

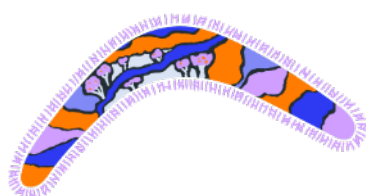


Beyond the Ramp - Social Value Analysis of the Inclusion Project - Final report

Setting a new standard for public spaces

Prepared for: Hawks Community Foundation

Date: 15 May 2026



Acknowledgment of Country

Social Ventures Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past and present traditional custodians and elders of this country on which we work.

'After the Rains' by Richard Seden for Saltwater People 2024

Project acknowledgements

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) would like to acknowledge the participation of Inclusion Project Officers, Living Without Boundaries (the Inclusion Project's Occupational Therapy partner), parents and the Inclusion Project staff who contributed to this report.

Social value is about understanding what matters to the people at the centre of programs, like the Inclusion Project. Hiding behind any social value report is a wealth of personal stories, lived experience and practice expertise, all of which contribute to the evidence base that is critical to the analysis. We are always grateful to those who share what matters to them.

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Our team is passionate about what they do and use their diverse experience to work together to solve Australia's most pressing challenges.

This report has been authored by SVA Consulting by Jessica Devlin and Jonathan Finighan.

For more information contact us: consulting@socialventures.org.au

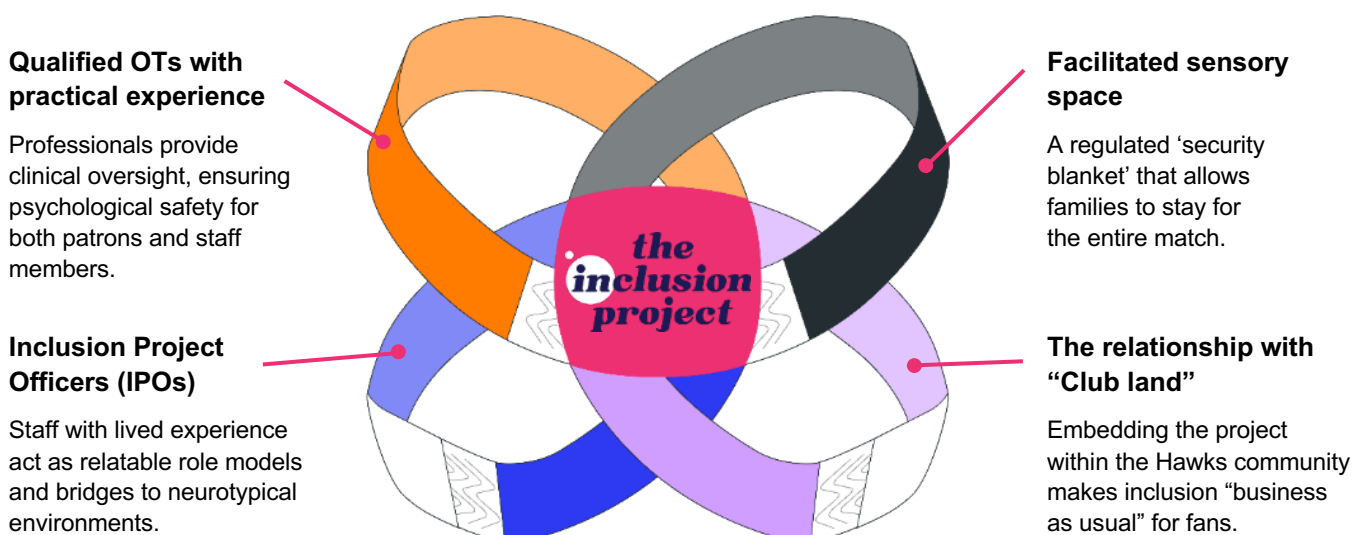
Executive summary

Getting out to see a sporting match, live entertainment, or visit the zoo is about so much more than having fun. It's about connecting with community, being yourself and being a part of something bigger, and spending time with friends or bonding as a family. People with a disability have as much of a right to do this as anyone else.

Unfortunately, this often isn't easy for many people with a disability because of how public spaces and venues are set up and run. While there has been much progress in making public spaces and venues more accessible for physical disability – such as wheelchair ramps and accessible toilets – hidden disabilities remain poorly catered for.

The Inclusion Project started with the kernel of an idea to ***“Make the best match days possible”*** for people with hidden disabilities. What started just with home games for the Hawthorn Football Club has grown into a program engaging with hundreds of events across multiple sporting codes and clubs, live entertainment and arts events, family festivals and the Melbourne Zoo.

The Inclusion Project Model



Scope of social value analysis

The social value analysis focuses on the outcomes generated by the Inclusion Project between March 2024 and February 2026. Program data, consultations with patrons and program staff including Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Inclusion Project Officers (IPOs), and desktop research were used to inform the approach and validate assumptions. Quotes from consultations are included throughout the report. See the appendix for detail on the methodology.

Social value generated through the Inclusion Project

This social value analysis of the Inclusion Project provides evidence for the opening assertion that attending these events is about far more than entertainment. The Inclusion Project's model was found to generate material outcomes for four different stakeholder groups:

- **Patrons engaging with the Inclusion Project have experienced an increase in their sense of community belonging**, by being much more able to get out and go to sporting matches and cultural events and receiving support and practical strategies from OTs so they can meet their needs.
- Inclusion Project Officers have experienced profound shifts in their confidence, social connections and workplace experience, and the project has even been a launchpad for some to secure open market roles with other employers.
- **Sporting clubs have benefited from an expanded base of supporters and members**, because the Inclusion Project increases attendance at matches and club affinity.
- **And venues and major events benefit from improved fan and customer experience:** increasing attendance for people with disability increases in-venue spending and ticket sales. Given that about 20% of domestic tourism spend in Australia is by people with a disability, the Inclusion Project model can help venues and events companies unlock new 'consumer markets' that support economic growth.

The analysis concludes that the Inclusion Project generated a total of **\$5.9m** in present value terms over March 2024 to February 2026 (the period of this analysis).



Inclusion Project Officers providing match-day support at the Melbourne Storm game

Insights

This report identifies six key insights about the Inclusion Project's impact:

1

"Belonging" is the ultimate driver of value: While practical event support is critical, over half of the social value created by the Inclusion Project (\$3.35m of \$5.9m total social value) comes from people with disability and their families and carers being able to participate in the community and feel a greater sense of belonging at sporting and cultural events.

2

The IPO model delivers transformational employment outcomes: Consultations found that the impact of the project on IPOs is profound. A supportive workplace that genuinely values their lived experience and provides opportunities for connection and learning acts as a powerful launchpad, building real-world skills and confidence for open-market roles.

3

Much more than a sensory space: The true social value stems from the 'secret sauce' of combining a facilitated sensory space with clinical oversight from on-site OTs, the unmatched peer-to-peer validation of neurodivergent IPOs, and deep integration into pre-existing, passionate mainstream sporting communities.

4

Leveraging cultural capital to build community capacity at scale: By tapping into the cultural capital and marketing infrastructure of partner sporting clubs, the project is uniquely placed to reach millions of fans with inclusion messaging and contribute to raising community awareness and normalising inclusion at a macro level.

5

Core foundational funding is structurally essential for scale: While fee-for-service revenue covers event-day staff, continued foundational grants are vital to fund the clinical architecture, project management, and workforce training that supports the model's integrity.

6

Future measurement can deepen evidence-based delivery: To build on this analysis, the Inclusion Project should consider implementing baseline and follow up surveys for IPOs to track career progression, gathering additional data to track repeat attendance and trends for patrons, and working with venue ticketing partners to measure how the project's "security blanket" directly influences patron attendance over time.

The Inclusion Project

The hidden challenge

One in five Australians lives with a disability – and an overwhelming 80% of these are hidden. While society has made great strides in physical accessibility, people with hidden disabilities like autism, brain injuries, or intellectual disabilities are often still misunderstood and their needs overlooked.

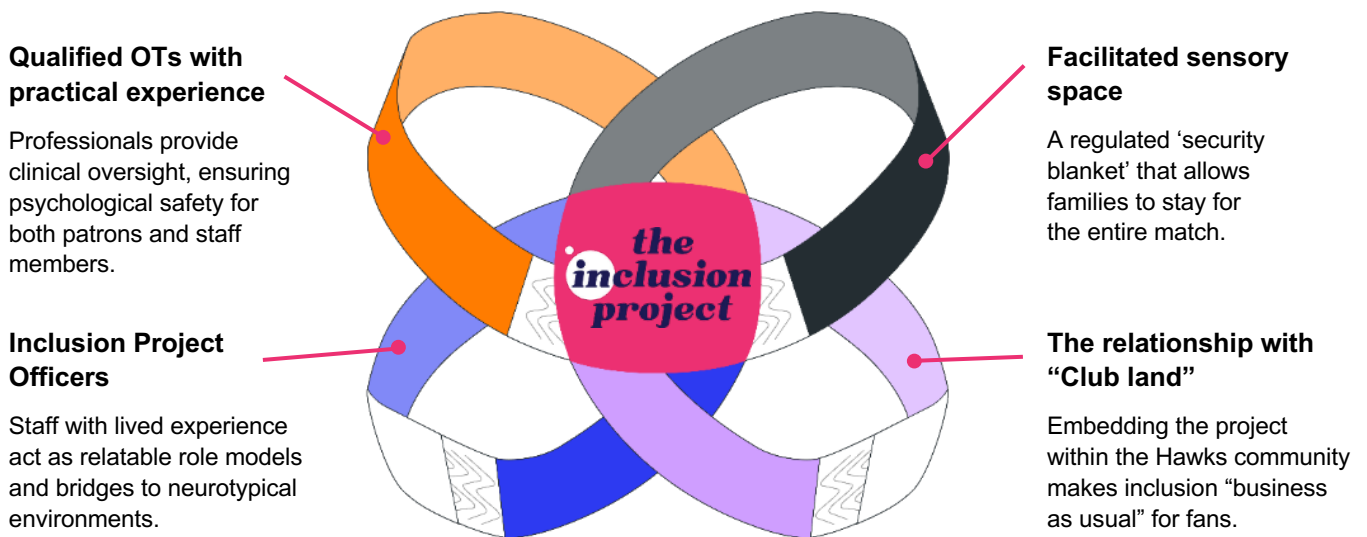
The sensory overload of public spaces and sporting and cultural events, and generally low levels of community awareness, often exclude people with a hidden disability from participating in community life. And traditional workplaces often fail to provide meaningful work opportunities for people.

Changing the game

Enter the **Inclusion Project**. The Hawks Community Foundation has pioneered a unique approach to make sporting and cultural events genuinely accessible for everyone.

The Inclusion Project sets up an ecosystem of support that unlocks the game-day experience for families, while simultaneously creating meaningful, tailored employment for young people with a lived experience of a hidden disability:

- **Facilitated sensory spaces:** Serve as a vital ‘**security blanket**’ that gives families the confidence to attend events and the practical means to stay and self-regulate if needed.
- **Occupational therapists (OTs):** Provide the **clinical oversight and active facilitation** required to keep the space safe and therapeutic, while protecting the psychological well-being of the staff.
- **Inclusion Project Officers (IPOs):** Act as highly visible **role models and peer-to-peer bridge-builders** who use their lived experience to translate the world for both neurodivergent and neurotypical people.
- ‘Club land’ connection: Embeds these accommodations within an established, passionate community, which removes the clinical feel of disability support, fosters genuine belonging, and normalises inclusion.



Beyond the immediate support for patrons and staff, the model leverages the reach of partner sporting clubs to encourage broader community inclusion. By operating in highly visible stadium environments, the project reaches millions of attendees. This exposure helps to normalise hidden disabilities, build awareness of sensory spaces and needs, and provide valuable representation for neurodivergent individuals in the workforce.

Occupational therapists – the clinical backbone

While many venues are beginning to offer basic sensory spaces, the Inclusion Project elevates this by partnering with Living Without Boundaries to place qualified OTs directly into the environment. OTs play a crucial role in activating sensory spaces and creating supportive and safe workplaces for IPOs.

- **Active clinical intervention:** Unlike standard sensory rooms that merely offer a quiet place to sit, the presence of OTs transforms the space into an actively facilitated, therapeutic environment. OTs apply their clinical lens to understand complex behaviours, help patrons interact with the space and use techniques to help regulate and meet their needs, and educate parents and support people about neurodiversity and disability.
- **Embedding best practice:** In between match days, Living Without Boundaries supports the Hawks Community Foundation with ongoing planning, evaluation, and post-shift observations that align the Inclusion Project with clinical 'best practice'.
- **Supporting staff wellbeing:** OTs also play a role in the development of policies, procedures, and systems that support psychological safety for IPOs. Because the IPOs have lived experience with hidden disabilities, OTs support IPOs during their shifts, such as identifying when IPOs might need support and encouraging breaks during shifts.



Inclusion Project Officers and Occupational Therapists working at the Australian Open.

The Inclusion Project's reach

Between March 2024 and February 2026, the Inclusion Program reached:



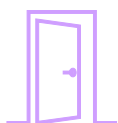
231

Events



46

Inclusion Project Officers
employed



12,170

Patrons visited the
sensory rooms



17,197

Patrons spoke with
an IPO around
venues



5,401

Patrons supported
by an OT



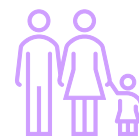
6%

Patrons are adults
attending alone



51%

Patrons are
children



43%

Patrons are parents
or support people



Inclusion Project Officers handing out posters at the Melbourne Vixens game.

Key partners and clients



ROD LAVER ARENA

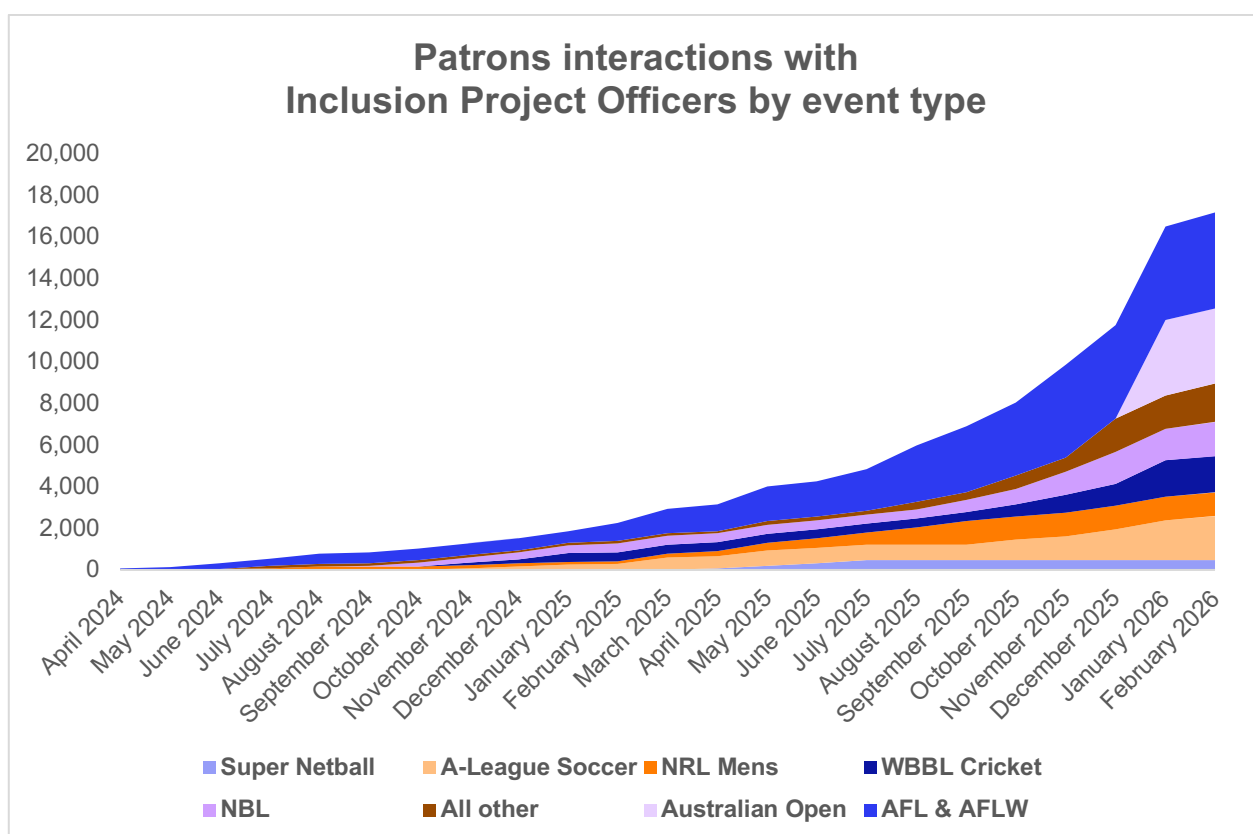


Occupational Therapist and Inclusion Project Officer facilitating at Disney on Ice.

Growth

The Inclusion Project experienced significant growth in the two years to February 2026. In the six months prior to March 2024 (the start of this analysis period), the Inclusion Project engaged with approximately 1,500 patrons. Two years later, in the six months leading up to March 2026, this number was almost 10,000.

Alongside increased attendance, the operational scope of the project has broadened considerably. Initially focused on Hawthorn Football Club AFL match days, the project has successfully diversified its footprint to support a wide array of different sporting codes and major entertainment events. The figure below shows total number of patrons interacting with IPOs by event type, from the start of this report's analysis period.



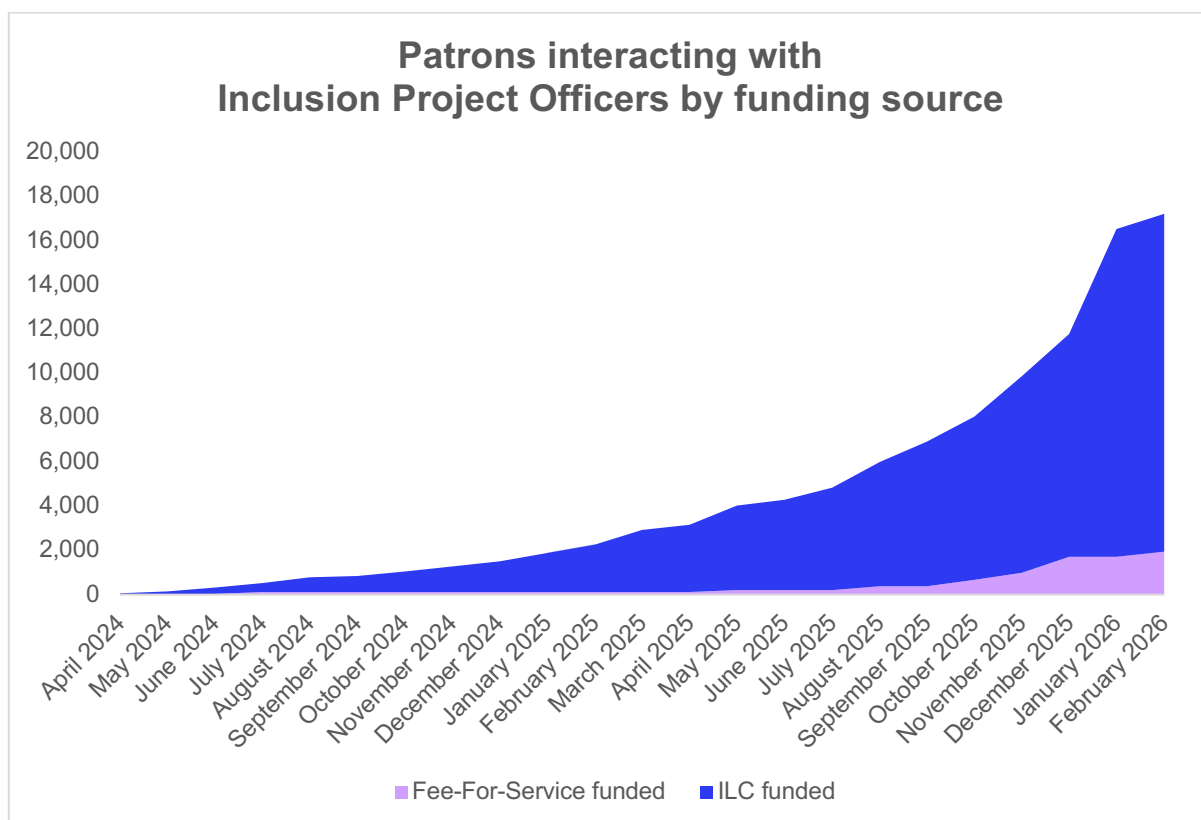
Note: The Inclusion Project didn't just start in April 2024 – it was already running under a previous grant from NDIA. In the 6 months prior to March 2024 it engaged with approximately 1,500 patrons.

This expansion has been driven by a mix of ILC grant funding and growing Fee-for-Service (FFS) revenue. Almost 90% of interactions during the analysis period were funded through the ILC grant, with the remainder funded through FFS arrangements, primarily focused on the entertainment sector (see next page). While FFS funding has grown over time, the ILC grant remains a key catalyst for the Inclusion Project's growth. The grant established the necessary infrastructure, capacity and workforce to take on FFS opportunities, and continues to contribute to overheads. Ongoing grant funding remains structurally essential to preserving the project's social value:

- **Funding the whole picture:** FFS events are a great way to reach new venues, but they usually only cover the specific staff needed on the day. Grant funding remains vital because it

pays for everything behind the scenes – such as project management, expert clinical guidance, and training for the peer workforce – which is what truly creates the project's social value.

- **Maintaining the sporting presence:** Sporting clubs provide valuable in-kind contributions but generally do not contribute financially to the project. The grant ensures the project maintains its deep roots in community sport.
- **Driving commercial co-investment:** The grant acts as seed funding to leverage private investment. At the Australian Open, the provision of the ILC-funded model demonstrated such clear value that event organisers contributed additional financial investment to extend the offering.



Inclusion Project Officers working at the Melbourne Victory game.

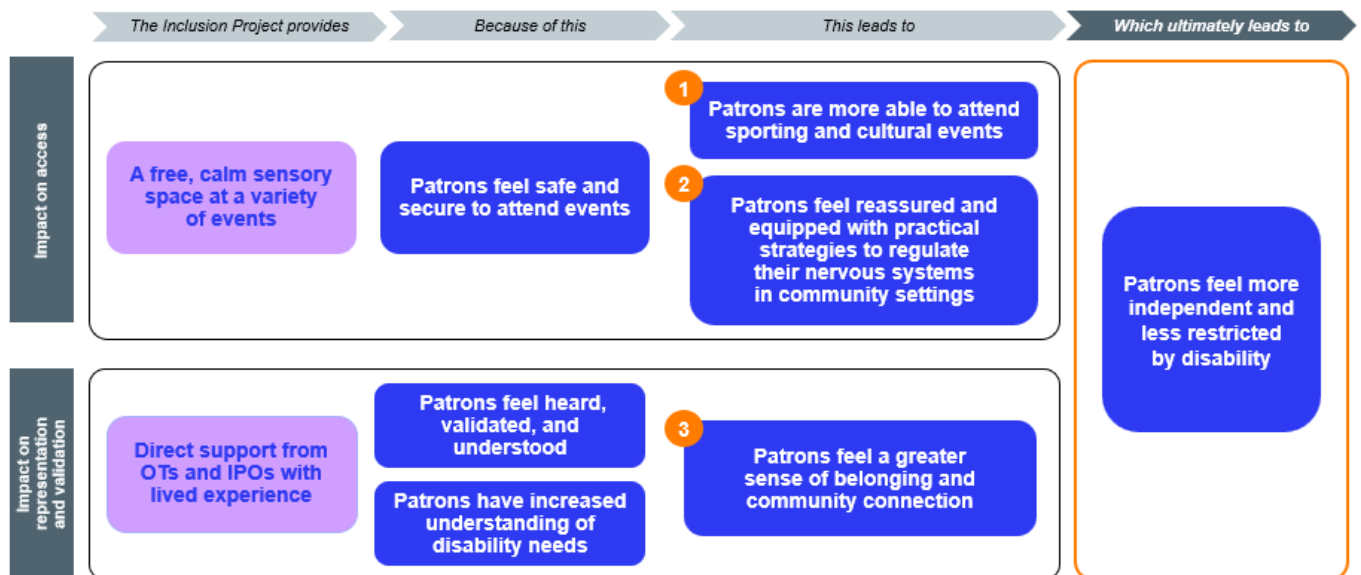
Outcomes for patrons

This section presents evidence on the outcomes experienced by patrons who interact with the Inclusion Project. **Outcomes are changes** – in this case, the changes experienced by patrons as a result of the Inclusion Project. Patrons include children and adults with a disability, and their parents and carers.

The section also includes findings on the value of these outcomes. The value of these outcomes is estimated using financial proxies. But financial proxies only tell part of the story: we also present evidence on the depth of this impact gathered through consultations.

“Without forward thinking and innovative, community focused groups like [the Inclusion Project], wonderful and inclusive progress like this would never occur.”

Parents engaging with the Inclusion Project



The social value analysis concluded that the Inclusion Project's model creates three material outcomes for patrons, the value of which is estimated below:

- **Outcome 1:** Patrons are more able to attend sporting and cultural events
- **Outcome 2:** Patrons feel reassured and equipped with practical strategies to regulate their nervous systems in community settings
- **Outcome 3:** Patrons feel a greater sense of belonging and community connection

Evidence on each of these outcomes and their estimated value is presented over the page.

Outcome 1: Patrons are more able to attend sporting and cultural events

\$681k

The Inclusion Project means patrons with a hidden disability are significantly more able to attend sporting and cultural events that would otherwise be too difficult for many.

The presence of the sensory space gives patrons the choice to step away from an event to regulate their nervous system when needed and then return to the event if and when they feel ready to. Even if patrons don't need to use the sensory space on a particular match day, it is there if they need it, and this helps **give them the confidence to go in the first place**. For children with a disability, it isn't just the child who benefits, but so do the parents and siblings of the child who are also often restricted from going to sporting and cultural events because of poor accessibility. This reduces the need to leave part way through an event as they may have done previously.

Quantity: This outcome is experienced by every patron recorded as interacting with IPOs, including around venues – not just those who visit a sensory space on the day – because the very presence of the Inclusion Project increases the likelihood that patrons with a disability will attend (**17,197 patrons**). SVA's analysis assumes the presence of these supports is often the deciding factor in a family's choice to attend.

Valuation: Valued using the average cost of purchasing a ticket and public transport to an event. The average ticket price for sporting and cultural events is used as a proxy to measure the value of attending these events. The valuation conservatively applies a 20% deadweight, accounting for a minority of patrons who would have attended the event regardless.

"The sensory space is like a security blanket or a back-up plan for a family – even if they don't end up coming in, they know it's there if they need it. So that means they can go to a game."

Inclusion Project Officer



Sensory support resources and Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyards found in an Inclusion Project Sensory Space.

Outcome 2: Patrons feel reassured and equipped with practical strategies to regulate their nervous systems in community settings

\$415k

Parents and their children feel reassured through dual-support from the presence of sensory rooms of events, reinforced with the assistance of OTs to provide on-hand help when needed.

Parents and families gain immense reassurance from speaking with the Inclusion Project's OTs. The presence of the Inclusion Project's staff to answer parents' questions both alleviates stress and validates their experiences. An additional benefit of visiting a sensory space for patrons is access to OT services for no cost outside of the ticket price. Not only does this save money for patrons in their NDIS plans but also allows OTs to see many more people than they would usually see in a traditional clinical environment.

Quantity: This outcome is measured by counting the number of patrons who engage with OTs (**5,401 patrons**). This is a conservative estimate because it isn't only OTs who provide this reassurance – the IPOs also play an important role here, but in the interests of avoiding double counting and over claiming, the analysis uses a more conservative measure.

Valuation: Valued with reference to the average out of pocket cost to see a professional OT in a community setting under the NDIS Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits 2025-26, including the cost of provider travel. This cost is adjusted to reflect that engagements with OTs are a typical 1-hour session: 33% of the out-of-pocket cost is used to approximate that the average length of engagement with an OT in a sensory space may be closer to 20 minutes. It is assumed that a minority of patrons would receive similar support and reassurance through other means, even if the Inclusion Project was not available, so a deadweight of 20% is applied.

"IPOs and patrons come together [and it] instils a lot of hope to see an IPO working."

Occupational Therapist

"[It is] so important having a space for [a] young person with neurodivergence to meet me as an older person who has a job, they often think they can't get a job."

Inclusion Project Officer

Outcome 3: Patrons feel a greater sense of belonging and community connection

\$3.35m

The Inclusion Project gives people with a hidden disability the opportunity to get out and go to a footy game or see live music, just like everyone else.

By enabling people to go to sporting and cultural events and connecting them with 'club land', the Inclusion Project helps families feel more included, participate more in community, and in many cases, become dedicated fans of teams like the Hawthorn Football Club.

Quantity: The analysis assumes that this outcome is experienced primarily by people with a disability both young and old who interact with the Inclusion Project, as well as a portion of

parents and carers. Parents and carers of people with a disability can also experience social isolation due to caring responsibilities, so the Inclusion Project also enables this group of patrons to experience this outcome. The quantity is based on all patrons who visit the sensory space, plus 25% of those who interact with IPOs around the stadium, to recognise the role that IPOs play in generating this outcome (**16,469 patrons**).

Valuation: To estimate the social value of a greater sense of belonging and community connection, we refer to a comparable intervention under the NDIS – ‘Assistance to Access Community, Social and Recreational Activities’. Patrons could also experience a sense of belonging and community connection by spending their NDIS package funds to pay a provider to access community, social and recreational activities, as a way to make friends, connect with a community around shared interests and find a sense of belonging. This outcome is valued for children and adults with a disability using the NDIS Price Limits for these activities (assuming a 4-hour activity); the value per parents/carers is adjusted down to 25% to recognise they receive a secondary benefit. The valuation applies a 20% deadweight accounting for a minority of patrons who would have attended regardless.

Beyond the numbers

There is so much sport in school. This project helps kids connect to this culture. Our son can now be part of the conversations, he knows the vernacular, these basic things are so important. It's very hard to find sports for kids like him that he can be involved in. We want him to be doing something mainstream but understands.

Parents visiting Inclusion Project

The numbers and dollars of a social value analysis only ever tell part of the story. Consultations with IPOs, OTs and parents heard numerous examples and stories that illustrate the deeper value of the project for people.

- **Connecting to mainstream sport culture and ‘club land’.** What the financial proxies above miss out on is the value generated by the Inclusion Project through connecting patrons into the pre-existing community of ‘club land’. Unlike typical ‘community access’ activities under the NDIS, the Inclusion Project occupies a unique position to connect people into the ‘mainstream’ community, identity, belonging to sporting clubs, and the broader culture of sports and fans. Consultations heard examples of families adopting Hawthorn as their team, or children with disability learning about football and then being able to engage with other kids at school about their footy club, players and what happened in matches on the weekend. This connection into mainstream sporting culture and the communities of sporting clubs presents a unique value proposition and means the project occupies a truly unique space.
- **The power of the partnership model.** This is all made possible through partnership with major sporting clubs, who are a vital part of the Inclusion Project model. Partner clubs can send a powerful message to all sporting fans (not just people with disabilities) by lending their cultural capital to the Inclusion Project. Their support is necessary to help transform the stadium from an intimidating environment into a place where people with a disability can feel they belong.
- **The big picture – living an independent and unrestricted life.** All the above outcomes contribute to the big picture: independence and not being restricted by disability. By making it possible for people to get out of the house and into mainstream sporting and cultural events, receive support from qualified OTs in a community setting, and find a sense of community and

belonging in mainstream sporting culture, this all leads up to the ultimate outcome of patrons feeling more independent and not restricted by their disability.

"I was speaking with a father whose child had just got a diagnosis, and he was asking me thousands of questions. I was answering them for him and suddenly it was like a weight was just lifted off his shoulders. He became so calm and was incredibly grateful for the support. It was a really moving interaction."

Inclusion Project Officer



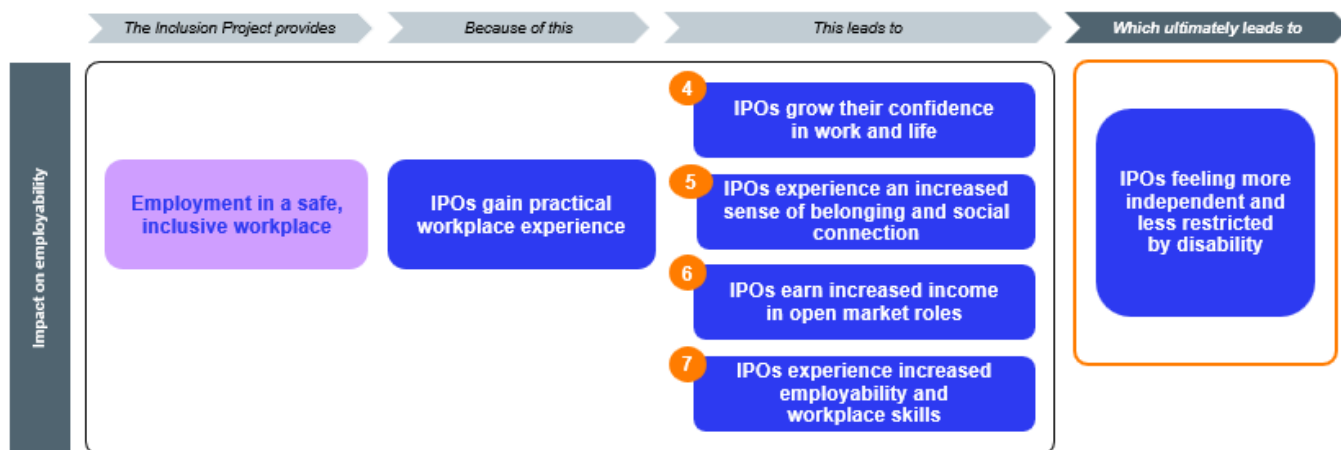
Participants at the Hawks Sensory Space at the Kennedy Community Centre.

"It means that people with disability might get to go to completely new events – to go out and see the world!"

Inclusion Project Officer

Outcomes for Inclusion Project Officers

This section presents evidence on the outcomes experienced by IPOs. The Inclusion Project enables those with hidden disabilities to gain meaningful employment in an environment that understands their unique needs. The Inclusion Project employed 46 IPOs over the course of the analysis period, and another five people with a lived experience of disability in other office roles.



The social value analysis focused on four material outcomes for IPOs:

- **Outcome 4:** IPOs grow their confidence in work and life
- **Outcome 5:** IPOs experience an increased sense of belonging and social connection
- **Outcome 6:** IPOs earn increased income in open market roles
- **Outcome 7:** IPOs experience increased employability and workplace skills

Outcome 4: IPOs grow their confidence in work and life

\$74k

Working for the Inclusion Project builds IPOs' confidence to do their work, speak to strangers and advocate for themselves at work and beyond.

The Inclusion Project provides IPOs with a safe, supportive environment to step out of their comfort zones. OTs have helped Hawks Community Foundation to shape a workplace that provides this support. This can lead to profound personal growth. Through their roles, IPOs develop crucial life skills, such as time management, communication with a wide range of people and problem solving. These skills permeate into their everyday lives – like navigating public spaces and transport, ordering a coffee or advocating for themselves.

Quantity: The analysis concludes that this outcome is experienced by all IPOs employed by the project (**46 IPOs**).

Valuation: This outcome is valued with reference to the out-of-pocket costs to attend a course to build general life skills, which is a common alternative means to achieve this outcome. It is assumed a very small minority (10%) of IPOs would have alternative opportunities to experience the growth in confidence to a similar depth to what is offered through the Inclusion Project.

"I feel more confident and proud by being involved in the inclusion project."

Inclusion Project Officer

"When I'm in my uniform I can do anything!"

Inclusion Project Officer



Inclusion Project Officers attending a staff training day and meeting Sensory Sidekicks, Ace and Indi.

Outcome 5: IPOs experience increased sense of belonging and social connection

\$104k

IPOs overcome social isolation through the Inclusion Project which fosters an inclusive environment that welcomes into the community.

By working alongside peers with shared lived experiences, IPOs find a unique, highly inclusive environment where differences are embraced as the norm. They complete intensive group training workshops, led by OTs and Inclusion Project staff, they work together on shifts, and they also learn from each other: every IPO's first trial shift involves them shadowing an experienced IPO, which gives IPOs a chance to build leadership skills and teach others. They make friends, learn together and 'feel a part of something'.

Quantity: The analysis concludes that this outcome is experienced by all IPOs employed by the project (**46 IPOs**).

Valuation: The value of experiencing the sense of belonging and social connection experienced by IPOs can be understood with reference to the average cost of participating in an all-day team building offsite or being in a special interest or professional group in the context of work. This proxy is multiplied by 6 to reflect the number of all day in-person training sessions that IPOs experienced over the two years of the analysis period.

Outcome 6: IPOs earn increased income in open market roles

\$62k

IPOs earn an income in open market roles, which supports their economic independence

For many neurodivergent individuals facing systemic barriers to open employment, the alternative to working at the Inclusion Project is often closed employment within an Australian Disability Enterprise or similar. By employing IPOs at mainstream, open-market award wages, the Inclusion Project provides immediate economic dignity and financial independence. The value of this outcome is represented by the increased income IPOs earn with the Inclusion Project compared to the baseline wages of closed employment.

Quantity: This outcome is quantified by counting the total number of hours worked by IPOs during the analysis period (**7,042 hours**). Note that this focuses only on hours worked by IPOs and excludes other Inclusion Project staff with a lived experience of disability.

Valuation: The value of this outcome is estimated with reference to the difference between the Award wages paid by the Inclusion Project (\$35.15 per hour) and the typical wage that IPOs might be paid under the Supported Employment Services Award 2020 (\$25.85 per hour based on Grade 3 wage).

"[It was the] first time I've seen 'I could do this as my job, I could do this full time. Almost like I've got a purpose: a job I can do, it doesn't drain me, it suits my skillset."

Inclusion Project Officer

Outcome 7: IPOs experience increased employability and workplace skills

\$51k

IPOs gain on the job experience and workplace skills that support their long-term employability.

IPOs develop critical employability and practical workplace skills that are applicable in both professional and personal spaces. IPOs receive on-the-job training in essential professional habits. They gain skills and experience that helps equip them for work – including how to communicate effectively, plan their day, manage a shift, and get to and from work. OTs also help them learn vital workplace self-regulation strategies, such as how to articulate their needs and request a break when feeling overwhelmed. Some IPOs have secured open-market employment with other employers after working with the Inclusion Project, including the Australian Open and Melbourne Cricket Club.

Quantity: This outcome is estimated to be experienced by **14 IPOs** who are known to Hawks Community Foundation to have secured employment with other employers during the analysis period. This is a conservative figure as it overlooks the fact that other IPOs will have also gained increased employability and workplace skills.

Valuation: The value of this is understood with reference to the estimated income earned in the short term by IPOs who have secured employment elsewhere – using short-term roles with the Australian Open as a benchmark the outcome is valued on the assumption of the equivalent of 3 weeks of full-time work at award wage paid by Inclusion Project.

Beyond the numbers

"I want to tell you one thing – before I worked with the Inclusion Project I didn't leave my house for months. I was at home with the curtains drawn, I was too afraid to leave the house. And now I'm working at games and talking to strangers."

Inclusion Project Officer

It is hard for financial proxies to capture the depth of the impact that the Inclusion Project appears to have for Inclusion Project Officers.

- **Confidence:** Financial proxies can estimate the value of 'employability' or 'community participation', but they struggle to capture the profound growth in confidence experienced by IPOs. Going from severe social isolation to confidently navigating a crowded stadium and actively initiating conversations with strangers is an enormous leap. It is about more than gaining confidence at work – it can significantly change how they live in the world.
- **Being able to work:** For young people with a disability, getting a job is about much more than just earning a wage – it can also be a source of great pride for them and their families, validates them as contributing adults, and shifts perceptions about their capacity and future.
- **Representation:** A uniquely powerful value for the IPO workforce is the representation it provides to patrons. During consultations, IPOs shared stories of young, neurodivergent children lighting up when they met someone 'who gets it'. When children and their parents see an older neurodivergent person who is confidently employed and leading a program, it provides living proof that a mainstream, working future is possible.
- **The big picture – living an independent and unrestricted life:** Just as it does for the patrons, every outcome for the IPOs contributes to the ultimate outcome of independence and living without restrictions. By providing a safe, supported environment the Inclusion Project helps remove the restrictions often placed on people with hidden disabilities, which enables them to lead full, independent lives.

"My family didn't really believe I've gotten a job, cos it was such good news that I got it and made me independent."

Inclusion Project Officer



Inclusion Project Officers attending the Inclusion Project Staff Awards night, celebrating their achievements.

The ripple effect: venues, clubs and community

The impact of the Inclusion Project ripples out to sporting clubs, venues and the broader economy. Making sporting and cultural events genuinely inclusive unlocks new audiences, enhances patron experience, boosts supporter and membership bases, and contributes to economic growth.

- **Outcome 8:** Sporting clubs and codes experienced increased supporter and member base
- **Outcome 9:** Venues and events experience improved fan and customer experience

Evidence on these outcomes is presented below, followed by insights on the broader contributions of the Inclusion Project to shifting community awareness and economic growth.

"We've adopted Hawthorn as our team!"

Family visiting Inclusion Project sensory spaces

Outcome 8: Sporting clubs and codes experienced increased supporter and member base

\$555k

By removing the barriers to attendance, the Inclusion Project allows sporting clubs to connect with an entirely new segment of the community.

Families who previously could not attend games are now able to participate in the match-day experience, fostering a newly unlocked loyalty to the club ecosystem. Some families reported adopting sporting clubs as a result of the Inclusion Project – and also attending completely new sporting codes and events just because they knew the Inclusion Project was there.

Quantity: The size of this new supporter and member base is estimated based on analysis of the number of patrons who are 'repeat attendees' to Inclusion Project events (based on a survey of patrons) for club sporting events – i.e. excluding the Australian Open (**7,061 patrons**).

Value: The value of this outcome is based on the weighted average cost of an annual membership to a sporting club – using memberships for the Hawthorn Football Club as a proxy. This outcome is a direct consequence of the first outcome for patrons above (increased attendance at events), so the same deadweight assumption of 20% is applied here.



Inclusion Project Ambassador presenting on the Melbourne Storm partnership.

Impact on venues and events

Outcome 9: Venues and events benefit from improved fan and customer experience

\$1.04m

For venues, the availability of a dedicated, Inclusion Project facilitated sensory space prevents early departures and drives specific attendance to inclusive locations over non-inclusive ones.

Venues directly benefit from the prolonged engagement of patrons who feel supported enough to remain for the entirety of an event. Venues partnering with the Inclusion Project may experience improved customer experiences through the creation of overall better-quality, more inclusive facilities. Not only do the benefits of the sensory spaces help patrons attending events, venue staff are also able to access the space if they become overwhelmed during demanding shifts.

Quantity: This potential new fan base is measured by the total number of patrons engaged across the project (**18,790 patrons**).

Valuation: This outcome is valued with reference to the estimated average in-venue spend including on food and beverages, across families and individual adults.

Note: *Venues and events also directly benefit from increased ticket sales which is driven by the first outcome for patrons: Patrons are more able to attend sporting and cultural events that (see above). For the purposes of the analysis, the value of ticket sales is not included here to avoid double counting, but the critical role that the Inclusion Project plays in increasing ticket sales among patrons represents clear value to venues and events.*



Inclusion Project operating at a Melbourne Vixens game.

Beyond the numbers

Ultimately, this ripple effect also extends to broader impacts on the community and local economy that form an important part of the Inclusion Project's **long-term vision to make this model the norm in public spaces**:

- **Community awareness of hidden disabilities and reduced stigma.** The presence of IPOs and sensory spaces at high-profile, mainstream sporting and cultural events provides enormous public visibility that helps to normalise hidden disability across the broader public. Over the evaluation period, the project had a visible footprint at events with a combined attendance exceeding 5 million people. Backed by an estimated \$420,000 per year in in-kind marketing support from professional clubs – including Hawthorn, Melbourne Storm, Melbourne Stars, Melbourne Victory and the Melbourne Vixens – the project utilises stadium infrastructure such as big screens to bring hidden disability into mainstream visibility (see further below). This represents an important systemic outcome. It educates the broader public, demystifies sensory needs and normalises inclusive infrastructure.

"I had a late diagnosis. Growing up I just wanted to be understood. Before my diagnosis, I was not seen as normal. There was stigma. As time goes on and there's more knowledge about disability, there's more opportunities now."

Inclusion Project Officer

- **Tourism and economic spend.** According to Tourism Research Australia, **over 20% of domestic tourism spend in Australia is generated by people with a disability**. Initiatives that successfully eliminate barriers to attendance like the Inclusion Project can unlock this significant 'customer segment' to increase revenue for local tourism, hospitality and events.



Inclusion Project Officer providing support in the Sensory Space at the Melbourne Zoo Dream Day.

Investment in the Inclusion Project

These outcomes are made possible through a combination of grant funding, fee for service revenue and in-kind support provided by a wide range of partners.

Total cash investment in the Inclusion Project over March 2024 to February 2026 was \$1.66m.

This includes a grant from the Department of Social Services Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program – value adjusted to \$1.36m for this analysis period¹ – \$200,000 in other grant funding, and \$100,000 in revenue from venues and events paying to host the Inclusion Project's services on a fee-for-service basis.

The Inclusion Project has also successfully leveraged significant in-kind support from a wide range of partners including sporting clubs and major venues, worth an estimated \$1.45m.

These partners provide essential infrastructure and resources that helps transform major venues and events into genuinely inclusive spaces.

In-kind support	Value	Notes
Back-office support: finance, HR, management and event coordination	\$320,000	Provided by the project's 6 partner sporting clubs, including Hawthorn Football Club. Hawthorn estimated at \$85k p.a. and \$15k p.a. for other clubs
Marketing and promotion support	\$420,000	Provided by the project's 6 partner sporting clubs, including Hawthorn Football Club. Estimated at \$35k p.a.
Venue space and event day coordination	\$690,000	Provided by venues. Estimated at \$3,000 per event
OT support	\$20,000	Living Without Boundaries provides in-kind project management support, best practice guidance, budgeted at \$10k p.a.
Total	\$1,450,000	

The Inclusion Project has used its grant funding to successfully unlock \$420,000 in commercial marketing support from partner sporting clubs. By securing premium in-venue advertising, such as stadium big screens and logo allocations, the project promotes its sensory spaces and IPOs to millions of sports fans. This drives widespread awareness of hidden disabilities, amplifying the program's impact far beyond the walls of the sensory space.

¹ The total ILC grant of \$1,513,000 (awarded for 28 months) was prorated to 24 months to match the evaluation period, with historical CPI applied to bring the present value to FY25-26 dollars.

Social value generated

The total social value of the material outcomes generated by the Inclusion Project over the analysis period is estimated at \$5.9m in total present value terms. This includes \$4.44m in value generated for patrons (70% of total social value). The table below presents the total estimated value generated for each outcome.

Stakeholder	Outcome	Value	Total value by stakeholder	Share of total value
Patrons	1. Patrons are more able to attend sporting and cultural events	\$681,000	\$4,444,000	70%
	2. Patrons feel reassured and equipped with practical strategies to regulate their nervous systems in community settings	\$415,000		
	3. Patrons feel a greater sense of belonging and community connection	\$3,348,000		
IPOs	4. IPOs grow their confidence in work and life	\$74,000	\$291,000	5%
	5. IPOs have an increased sense of belonging and social connection	\$104,000		
	6. IPOs earn an income in open market roles	\$62,000		
	7. IPOs have increased employability through gaining workplace experience	\$51,000		
Sporting clubs	8. Increased supporter and membership base	\$555,000	\$555,000	9%
Venues and events	9. Improved fan and customer experience	\$1,039,000	\$1,039,000	16%
Total value		\$6,330,000	\$6,330,000	
Present value	'Present value' adjusts the value of future outcomes into today's dollars using a standard 7% discount rate ²	\$5,910,000		

All figures are rounded

² The Australian Government Office of Impact Analysis sets a standard that social value analyses should apply a 7% discount rate. <https://evaluation.treasury.gov.au/sites/evaluation.treasury.gov.au/files/2025-07/guide-cost-benefit-analysis.pdf>. This only affects outcomes #4 and #5 for IPOs, which are assumed to extend for 3 years for the social value calculations.

Insights: Understanding the value of the Inclusion Project

The Inclusion Project generates significant social value for patrons, IPOs, sporting clubs and venues and events. The following insights explore where this value is really coming from, why the project's unique model works so well, and what to keep in mind as the project grows.

1. Belonging is the ultimate driver of value

The project reaches a huge number of people, with over 17,000 patron interactions across the program. The presence of the Inclusion Project gives people the practical support they need to attend events in the first place, but the real value created is that people with a hidden disability and their families can finally get out into the world, participate in the community and belong. They get to enjoy life just like everyone else. Because of this the vast majority of the total value generated by the project is experienced by the patrons, with \$3.3m of their \$4.4m in value coming directly from this increased sense of belonging and community connection.

2. A transformational employment model for IPOs

While the total social value generated for the IPOs makes up a smaller slice of the overall pie compared to the thousands of patrons, the value of quantified outcomes per IPO is significant (over \$7,000 per IPO) and consultations found the impact of being employed through the Inclusion Project can be transformational.

Consultations found that the true value for IPOs comes from being in a highly supportive workplace that values their lived experience, challenges them to grow, navigate high-sensory environments, speak to strangers, and connect as a group. And the evidence shows that the project can act as a launchpad into new open-market roles with other employers.

3. Much more than a sensory space

While a physical quiet room is a helpful starting point, the social value documented in this report is created by enhancing the sensory space with three other ingredients in the Inclusion Project 'secret sauce':

- **The clinical backbone:** Having OTs on-site means families are getting access to allied health expertise in a mainstream community setting, and that sensory rooms are used effectively. They also support IPOs to play their role.
- **Lived experience:** IPOs act as a bridge to the neurotypical environment. Their visible presence provides unmatched peer-to-peer validation for patrons and serves as a role model for young children with hidden disabilities who see a working future for themselves.
- **Connection to mainstream community:** The project taps into the pre-established, passionate communities of mainstream sporting clubs. Embedding the support within an existing fan base removes the clinical feel of disability support. It connects patrons directly into a pre-existing mainstream community and club identity, making inclusion feel completely normal.

4. Leveraging cultural capital to build community capacity at scale

The Inclusion Project's partnership model with sporting clubs also enables it to tap into significant cultural capital, expertise and marketing infrastructure of these institutions. This puts the Inclusion Project in a unique position to reach millions of people with inclusion messages and contribute to community capacity building at scale.

5. Core funding is structurally essential for scale

As the project expands across new sporting codes, entertainment events, and potentially new regions, there is a risk in assuming that fee-for-service revenue can entirely replace grant funding. While fee-for-service is a great way to reach new venues, it typically only covers the frontline staff needed on the day.

Foundational grant funding like the ILC grant remains structurally essential because it pays for the crucial behind-the-scenes architecture: the clinical guidance, project management, and ongoing training for the peer workforce. Without this core funding, the project risks becoming a standard staffing agency and losing its therapeutic value.

6. Recommendations for future measurement

To build on this report and ensure evidence-based delivery in the future, the Inclusion Project could further understand and value its outcomes by considering several data collection activities:

- **For IPOs:** Set up a survey timeline for IPOs (and their parents/carers) to track sustainable life-skill development and long-term career progression, or a baseline survey (when IPOs first join) and post-season survey to track change over time.
- **For patrons:** Introduce a means to track repeat patrons to understand longer-term outcomes and changes in their duration of stay. Work with ticketing partners to measure how the "security blanket" of the program directly influences the confidence to purchase tickets.
- **For partners:** Add survey questions to measure if patrons are purchasing club memberships as a result of the program.



Inclusion Project Sensory Space at the Melbourne Convention Centre for the Good Friday Appeal, Kids Day Out.

Appendix: Social value analysis methodology

Scope

The evaluation examines the Inclusion Project's work from March 2024 to February 2026 (inclusive).

The analysis should be considered conservative because, in line with the Principles of Social Value (below), it sought to avoid overclaiming and only including material outcomes. Any assumptions about the extent or value of outcomes were intentionally conservative.



Inclusion Project Officers appointed to casual customer service roles for the Australian Open.

Method

The social value analysis conducted during this evaluation measures the value of changes made to peoples' lives as a result of engaging with the Inclusion Project. As a social value analysis, the approach of the Inclusion Project follows the Principles of Social Value.

Principles		Definition	Application in this analysis
1	Involve stakeholders	Stakeholders should inform what gets measured and how this is measured and valued.	We drew on consultations and surveys of IPOs, OTs, parents and the Inclusion Project team. We worked closely with the Hawks Community Foundation team to understand their work and data.
2	Understand what changes	Articulate how change is created and evaluate this through evidence gathered, recognising positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended and unintended.	Analysis and consultation explored how the Inclusion Project contributed to changes in stakeholders' lives, and which were the most significant or valuable changes. Questions in consultation were neutral rather than biased towards positive changes.
3	Value the things that matter	Use financial proxies so the value of the outcomes can be recognised.	Where applicable we identified financial proxies based on a combination of Inclusion Project data and desk-based research, testing the validity of financial proxies with the Inclusion Project team.
4	Only include what is material	Determine what information and evidence must be included in the accounts to give a true and fair picture, such that stakeholders can draw reasonable conclusions about impact.	Analysis and consultation informed the quantities used in the analysis and broader discussion of the outcomes in the report. We included outcomes in the analysis where there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate and quantify the Inclusion Project's impact.
5	Do not overclaim	Organisations should only claim the value that they are responsible for creating.	Consultation explored 'what would have happened without the Inclusion Project' or some of its elements and how widespread the change was.
6	Be transparent	Demonstrate the basis on which the analysis may be considered accurate and honest and show that it will be reported to and discussed with stakeholders.	The full set of assumptions and calculations is documented in an Impact Map (Excel). Key assumptions are included in this report.
7	Verify the results	Ensure appropriate independent verification of the analysis.	We worked closely with the Inclusion Project team to iteratively test and refine all aspects of the analysis and aligned assumptions with applicable standards.
8	Be responsive	Pursue optimum Social Value based decision making that is timely and supported by appropriate accounting and reporting.	We discussed the findings of the social value analysis in detail with the Inclusion Project team, how they might be used and what the findings mean for the program going forward.

Data collection and consultation

The Hawks Community Foundation provided organisational data about the Inclusion Project which was used to understand program delivery and outcomes over the analysis period. This included data from the Inclusion Project's project management system (Asana), survey data from patrons / families and IPOs, and program documents.

Program data was particularly important to understand the number of patrons engaging with the Inclusion Project (sensory spaces, OTs and IPOs roaming around venues), the number of events and event types. Survey responses provided further insight into the impact of the Inclusion Project on the patrons interacting with it.

The social value analysis used the following consultations:

- IPOs: 2x focus groups and 2x interviews
- OTs: 1x focus group and 1x interview
- Patrons (parents): 1x interview and 1x online survey

Limitations

The following are material limitations to the methodology:

- We were unable to speak with the families of IPOs during the consultation process. Assumptions have been made for this stakeholder group based on insights from interviews and focus groups from other stakeholder groups, including consulting directly with IPOs
- Data on interactions with the Inclusion Project – either visits to the sensory space, interactions with OTs or interactions with IPOs – do not include data on repeat visits, and a single recorded interaction may involve more than one person. Therefore, the number of 'unique' individuals interacting with the project may be higher or lower.
- We could only speak directly with a few patrons and parent. We accounted for this by utilising results of a patrons' survey conducted by the Inclusion Project team and gathering perspectives on patrons' outcomes from IPOs and OTs.
- Qualitative data gathered through the above consultations was a primary source of data to help quantify the number of outcomes achieved. To mitigate sources of bias we triangulated data from across the different stakeholders and refined and tested assumptions with the Inclusion Project team.

Applying the Principles of Social Value: worked example

This is a worked example of how the first five Principles of Social Value were applied to one outcome valued in the analysis.

1	Involve stakeholders	The stakeholder group for this example are patrons who have engaged with the Inclusion Project	
2	Understand what changes	Example outcome: Feeling a greater sense of belonging and community connection	
3	Value the things that matter	4	5
		Include what is material	Do not overclaim

Quantity <i>How many people experienced a change?</i>	Deadweight <i>How much of that change would have happened anyway?</i>	Duration and Drop-off <i>How long did the impact of the change last?</i>
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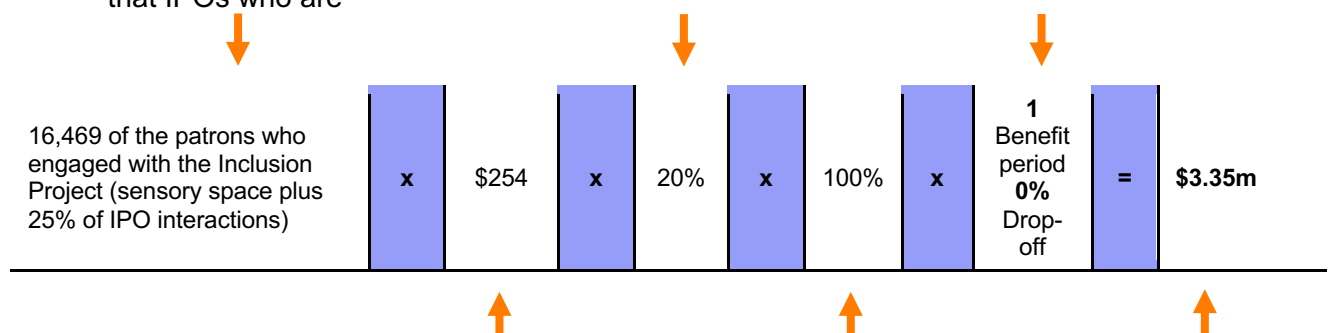
Using Asana data, we estimated that 16,469 patrons experienced this. This is based on:

- Number of patrons who visited sensory spaces
- Plus, an additional 25% of the total interactions with IPOs, to reflect that IPOs who are

We assume that 20% of these patrons would have experienced this outcome through alternative means (such as attending a community group), even if the Inclusion Project did not exist.

Therefore, we assume most patrons would not have experienced this outcome without the presence of the Inclusion Project model at games and events.

Feeling a greater sense of belonging and community connection is valued for the duration of the activity – it does not extend beyond one year.



Financial Proxy <i>What is the value of this outcome to the stakeholder?</i>	Attribution <i>How much of this change was a result of the Inclusion Project?</i>	Adjusted value <i>What's the value of the outcome?</i>
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Valued based on the out-of-pocket cost to access support under the NDIS under the item 'Assistance to Access Community, Social and Recreational Activities' for four hours (approximately equivalent to the time to attend an event, including travel).

- Value per outcome for children / adults with a disability: \$374 (excludes NDIS pricing limits for public holidays)
- Value per outcome for parents / carers: \$93 (to recognise that parents / carers also experience this)

The value of increased understanding of rights is attributed completely to the Inclusion Project. No other stakeholders contributed to this outcome.

The net value of the outcome after adjusting for quantity, financial proxy and discounts.



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