeritus in the Sydney Medical School, and Honorary Professor in the Faculties of Education and Social Work and Health Sciences at the University of Sydney; and Adjunct Professor in the School of Rural Medicine, University of New England.

Professor Parmenter formerly held the Foundation Chair of Developmental Disability Studies in the Sydney Medical School and Director of the Centre for Disability Studies at the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney. Other positions held include: Professorial Fellow and Director of the Unit for Community Integration Studies at Macquarie University, prior to which he held teaching and administrative positions in the New South Wales Department of Education and Training.

His research and teaching activities in the area of disability have included employment, community living, quality of life, ageing, mental health, autism, policy development and the evaluation of support programs. Currently he is actively engaged in researching the setting up of natural support networks for people with disabilities in anticipation of the time when their parents will no longer be able to care for them. He is noted for his ability to translate research into practice.

**Campaign Partner – South’s Cares – South Sydney Rabbitohs**

South’s Cares, the charity arm of the South Sydney Rabbitohs, has established workplace mentoring programs throughout the South Sydney and Coffs Harbour regions by way of the South’s Cares Workplace Mentoring program.

Players and staff involved in the program deliver sessions to jobseekers highlighting strategies to overcome barriers to work, peer pressure, self-esteem building and making better life choices. Players deliver key messages through their own life experiences with their input forming part of a structured approach to provide information and get participants to commit to and complete job seeker training.