



ANNUAL REPORT

2023-24

CONTENTS

- 3 Vision, Mission and Objective
- 4 Key Achievements
- 6 Sponsorships
- 8 President's Report
- 10 Chief Executive Officer Report
- 12 Chief Operations Officer Report
- 14 Disability Employment Services
- 15 ParentsNext
- 16 Workforce Australia
- 18 Community Services
- 21 Transition to Work
- 22 Self-Employment Assistance
- 24 Training Services
- 27 Australian Apprenticeship Support Network
- 28 Reconciliation Action Plan
- 31 Board of Directors and Senior Executive Leadership Team





VERTO

SKILL TO TRANSFORM

VERTO is a not-for-profit organisation and charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) under a Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) subtype. We offer employment, training, and community services that positively transform the lives of individuals and the communities in which we operate. Since our beginnings as a community college in Bathurst in Central Western NSW in 1983, we have grown to provide services at more than 50 sites across NSW.

While much has changed in that time, one thing has remained the same: our commitment to making a difference through equal access to employment, education and community services. This includes offering bespoke programs that support vulnerable individuals and communities, including Indigenous services, disability services, tenants' advice and advocacy, and financial counselling.

OUR VISION

VERTO's vision is to reduce the disadvantages often associated with unemployment. We will achieve this by being an industry leader, key influencer and trusted voice for the employment and education sectors.

OUR MISSION

VERTO's mission is to assist people in need, positively transforming the lives of individuals, families and communities.

OUR OBJECTIVE

VERTO is committed to the building of social capital through the provision of programs and services aimed at enhancing community development and social fairness. They include:

DIVERSE SERVICES that directly address social and economic disadvantage by removing barriers and providing specialist support for people who are long-term unemployed, have a disability, have low skills or who are geographically isolated.

TARGETED ASSISTANCE that addresses issues arising from discrimination, poverty, housing problems and other forms of disadvantage.

LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES that are accessible and relevant to the widest possible range of individual and community needs.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

2023-24

699

DISABILITY
PARTICIPANTS
SUPPORTED

- 16% were Indigenous
- 10% were a parent
- 3.6% were culturally and linguistically diverse
- 71% were on JobSeeker payments
- 11% were on disability support payments
- 6% were on parenting payments



12.179

WORKFORCE
AUSTRALIA
PARTICIPANTS
SUPPORTED

- 25% were Indigenous
- 14% disclosed a disability
- 10% were ex-offenders
- 6% were homeless
- 25% were mature-age
- 13% were receiving principal carer payments
- 1,987 participants were supported into sustainable employment



3.287

TRANSITION
TO WORK
PARTICIPANTS
SUPPORTED

- 32% were Indigenous
- 53% were male, 46% female and 1% other
- 833 employment placements and 333 education placements were achieved



3.036

CASES SUPPORTED
THROUGH OUR
TENANCY ADVICE
AND ADOCCACY
PROGRAM

- We provided more than 17,750 sessions of support. This included:
 - Advocating at more than 450 tribunal hearings
 - Preventing homelessness for more than 530 tenants
 - Assisting 294 tenants who recieved no-grounds eviction notices.





- 94.85% completion rate
- 76 trainee/apprenticeship enrolments

5.700+
STUDENTS
ENROLLED



- 39% of participants were Indigenous
- 4% were males
- 3% were from a CALD background
- 8% reported homelessness
- 12% disclosed mental health issues
- 47% reported having not completed Year 10 or 11

1.376
PARENTSNEXT
PARTICIPANTS
SUPPORTED



- 3,040 financial counselling sessions were conducted
- An average of 229 minutes was spent with each client
- 54% of cases cited financial issues as their biggest concern
- Over \$277,000 worth of clients' debts were waived in 2023–24

330
CLIENTS
SUPPORTED
THROUGH OUR
FINANCIAL
COUNSELLING
PROGRAM



- 204 participants were enrolled in the Micro Business Skill Set
- 140 business advice sessions were conducted
- 244 business plans were completed

240
SMALL BUSINESS
COACHING
PARTICIPANTS



- 1,210 sign-ups completed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- 508 Australian apprentices with a disability supported into employment
- 626 mature-age workers commenced apprenticeships throughout NSW

12.567
APPRENTICESHIPS
SIGN-UPS
COMPLETED

SPONSORSHIPS

As a not-for-profit organisation and registered charity with the ANCC under the PBI subtype, VERTO is proud to support various community organisations and events throughout NSW.

VERTO's sponsorships and donations help support those in need within our communities, while also enhancing stakeholder relationships and increasing awareness of VERTO's services.

DURING THE 2023-24 FINANCIAL YEAR, VERTO PROUDLY MADE MORE THAN 65 DONATIONS AND SPONSORSHIP COMMITMENTS, TOTALLING MORE THAN \$205,000 IN VALUE.



VERTO'S SPONSORSHIPS AND DONATIONS IN 2023-24 INCLUDED:

- Ronald McDonald House Charities in Orange, Sydney and Newcastle
- Heart2Heart Project – Murwillumbah
- Headspace – Orange, Cowra, Port Macquarie and more
- NAIDOC Ball – Dubbo
- NAIDOC Business Awards – Coonamble
- Story Dogs – Grafton
- Central West Mum's Group – Central West
- Canowindra Public School, Indigenous Art Competition – Canowindra
- Share the Dignity – NSW
- Special Children's Christmas Party – Newcastle
- Casino Beef Week – Casino
- International Women's Day – Taree
- Far West Orana Business Awards – Broken Hill
- Youth Chair Surfing – Wallsend
- Rhino Awards - Dubbo
- Golden Crow Awards – Wagga Wagga
- Wyangala Country Club fireworks – Wyangala.





PRESIDENT'S REPORT

ANDREW ABEL

VERTO has delivered another year of remarkable client outcomes and support across all its service areas in what has been a period of both strong performance and achievement.

It is a privilege to report VERTO's consistently outstanding achievements, but that is only possible because of what VERTO is – an organisation intently focused on its mission and relentless pursuit of providing a better opportunity, pathway, or outcome for its clients.

VERTO has proven itself to be lean and agile, having the ability to pivot quickly to meet the needs of rapidly changing sectors and economic conditions, and it is well positioned to meet future challenges.

In terms of core business, our Employment Services division, which employs more than a third of our people and includes Disability Employment Services (DES) Transition to Work (TtW), Workforce Australia, and ParentsNext, performed very strongly, particularly in a tight labour market.

Of particular note, TtW, in just its second year of operation, performed well above expectations. It has

also been pleasing to see DES outcomes trending noticeably higher over the course of the year, which is remarkable in a rising unemployment environment.

The Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) performed well throughout the year, commencing more than 12,000 apprentices. Disappointingly, VERTO no longer holds a contract to deliver services under the AASN following the recent tender for services to 2026.

VERTO first acquired a contract to deliver apprenticeship support services in 2003 and has held a contract for 21 consecutive years. In that time, we have assisted and supported almost 200,000 apprentices and employers. It is a significant achievement and one we should be most proud of.

I would like to acknowledge all those who worked in AASN over the years for your work with the apprentices and employers we served, and the contribution this vibrant program made to VERTO.

Training Services, which was most impacted by the disruptions of the pandemic years, continued to make solid progress across multiple fronts.



The team secured numerous large-scale accredited training opportunities, predominantly within the aged care sector, but also with some notable global brands.

Our Community Services team had another very consistent year. Community Services delivers the Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Program (TAAP), Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) and the Financial Counselling program. This is a dedicated team, often dealing with people in challenging circumstances.

Moving to other companies in the VERTO Group, it is now 12 months since VERTO welcomed Campbell Page Ltd into the group. Over that period, Campbell Page's performance has improved considerably following a significant organisational restructure to prioritise client outcomes and streamline operations, and the appointment of a new CEO with deep experience in the disability employment and recruitment sectors.

Campbell Page has realised a suite of organisational synergies by leveraging the expertise and resources of VERTO, at both a Board and operational level, resulting in a more robust and capable organisation.

It is pleasing to see the uptick in client placements and outcomes across the organisation.

When VERTO acquired Riverina Community College (RCC) almost three years ago, its future was uncertain. Having just completed its second full financial year as part of the VERTO Group, it is a different story. RCC has returned to a strong operating surplus, having exhausted its ACE funding allocation for the year,

growing fee-for-service training courses and expanding NDIS activities through the successful Art Factory.

RCC is also in the process of applying for re-registration of its RTO and is being guided by VERTO's team of experts.

Looking forward, economic conditions are expected to soften further, with a tight labour market and rising unemployment. It is important to note that historically, it has been in those times that VERTO does its most important work.

VERTO is well positioned, strategically, financially, and culturally, to meet the challenges ahead. We are excited about the opportunities in front of us as we continue to meet the needs of our clients and customers.

AS I LOOK ACROSS THE FULL SPECTRUM OF SERVICES VERTO PROVIDES AND THE CLIENTS WE WORK WITH. I AM FILLED WITH A DEEP SENSE OF PRIDE IN OUR PEOPLE AND OUR MISSION.

I acknowledge and extend my gratitude to the Directors of VERTO for their wisdom and professionalism in the oversight of VERTO, and to our CEO, Ron Maxwell, for his tireless and effective leadership of this great organisation.

VERTO would not be what it is without our people. They are the heartbeat of our organisation, and because of their dedication to our mission, clients and customers, that heart beats strongly.



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

RON MAXWELL



The 2023–24 financial year was a successful one for VERTO, marked by the excitement of winning new government contracts and the opportunity to assist thousands of clients. I'm proud of the significant and meaningful contributions we made to the communities we serve.

The year was bittersweet, marked by many successes, a significant loss and immense achievements. Reflecting on the past year, we see countless stories of lives transformed by VERTO's work in the communities we serve.

There is nothing more empowering for an individual than gaining employment – it's a pathway to a new future. Through our range of services, we were able to guide individuals on their journey to employment.

The highlight of the last financial year for me was VERTO's 40-year celebrations in October. I had the pleasure of joining with all staff for a special morning tea with guest speaker, humanitarian Michael Crossland, followed by a celebratory dinner in Bathurst.

It was inspiring to gather with past and present Board Members, CEOs, current staff, and representatives from the VERTO Group to reflect on how far our organisation has come. From our humble beginnings as a community college in Central Western NSW in 1983, we have grown into a group with more than 120 locations nationwide.

In April 2024, VERTO successfully tendered for the New Energy Apprenticeships Mentoring Program. We were the only organisation to win the right to deliver this contract nationally – and we're excited to make a significant difference in the clean energy sector, and to support Australia's economic growth.

In June 2024, VERTO also won the right to deliver the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Skills for Education and Employment program (SEE) in the Hunter and Murray Riverina regions.

These were outstanding results for our organisation that saw us expand our already large range of life-changing employment, apprenticeship, training and community services.

Unfortunately, in June, we said farewell to the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) program after 21 years of delivering this service across NSW. I want to recognise and commend the team's dedication and hard work throughout this period, where they consistently delivered strong results year after year.

The last financial year marked VERTO's second year delivering the Federal Government's Workforce Australia program. During this period, we supported 12,179 participants, bringing the total number of participants assisted since the program's inception to 20,485.

In 2023–24, 1,696 placements and 2,664 successful outcomes were achieved. The Workforce Australia team facilitated more than \$2.575 million in employment fund support for participants and employers over this period, bringing the total to just over \$4 million.

Very pleasingly, participant satisfaction remained high, with ratings of 4.2/5 for support and advice for job seeking, 4.1/5 for connection with support services, and 4.5/5 for being treated with respect. These ratings underscore the excellent work the team continues to deliver.



One of VERTO's longest-running services, the Tenants' Advice and Advocacy program (established in 1993), had another successful year, handling over 3,000 tenancy matters (including more than 550 trips to the tribunal).

This dedicated team prevented eviction for more than 300 of our region's most vulnerable tenants as rising living costs, increasing rental prices, and a shortage of rental properties continued to impact some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

VERTO's financial counsellors also made a profound difference, assisting more than 320 clients and successfully securing the waiver of more than \$277,000 in client debts. These are just a few examples of the life-changing help and support we provide every day.

In 2023–24, VERTO solidified its reputation as a community-focused organisation by contributing more than \$205,000 in sponsorships and donations to support those in need. These efforts not only enhanced our relationships with stakeholders but also raised awareness of VERTO's services across our communities.

It was also the first full year of Campbell Page being part of the VERTO Group, and we welcomed Paul Barbaro as CEO during this period. We are excited about what the future holds for us.

VERTO's strong achievements in 2023–24 would not have been possible without the dedication and direction of our highly skilled management team and devoted workforce. You continue to be the driving force behind our success, and I want to sincerely thank you all for your unwavering dedication to VERTO, our values, and our vision.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to VERTO's Board of Directors and our Board President, Mr Andrew Abel, for his support and guidance.

I finish this report with wise words from the great coach Vince Lombardi:

**"THE ONLY PLACE WHERE
SUCCESS COMES BEFORE
WORK IS IN THE DICTIONARY."**

We all worked hard, and we found success.





CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER'S REPORT

ALYSSA BENNETT

This year has been marked by significant, ongoing efforts across our portfolios – Training Services, Employment Services, Community Services, and Quality and Risk. Operationally, we have concentrated on fostering activities and behaviours that build a robust, healthy, and productive organisational culture. This culture prioritises a client-centric approach and consistently delivers high-quality service, driving continuous improvement and enhancing our performance trajectory.

I am proud to present our operational achievements and highlights for 2023–24, made possible by our unwavering commitment to creating a positive impact on the communities we serve.

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

VERTO's disability employment service is committed to ensuring people with disability, injury or a health condition are supported to find and maintain employment, and enjoy equal opportunities to do so. In fact, since 2010, VERTO is proud to have supported more than 3,830 clients through our Disability Employment Services, with our service being rated 4.42 out of 5 by our participants, and 99 per cent reporting that they feel their rights are respected.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

VERTO's Community Services portfolio delivers wrap-around support services that are vital to VERTO's mission.

The Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Program (TAAP) provides highly skilled tenant advocates who offer quality information, advice, and advocacy to NSW renters. Our Financial Counselling Service supports individuals with budgeting, debt management, creditor negotiations, credit and bankruptcy advice, and emotional support during financial hardship. The Aboriginal Youth Leadership Program (AYLP) aims to improve school retention rates, thereby enhancing educational and employment opportunities for Indigenous youth post-school.

As you will see throughout this annual report, these programs continued to make a huge impact for our clients in 2023–24.

TRAINING SERVICES

In 2023–24, VERTO's Registered Training Organisation (RTO) delivered training to more than 5,700 students and achieved a 94.85 per cent completion rate. Our most popular short courses were Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA), First Aid, and Responsible Conduct of Gambling (RCG), while our top three full qualifications were Certificate IV in Leadership and Management, Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability), and Certificate III in Business.

Training Services' investment in a continuous improvement project has yielded outstanding results throughout the year, including enhanced internal efficiencies and a revitalised market position.

Training Services concluded the year on a high note, with the exciting announcement of our expansion to deliver the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) Program in the Hunter and Murray Riverina regions. This program offers quality training to help Australians overcome barriers in language, literacy, numeracy, and digital skills.

Additionally, we successfully secured the renewal of our RTO registration with the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) for another seven years, reinforcing our commitment to excellence.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Across the Employment Services sector, there were several important reports released throughout the financial year that will guide and shape the future of all employment services.

- In September 2023, the Australian Government released an employment white paper titled *Working Future, the Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*.
- The final report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) was also released in September 2023.

- The House Select Committee's Inquiry into the procurement, performance and appropriateness of Workforce Australia Employment Services final report, *Rebuilding Employment Services*, was released in December 2023.

WORKFORCE AUSTRALIA

Workforce Australia provides a flexible service to help prepare people for work and connect them with employment. During 2023–24, VERTO's Workforce Australia Services were delivered to a total of 12,179 clients across the Central West, Hunter, Far West Orana and North Coast employment regions. Two years into the contract, we have worked with approximately 20,485 clients, and have provided employment fund support of \$4 million.

We continue to support a diverse client base of individuals, including 25 per cent First Nations, 25 per cent mature-age, 13 per cent principal carer parents, and 14 per cent with a disability. Our work in tailoring services to the unique circumstances of our clients continues to be critical in the delivery of effective employment services.

TRANSITION TO WORK (TTW)

TtW is an intensive employment service that helps people aged 15–24 into employment or education. This includes pre-employment support, the development of practical skills, and connection with job and training opportunities, and community support services.

VERTO's delivery of this important program has supported 4,618 TtW participants in the past two years in the Hunter and North Coast employment regions, with ongoing growth in funded places allocation across 2023–24, indicating strong demand for this program.

PARENTSNEXT

ParentsNext is a voluntary pre-employment program providing support for parents with young children to plan and prepare for employment. Contract to date, VERTO has supported 3,172 participants in this program with their work and study goals.

This assistance includes the co-creation of a pathway to reach these goals, which may involve connecting participants to activities and support services. VERTO's ParentsNext participants have successfully achieved 488 employment and education outcomes contract to date, which is testament to the quality outcomes this program achieves.

QUALITY AND RISK

With quality of services at the cornerstone of all we do, all existing accreditations were maintained throughout the year, including ISO9001, Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), National Standards for Disability Services (NSDS), ISO27001 and Right Fit for Risk (RFFR).

Congratulations to the Quality and Risk team for their meticulous work in preparing for each audit, and thanks to all service delivery staff who consistently demonstrate superior expertise and passion and represent VERTO incredibly well in doing so.

The numerous achievements highlighted in this Annual Report are a testament to the dedication and resilience of our team, the trust of our clients and stakeholders, and the support of our partners. Recognising that our people are our greatest asset, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the staff of VERTO for their tireless efforts in transforming the lives of those we serve.

We look forward to building on this year's successes and expanding our reach, delivering even more life-changing services in the years to come.





DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

JULIE BURGEMANN

VERTO's Disability Employment Service (DES) is under contract with the Department of Social Services to support individuals with injuries, illnesses, and disabilities in achieving their employment and training-related goals.

Currently, VERTO operates its DES program across 18 sites in the Central West and Mid North Coast regions. During the 2023–24 financial year, a total of 699 DES participants received support. Of those who transitioned into employment, 40 per cent achieved sustainable ongoing employment and were successfully exited from the DES program as independent workers.

VERTO achieved significant growth in supporting participants in the ongoing support phase, with an increase of 142 per cent in outcomes in 2023–24.

VERTO is dedicated to delivering personalised, person-centred services that lead to meaningful and lasting employment. Our commitment is evident through regular feedback praising the invaluable work and service provided by our consultants to participants and employers.

Additionally, we consistently receive positive evaluations from external auditors and maintain

certification in the National Standards for Disability Services standards.

In October 2023, new interim performance indicators replaced the outdated star ratings methodology. Throughout this period, VERTO performed steadily, with 70 per cent of our contracts meeting performance indicators, and 76 per cent of those exceeding the national average.

VERTO generated more than \$188,050 in client spending within the DES program in the last financial year, which included financial support for wage subsidies, and funding for equipment, transport, training, police and ID checks, and transportation.

VERTO formed a Disability Inclusion Committee to assist with developing our service delivery model. This committee consists of members of the public and employees that have a disability or lived experience.

As the current DES contract concludes on 30 June, 2025, we are actively preparing to procure the new contract. VERTO's unwavering dedication to assisting people with disabilities in finding meaningful employment and promoting the benefits of the DES program positions us strongly for the future.



PARENTSNEXT

JULIE BURGSMANN

VERTO delivers the ParentsNext program across 16 locations in the Central West and North Coast regions. The program is contracted by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and is a voluntary pre-employment program that assists parents plan and prepare for work by the time their youngest child starts school.

ParentsNext is an income-generating activity that aligns with VERTO's mission to assist people in need, positively transforming the lives of individuals, families and communities.

VERTO's caseload numbers continued to fluctuate in 2023–24 due to the voluntary nature of the program, which changed from compulsory to voluntary in May 2023.

During 2023–24, VERTO assisted 1,376 participants move towards a better future, supporting them to access suitable activities to improve their work readiness. This included more than 640 referrals to training opportunities, while supporting 57 participants into employment.

In March 2024, DEWR implemented an engagement support voucher incentive to encourage in-person engagement from participants. This was a successful initiative, which saw our engagement rates increase by 59 per cent.

In 2023–24, VERTO facilitated more than \$125,600 in participant expenses through the participation fund. This spend brings our total spend contract to date to more than \$900,000 in participant support.

In December 2023, the ParentsNext contract received a four-month extension, taking the contract end date to 31 October 2024. This was because the DEWR needed more time to develop the new program, and take into consideration the findings from the Select Inquiry Committee into Workforce Australia.

Procurement for the new contract was released in April 2024. VERTO completed a tender submission, and we are awaiting outcomes of this bid, which should be released in September 2024.

VERTO's commitment to performance and participant satisfaction, along with its successful track record, positions the organisation well for future opportunities.



WORKFORCE AUSTRALIA

LINDSAY BULL



VERTO's reputation for delivering quality services to local communities was exemplified in 2023–24 by the Workforce Australia team's commitment to creating meaningful opportunities for participants and employers.

In the past 12 months, the Workforce Australia team assisted 1,987 participants into sustainable employment, culminating in 4,505 employment placement contracts to date. These placements have been supported with wage subsidies of \$664,805.35, paid directly to employers.

The Workforce Australia team has supported more than 5,000 participants by facilitating over \$1.9 million in employment fund expenditure, with 54 per cent of this being utilised for work-related training, upskilling and equipment, which has assisted in gaining and maintaining employment.

VERTO Workforce Australia participants have been linked to more than 1,300 activities to address barriers to employment. These activities have included accredited training to address skills gaps and non-vocational training to address the complex barriers experienced by participants that limit their ability to capitalise on employment opportunities.





VERTO ASSISTED MORE THAN 1.100 EMPLOYERS DURING 2023–24 BY CREATING JOINED-UP SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS CRITICAL SHORTAGES AND SKILLS GAPS IN THE LABOUR MARKET. THESE SOLUTIONS INCLUDED THE CREATION OF BESPOKE PRE-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS CO-DESIGNED WITH LOCAL EMPLOYERS AND STAKEHOLDERS.

VERTO's successful place-based programs, such as our collaboration with Coonamble Shire Council, have achieved high-quality outcomes for the local community. Led by Workforce Australia's Regional Manager, Aimee McMillan, this program addressed skill shortages through accredited short courses and soft skills while incorporating culture to acknowledge the caseload of 80 per cent Indigenous participants. This program alone achieved 15 employment placements, equating to 12.2 per cent of the Coonamble caseload in 2023–24.

In 2023, VERTO was appointed by the department to be the lead provider of services to ex-offenders in the Far West and Central West. VERTO has collaborated with other providers and representatives from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice to implement a strategic approach to support this participant cohort.

VERTO's Workforce Australia team continues to deliver a high-quality, person-centric service to its customers. Internal participant satisfaction surveys rated high with 4.5 out of 5, and the contract received a 'High' rating from the department for quality of service from surveys conducted with participants across all four employment regions.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the dedication of the Workforce Australia team who continue to deliver meaningful outcomes in our local communities. The 122 compliments received this financial year is testament to the positive impact you have had on the lives of our participants.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

PAMELA HUNTER



As I reflect on the 2023–24 financial year, it was another year that presented many challenges for our clients, with continued increases to cost of living, rental shortages and affordability issues.

Pleasingly though, of my eight years managing Community Services, this has been one of the most progressive years of legislative changes I have seen, bringing significant benefits for vulnerable clients. The NSW Government has continued to address the cost-of-living crisis and tackle unprecedented levels of homelessness and housing instability.

I also had the privilege of handing the Community Services portfolio over to VERTO's new Community Services Manager, Jacinta Ryan. I look forward to seeing Jacinta take this portfolio to new heights while still maintaining high-quality and customer-centric service to our clients.

ABORIGINAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

VERTO's Aboriginal Youth Leadership Program is embedded into Canobolas Rural Technology High School, Glenroi Heights Public School, and Bowen Primary School, and was again very successful in 2023-24.

Funded collaboratively by the schools and the National Indigenous Australians Agency, this program has been running for over seven years and continues to expand and enhance its goals annually.





The activities and initiatives continue to change to meet the demands of students, teachers and community, with the consistent goal of changing the lives of the students we work with.

A highlight for the program this financial year was the collaboration with the Orange Local Aboriginal Lands Council to implement cultural burning practices within secondary high schools. The process involved learning from Elders about the reasons, methods, timing, and locations for effective burning. Students actively participated in the burning practices and worked together as a community to ensure a successful event.

To celebrate 25 years of mining in the district, Newmont Cadia Valley Mine commissioned a one-ounce gold coin made from Cadia gold. The coins were auctioned off for local charities and not-for-profit organisations, and VERTO was thrilled to be one of the lucky organisations that was chosen to receive the profits of one of the coins. The funds raised allowed VERTO to support the Junior Tidda Tradies with personal protective equipment. This junior version of the Tidda Tradies program aims to foster educational success and practical skill development among Indigenous students.

Cadia later contacted VERTO's Tidda Tradies to assist in their garden blitz to complete a makeover in a local school. Tidda Tradies were commissioned by Cadia to build three seat benches that took pride of place in the gardens of the Spring Terrace Public School. It was amazing for our female tradies to work alongside Cadia Mine's female tradies.

The Aboriginal Youth Leadership Program continues to retain foundational activities, including:

- Cultural groups with year 5 and 6 students
- Wula Gurray Choir (Language choir)
- NAIDOC Gala Day
- Junior AECG Ball
- VERTO transportation.

TENANTS' ADVICE AND ADVOCACY PROGRAM

Over the past 12 months, there have been significant changes made in the sector, particularly relating to removing no-grounds eviction notices from the Residential Tenancies Act (2010).

A key election promise from the Minns Government was to abolish no-grounds evictions, something tenants' advocates have fought to introduce for decades. Each year, approximately 30,000 renting households in NSW face a no-grounds eviction – equivalent to one eviction every 18 minutes.

COMMUNITY SERVICES CONTINUED...

Research has shown that these evictions have a significant financial impact, with immediate moving costs averaging \$4,000 per household. VERTO remains committed to supporting the NSW Tenants Union and the broader housing network in securing enhanced protections for renters. We anticipate an announcement from the Minns Government regarding their pre-election pledge to eliminate no-grounds notices, and VERTO is excited to be involved in this historic development.

The NSW Government also launched an ambitious reform and key election commitment to tackle the state's housing crisis through the official launch of Homes NSW. Homes NSW brings together the housing and homelessness services of the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), the NSW Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC), the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) and key worker housing all under one roof – making the system more efficient and accessible, putting people back at the heart of housing, with roofs over their heads.

This marks a once-in-a-generation reform that will allow VERTO tenancy consultants to better support and advocate for tenants, ensuring more effective and comprehensive assistance in navigating their housing needs.

In the last financial year, VERTO's Tenants' Advice and Advocacy program:

- Assisted in 3,036 tenancy matters
- Represented tenants at the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal in 450 matters
- Prevented homelessness for over 530 tenants
- Assisted 294 tenants who received no-grounds eviction notices
- Conducted more than 17,750 client sessions.

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING

VERTO has proudly been delivering Financial Counselling to private tenants for more than three years. Funded by the Financial Counselling Foundation (FCF), VERTO has assisted 901 clients in hardship over the past three years. Pleasingly, 56 per cent of referrals came from VERTO's own internal services, while a further 115 came from family, friends

or other clients receiving support, and 7 per cent came from other housing or accommodation support services.

VERTO received additional funding from FCF to employ a second financial counsellor, enabling us to better support and aid individuals in the communities in which we live and work.

In another pleasing announcement, this year saw the introduction of a new funding body known as the Financial Counselling Industry Fund (FCIF).

The FCIF is the outcome of a partnership between the financial counselling sector and various industries and companies, including member banks of the Australian Banking Association, the Australian Energy Council, Energy Networks Australia, the Insurance Council of Australia, Responsible Wagering Australia, Tabcorp, Afterpay, Telstra, Optus, and Credit Corp.

A \$33 million investment over three years from these organisations will enable more than 30,000 additional Australians to access financial counselling services, either in person or through the National Debt Helpline's phone and webchat services. VERTO welcomes the news of additional support to this critical and life-changing service, which all clients of VERTO can benefit from.

In the last financial year, VERTO's Financial Counselling service:

- Assisted more than 330 clients experiencing financial hardship
- Conducted 3,040 financial counselling sessions
- Spent on average 229 minutes with each client
- Provided more than 190 referrals to other community and government support agencies
- Helped participants with a range of financial issues, with the most common challenges being budgeting, changed circumstances, finance literacy, and credit and debit issues
- Assisted in waiving more than \$277,000 in debt for individuals and families facing hardship.

TRANSITION TO WORK

PAUL RICHARDS



In our second year of providing the Transition to Work (TtW) program, VERTO continued to build on the strong foundations laid in the first year.

We are now well and truly established within the Hunter and North Coast communities. Our program focuses on equipping young people with the skills, confidence, and tools they need to navigate the challenging transition into either education or employment opportunities.

Highlights throughout the 2023–24 financial year include:

- 3,287 TtW participants were supported, including 295 group two participants
 - 53% of participants were male, 46% were female and 1% other
 - 32% of participants were Indigenous
 - VERTO's group two caseload saw a 124% increase year-on-year, demonstrating the reach of the TtW program
 - We generated a total of 833 employment placements and 333 education placements, leading to 490 outcomes in education or employment
 - Of the employment placements achieved, 10 per cent were a traineeship or apprenticeship and 1% were self-employment
- Contract to date, 4,618 individuals have been supported through TtW and we have worked with more than 990 employers to source/support candidates.
 - We connected with more than 400 community organisations to support our youth with opportunities aligned to their employment and education goals
 - We connected with more than 30 high schools across the Hunter and North Coast employment regions
 - Participants transitioned into industries such as accommodation and food services (30%), retail (18%), construction (10%), and health care and social assistance (7%).

As we conclude the 2023–24 financial year, VERTO remains committed to the continued growth and success of the TtW program. Our achievements reflect not only the dedication of our team but also the resilience and ambition of the young people we support.

Moving forward, we will continue to ensure that even more individuals can access the resources and opportunities they need to forge successful paths in education and employment, and we look forward to empowering the next generation to achieve their full potential.





SELF-EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

MATTHEW ESCHLER

With VERTO entering its second year of delivering the Self-Employment Assistance (SEA) program, we continued to strive to support entrepreneurs looking to start their own business.

In 2023–24, the SEA program experienced success across all regions, thanks to the dedication and commitment of our staff in helping participants succeed.

The SEA program is an income-generating activity that aligns with VERTO's mission to assist people in need, positively transforming the lives of individuals, families and communities.

VERTO successfully supported over 240 participants across the Mid North Coast, Far West Orana, Murray Riverina, and Hunter regions. Over the past 12 months, VERTO received 510 direct inquiries for the program, including referrals from providers, demonstrating that awareness for this program is growing within the microbusiness and entrepreneurial communities.

Through the SEA program, VERTO enrolled 204 participants in the Micro Business Skill Set, provided small business coaching to 240 participants, conducted 140 business advice sessions, and completed 244 business plans.

These activities support participants in starting and exploring the option of self-employment. The Mid North Coast region successfully utilised all small business coaching places – a great result for the team in this region.

VERTO is uniquely positioned to offer this service, providing tailored support options for participants who face additional barriers. This training is delivered by Debra Shadlow from the Hunter region, who works with participants one-on-one and in small groups,





including after hours, to ensure they are fully supported in starting their self-employment journey.

Additionally, Debra provides training to participants from other regions, assisting facilitators with their caseloads – a distinctive feature of VERTO's SEA program.

The SEA team takes an innovative approach to delivering information to participants. Over the past 12 months, our team members have hosted digital workshops for microbusiness owners, including our Entrepreneur Eats sessions, Small Business Digital Showcase series, and the successful Indigenous Small Business Expo. These events were designed to promote self-employment opportunities and provide business owners with the essential information they need to set themselves up for success.

VERTO's SEA team will continue to host stakeholder events that attract participants to the program and promote opportunities for the refugee community, First Nations peoples, existing microbusinesses, and the emerging Clean Energy sector aligned with Australia's commitment to net zero.

VERTO's SEA program has facilitated the successful establishment of numerous microbusinesses. Notably, several of these high-performing businesses have been nominated for awards:

- Dylan Ty – Best New Business NSEA Awards
- Daniel and Katie Ryan – Business Change Award NSEA Awards
- Chae Taylor – Finalist of the Mid North Coast Small Business Awards.

The above-mentioned participants have had success in self-employment through their dedication, skills, and guidance from VERTO's facilitators.

I am also proud to acknowledge Debra Shadlow's nomination for the NSEA awards in recognition of her outstanding work in training participants, as well as Alyssa Mudford's achievement as a finalist for her exceptional efforts in supporting both facilitators and participants.

The SEA team is eager to continue driving the success of microbusinesses in the coming year.



TRAINING SERVICES

DARREN FOSTER

It was a huge year for Training Services. While managing a significant amount of change in a relatively short period of time, we produced our best financial result since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Training Services is an income-generating portfolio, with activities that align with VERTO's mission to assist people in need, positively transforming the lives of individuals, families and communities.

In March 2024, we commenced an operational review, looking at all aspects of the business from reporting lines and structures to marketing, sales and administration. The proposed operational change included the development and implementation of eight core strategies listed below, with 48 tactical strategies created to support the overarching plan:

- Revised job descriptions
- A go-to-market strategy targeting high-margin, high-volume products, including traineeships
- A new training delivery model focused on training completions
- An improved employee value proposition for trainer/assessors that is focused on increasing actual revenue, student satisfaction and completions
- New negotiated service delivery models between internal business functions on a cost-return basis
- A new operating model (including organisational restructure)
- A technology plan that improves scheduling, streamlines the student journey, and reduces indirect costs
- Revision of contractor contracts.

It was a huge undertaking to make such significant change while continuing to operate as our budget demanded. Our financial results show a significant reduction in the gap between our budget and actuals year-on-year.

One of our key strategies was reducing the cost-per-unit outcome. This saw reductions in trainer wages to unit outcome in the lead up to the end of the financial year. In a period of three months, we halved the cost from an average of ten hours to five hours, and we are now down to an average of 3.5 hours per unit outcome. The goal is to achieve a trendline somewhere between 2.5 and 3 hours per unit outcome across the new financial year.

Our compliance team managed over 20 qualification transitions across several training packages, the adoption of a new compliance system and a year in which re-registration was due.

A project plan was created and we were on track with the proposed timeline when we got the good news in May that we had been re-registered for another seven years, which was an outstanding result. We are working hard in the background to finish off unit validations and post-assessment validations as we transition to an online compliance system.

Our ACE Community Service Obligation (CSO) funding was slow in the first half of the year, picking up pace as we entered the financial year's final four months. I am pleased to confirm that we have exceeded our target again; this will be the sixth time in the last seven years – a great achievement for the team.

In total, we delivered approximately 400 separate programs to students throughout the year. This is an increase of 40 courses, with lower average enrolment numbers the cause for the increase. The program continues to support people experiencing disadvantage or those who live in regional and remote areas, creating opportunities for them to access pathways into VET qualifications and improving their skills and local employability chances.



Smart and Skilled part qualification funding was a little more difficult to secure due to the change of government.

Under our Smart and Skilled contract, we delivered 420 programs, giving us a 16 per cent reduction year-on-year for part qualification outcomes. Most enrolments were in the new business skillset delivered through our Self-Employment Assistance contract.

Our full qualification programs/enrolments increased this year by 30 per cent year-on-year. Aged care and business/leadership accounted for approximately 30 per cent each of our total enrolments, with community services the next highest with 16 per cent.

The shift away from study for personal reasons continued this year, with more than 57 per cent of enrolled students citing job/work-related requirements as their reason for studying.

The top six in order of total percentage were:

1. Extra skills for my job 26%
2. To get a job 20%
3. Requirements of my job 13%
4. Personal reasons 13%
5. To try a different career 8.5%
6. Personal reasons 8.5%.

Our student engagement and completion record is something the Training Services team is proud of, and the statistics below illustrate our continued impact.

We trained approximately 5,700 students this year, reducing by 2 per cent year-on-year. The decreased enrolments did not have an impact on our revenue and profit - in fact **we produced our best financial results when compared to the last few years.**

We submitted a tender for the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) Program to deliver language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills training in December 2023. We won the Murray Riverina and Hunter regions – a wonderful result for all involved.

SEE helps participants build literacy, numeracy, English language, and digital skills – core competencies that are **essential not only** for personal and professional success but also for active and engaged social participation. It is a truly life-changing program, particularly in regions where educational gaps persist.

TRAINING SERVICES

CONTINUED...

VERTO's overall completion rate for training in the 2023–24 financial year was an average of 94.85 per cent across all programs. This is an area where VERTO continues to trend well above the national averages. Similarly, the overall satisfaction rate for training from students and employers was 90 per cent, with training quality rated 90.5 per cent from students and employers, and effective support to students a 91 per cent rating.

Our student demographic shifted last year, with the results below indicating our impact on our communities:

- 92% of total training was delivered to regional and remote regions of NSW
- 58% of our students were female, an increase of 5% from last year
- 13% of students identified as having a disability, a reduction of 2% from last year
- 19.5% of students were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, a decrease of 2.5%
- 29% of students were mature-age, no change year-on-year
- 95% of our students had a work-related reason for studying with VERTO
- We enrolled 76 students into a traineeship to support their learning on the job.

Training Services looks forward to extending our footprint across Australia in 2024–25 as we deliver a range of accredited and non-accredited training programs that support and positively impact our students, employers, and industries to help our communities to thrive.

AGED CARE TRAINING PROJECT

VERTO recognises the tremendous effort of the aged care sector to provide high levels of care and service in a highly regulated environment. We have created an education solution mapped to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Standards to support this industry.

Catholic Health Care is our largest provider, purchasing 41 kits in early 2024, followed by Thompson Health Care and Warrigal Aged Care.

We continue to generate strong demand for mental health awareness and support workshops - creating a flip card range for our nurses to support with the patient assessments on shift (eg. pressure injury). These are very popular at the live events where we exhibit.



AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICESHIP SUPPORT NETWORK

MATTHEW ESCHLER

The 2023–24 financial year saw the introduction of a change in services for providers by the Australian Government. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations moved towards a model that supports Australian apprentices and employers throughout their entire employment journey, with Indigenous, women and culturally and linguistically diverse apprentices the focus.

VERTO changed its service delivery model to ensure that we could support all stakeholders in their apprenticeship journey. VERTO performed well over the year, delivering solid outcomes for thousands of apprentices and trainees.

Key achievements in 2023–24:

- 12,567 sign-ups completed throughout NSW and interstate to support our national clients and partners
- 1,210 sign-ups completed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into Australian apprenticeships
- 508 Australian apprentices with a disability supported into employment
- 626 mature-age workers commenced Australian apprenticeships throughout NSW.

VERTO's commitment to supporting apprentices through to completion is highlighted by the Training

Support team, where VERTO's mentors helped Australian apprentices with complex issues. VERTO successfully supported:

- 191 Australian youth apprentices
- 1,620 Australian apprentices undertaking a mainstream apprenticeship
- 434 Women in non-traditional trade apprenticeships
- 520 Australian apprentices from regional and remote locations
- 33 Australian apprentices in designated clean energy trades.

Additionally, VERTO provided entry-level career advice to 2,444 potential Australian apprentices across NSW from our gateway service – an outstanding result.

In April 2024, VERTO won the right to deliver the New Energy Apprenticeships Mentoring Program. VERTO will assist apprentices undertaking a clean energy qualification connect with clean energy mentors to help provide career advice and support the apprentice to completion.

We're looking forward to providing additional support to clean energy apprentices, trainees and employers with peer support events, and promoting clean energy apprenticeship occupations nationally.



RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

Founded with a mission to address rural skills training needs, VERTO has grown into one of Australia's leading employment and training service providers. Throughout our expansion, our commitment to transforming the lives of individuals, families, and communities has remained steadfast. We bridge the gap between economic isolation and participation, turning challenges into opportunities and aspirations into achievements through a comprehensive range of services.

Under the guidance of our 2022–24 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and internal working group, we enhanced the cultural competency of VERTO's leadership and staff, actively sought First Nations employment opportunities, deepened our engagement in reconciliation initiatives, and leveraged our youth skills and employment programs to deliver meaningful outcomes for First Nations peoples and communities.

Our 2024–26 RAP continues to emphasise practical, measurable actions that contribute to the nation's reconciliation journey.

VERTO acknowledges this extensive sphere of influence and the critical role we can play in helping

to facilitate the three pillars of reconciliation – respect, relationships and opportunities. We look forward to building upon those again in our 2024–26 RAP.

Highlights achieved throughout the duration of the 2022–24 RAP:

- From 1 July, 2023 through to 30 June, 2024, VERTO had a total 1,031 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enrolled in training through our RTO with an overall completion rate of 95.5%
- Since 2016, 180 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students annually have participated in our Aboriginal Youth Leadership Program, which promotes and helps Indigenous youth to become community leaders and determine their own future
- Establishing and maintaining strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and bodies to deploy a localised approach to employment services. Organisations include Bamara in Dubbo, Mingaan Wiradjuri Aboriginal Corporation in Lithgow, Nguumambiny



Indigenous Corporation in Dubbo, Bundjalung Tribal Society in Lismore and Real Futures based in Kempsey. These relationships have been critical to the development of effective engagement plans to maximise the positive impact of VERTO's employment services.

- Continued delivery of the Hunter Local Jobs Plan, which emphasises the role of the employment facilitator in implementing strategies that leverage local leadership and expertise to deliver outcomes, including through engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and communities.
- Delivery of a Self-Employment Assistance pilot showcase in Dubbo early in 2024, which was a collaboration with Service NSW and Many Rivers. Based on its success, VERTO plans to expand the showcase through similar partnerships in other regions.
- Continued delivery of the Sistas in Trade program, co-designed with VERTO and Bamara, for the NSW Government. This program combined vocational and non-vocational training to support women to participate in the construction industry and included Indigenous mentoring.
- Delivery of a pre-employment program with Coonamble Shire Council and the Wake Up, Shake Up Program, leading to employment for eight participants with Coonamble Shire Council, complemented by Indigenous mentoring.
- Working with the Bundjalung Tribal Society to improve Indigenous outcomes through pre-employment programs.
- Delivery of the Real Futures' Tiddas in Construction program.
- Delivery of the Abergeldie pre-employment program in partnership with Mingaan Wiradjuri Aboriginal Corporation, which included a smoking ceremony.
- Collaborating with National Broadband Network (NBN) to deliver digital literacy skills and cyber security competency, with tailored training developed and delivered to Indigenous clients in Coonamble.
- Delivery of the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program, with funding from the National Indigenous Australians Agency. Cultural awareness training was delivered to staff and employers, fostering a mutual understanding and respect for the needs of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.
- Attracting First Nations people into our workforce – 6.4% of VERTO's employees are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (which is double the national First Nations populace rate).
- Reviewing and updating all policies to facilitate involvement by VERTO staff in internal and external events to celebrate NAIDOC Week.
- Ensuring an ongoing focus on evolving our Indigenous Employment Strategy to place a priority on providing sustainable employment, career development and training in supportive and culturally sensitive environments.
- Annually consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to ensure their feedback is provided and reflected in the ongoing improvement of VERTO recruitment, retention, professional development and personal experiences working at VERTO.





BOARD OF DIRECTORS



PRESIDENT
ANDREW ABEL



VICE PRESIDENT
LARRY ANDERSON



TREASURER
DAVID WEEKES



SECRETARY
ANDREW BOOG



DIRECTOR
DR THÉRÈSE JONES



DIRECTOR
DAVID PENNELLS



DIRECTOR
DR MELANIE BOURSNELL

SENIOR EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM



**CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER**
RON MAXWELL



**CHIEF OPERATING
OFFICER**
ALYSSA BENNETT



**CHIEF FINANCIAL
OFFICER**
DIANA MUDFORD



**CHIEF
COMMUNICATIONS
OFFICER**
GEMMA GELLING



**CHIEF
INFORMATION
OFFICER**
RYAN PRIEST



**GENERAL MANAGER OF
APPRENTICESHIPS AND
NEW BUSINESS**
JASON FOSTER



CONNECT WITH VERTO

☎ 1300 483 786

✉ INFO@VERTO.ORG.AU

🌐 VERTO.ORG.AU

VERTO IS A CHARITY
REGISTERED WITH THE
AUSTRALIAN CHARITIES
AND NOT-FOR-PROFITS
COMMISSION WITH A PUBLIC
BENEVOLENT INSTITUTION
SUBTYPE.

