



Armidale Regional Disability Summit

Date/Time:

Wednesday, 3 December 2025

10am – 3pm

Location:

Armidale City Bowling Club

Keynote Speaker:

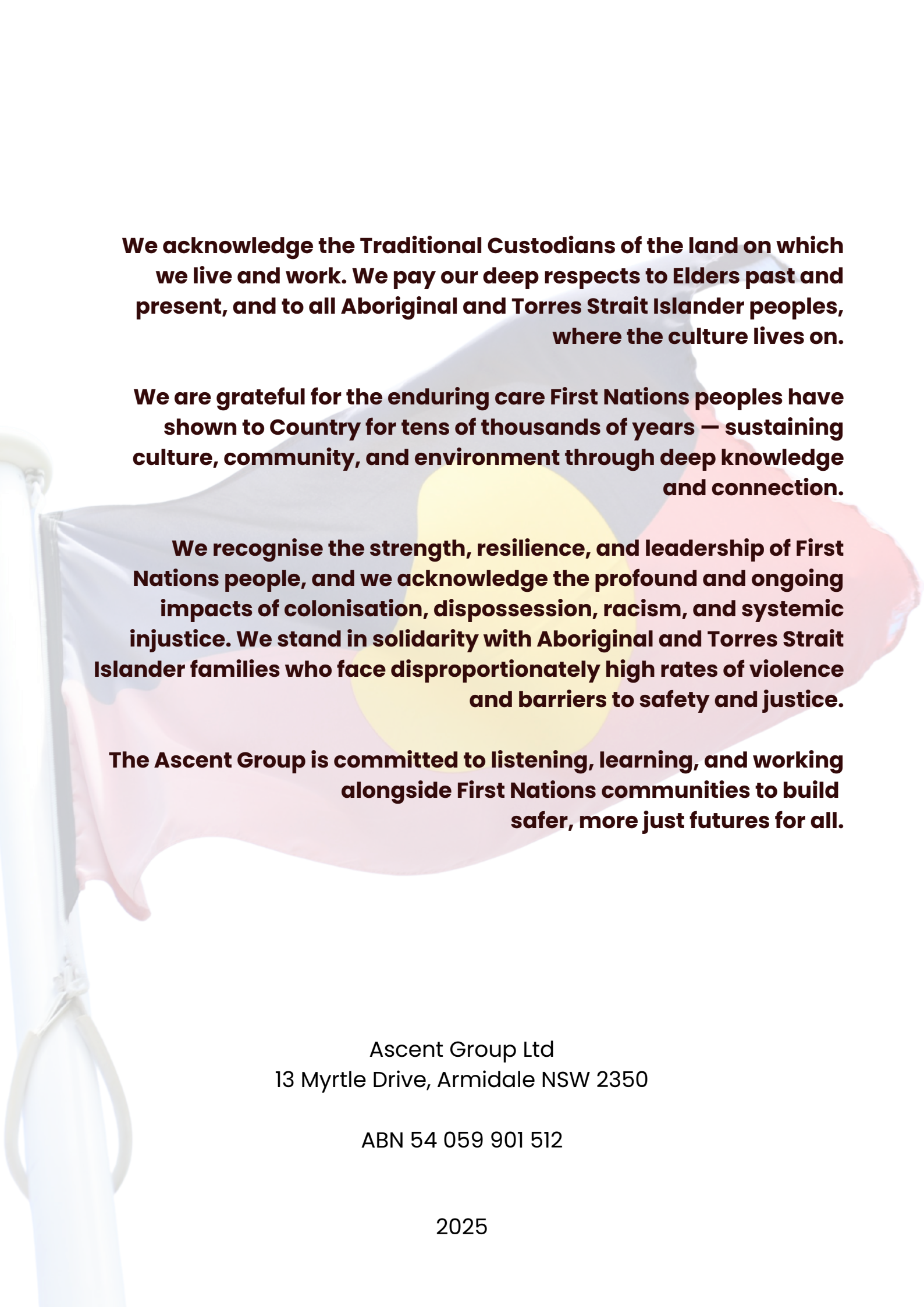


Stuart Wark

**Deputy Head of the School
of Rural Medicine**
University of New England

National Vice President
Australian Society for
Intellectual Disability (ASID).

Churchill Fellow



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work. We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, where the culture lives on.

We are grateful for the enduring care First Nations peoples have shown to Country for tens of thousands of years — sustaining culture, community, and environment through deep knowledge and connection.

We recognise the strength, resilience, and leadership of First Nations people, and we acknowledge the profound and ongoing impacts of colonisation, dispossession, racism, and systemic injustice. We stand in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who face disproportionately high rates of violence and barriers to safety and justice.

The Ascent Group is committed to listening, learning, and working alongside First Nations communities to build safer, more just futures for all.

Ascent Group Ltd
13 Myrtle Drive, Armidale NSW 2350

ABN 54 059 901 512

Welcome Message Penny Lamaro, CEO, Ascent Group Ltd

Welcome, everyone, to the 2025 Armidale Regional Disability Summit.

It is an honour to bring our community together for a day of learning, inspiration, and collective determination. Today is more than a summit — it is a celebration of the strength, creativity, and leadership that exists across regional Australia. Every voice in this room matters, and every story shared today helps shape a future where people with disability can thrive, belong, and be heard.

At Ascent Group, we believe deeply in the power of opportunity and the right of every person to live a life rich with choice, purpose, and connection. Our organisation has long been committed to reimagining what is possible — through innovative supports, inclusive employment, and partnerships that honour lived experience. This Summit reflects that same commitment. It brings together advocates, experts, families, service providers, and community members to spark ideas and drive meaningful change.

I am grateful to our incredible speakers, panellists, and contributors who bring wisdom, courage, and authenticity to today's conversations. I also acknowledge the many individuals and organisations who have helped make this event possible, and I express my sincere appreciation for their ongoing support.

Finally, I extend my deepest respect to the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather. Their resilience, knowledge, and leadership continue to guide our work toward justice and inclusivity.

Thank you for joining us. May today ignite new connections, challenge old barriers, and strengthen our shared vision for a more inclusive and empowered regional community.

*Penny Lamaro
Chief Executive Officer
Ascent Group Ltd*





We dare to be different through innovative supports that re-imagine possibilities and unlock creative potential.

Integrity

We act with honesty, fairness, and accountability in everything we do. People can trust that our decisions are guided by respect for human rights, transparency, and doing what is right — even when it's difficult.

Bold

We are courageous and forward-thinking, willing to challenge barriers and create new opportunities. Being bold means speaking up for justice, innovating with purpose, and striving for change that makes a real difference in people's lives.

Joy

We celebrate people, and bring warmth and positivity into our work. Joy is about creating uplifting experiences, recognising the uniqueness of every individual, and the importance of pleasure and contentment in every life.

Togetherness

We believe that true progress is made when we work in partnership. Togetherness means collaboration, inclusion, and belonging — walking alongside participants, families, staff, and community so that everyone has a voice and a place.

Program.

**10:00 AM –
10:20 AM**

Welcome to Country &
Opening Remarks

**10:20 AM –
10:50 AM**

Opening Keynote
“Breaking Down Barriers
in Regional Australia”

**10:50 AM –
11:20 AM**

Lived Experience Panel
“Our Rural Stories”

**11:20 AM –
11:50 AM**

Policy Spotlight –
“Turning Rural Voices
into Action”

**11:50 AM –
12:20 PM**

Fireside Chat –
“Breaking Barriers Together”

**12:20 PM –
1:00 PM**

**Lunch &
Community Showcase**

**1:00 PM –
2:00 PM**

Big Ideas Pitch –
“Innovations for Rural
Inclusion”

**2:00 PM –
2:30 PM**

Inclusive Workplaces –
“Recruiting and supporting
people with disability locally”

**2:30 PM –
3:00 PM**

Closing and Thank you



At Mountview Pharmacy we offer professional and friendly advice from our qualified staff, competitive prices, and a range of in-store services designed to help you and your family stay at your best health all year round.

28A Rockvale Road, Armidale

THE BIG IDEAS PITCH



5-MINUTE PITCH

from community members, schools, and organisations that highlight a barrier faced in regional towns and their innovative solution.



1.00PM TODAY - RIGHT AFTER LUNCH!

Our Speakers.



STUART WARK

Professor Stuart Wark is the Deputy Head of the School of Rural Medicine at the University of New England. He is interested in helping people with intellectual disability in rural Australia. He has received a Churchill Fellowship and an Endeavour Fellowship to see how we can better support older people with an intellectual disability. Stuart is the national Vice President for the Australian Society for Intellectual Disability (ASID). He presents regularly at national and international disability conferences.



ANNE RIX

Anne holds a Master of Human Services Management from Charles Sturt University and a Graduate Diploma of Community Services from the Rural Health Education Research Centre. She has extensive experience in the disability sector, facilitating the transition of people with disability in New England Northwest NSW, staff, and equipment from the state-government agency, Ageing Disability and Home Care to new providers working with the National Disability Insurance Scheme. People with disability and their families remain a priority group to receive support from New England Family Support Service, where Anne currently oversees ten programs delivered by highly professional and dedicated teams.



LAUREN STRACEY

Lauren is the CEO of Youth Action and a psychologist with 20+ years in the not-for-profit sector, dedicated to young people and families facing systemic barriers. Her work spans frontline service delivery, disaster recovery, policy reform, and leadership in values-driven organisations. A strategic thinker and passionate innovator, Lauren believes it's through the power of relationships that we are able to drive meaningful change. From delivering rural mental health support to driving policy reform, she champions early intervention and prevention. Her passion for social justice ensures young people are heard, valued, and central to decision-making — advocating for systems that foster hope, strength, and wellbeing.



SUMMER FARRELLY

Summer Farrelly (they/them) is an 18-year-old neurodivergent inclusion advocate, education consultant, public speaker, animal behaviourist, and creator and facilitator of the animal-assisted learning program "Chickens to Love." They are a third-year Bachelor of Zoology at the University of New England already planning to continue through to complete their PhD.

Our Speakers.



SAM COUPLAND

Sam was raised on a mixed farming property east of Tamworth and came to Armidale for school and university. After twenty years working in Sydney and abroad he and his wife chose to raise their children in Armidale so they could enjoy all the benefits of a thriving regional city.

As a business owner, Sam has spent the past 20 years improving businesses or building them from the ground up. He has employed people through the good times and carried them through the tough times.

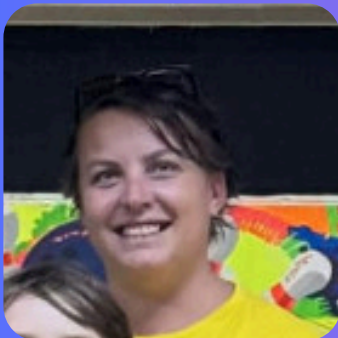
Sam brings a unique skillset and perspective to his role as Mayor of Armidale. He also holds a deep seated understanding that those without personal agency should also have a voice (having the privilege of being the father of a child with a disability).



ANDY CURETON

My name is Andrew Cureton, and I'm the founder of Neuro-D. I have ADHD and autism, and it's through my own personal struggles — as well as the experiences of friends and family — that I was inspired to create Neuro-D.

My ADHD affects my short-term working memory and executive functioning, which can make everyday work tasks more difficult. Through Neuro-D, I hope to make a meaningful impact on the world. I want people like me to feel seen, heard, and validated. I want to inspire companies and organizations to not only value but actively support their neurodivergent employees.



TAMMIE JOLLIFFE

Tammy is a busy mother of 5 active kids and the owner of the Armidale Skate Bowl Play, an all-age activities family focused party centre. Armidale Skate Bowl Play (Formally Armidale Sport and Rec) has been part of the Armidale scene for 35 years. They know the town and the people. The centre's key themes are: Relaxing, Challenging, Competitive.

We think this is valuable support for our community. We believe our combination of many social events, family focus and fundraising all safe from the outside weather is unique in the world.



LEE-ANN TURNER

I have been employed with the Ascent Group for approximately seven years. I initially held the position of Team Leader within the Community Living Services division before advancing to my current role as Business Team Leader at the Acacia Park Enterprise Area, a position I have held for the past six years.

INCLUSION IN ACTION DISABILITY AWARDS

Celebrating the power of inclusion, innovation, and community

Date: 3 December 2025 @ 6.30pm

Location: Armidale City Bowling Club

Tickets: \$50, includes light supper

Dress: Formal – lets get glammed up!

aidacare™

HEALTHCARE EQUIPMENT

**YOUR TRUSTED PARTNER IN
HEALTH, MOBILITY, AND DAILY
LIVING SOLUTIONS.**

Shop Aidacare now offers the option to book In-Home or In-Store Trials on select products — helping you find the solution that truly fits your needs.

Plus, with our 30-Day Return Guarantee, you'll have added peace of mind. If your purchase isn't quite right, simply return it within 30 days for a full refund — no hassle, no stress.

It's just one more way we're making it easier than ever to access the right products and support, so you can live with greater comfort, confidence, and independence.



Our Speakers.



KERRIE SAUER

With over 30 years of experience in the disability employment services sector, I've dedicated my career to fostering inclusive workplaces and creating meaningful opportunities for people with disabilities. As Business Manager at The Ascent Group, I'm passionate about driving lasting change — ensuring individuals with disabilities are empowered to thrive. Guided by compassion, collaboration, and strategic insight, I'm proud to support The Ascent Group's mission: we dare to be different through innovative supports that reimagine possibilities and unlock creative potential.



ADAM HENDERSON

My career with Ascent began three and a half years ago, and during that time I have been fortunate to gain experience across a variety of roles within the organisation. I started as a Support Worker, then moved into administrative positions including Receptionist and Plan Management Assistant, before progressing to Head of Plan Management. Each of these roles has provided valuable insight into the diverse work Ascent undertakes. I now proudly serve as Team Leader at Acacia Park Enterprises, where I focus on our supported employee's, building strong teams, and maintaining high standards of service delivery.



LISA WATERS

Lisa Waters proud Anaiwan woman born and raised in Armidale, a descendant of the Gomeroi, Biripi and Yorta Yorta people. Lisa is currently Ascent Group's Cultural Liaison Co-Ordinator. Prior to this role Lisa has worked with Children and Young People in Out of Home Care, the CEO at the Armidale Local Aboriginal Land Council, and various roles with Armidale Regional Council. One of Lisa's proudest achievements was being the President of the Narwan Eels Rugby League Football Club where she was heavily involved in supporting the Youth within the community. Lisa believes that drawing on her lived experiences and that of her old people help guide her when supporting young fullas today. Lisa is passionate about being an advocate when supporting her people with navigating the systems they continue to struggle with.

ACACIA PARK ENTERPRISES *Business with Heart*

At Ascent we specialise in providing supported employment opportunities for people with disability through our commercial services group, Acacia Park Enterprises.

PLEASE GET IN TOUCH FOR MORE INFORMATION.
WE'RE ALWAYS HAPPY TO DISCUSS WHAT
OPPORTUNITIES MIGHT BE SUITABLE AND AVAILABLE.

6776 8977



Our Speakers.



JENNY DEVENISH-MEARES

Jenny and her late husband David built a loving family together, raising four children: Matthew, Andrew, Rachel and Jonathan. David was diagnosed with Stickler's Syndrome, a condition inherited by their three sons. Andrew is legally blind and now lives independently with his family, while Matthew and Jonathan both live with profound autism and are supported in residential living. For the past 50 years Jenny has dedicated her life to caring for her family, being to primary carer for David throughout his life. As well as deeply involved in Matthew and Jonathan's lives, attending medical appointments, advocating through NDIS and ensuring they are supported as they navigate adulthood within supported living environments.

Jenny's lifelong commitment to her family is a powerful reflection of her resilience, advocacy, and unwavering love as both a partner and a mother.

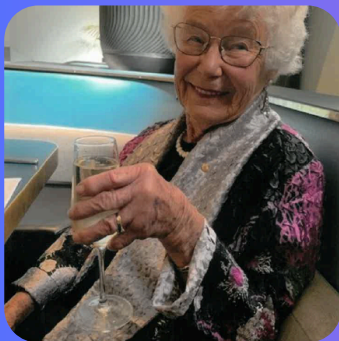


HAYLEY CLARK

Hayley is an 18-year-old woman living with Autism and Sensory Processing Disorder. She is a proud sister and aunty, and a much-loved daughter and granddaughter. Energetic, outgoing, and deeply engaged with the world around her, Hayley enjoys connecting with people of all ages and brings a vibrant, open-hearted presence to everything she does. She is excited to share her experiences at the Summit and contribute her voice to conversations about inclusion, accessibility, and the everyday realities faced by people with disability.

Hayley's lived experience also includes being a young person whose mother has a psychosocial disability and receives NDIS Supported Independent Living (SIL). This family perspective adds richness and depth to her understanding of the supports, challenges, and opportunities within the disability sector.

Hayley looks forward to being part of the Summit and offering insight from both her personal journey and her role within a family navigating disability supports.



RUTH BLANCH OAM

Ruth grew up living east of Guyra, and went to school at Armidale High followed by Armidale Teacher's College. Once married she and her family lived in the Wollun/Kentucky district. Ruth and her husband Noel were forty three when their Down Syndrome son Greg was born, the last of 3 children. Ruth says "Our desire was for Greg to be a valued member of our family." When Greg was three, Noel was diagnosed with Leukaemia and died three years later. Vicki had completed her University course whilst Sam was starting at Canberra School of Music. In 1982 Noel, Greg and I relocated to Armidale where services for people with a disability were more readily available. Living in Armidale has been a joy. There have been continued opportunities for Greg and me to be involved in the community.

The People & Organisations who made this possible

 Life Pharmacy Group 

Rotary 
Club of Armidale Central

aidacareTM
HEALTHCARE EQUIPMENT