



# Access and Inclusion Action Plan

2025 Annual Report

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At are-able, we are committed to creating an inclusive and accessible organisation where people of all abilities can thrive. Our *Access and Inclusion Action Plan (AIAP 2024-2026)* guides this commitment by setting clear objectives across our people, systems, environments and community partnerships. This annual report provides an update on the progress we have made over the past year, highlighting our achievements, the challenges we have faced, and the steps we are taking to continue strengthening access and inclusion across all areas of our work.

## Executive Summary

In 2025, are-able continued its commitment to building an inclusive and accessible organisation through the implementation of its Access & Inclusion Action Plan (AIAP) 2024-2026. This report outlines the progress made across four strategic pillars: Our People, Our Systems & Processes, Our Environment & Service Delivery, and Our Community & Partnerships.

Key achievements include the establishment of the Disability Employee Network (DEN), the development and rollout of a Workplace Adjustment Policy, and the integration of accessibility considerations into recruitment and onboarding processes. are-able celebrated the International Day of People with Disability and upgraded its membership with the Australian Disability Network to enhance access to resources and support.

Through the are-able Foundation, over \$100,000 in community grants were distributed to 24 organisations across regional Victoria, supporting initiatives in disability inclusion, youth mentoring, mental health and food security. Additionally, 35 good news stories were shared, showcasing the real-world impact of are-able's work in empowering individuals and communities.

While significant progress has been made, the report acknowledges ongoing challenges, particularly around time constraints and the need for broader awareness and engagement. Lessons learned have informed a set of actionable next steps aimed at deepening impact, including enhanced communication strategies, structured planning and expanded training and awareness initiatives.

## Message from our CEO

I am proud to present are-able's report on our Access and Inclusion Action Plan. This report reflects the progress we have made towards building a more inclusive and accessible organisation, one that truly values the contribution of all people.

Over the past year, we have taken meaningful steps to strengthen our culture, and community partnerships to ensure that accessibility and inclusion remain at the heart of everything we do. While we celebrate the achievements outlined in this report, we also acknowledge that there is still work to be done. Our journey is ongoing, and each step brings us closer to realising our vision of a workplace and community where everyone has equal opportunity to participate and succeed.

I would like to thank our employees, partners and community members who have contributed to this important work. Their insights, passion and commitment ensure that our AIAP is more than a plan on paper, it's a living commitment to positive change.

Together we will continue to make a difference and build an organisation that truly reflects the values of access, inclusion and belonging.

# Progress Across our Pillars

**Our Access and Inclusion Action Plan is built around four key pillars:**



Our People



Our Environment & Service Delivery



Our Systems & Processes



Our Community & Partnerships

Each pillar outlines clear objectives and actions designed to strengthen accessibility and inclusion across all areas of are-able. The following section provides an update on our progress to date, highlighting the initiatives we have implemented, the outcomes we have achieved, and the lessons learned along the way. These achievements reflect the dedication of our staff, the support of our partners and our shared commitment to creating a workplace and community where people of all abilities are valued and supported to thrive.



## Pillar 1: Our People

To ensure that all of our employees, regardless of disability, feel a sense of belonging and are provided with the opportunity to build a career with are-able.

### Actions

Objective	Actions	Outcomes	Lessons Learned	Next Steps
Establishment of are-able's Disability Employee Network	Develop operating model of the DEN, captured within a Terms of Reference	Terms of Reference created and approved by Executive. DEN established and Chairperson, Vice Chairperson & Secretary appointed. Monthly meetings being held and minuted.	Balancing workloads and volunteer commitments within the DEN requires clearer role expectations and time allocation. Future planning should include dedicated time for DEN activities and leadership support to ensure momentum.	Increase awareness of DEN across are-able. Launch a Comms plan to enable regular all staff updates at Town Hall & SMT. Increase storytelling to share lived experiences. Establish a 12-month road map to ensure a structured plan.
Participation in International Day of People with Disability	Promote awareness and training in the lead up to the celebration.	Celebrated IDPD in 2024.	In the lead up to IDPD 2025 will be creating greater awareness and providing employees with access to training/webinars.	Collaborate with Marketing to create visual campaigns.

Objective	Actions	Outcomes	Lessons Learned	Next Steps
<p>Continued promotion of a workplace culture of inclusivity, support and accessibility amongst are-able's workforce.</p>	<p>Foster an inclusive workforce with open communication and feedback channels, led by are-able's Leadership group.</p>	<p>Various milestones achieved to demonstrate our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility, including the establishment of our Workplace Adjustment Policy.</p> <p>Creation of DEN.</p> <p>Upgraded are-able's membership with AusDN from Bronze to Silver to gain greater access to information and resources to increase focus on accessibility and inclusivity.</p> <p>Commenced work on Disability Confident Recruiter accreditation.</p>	<p>Time constraints have limited further planning over the next 12 months.</p>	<p>Creation of a resources hub to include toolkits and FAQs.</p> <p>Encourage DEN members to run "lunch and learn" sessions on their respective sites.</p>



## Pillar 2: Our Systems & Processes

We aim to refine our systems and processes to embed inclusivity, accessibility and equitable practices throughout all organisational operations and interactions.

### Actions

Objective	Action	Outcomes	Lessons Learned	Next Steps
Implement Personal Evacuation Emergency Plan (PEEP)	Implement annual survey to determine individual evacuation requirements.	Existing staff were provided with the opportunity to complete the PEEP survey.	To capture the required information from new employees, the survey is now built into are-able's onboarding workflow, ensuring that all staff have completed the survey.	Continue surveying new employees. Weekly checks on PEEP results to capture accessibility requirements.
Develop a Workplace Adjustment Policy	Design Workplace Adjustment Policy & develop a procedure for requesting adjustments. Managers to incorporate Workplace Adjustment discussion into one quarterly One-on-Ones.	Workplace Adjustment Policy created and approved by the Executive. This now sits on our Connect page for all employees to access.	All staff have access to the Workplace Adjustment Policy.	Continue promotion of Workplace Adjustment Policy on Connect.
Incorporate accessibility, PEEP's and request for Workplace Adjustments into recruitment process and new starter induction training.	Embed within Onboarding process for new employees and discuss during Induction.	PEEPs & Workplace Adjustment Policy and Process explained during are-able Induction.	Process ensures that workplace adjustment requests are proactive rather than reactive. We have been able to reduce barriers and normalise conversations around support needs, demonstrating genuine commitment to accessibility and inclusion.	Commitment from Managers to be openly discussing Workplace Adjustments in one-on-ones.

Objective	Action	Outcomes	Lessons Learned	Next Steps
<p>Ensure the accessibility of our technology and online environment.</p>	<p>Continue to review and improve the accessibility of our website to comply with the latest standards of WCAG.</p>	<p>Annual compliance audit completed by Janek in October 2024.</p>	<p>Early integration of accessibility principles not only saves time and resources but also improves user experience. Embedding accessibility checkpoints into project planning and procurement can further streamline implementation.</p>	<p>Conduct user testing with people with disability to assess user experience.</p>



### Pillar 3: Our Environment & Service Delivery

We aimed to refine our systems and processes to embed inclusivity, accessibility and equitable practices throughout all organisational operations and interactions.

#### Actions

Objective	Action	Outcomes	Lessons Learned	Next Steps
Communicate the guidelines surrounding lighting in general work areas to all staff.	Provide resources/references for staff to consult if they have questions or concerns about lighting in their workplace. Reference lighting in Workplace Adjustment Policy.	All staff have been provided with the opportunity to complete the PEEP survey. Lighting has been included in our Workplace Adjustment Policy.	The process highlights the value of proactive communication and that safety measures are more effectively applied and maintained.	Involve input from neurodiverse employees in shaping and testing guidelines to ensure they are practical and relevant. Run short awareness sessions for managers and team about how lighting can affect neurodiverse employees, ie sensitivity to light, glare, brightness.
Seek guidance in relation to creating neurodiverse workplaces to promote a more diverse and inclusive environment for all employees.	Incorporate discussion into DEN. Conduct employee surveys to identify understanding of neurodiverse requirements. Incorporate into workplace adjustment policy.	There is now an inclusion in the Workplace Adjustment Policy to reflect neurodiverse workspaces.	Progress in creating neurodiverse friendly environments requires dedicated focus and cross functional collaboration. Leveraging AusDN resources and engaging neurodiverse employees in co-design will accelerate meaningful change.	Design and deliver awareness campaigns for all staff to build understanding and confidence in supporting neurodiverse employees.

Objective	Action	Outcomes	Lessons Learned	Next Steps
Communicate current process regarding the assessment of new premises to all staff.	Embed within Onboarding process for new employees and discuss during Induction.	Implementation of PEEPs & Workplace Adjustment Policy illustrated during are-able Induction.	Current site arrangements and time constraints have limited further progression in this area.	<p>Document steps involved in assessing new premises – eg accessibility requirements, compliance audits, employee wellbeing, approvals.</p> <p>Provide staff with a way to provide input on premises, eg surveys.</p>



## Pillar 4: Our Community & Partnerships

We aimed to foster collaborative partnerships within our community to promote awareness, education and engagement around accessibility and inclusion initiatives.

### Actions

Objective	Action	Outcomes	Lessons Learned	Next Steps
Embed accessibility and inclusion into our procurement practices through the implementation of formal processes.	Integrate accessibility and inclusion considerations in the evaluation for vendor selection.	Collaborated with Finance in determining how accessibility can be included in procurement practices.	Embedding accessibility into procurement requires not just policy updates but cultural change. Early engagement with executives and suppliers can build shared understanding and commitment to inclusive practices.	Amend policy and seek approval. Implement check list to evaluate suppliers.
Promote good news stories across our community in relation to are-able's support of the communities in which we live.	Consistent input from employees regarding the positive impact are-able is having within the community.	are-able has produced 35 good news stories this calendar year, highlighting the ways we support, engage and empower people within our communities.	Celebrating our success by sharing good news stories and achievements motivates staff, reinforces inclusive behaviours and demonstrates our impact in the wider community.	Continue gathering and communicating good news stories across our footprint.

Objective	Action	Outcomes	Lessons Learned	Next Steps
<p>Continue promoting are-able Foundation to demonstrate support provided to community activities to assist people living with disability or disadvantage.</p>	<p>Offering up to \$5,000 in community grants to assist community organisations.</p>	<p>24 organisations were awarded a Foundation Community Grant in 2025, totalling \$100,357. These funds were invested into grassroots projects across regional Victoria. The projects supported disability, food security, youth mentoring, inclusive support and mental health initiatives.</p>	<p>These initiatives reflect are-able's continued dedication to fostering belonging, increasing participating and creating healthier and more resilient communities for all.</p>	<p>Continue offering community grants and sharing the good news stories with are-able's workforce.</p>

## Our Foundation

Our are-able Foundation is dedicated to empowering local communities through grassroots initiatives that create lasting impact. By supporting projects driven by community needs and ideas, we aim to foster inclusion, resilience and meaningful connections. Each initiative reflects our commitment to building a future where everyone can thrive.

In our AIAP we set an objective of providing over \$100,000 in community grants per year. This year we have provided \$100,357 across 24 organisations. This reflects our continued dedication to fostering belonging, increasing participating and creating healthier and more resilient communities for all.



## 2025 Grant Recipients

Congratulations to the organisations awarded a 2025 are-able Foundation Community Grant:

### Ararat

- Central Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network

### Ballarat

- The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation
- Ballarat International Foto Biennale

### Colac

- The Salvation Army Colac

### Geelong

- Corner Boxing Co.
- Freedom Sports Foundation Limited
- Lazarus Community Centre Geelong Ltd
- Bluebird Foundation

### Hamilton

- GSGLLEN
- Dunkeld Recreation Reserve Inc.
- Riding for the Disabled – Hamilton Centre

### Horsham

- Horsham Neighbourhood House

### Mildura

- CatholicCare Victoria
- Garden of HOPE Mildura INC
- Robinvale Community Garden Committee / Our Place Robinvale

### Portland

- HEYWOOD MEN'S TALK GROUP INC
- United Way Glenelg

### Shepparton

- Greater Shepparton Basketball Association Inc
- Kyabram Blue Light

### Swan Hill

- Swan Hill Community Toy Library

### Warrnambool

- Disabled Surfers Association Great South Coast Victoria
- Warrnambool Breastfeeding Centre
- Merri River School
- Western District Food Share Inc

## Good News Stories

are-able has produced 35 good news stories this calendar year, highlighting the ways we support, engage and empower people within our communities. These stories appear on are-able's website, and an example is provided below.

### From Setback to Support Worker: A Ballarat Client's Journey to Empowerment



**When are-able Site Manager Carolynne first met the 44-year-old Ballarat woman, she was navigating the aftermath of profound personal trauma, health challenges, and prolonged disconnection from employment. Born in the Philippines, the client migrated to Australia in her early 20s, leaving behind a close-knit family she had helped raise. The move brought culture shock and, heartbreakingly, a marriage marked by domestic violence that severely impacted her mental health.**

Despite holding qualifications in aged care, computer science, and small business management, the client's confidence and capacity to engage in meaningful employment had been deeply affected. She suffered from anxiety, depression, a disc protrusion, and hyperthyroidism, and had not felt truly supported in past work environments. She had worked as a housekeeper for six years before connecting with are-able, but fear, distrust, and self-doubt clouded her path back to the workforce.

With support from Carolynne, the client's journey took a dramatic turn. Together, they focused on building trust, boosting confidence, and breaking down barriers to employment. This included goal setting, emotional support, and practical steps like supplying interview clothing, providing a learner driver's book, assisting with a Working with Children Check, and preparing for job interviews.

The client had expressed an interest in administration but was unsure of her options. Through ongoing discussions, Carolynne helped her realise her natural empathy and background in care work could be perfect for a role in support work. Without a driver's licence, transport was initially a hurdle—until the client independently found an opportunity through a friend at a local NDIS support agency that didn't require driving.

The client interviewed successfully and began working in a role that proved to be a perfect fit: providing personal and community support to a non-verbal elderly woman. Her duties included personal care, going on walks, styling her hair, and helping her feel dignified and valued—small gestures that made a world of difference.

Since then, the transformation has been extraordinary. The client has now maintained over 52 weeks of continuous employment. She's visited her family in the Philippines for the first time in years, replaced lost residency documents, secured a new passport, and is now saving for a car and working toward relocating her sister to Australia. She is actively seeking opportunities to expand her work hours and apply her skills in other support settings.

are-able continues to provide emotional support, check-ins, and resources such as First Aid and CPR training to help her thrive. With a renewed sense of purpose and joy, her warmth and resilience now shine in every appointment, leaving staff smiling and inspired.

**“It has been my honour to work with this client,” says Carolynne. “To hear of the adversity she has been through and to see where she is now is just wonderful. She is confident, bright, bubbly”.**

This story is a testament to the life-changing impact of meaningful support, trust, and employment opportunities. It shows what's possible when barriers are broken, and belief is restored.

## Next Steps

Building on the progress made in 2025, are-able will continue to embed access and inclusion across all areas of the organisation. Key priorities for the coming year include increasing awareness and engagement with the Disability Employee Network (DEN), expanding training and storytelling initiatives to foster a culture of inclusion, and enhancing accessibility in recruitment, onboarding and digital environments.

We will also strengthen our procurement practices to reflect inclusive values and continue investing in community partnerships through the are-able Foundation. A structured 12-month roadmap will be developed to guide implementation, supported by regular communication, feedback loops, and collaboration across teams.

These next steps reflect our ongoing commitment to creating a workplace and community where people of all abilities are empowered to thrive.

