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MEDIA RELEASE

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Exciting future for merging disability support organisations

McCallum Disability Services (MDS) and Ballarat Regional Industries (BRI), two of Ballarat's leading disability support organisations, have finalised merger negotiations to create the largest employment social enterprise in Western Victoria to deliver significant social impact to its communities.

The merger expands on inclusive employment opportunities for people living with disabilities and provides greater opportunities for it to partner with commercial businesses and expand its extensive and diverse services.

MDS and BRI are expected to finalise the merger by the end of November.

These two organisations support more than 600 people living with disabilities across Central Highlands and Northern Grampian shires through a range of services.

In announcing the merger, MDS Chair Joe Ballinger and BRI Chair Wendy McNabb said the organisations had worked in parallel over many years, always with the vision of empowering people with disabilities through provision of employment opportunities, to live the fullest, most independent lives possible.

"We have supported each other and built our organisations side-by-side over many decades," Mr Ballinger said.

BRI Chair Wendy McNabb said the merger would provide more effective and diversified services to all involved. "We have a common vision and the best way to achieve that vision and ensure the long-term success of our organisations is to merge our services and create greater opportunity for our communities through improved resourcing, investment and funding."

Since 1953, McCallum has been a trusted provider of adult disability services, including long and short-term accommodation, respite care, day support, outreach services, lifestyle options and supported employment in Ballarat and St Arnaud. Over the past 37 years, BRI has created a range of employment options at its Australian Disability Enterprise sites in Ballarat.

BRI CEO Geoff Russell said the merger would provide more flexible and diverse work opportunities for its supported workforce, deliver more services to clients, members, commercial partners and communities and provide staff with more opportunities for career advancement and development.

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“By bringing these two longstanding Ballarat organisations together, we are strengthening services for the people of Ballarat. We are proud of the opportunities we provide for people with disabilities. We give them real jobs in the recycling, packaging, event management, manufacturing and maintenance sectors – jobs that make a difference to their lives and to the commercial partners for whom we are fulfilling contracts,” he said.

The merger will improve service capacity and secure the employment of over 500 staff by providing more effective services to a wider range of stakeholders.

Under the merger agreement, Mr Russell will transition his role to facilitate and support the merger, and McCallum CEO Mr Tyrone McCuskey will become CEO of the joint operation to achieve a bigger and brighter future.

The organisations will operate under their current brand names for the foreseeable future with the two employment divisions being operated under one management structure. They are committed to ensuring there is no business interruption as the merger is finalised, with all contracts and existing services being maintained.

Mr McCuskey and Mr Russell expressed gratitude for the ongoing community and business support for their valuable programs.

Both the McCallum and BRI boards have endorsed the merger and are expected to give their final approval at AGMs scheduled for late November.

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