



**2024  
2025**  
ANNUAL  
REPORT





“**My Melba  
support workers  
don’t see my  
identity or my  
disability – they  
just see me.**”

Tristan



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## Vision

**A society that values the  
individuality and rights  
of all people.**

## Purpose

**To open up a world of  
opportunities for  
people to live  
a fabulous  
life.**

### Acknowledgement of Country

**We acknowledge the Traditional  
Custodians of the land on which we work  
and live. We recognise their continuing  
connection to Country and community.  
We pay respect to Elders past and present.**



# From the CEO and Chair



It has certainly been a year of profound change across the disability sector, but at Melba one thing will never change. People we support always come first.

The disability sector is facing the most challenging operating conditions in its history. Creating a sustainable Melba into the future is not just a concept, it's a daily commitment, it's our responsibility. It's how we work towards ensuring Melba can continue delivering quality, person-led support for the next 50 years, not just the next 12 months.

There has been a lot of talk this year about funding and pricing – and for good reason. The current NDIS price settings do not match the real cost of delivering quality, person-led support, particularly for people with complex needs. We are vocal about this because it matters: quality has a cost. Melba will continue to advocate for a pricing model that sustains quality and safeguards outcomes for people, while we manage our resources carefully and transparently. Our reported loss in this context reflects conscious decisions to prioritise continuity and quality during a volatile period.

We were also reminded of the sector's fragility with the closure of several service providers including Annecto after more than 70 years of service. We were deeply saddened by this news, and we moved

quickly to support continuity for people who wished to join Melba. We now provide support to more than 70 people at home and in their communities and offered employment to more than 100 support workers – helping preserve trusted relationships wherever possible. This is what sector stewardship looks like: people first, working in partnership, and creating practical solutions in difficult moments.

In line with current landscape, we have shifted to a rolling strategy. Our core pillars remain in place, but the way we deliver on them is evolving. We are prioritising practical innovation including:

- > **Meaningful homes:** our approach to home and living, is providing a pathway for people to choose where they live, who they live with, and the kind of home that suits their life.
- > **Modern systems** such as Workday are streamlining processes and freeing our teams to spend more time on what matters – supporting people.
- > **Better data and insights** are giving us a clearer line of sight on quality and impact. In the true Melba Way, this means we can see what's working, what's not, and where to improve – using real information and data about the services people use, the ones they don't, and where they want to be.

While there are definitely challenges, there is much to be proud of. Together, we strengthened connections, embraced new skills, stretched beyond comfort zones, and lifted safety and quality. Most importantly, we kept listening – to people we support, to families, and to each other. To everyone who chooses Melba as their support provider: thank you for trusting us and leading the way. You are the heart of this community.

This year marked a historic milestone for Australia: the appointment of the nation's first Federal Minister for Disability. For the 5.5 million Australians with disability, this is the most significant step forward since the NDIS began in 2013. A dedicated voice at the Cabinet table matters – it means disability is considered, prioritised and advocated for every day, not as an afterthought but as a national priority. It builds on decades of progress since the Disability Services Act, the Disability Discrimination Act, and Australia's ratification of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Looking ahead, our focus is clear: do the basics brilliantly, keep people at the centre, and make every decision through a human rights lens. We will keep investing in our workforce, listening and codesigning with people we support, and using data to improve quality and outcomes. We see a future defined by resilience, strength, commitment and hope – and a Melba that is built to last.

“Thank you to the people we support, families, our employees, partners and supporters. Together, we will continue to open up a world of opportunities for people to live life – proudly, joyously, creatively, adventurously – their way.”

 <p>Best in class experience for the person supported</p>	 <p>Melba Way aligned practice &amp; culture for today and tomorrow</p>	 <p>Melba as an employer of choice</p>
 <p>Streamlined and reliable operations</p>	 <p>Financial performance</p>	 <p>Contemporary and innovative services and solutions</p>



# Our impact

 **144**

SIL group homes,  
townhouses, units and  
apartments

**975**

services provided

**6**

PBS practitioners  
provided

**5,188**

hours of support to  
more than

**70**

people

**1,298,676**

hours of people  
supported

 **35**

parents attended our first  
two workshops on talking about  
friendships, relationships  
and intimacy

 **9**

Respite locations



**15**

Arthur Creative  
Ballarat programs

**67**

Travellers across  
**31 trips**

**12**

Breaking Ground  
programs

**112**

employees  
completed our newly  
launched anti-racism  
training

 **39**

Community  
Connections  
programs

**57**

ARROW  
meetings



Our values

# Human rights



**Everyone has human rights and these rights are the framework that Melba is built on. It's all about seeing people equally and treating everyone with dignity and respect.**





# Walking together

## Our reconciliation journey

Reconciliation isn't a destination – it's a journey we take together. At Melba, that journey begins with walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, listening, learning and acting to create a future where everyone can participate fully in life. We're committed to supporting self determination and providing culturally safe, respectful and responsive services.

Guiding our work is our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), a four-stage framework that turns intention into action:

**Reflect:** Building strong foundations

**Innovate:** Implementing change

**Stretch:** Reconciliation leadership

**Elevate:** Transformational change

We have completed the Reflect stage, deepening understanding, building relationships and laying the groundwork for meaningful change. With this foundation in place, we're ready to move into the Innovate stage, embedding reconciliation into the way we work every day.

This year brought several milestones. Tim White became our first Aboriginal Connections, Liaison and Awareness Officer, guiding our reconciliation work and connecting with peers at the National RAP Conference in Brisbane.

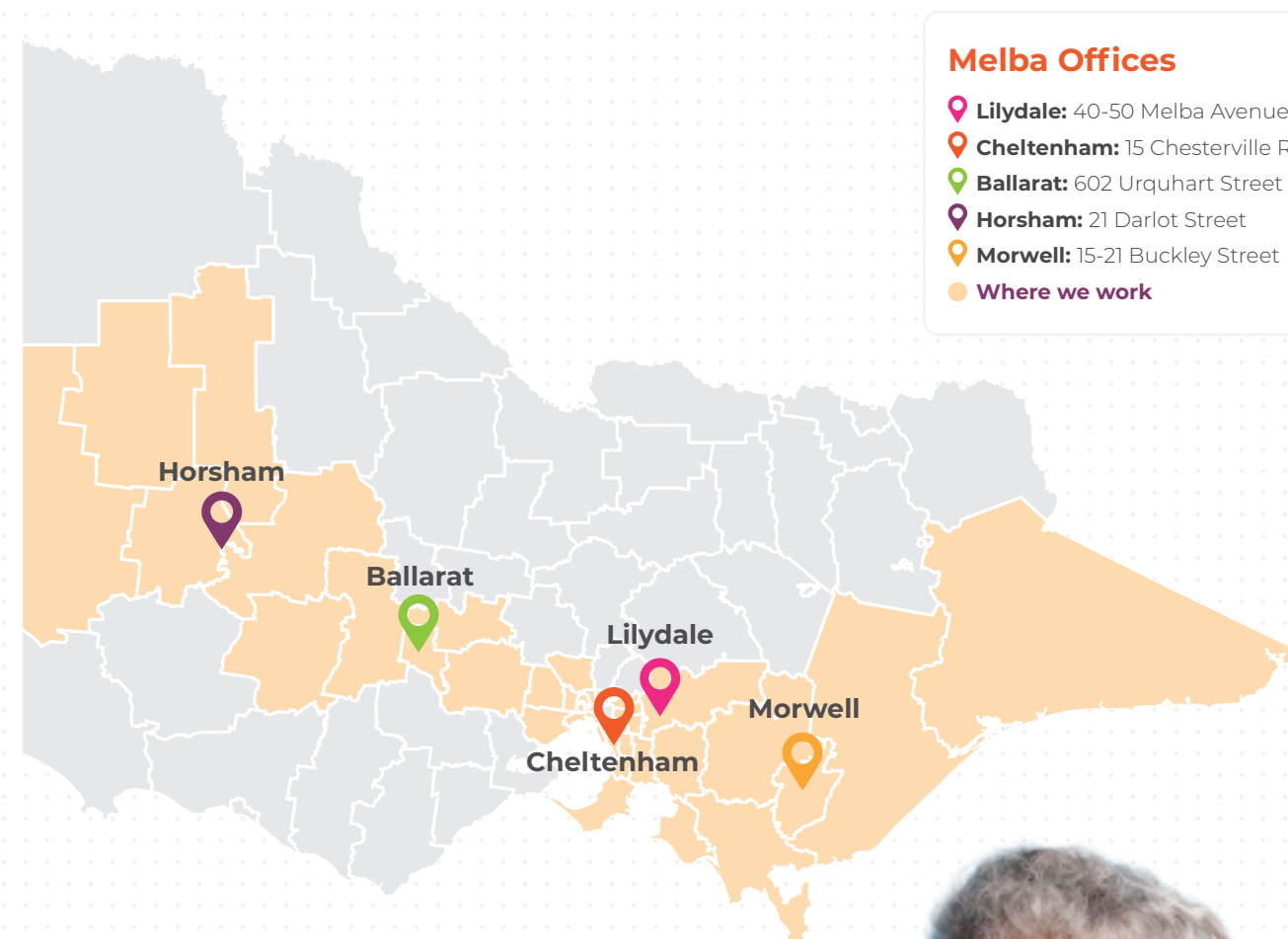
We created and started delivering Cultural Awareness training across Melba, helping teams reflect on inclusion and cultural safety.

Creativity played a part too – two students from Worawa College painted a vibrant mural at Melba Lilydale, celebrating culture, connection and our shared journey.

Reflecting on the importance of RAPs, Tim says: "A RAP is about reconciliation for Australia. It addresses the harm caused to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples through 200 years of policies that excluded us and limited our opportunities. RAPs are about levelling the playing field and giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples a voice and real self determination."

As we prepare for our Innovate RAP, our commitment remains clear: we will continue walking, learning and acting together to create lasting, positive change.

## Supporting Victorians for more than 50 years





# The Melba Way & ARROW

## Taking the personal approach

Organisations exist because of their people, and at Melba, we take it one step further. People we support are at the heart of everything we do. We prioritise their dreams, their choices, their lives – and we even have a name for it: The Melba Way. It's about taking the time to ask, listen and really understand what matters most to each person. From there, everything is tailored – whether it's big life decisions or the small details that make each day better.

Part of our listening process is working with ARROW (Advocacy, Rights, Representation, Outcomes, Worth), Melba's self advocates groups. ARROW members gather each month across the state to discuss issues and provide feedback, advice and direction to the Board on how our services are being delivered. This lens is vital.

This past year saw ARROW become even stronger with the Ballarat group growing to 14 members. The group is making its presence felt – the

redesigned and refurbished social hub which opened at Melba Ballarat this year was a direct result of ARROW's advocacy.

Everyone in the Melba community benefits from authentic voices with lived experience; these voices drive accountability and connection to what matters most. Members have input and influence from a platform where they are heard, respected and valued.

For Ron, being part of ARROW has been life changing. "Before ARROW, I didn't always feel confident to speak up," he says. "Now I know my voice matters and that what I say can make a difference, not just for me but for others, too."

That's The Melba Way in action – listening, learning and growing together, with people we support firmly at the centre.

“Before ARROW, I didn't always feel confident to speak up. Now I know my voice matters and that what I say can make a difference, not just for me but for others, too.”  
– Ron



**What The Melba Way means to me. Page 46**





# Highlights



## Service excellence

Severe Dysphagia campaign  
Successful recertification audit



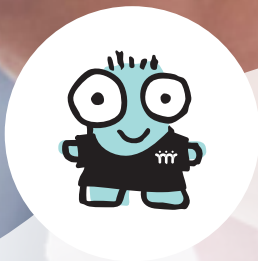
## Intimacy

Three employees qualified as intimacy workshop facilitators  
Introduced parent workshops  
Spoony partnership



## Leisure and recreation

Longest ever trip – 15 days in Texas



## Arthur Creative

Introduced three new workshops: Misfits Outreach, Textiles and Song Crafters  
Expanded into Lilydale



## General

Cheltenham Hub opened  
Appointed Aboriginal Connections, Liaison and Awareness Officer  
Melba Employee Engagement Survey



## ISA

Expanded into Horsham and Gippsland



## Marketing

Launched Melba Community News  
Targeted localised campaigns to support Melba strategy  
Launched phase two of website  
Built brand awareness and growth opportunities through expos and schools engagement



## Complex health

Worked with NDS and Gordon TAFE to develop a learning package supporting positive health outcomes  
One employee qualified as a continence nurse and can provide this support to anyone who needs it



Our values

# Passion



**Passion is about living your purpose, being energised by the work you do. Our passion drives us to create meaningful moments and transform everyday experiences into opportunities.**





# Christine's magazine moment

If you're looking for Christine most Thursday mornings, she's not hard to find. "Day program" is pretty much stamped on her weekly calendar.

One Thursday this year was a little different. On this day, Christine was late as she had to make an important detour. Her first stop was the newsagent, today being the day her story was going to be featured in Take 5 magazine – a national publication with a readership close to 450,000!

This was the day Christine was to become a celebrity!

Christine arrived at the newsagent and made a beeline for the magazine stand, buying numerous copies

She got a lot of copies and told people she'd sign her name on them, making sure her friends and family all had a copy. Her parents bought up big and on her next visit, they had copies of the magazine laid out on the table waiting for Christine to sign them.

Christine is clearly enjoying her newfound celebrity status, but behind the laughs is a whole other story. Take 5 certainly thought so – that's why it devoted two eye-catching pages to Christine's story.

Christine lives with three other women – Carissa, Jackie and Maggie\* (\*not her real name) – and, together, they are a tight group. Christine and Jackie have lived together for 20 years, Carissa joined them about 13 years ago and Maggie is a relative newcomer, joining the group four years ago.

Until this year, all four lived in a government-owned house that was not fit for purpose.

"It wasn't nice," Christine says. The house was quite old and in need of quite a lot of repairs. There were stairs that reduced accessibility and unfortunately even stopped some people being able to visit.

Everyone quickly agreed on the biggest problem... sharing one bathroom!

That all changed in June, when they moved into a new house built just for them. The house is made up of two units with accessible features such as adjustable benches and vanities. As exciting as all the accessibility features were, that wasn't what caught Christine's eye when she first walked in the front door – it was the fact all four bedrooms came with ensembles!

"The first thing I said was I have my own bathroom!" Christine says with a smile.

"I was so happy," she says. "I don't have to share!"

With no stairs, the house is completely accessible and there are more visitors than ever!

**» Read more about Supported Independent Living on Page 22**





# Supported Independent Living

Home means many things to many people. It might mean Friday pizza nights. It might mean having your favourite artwork on display. Whatever it is, the key ingredient is you! Home is where you can be yourself – fabulously, uniquely you.

That's what Supported Independent Living (SIL) is all about at Melba. It's support to live life on your terms. Maybe that's a shared house with friendly housemates and 24/7 support. Maybe it's your own apartment with support to suit your lifestyle. With Melba, SIL is about providing access to a range of different supports for you to decide what works best for you in your home!

This year, our SIL team celebrated many achievements, including:

- > **Welcoming six people who chose to move into shared houses with Melba.** Several of these moves meant leaving hospitals or aged care and stepping into a place they could finally call home. Six sets of keys handed over. Six fresh starts.
- > **Supporting three people when they chose to move to a new shared house that suited them better.** A different location, different setup, and a new group of housemates can make all the difference.
- > **Strengthened partnerships with specialist disability accommodation providers.** Working together to apply a broad range of industry knowledge to ensure the best possible outcomes.
- > **To ensure people can make informed choices about where they live, we introduced house profiles.** We work with people who live in shared houses to develop a profile of their home – think of them like home resumes that describe their home and show everything from layout and



accessibility to the vibe of the household. These profiles mean potential new housemates have the right information to decide if a certain house is right for them and their lifestyle.

SIL is more than a service. It's the freedom to live life your way. It's about people finding their place to belong.

This year's work – whether it be the partnerships, the profiles, the moves, the matches – it's all about working with people to find a home that works for them.

# Individualised Support Arrangements

No two lives look the same. We all have our routines, favourite places, people we love spending time with and the little things that make each day our own. That is what makes life fabulous.

Individualised Support Arrangements (ISA) with Melba is one to one support designed to celebrate those differences and is based on what you want your life to look like. It could be getting out and about in your community, joining a local group, or enjoying events such as concerts and markets. It could also be support at home with cooking, personal care or household tasks. Often, it's a mix of everything.

With Melba, you call the shots. You lead the planning, and we tailor the support to fit your independence, the things you want to do and what brings you happiness.

This year, we expanded our ISA supports into two new areas: Gippsland and Horsham. These are communities where people have been waiting for support that fits their lives.

This expansion has been transformative. We're now supporting 10 people in Horsham and another nine in Gippsland, providing tailored, individual support.

The real measure of impact isn't in the numbers, – it's in the moments. Moments people choose, moments people enjoy, true life moments.

**Living life, with your tribe,  
the way you want.**

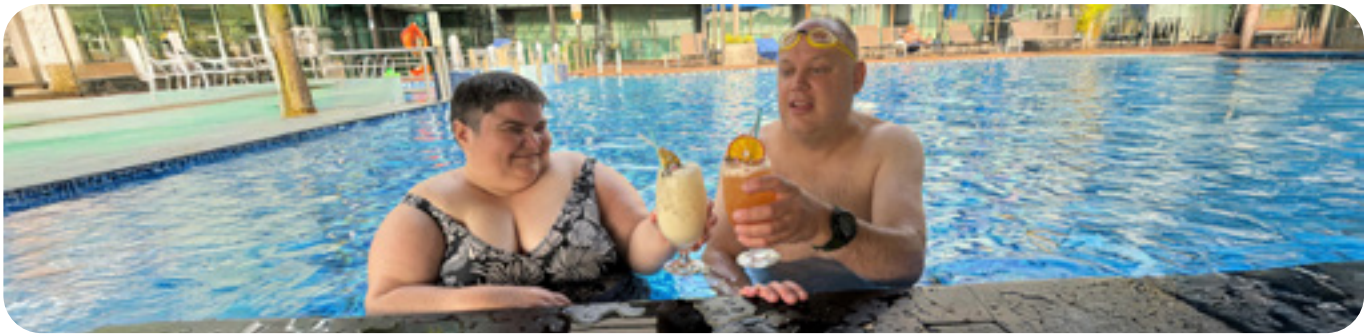




# Redefining intimacy



## Creating space for connection



Access to intimacy is a fundamental part of life, yet for many people with disability it remains a topic clouded by misunderstanding and stigma. Too often, discussions about intimacy focus solely on sexual relationships, overlooking the broader spectrum of connection that we all seek – emotional closeness, shared moments, physical affection and deep intellectual or spiritual bonds.

For people with disability, accessing intimacy can be challenging due to societal assumptions, lack of education and structural barriers that limit opportunities for relationships and personal connection.

At Melba, we are working to redefine intimacy and challenge outdated perceptions. Our approach represents a shift in how disability support services address this fundamental human experience. By acknowledging the full spectrum of intimate connections – from emotional to physical – and addressing both practical support needs and educational requirements, we are creating a model that has the potential to transform practices across the sector. We understand that respecting the right to access intimacy is not just about providing services but about recognising people's human rights.

In line with our proactive approach, in February we partnered with Spoony, Australia's leading friendship app designed specifically for people with disability. Launched in 2024, Spoony offers a safe, stigma-free alternative to mainstream social platforms, with unique features tailored to the disability community's needs. "By joining forces with Australia's leading disability app developer, we're part of upholding people's human right to access intimacy while prioritising safety, dignity and genuine connection," Hayley Dean, Melba CEO says.

Melba was a key partner at VALID Having a Say Conference in Geelong, where we delivered two significant initiatives. Ryan, who is supported by Melba, teamed up with Hayley Dean, and Kate Taylor, Melba's Innovation Lead, to present a session titled *Access to Intimacy*, leading a powerful conversation about why everyone deserves the chance to connect, love and belong. We also hosted a speed meeting event where our team supported people to meet others and practise their conversation skills in a safe and welcoming space.

We know that forming meaningful relationships is helped by having informed, confident families and support networks. That's why we launched our first parent workshops in June. We delivered our first *Talking with your loved ones about friendships, relationships & intimacy* workshop to Down Syndrome Victoria. These workshops aim to give people practical tools, open dialogue and a safe space to help them navigate these important conversations with their loved ones. The response was overwhelming and we're already planning more sessions across Victoria.

**"The honesty of discussing real-life situations and practical information about sexuality is refreshing... my daughter has the right to be a sexual being. I have been trying to find information like this for the last five years, so thanks."** – workshop attendee

Melba continues to champion the right to access intimacy in all its forms through partnerships, education and open dialogue – ensuring that connection, belonging and meaningful relationships are accessible to everyone.

# Equity in action

## Diversity and inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are two key principles that define Melba. Every person should be valued simply for being themselves and we're committed to building a community that lives and celebrates that each day.

Every Melba employee takes part in diversity, equity and inclusion training, designed to deepen understanding and develop the skills needed to build and champion a respectful, equitable environment. This ensures fairness is part of how we do things, not just something we talk about.

This year, three key initiatives strengthened that commitment.

In response to our Employee Engagement Survey, which identified concerns among employees aged 35 and under, and those 55 and over, we hosted a workshop for each group. These sessions gave employees a chance to share their experiences and ideas on workplace improvements, career development and work life balance. The feedback gathered will inform future practices that better serve our multi-generational workforce.



We introduced gender affirmation leave to reflect our commitment to supporting employees through significant life changes and affirming the identities of all team members.

We also published a statement against racism and launched anti-racism training across Melba, creating space for people to reflect on racism's ongoing impact and their role in addressing it.

Together, these actions bring our values to life – making Melba a community where differences are embraced, barriers are dismantled and everyone feels included.





Our values

# Creativity



**Creativity**  
enables us to see  
new possibilities  
and turn ideas into  
actions. We find  
innovative  
ways to make  
great things  
happen.







# “This is my place”

## Walking with wisdom between two worlds

Tim White is a gentle man. Put those two words together – gentleman – and they also sit comfortably. Several things strike you about Tim when you spend some time with him: his quiet dignity, his compassion, resilience and, significantly, his calm conviction to advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as Melba continues to live its Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Tim has been a Melba House Supervisor in Ballarat for eight years and knows Melba well. As a proud Wiradjuri man growing up in the region, he has witnessed, and experienced, the challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples face as the nation steps tentatively towards reconciliation.

Tim now also works part-time as Melba’s first Aboriginal Connections, Liaison and Awareness Officer. Tim says there is a common thread that ties his two roles together, and it’s one that permeates all of Melba.

“Both roles are grounded in human rights and ensuring people have a voice and opportunities for self determination,” he says.

“That’s the common thread. I’ve worked in disability support for 30 years and, for the last 10, I’ve felt a strong pull toward Aboriginal affairs and liaison work. Combining the two feels like I’m exactly where I’m meant to be.

“It’s the perfect fit – I can draw on my lived experience as an Aboriginal person while supporting people with disability. It’s deeply fulfilling, and I feel this is my place.”

Tim’s typical fortnight is a whirlwind of connection, planning and advocacy. He’s joint Chair of the RAP Working Group, helping Melba to grow our RAP from Reflect to Innovate (see story Page 12). He’s helping to guide major events such as NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week. He’s visiting the Melba community across Victoria, letting people know he’s available if they need support, advice, or simply someone to talk to.

He’s also building external partnerships, attending local Koori Network meetings, and working with organisations such as the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency to ensure people know they have his support.

Then there’s the training – reviewing and updating Melba’s First Nations cultural awareness programs, making them more accessible, tailoring them to different regions, and delivering sessions to employees.

“The work has really snowballed,” Tim says. “The more relationships I build, the more opportunities and needs emerge. The two days fill up very quickly.”

“The work has really snowballed. The more relationships I build, the more opportunities and needs emerge. The two days fill up very quickly.”





“This is my place”



Tim says he finds his new role immensely rewarding and is grateful for the opportunity to work in this space,

“I’ve always been a humanities person – always wanting to help others, to put people first,” he says. “I constantly ask myself: ‘How would I feel if I were in their shoes?’”

“As an Aboriginal person, I know what discrimination and racial abuse feels like, so I empathise strongly with others who’ve been through it. This drives me to ensure Aboriginal people, and people with disability, are not only supported but protected and empowered into the future.

“I only wanted to be part of this if it was about meaningful change, not tokenism. Hayley and the leadership team have been clear this is not about ticking a box – this is about doing what’s right.”

When asked if he could provide an example of Melba’s commitment to reconciliation in action, Tim doesn’t have to think long before nominating the day Uncle Shane Clarke spoke at our Cheltenham Hub during National Reconciliation

Week this year. The office was full and everyone had taken time out of their day to listen – really listen – to Uncle Shane’s stories of trauma and resilience.

“You could see it struck a chord with everyone there,” Tim says. “Everyone was listening intently and, afterwards, there were lots of questions. It filled me with pride. It reinforced my belief that Melba was authentic in this space.”



Afterward, as he walked Uncle Shane downstairs, the Elder told him: “Keep doing what you’re doing – keep getting your voice out there.”

“That really stayed with me,” Tim says. “He not only reminded me of the importance to keep talking, but he reinforced that my voice mattered.”

Tim’s role exists at a profound intersection: First Nations Peoples and disability. Both communities have experienced systematic exclusion, discrimination and denial of voice; for those at the intersection, that discrimination is compounded.

“They’re a minority within a minority,” Tim says. “They face discrimination both as people with disability and as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. That’s why cultural awareness and sensitivity in disability support is so important.”

Add intergenerational trauma, mistrust of mainstream systems built on centuries of harmful policies, and for some, LGBTQIA+ identity, and the layers of potential discrimination multiply.

“For many Aboriginal families, there’s still mistrust of government systems – for good reason,” he says. “But when they experience real support, like through Melba’s respite and support services, they start to see that things can be different.”

As Tim settles into his role and Melba develops its Innovate RAP, the work continues to grow. Those two days a fortnight will soon become four. The relationships will deepen. The trust will build.

“It’s happening,” Tim says. “You can feel it. We’re building a culture of genuine respect and understanding that can be seen at every level of the organisation.

“I am not doing this alone, it takes all of us to contribute to achieving reconciliation.”



“I am not doing this alone, it takes all of us to contribute to achieving reconciliation.”





# Creativity, connection and community come alive

## Day programs

Creativity and fun are more than words at Melba – they are two of our five core values – and our popular day programs are an example of how we live them.

Whether it's painting a mural, stepping onto a stage, planting seeds in a sun drenched garden, or simply sharing a laugh, our programs are all about building community, connection and expression.

This year, we've been especially busy – and excited – watching our creative community grow.

Melba's Arthur Creative, a vibrant arts hub in Ballarat, is a place where artists come together to paint, sculpt, write songs and perform. Led by artists, for artists, Arthur Creative has always been more than a studio – it's a place of belonging – and this year that energy has only grown. We launched three fresh workshops: Misfits Outreach, Textiles, and Song Crafters.



Artists held several exhibitions and were part of many local events, but there's one person we'd especially like to mention; Maddie. Last July, Maddie hosted an origami bookmark workshop at the

Ballarat Library during the school holidays, teaching 15 people the intricacies of this Japanese artform.

This year we expanded with the launch of Arthur Creative Lilydale. Partnering with The Misfit Project – a youth organisation that uses theatre, music and storytelling to empower young people – we held drama workshops for people of all ages and skill. Add to that new art, photography and textile classes and you have a growing creative hub where self expression is front and centre.

This expansion of Arthur Creative program is not to be confused with our established Community Connections curriculum, with new activities each semester in keeping with the changing seasons.

Meanwhile, over in Mount Martha, Breaking Ground continues to be a peaceful haven where creativity meets nature. Set on beautiful grounds, it's the perfect place to slow down, connect with others, and explore hands on activities – from gardening and art to exploring the local community – all while soaking in sea air and sunshine.

This year's expansion into Lilydale, the new workshops, partnerships and exhibitions are all focused on people being seen and celebrated for their talents.

As we look ahead to expansion into Gippsland and the Mornington Peninsula, we hope to have many more "I made this!" moments.



## Leisure and recreation

There's something magical about travel – the anticipation, the thrill of somewhere new, the stories you bring home. At Melba, our Leisure and Recreation program turns "I wish I could" into "remember when I did?".

Our tailored, fee for service holidays are an opportunity for you choose your own adventure, with scalable support for small groups or individuals.

This year we supported 67 travellers across 31 trips to destinations such as the snow-dusted mountains of Bright, the bustling streets of

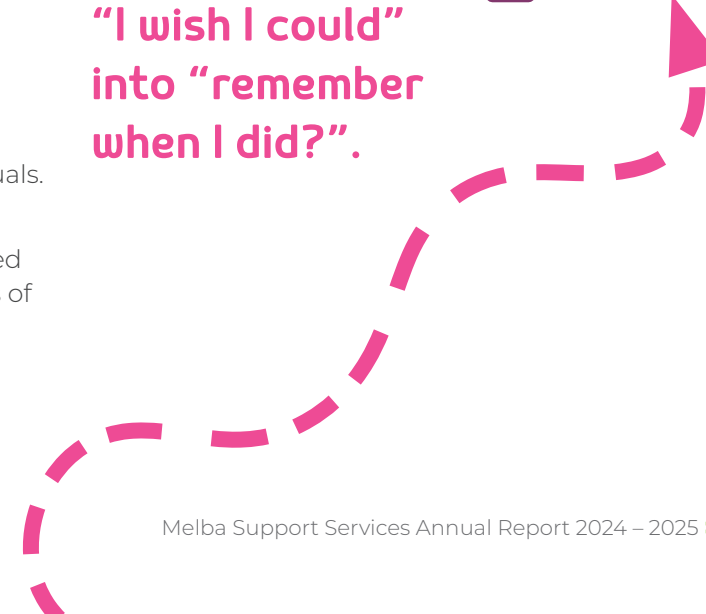


Vietnam, the temples of Thailand, harbour views in Sydney, the rugged Grampians and – in our longest trip ever – 15 days discovering everything Texas has to offer.

The biggest highlight, however, happened in the departure lounge, when Andrew and Lukas prepared to board the plane for Vietnam and suddenly recognised each other – they'd gone to high school together!

That's the beauty of group travel: you never know who you might meet or meet again.

**The Melba Leisure and Recreation program turns "I wish I could" into "remember when I did?".**







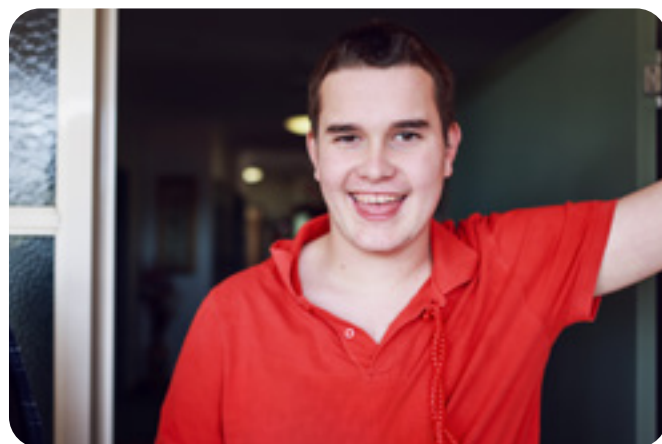
# Respite



Life can sometimes get in the way of the good stuff, no matter how hard you wish it didn't. There's bills to pay, appointments to keep, rooms to clean, clothes to wash, food to cook, children to entertain...you get the picture...but where do you get the time?

Add to that the potentially complex family dynamics when someone has a disability. Everybody loves one another, but that doesn't mean it's all plain sailing.

Narelle understands this all too well. Narelle has four children and fosters a fifth. Her two sons Taylor (28) and Jessie (17) both have disability, her daughters Tully and Kitty are under 10 and the child she fosters is four and has autism. Life can be demanding at times, particularly as a single parent.



Narelle has days when she's on top of things and days when she's not – days where she just needs a break, a time out to recharge her batteries so she can be the mother she wants and needs to be. And her boys need time away from their siblings, too. It's nothing personal, it's just a fact of life in this household.

This is where Melba comes in. We currently have seven respite locations across Victoria, offering short (up to 14 days) and medium (up to 90 days) stays as well as in-home respite services.

## Narelle says Melba respite has been a game changer for her family.

"We love respite because it gives me a break and my boys time out from their other siblings," she says. "It gives them fun things to do. The boys get on so well with the Melba team, they have their own rooms and often don't want to come home!"

Jessy agrees. He says Melba respite is "fun" because he gets to "hang out, play pool with Irene, and do things I like".

"It gives me some space, and it gives mum a rest, too," he says.

Melba has a range of respite options for anyone aged seven and above. Children and adults are never under the same roof at the same time. We support people with complex needs, everyone is welcome and fully supported by our experienced, highly trained employees.

This past year brought change in this space. We retired two respite locations in Gippsland and worked closely with people to make the transition to a new location smooth and as stress free as possible.

There's another side to respite – providing emergency respite for a person after the sudden loss of their primary carer. In a deeply distressing time, our respite service ensured they had a secure place to stay in a supportive environment while longer term accommodation was arranged.

On another occasion, when a person living independently needed support after a fall and minor surgery, respite accommodation was arranged quickly. With no family nearby and the hospital unable to discharge them safely to live alone, their sister contacted us seeking assistance. Concerned they might be placed in a local nursing home, she was relieved when we could offer appropriate support and accommodation until they had fully recovered.

These stories illustrate why our respite services, like everything at Melba, are fully tailored to people's needs. Respite can bring relief in tough times, joy in everyday moments and peace of mind for families like Narelle's.

"Since the boys have been coming to Melba's respite, I've noticed a big change in their behaviour," Narelle says. "They love going there and they're a lot calmer and tend to get on with their little sisters a lot better."





Our values

# Flexibility



**Flexibility is about being different for different people and adapting to each person's needs and choices. We are fully present and respond to changing needs.**





# Emily's 300km journey

## from isolation to independence

They say actions speak louder than words – sometimes actions can be very “loud”.

Emily, 29, recently achieved a life milestone when she moved out of home – a big moment in anyone's life. Emily has autism and people don't always understand the message she is trying to get across.

Emily has experienced more than her fair share of isolation and frustration. The major contributing factor is that people do not understand what she is trying to communicate, resulting in behaviours of protest.

“It's hard for her to make people understand what she's trying to communicate and that gets her frustrated – and that frustration is sometimes expressed using behaviours that can cause harm to herself and others.

“It's why Emily had to move out. We couldn't cope with her meltdowns anymore and that wasn't fair on Emily.” Emily's mum Maryanne says.

It took Maryanne five years to find Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) for Emily and, when she finally did, Emily's “reputation” meant it had to be more than 650km away.

“I live in Portland and Emily's house is in Sebastopol and that's because I couldn't get SDA any closer,” Maryanne says. “No disability support organisations in our region would support Emily, so I didn't know where to turn.

“I spent five years trying to find somewhere and then we got the house in Sebastopol, but the organisation we were looking at said they wouldn't support Emily because she was ‘too hard’.

“Melba, however, said they would be happy to support Emily.”





# Emily's 300km journey from isolation to independence

While other people may have had similar experiences, Emily's experience is unique because it's her experience; everyone is different. Everyone reacts differently to things, people have their own personalities, different experiences, different tastes. Melba gets that! It's a foundational piece of what we call The Melba Way – just ask Raylene Ruyg, an Operations Manager with Melba.

Raylene led Emily's support team when she joined the Melba community and says the first thing she focused on was understanding what was needed and accessing the right supports. She called on Lexi Clarke from our Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) team, and they worked together to ensure the team was equipped to provide quality, tailored support to Emily.

"We employed eight support workers so Emily would have consistency from 8am to 8pm – and there's always someone sleeping over, so Emily has 24/7 support," Raylene says. "It's the way Melba works – everything is tailored to the person."

"At Melba there is no one size fits all approach," Lexi says.

"Behaviour isn't going to occur for just one reason," she says. "The same type of behaviour can happen for multiple reasons, so you have to go back and have a look at what was going on for the person in that moment and then adapt the environments and supports."

"This was a new start for Emily, a fresh beginning, where she has the potential to live the best life, a fabulous life. The team took that on board – their attitude and their empathy, and their willingness to just slowly, slowly follow Emily's pace, learn and communicate with each other has been amazing."

"That's Melba's PBS point of difference: we're part of the support team – we're not just an adjunct."

One person who would never be described as an "adjunct" in Emily's life is her nan, Shirleyanne. She has lived with Emily on and off for about 17 years and the pair have a strong bond.

Shirleyanne describes Emily as a "strongheaded" woman who doesn't like change and will "let you know one way or another" if she's unhappy.

"I didn't think Melba would be able to change Emily's behaviours because she has difficulty adjusting to change," Shirleyanne says.

"She didn't like going to new places or going to the doctor or anything like that so how was moving to a new house going to work?"



Lexi admits she wasn't confident "we were going to get it right straight away", but there are already clear signs Emily's behaviours are shifting.

Each month, Shirleyanne enthusiastically travels 300km to spend the day with Emily and says she has never seen her granddaughter calmer and happier.

"She was frustrated at home – her parents were frustrated and I was getting to be the same way," she says. "But Emily's frustration has depleted, that's the change I see in her. She's accepting her support workers and she's settling. It's all such a big surprise for me."

When these comments are relayed to Lexi, she smiles and says she's proud to work for Melba because Melba's focus is on quality of life.

"When we focus on improving that, people are naturally happier and less likely to need to use behaviours of protest," she says.

Maryanne says Melba has supported Emily to have a future rich in possibility. "I'm absolutely ecstatic," she says. "Emily now has a better quality of life. She is getting her independence and won't have to rely on us. We know she's OK and that gives us peace of mind."

“ Emily now has a better quality of life. She is getting her independence and won't have to rely on us. We know she's OK and that gives us peace of mind. ”





# Positive Behaviour Support

Imagine feeling overwhelmed, frustrated or scared, but not being able to explain why. Imagine needing support, but the only way to share this need is through behaviour that others find challenging or concerning. For some people, this is a daily reality.

At Melba, we call these “behaviours of protest” because that’s exactly what they are. They’re not problems to be fixed or managed away – they’re communication. They’re someone communicating, as clearly as they can, “I need to tell you something and I don’t know how else to do it”.

Our Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) approach is built on one simple idea: everyone should be seen, heard and understood – exactly as they are.

PBS at Melba is about getting curious instead of getting frustrated. It’s trauma-informed, grounded in human rights, backed by evidence, and – perhaps most importantly – it’s creative and flexible. Because people, their behaviours and the solutions aren’t a one size fits all approach.

This year we’ve grown – not just in numbers, but in confidence, skill and impact. Three of our practitioners achieved Proficient Practitioner registration (a big deal in our field!), and we welcomed a new team member. By investing in our team, we’re ultimately investing in people we support – helping to create environments where they can experience greater independence and quality of life.

We welcomed 19 new people in our program, courtesy of a targeted marketing campaign that got the word out to people looking for help.

One area where we’ve seen significant growth is in supporting young people. Early intervention matters enormously, and we’ve taken a more targeted approach to ensuring young people receive individualised support that promotes positive development and wellbeing.

We’re also building our team’s confidence and capability in this space through specific learning opportunities, because working with young people requires its own set of skills and sensitivities.

Our reach has extended into the psychosocial sector as we know mental health and behaviour are often deeply intertwined. We’re strengthening our presence and capability to ensure our PBS service continues to meet the diverse and evolving needs of people across the community.

Beyond the numbers and milestones, what really matters is that lives are changing because PBS is not really about behaviour at all – it’s about understanding and connection – at the end of the day, behaviour is just another language.

This year we welcomed 19 new people into our growing Positive Behaviour Support program





Our values

# Fun



**We all cherish the ability to have fun. We take every opportunity to embrace possibilities and uncover fun in everyday experiences.**





# Where there's a Way, there's a will

Life gives you choices. It's full of decisions and those decisions ultimately define you. Do you take the easy way or the hard way? Do you do things the right way or the wrong way?

Making choices is part of life, it's constant and most seem simple enough, but what defines them? What makes "right" right? Where is the list of attributes? And are they universal?

Michelle Smith is faced with these questions every day and, as one of Melba's 18 Outcomes Managers, her decisions have tangible results. Life changing results, in some instances.

Michelle oversees six shared houses in Gippsland, which means she plays a huge role in the lives of the 25 people who live there and the careers of more than 50 employees. It goes without saying her job is important and it's vital she makes good decisions. The right decisions.

Michelle makes good decisions. She was recognised for her work as part of last year's Melba Awards. So, what's her secret?

"There's no secret – I'm guided by The Melba Way and I share Melba's values. They are what attracted me to Melba in the first place and why I stay here."

Michelle, who has been with Melba for five years, laughs when told she sounds like she's trying to impress the boss, but her sincerity is obvious.

Everyone in the Melba community knows what The Melba Way is. It's part of our employee inductions and is our core guiding philosophy – support people to "live life your way".

But it's one thing to say it; the proof, as always, is in the pudding.

"Melba talks the talk, but it walks the walk, too," Michelle says. "Melba has never let me down. We stand up for what we say we're going to stand up for. What I like most about The Melba Way is that the person always comes first. I love that one – never miss anything about a person."



“What I like most about The Melba Way is that the person always comes first”







## Where there's a Way, there's a will

"My team has heard me say it so many times: I don't care how long you've worked with a person – never presume or assume anything. Meet them where they're at, on the day. The person comes first every time. Take the time to listen. Slow everything down. Please don't tell people they need to wait, or that you need to finish mopping the floors – the floors can wait. Talk to the person. That's what it's about – putting the person at the forefront of everything we do."

Talk to Michelle long enough and three things strike you: her passion, humility and work ethic.

Michelle says she's an "early to bed, early to rise" person who will "hit the computer between five and six every morning and will be cranking out the work – and then I'll shut off at 5pm".

In between addressing her inbox while most people are still sleeping and clocking off with her colleagues, Michelle spends as much time as she

can at her six houses because it's here, in people's homes and away from her desk, she gets to ensure The Melba Way is being put to into practice.

"I'm very, very present," she says. "There are so many components to my job, but being present is what I find to be very important. I like to know that my teams are getting it right and that we're upholding Melba's policies, procedures and values.

"You get to build up a rapport with people we support, too. I love seeing positive outcomes for them and, equally, I love seeing job satisfaction in my team. They're both vitally important to me."

Michelle is a key player in Melba's SIL service. You hear the words supported independent living a lot in NDIS circles, so it's easy to become immune to their significance, but if you take the time to pause and reflect on them, they succinctly say everything that needs to be said about what this service is.

## Supporting people to live independently

Michelle says there are four key things to people having a great place to live: the right matching of the people that live there, the right employees, the right equipment and good processes. And then she adds a fifth: a good manager.

"Getting all of that right is not as easy as it sounds," she says. "We spend a lot of time making sure people are well matched and our SIL Vacancies team plays a major role in that. There's a lot of meet and greets with people and their families to find out what their wishes are and then a lot of time is spent determining if we have the right house for them.

"Then there are our employees. We recruit specifically for the needs of each house. Some people prefer to be supported by women, others by men, for example. It's a constant juggling act, but Melba takes the matching process seriously."

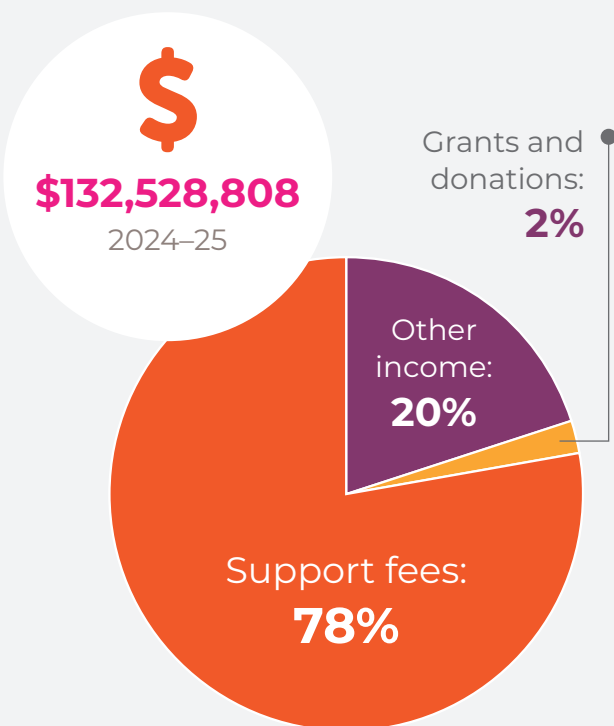
Decisions. There's a lot of them, they never end, but if you apply The Melba Way to your thinking good outcomes generally follow.





# Financials

## Total revenue:



## Expenses (% of costs)

