

Community Living Options

CONNECT

February / March 2026 | Issue 43



Dreams of being a Surf Life Saver

Support & Kindness

meet EMMA
my journey through
CLO





From our CEO

At Community Living Options, our purpose comes to life through the people we support, the staff who walk alongside them, and the shared commitment that connects us all. This edition of our newsletter highlights the real impact of thoughtful, person-centred support.

Stories such as Brendan's journey toward becoming a Surf Life Saver, show what is possible when people are supported with patience, respect and belief in their goals. These outcomes are the result of skilled, compassionate staff who understand the importance of dignity, choice and meaningful connection, even when progress is complex or takes time.

I want to sincerely acknowledge the dedication of our teams across all regions. Whether your work is highly visible to participants or happens largely behind the scenes, your contribution matters.

This newsletter also reflects the strength of our culture at CLO. Our recent Culture Survey reinforces the importance of listening to our people and understanding how well we are living our values of trust, inclusion, learning, connection and kindness in our everyday work. Creating a safe, supportive workplace for staff directly supports the quality of care experienced by participants, and this remains a priority.

Alongside direct support, a significant amount of work continues behind the scenes to keep CLO stable, compliant and trusted in a challenging sector. Our teams have been managing complex governance, regulatory and contractual requirements, including audit preparation, cyber security, insurance and government partnerships. This essential work provides assurance to our Board, regulators and funders that CLO is operating safely, ethically and in line with our purpose.

What matters most is that this organisational effort translates into real outcomes for people. A strong example is the continued success of Regency Green, where participants are transitioning from hospital into long-term homes with very high success rates. These outcomes happen because staff across the organisation do their work well, consistently and with care.

The disability sector remains under significant pressure, and many organisations are struggling. Against this backdrop, CLO continues to be a strong, credible and values-led provider. The work is not easy, but it is meaningful—and it is worth doing.

Thank you to our staff for the important work you do every day, and to our participants and families for trusting us to be part of your journey. Together, we continue to enable opportunity, explore possibility and establish connection.

Brendan Stone

Dreams of Being A Surf Life Saver



Brendan has been making incredible progress through the SameWave Program, turning his long-standing goals into reality.

His passion for beach lifesaving has not only helped him build important skills but also opened doors to social participation and community involvement. Each week, Brendan attends sessions with enthusiasm, supported by dedicated staff who encourage his growth and independence. Beyond achieving his lifesaving skills, Brendan enjoys the social side of the program – meeting new people, forming friendships, and sharing fun experiences along the way. His journey is a great example of how CLO can empower participants to reach personal goals while enjoying meaningful connections. Brendan's story reminds us that with persistence, support, and a positive attitude, anything is possible!



Festive CELEBRATIONS



THE 2025-26 HOLIDAY SEASON, OUR CROSS REGIONAL SOCIAL CLUB BROUGHT PARTICIPANTS TOGETHER FOR A DAY FILLED WITH JOY, CONNECTION, AND FESTIVE CHEER.



The event was designed to celebrate the important of community and inclusion during the Christmas period, creating opportunities for meaningful engagement and shared experiences. Participants enjoyed a variety of activities including arts and crafts, where creativity and laughter flowed freely. A delicious Christmas lunch was served, offering everyone a chance to relax and connect over a meal.



The highlight of the day was a special visit from Santa, spreading smiles and holiday spirit throughout the room. Events like these remind us of the power of connection and the positive impact of coming together to celebrate.



Thank you to everyone who participated and helped make this day memorable!



meet EMMA WEST

My Journey Through CLO: Growing Through Change

When I joined CLO; I brought with me a background in complex disability support and several years of leadership experience. In my previous organisation, I had worked my way from support worker through to manager — a journey built on hard lessons, hands-on experience, and a deep commitment to supporting people with disability to live the lives they choose. Despite coming from a management role, I made the decision to step into CLO as a Service Coordinator (SC) in Rural & Regional under the leadership of Sharon Partington. It was a deliberate choice: I wanted to work for an organisation with strong values, a positive culture, and a clear purpose. Taking a step down to get my foot in the door at CLO felt like the right move — and it absolutely was.

Just six months later, I was asked to step into an Acting Assistant Manager role for what is now the Disability & Autism region. The experience allowed me to grow in all the right ways. I learned a lot, grew faster than expected, and then returned to my SC role with a broader understanding of what leadership at CLO could be.

Over the following years, I had the opportunity to act as General Manager for Rural & Regional during periods of leave, before later taking on a Service Coordinator position in the newly formed Forensic & Specialist Transition (FAST) region. Not long after, I returned once more to acting GM capacity — this time for the Disability & Autism region — before moving into my first permanent management role as Operations Manager in FAST.

Becoming CLO's first OM was a milestone I'm proud of. The role played directly to my strengths: workforce management, coaching, and developing staff. FAST was a challenging region, but one that pushed me to grow in confidence, capability, and clarity about the kind of leader I wanted to be.



Then in October 2026, I was offered the role of General Manager for Dual Disability — a moment that felt both exciting and terrifying. Accepting the position meant moving to Grenfell Street, away from the familiar team and routines I had come to rely on. Dual Disability was a completely different environment: new participants, new staff, new SCs. In many ways, it felt like starting over. But change is where growth happens. I accepted the role wholeheartedly, determined to lean into discomfort, build new

relationships, and shape the region in a way that reflects both CLO's mission and my own values as a leader.

Throughout my journey, the greatest privilege has been the people — the staff, participants, families, and teams I've had the honour to walk alongside. Every region I've worked in has introduced me to incredible individuals whose passion, resilience, and commitment remind me why this work matters. I'm proud of the collective accomplishments we've achieved and the meaningful outcomes we've supported for both staff and participants. Those successes, big and small, are what stay with me.

Looking back now, I'm grateful for every step of the journey — the lateral moves, the acting roles, the new regions, and the variety of managers I've worked under, each with their own leadership style and priorities. That movement across the organisation is what shaped me into the manager I am today: adaptable, grounded, curious, and committed to supporting people and teams to thrive.

After years of service across multiple regions and roles, I still feel incredibly proud to be part of CLO. This organisation has given me room to grow, to challenge myself, and to build a career I believe in. And I'm excited to continue contributing to our shared vision, enabling opportunities, exploring possibilities and establishing connections.

Helping you stay safe while enjoying Australia's beautiful beaches.



About Surf Life Saving Australia.

Surf Life Saving Australia is Australia's peak coastal water safety, drowning prevention and rescue authority.

With over 200,000 members and 316 affiliated Surf Life Saving Clubs, Surf Life Saving Australia represents the largest volunteer movement of its kind in the world.

Surf Life Saving is a unique not-for-profit community cause that exists through community donations, fundraising, corporate sponsorship and government grants. Since Surf Life Saving was established in 1907, over 715,000 people have been rescued by our surf lifesavers.

Despite significant advancements in technology, techniques and knowledge, people still drown on the coast in unacceptable numbers. Surf Life Saving exists to save lives, and we are committed to reducing the coastal drowning rate in Australia.

[Profile | Surf Life Saving Beach Passport in partnership with Qantas](#)



SALVATION ARMY WOMEN & CHILDREN'S SHELTER CHRISTMAS DONATIONS

Every December, the halls of the CLO Edwardstown, Victor Harbor and Grenfell Street offices fill with bright baskets and quiet generosity. Staff and community members gather tins of food, toiletries and small gifts – simple items that become symbols of dignity for families staying in the Salvation Army's Women and Children's crisis accommodation.

Across Australia, the Salvation Army continues to support thousands facing homelessness and hardship, especially during Christmas when demand surges for essential aid. Each donated item carried a message: you are not forgotten. And as the baskets overflow, hope returns to those who need it most.





Support & Kindness

Over a year ago, a participant was diagnosed with dementia. Following the diagnosis, the participant's health and wellbeing declined significantly. They became reluctant to leave the house, chose to sleep on the lounge room couch rather than in their bedroom, and withdrew from activities they had previously enjoyed, including watching television.

Through consistent encouragement and compassionate support, staff were initially able to assist them to sleep on a bed set up in the lounge room instead of the couch. After more than a year of medication trials and ongoing staff support, they gradually began watching television in their bedroom again. Later in the year, staff successfully supported the participant to move their bed back into the bedroom — a significant milestone in their journey.

As confidence grew, a long-standing interest in sport began to re-emerge. Staff noticed how much enjoyment they gained from watching various sports programs and matches each day, reconnecting with something that had once brought great joy. The participant had not left their home for over a year; however, staff remained committed to supporting them through the challenges of dementia and continued to gently encourage engagement without giving up. Conversations were held about attending a live sporting event — an activity the participant had previously enjoyed.

With reassurance and encouragement, the participant agreed to attend a sporting match, and staff supported them through the process of purchasing a ticket. Outstanding support was demonstrated by clearly explaining each step, communicating closely with the participant's family, and respecting their dignity of risk, choice, and control — even with the understanding that the participant might decide not to attend.

Planning for the outing involved additional staff hours, adjustments to the support plan, and coordination around evening medication administration. Staff worked collaboratively to ensure all aspects of the outing were carefully considered and safely managed.

On the day, the outing was a great success. The participant showed remarkable bravery in attending the event after not leaving home for over a year. This achievement reflects not only the participant's courage, but also the dedication, kindness, and person-centred active support demonstrated by staff to make this meaningful experience possible.

CLO Culture Survey – understanding our employee experience

It is appropriate that, in Mad March, when Adelaide celebrates culture through the Festival, the Fringe and WOMADelaide, that CLO wraps up its annual Culture Survey.

Our survey is an essential part of understanding what our employees are experiencing and how they feel about working for CLO and with our participants. Through different sets of questions, we ask our employees to give us honest feedback about things like:

Are we reflecting our purpose and values, not just through the supports and services we provide, but in all our workplace interactions?

Do our staff feel safe and supported at work?

Do we develop skills and knowledge effectively?

Are our teams working well and do we provide effective leadership?

All these things are important for CLO as an employer of over 800 people. We can't just talk about things like our values and purpose without measuring whether we are actually "walking the talk". The survey is not an exercise we take to be able to just tick a box and say "well, we asked our staff how they feel about work and we'll do it

again next year". We genuinely look at the results, and across the organisation we get together to look for opportunities to do things better and to continually improve our employee experience.

We can compare results to our last survey and see how we are progressing from one year to the next. Importantly, we can also highlight areas that are worth celebrating – through initiatives like our staff and participant recognition programs, we show a commitment to proudly calling out the amazing things that people do which contribute to the brilliant and inclusive organisation we have.

Importantly, our survey is not just about the experience of our employees; the feedback is an integral part of our quality improvement program and helps us look at the relationship between our staff feeling valued and safe in the workplace and the delivery of quality person-centred practice to our participants. It is a great example of how every employee, every participant and every system and process we use at CLO helps us to CONNECT.

From the CLO People and Culture Team

NDIS Mid-Term Re-registration Audit – April 21 to April 24

Many of you will recall that CLO completed its NDIS Re-Registration Audit in late 2024, and we passed with flying colours. In the middle of each of these full audits that are conducted every three years, we are required to undertake what is called a Mid-Term Re-registration audit and this is nearly due.

From April 21 to April 24, an external independent auditor will visit our offices and will speak to a sample of our staff and participants as part of measuring our performance against the NDIS Practice Standards (which is about

how we keep participants safe and provide quality supports). The audit is not extensive as the one in 2024 as it doesn't cover the full set of practice standards, and, because we passed with flying colours last time, the auditor doesn't have any concerns (we had no non-conformances) to follow up from the last audit.

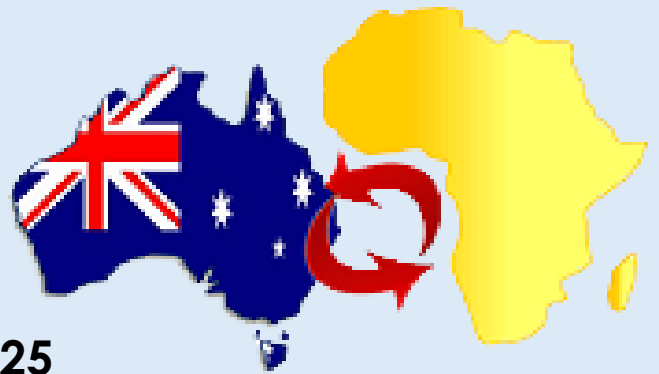
Our Quality and Compliance team will be sending regular updates to staff and to our participants in the near future. We remind our participants and families/guardians that you may be asked to speak to

the auditor but you also have the opportunity to not be involved with the audit if you don't want to be – you just need to let your Service Coordinator or contact person know.

We are proud of our commitment and track record in quality and safeguarding and look forward to working with the auditor, our staff and our participants as part of that commitment.

From the Quality and Compliance Team

CELEBRATION OF AFRICAN AUSTRALIANS INC



African Australian Awards 2025

Our colleague, senior support worker Magdi Eltahir has recently been awarded the Community Leader Award at the African Australian Awards 2025 (he is too modest to boast about it), presented to him in Canberra, in recognition of his outstanding community service.



This award acknowledges his inspiration, dedication, devotion, and strong commitment to serving his community.

These same qualities are clearly reflected in the way Magdi supports participants every day through his work at CLO.

We are incredibly proud of this achievement and grateful to have someone whose values, compassion, and leadership positively impact both the community and our organisation.

Congratulations Magdi on your well-deserved recognition.