

MEDIA RELEASE

Built on legacy and focused on her future: One-year-old Thea finds her voice with Ability WA

PERTH, WA, 8th September 2026 - As Ability WA celebrates 75 years of supporting West Australians to realise their abilities, the organisation has launched a new billboard series spotlighting the real families behind its services.

The first billboard in the series features one-year-old Thea Paljetak and her speech pathologist, Lauren Lowrey, whose work together through Ability WA's early intervention program helped Thea find her voice.

The billboard, reading *"built on legacy and focused on her future,"* is part of a broader campaign, Shine Together 75, marking Ability WA's 75th anniversary and its 75-year commitment to the Western Australian community.

A parent's instinct and a quicker way in

Thea's mum, Chloe, first noticed something was different while attending a parents' group.

"Thea's communication and speech wasn't developing as quickly as the other babies," Chloe said. *"The child health nurse mentioned a speech program with Ability. As we could self-refer, we didn't have to wait like we would have for a standard referral."*

The program, Inklings, is developed by The Kids Research Institute Australia and delivered in Western Australia by Ability WA. It supports families of children aged six to 18 months who are showing early differences in their communication development.

Within six months, working fortnightly with Ability WA's Clinical Lead Speech Pathologist Lauren Lowrey, at the Murdoch Hub, Thea progressed from minimal non-verbal communication to babbling, talking and communicating confidently. Her progress was so successful that she no longer needed further support.

"Before we started with Ability WA, Thea wasn't babbling at all, just grunting, and her non-verbal communication was minor," Chloe said. *"She's come such a long way in both. It was extra special that her first word was 'mama'."*

For Chloe, the billboard's message resonates deeply. *"Thea's future is about helping her better herself and put her best foot forward giving her the means to get there when she can't always get there herself,"* she said.

"My advice to any parent would be to trust your gut, see a child health nurse and look into your options. I had no idea this was available to us, and I'm so glad I found Ability WA."

Getting in early makes a lasting difference

Ability WA's Lauren Lowrey said early childhood intervention was one of the most powerful windows in a child's development.

"Early childhood intervention is a pivotal, dynamic period in a child's life," Lauren said. *"If you get in at the right time, research suggests children need less support in the long term. It allows for structured, parent-led social communication coaching that works to the child's strengths and helps parents adapt to their child's own communication style."*

Lauren said what stood out most in Thea and Chloe's journey was the connection between them. *"It's a really rewarding experience seeing how in tune mum is with Thea. I've loved helping Thea share what she needs and her thoughts and seeing the interaction patterns she now has with her mum."*

She said the approach reflects the way Ability WA works across all its therapy services. *"At Ability WA, we take a holistic, family-centred approach to therapy services. We recognise that families know their child best, so we work in partnership with parents and caregivers to understand their priorities, goals and day-to-day challenges. Drawing on the expertise of our multidisciplinary team, including Speech Pathology, Dietetics, Occupational Therapy, Positive Behaviour Support, Physiotherapy and Exercise Physiology. We tailor support to what will make the greatest difference in daily life."*

Ability WA also works to bridge the gap for families who don't yet have funded supports in place. Children can miss out on early intervention while waiting on NDIS approval or other funded services. Ability WA offers services designed to support these families during critical stages of development, so children receive timely intervention when it matters most.

75 years of showing up for WA families

Ability WA CEO, Jacquie Thomson, said Thea and Chloe's story captured exactly what the organisation had set out to do 75 years ago, and what it remained committed to today.

"Seventy-five years ago, Ability WA began with a small group of parents determined to give their children a better future," Thomson said. *"Thea and Chloe's story is a beautiful reminder that this is still exactly what we're here to do, walking alongside families, at the moments that matter most, so every person we support can realise their abilities. As we mark this milestone, we're not just looking back at what we've built, we're looking ahead at how we keep showing up for the next 75 years."*

Thea's billboard is the first in a series of Shine Together 75 placements across the Perth metropolitan area, each spotlighting a different Ability WA customer story throughout the anniversary campaign.

About Ability WA

For 75 years, Ability WA has been empowering Western Australians to realise their abilities. From its beginnings as a small group of parents committed to improving their children's lives, Ability WA has grown into a leading disability service provider, supporting over 2,300 customers and employing more than 1,200 staff across therapy services, home and living support, employment services, community programs and assistive technology. Ability WA's impact stretches across the Perth metropolitan area, with its team delivering services from multiple hubs and within the community.

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High-resolution billboard photography and photography of Thea and Laren's therapy session are available upon request.

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