

The Bulletin

Statewide Vision Resource Centre

Number 15

Friday 10th October 2008

This issue was edited by Lyn Robinson and Marion Blazé from the Statewide Vision Resource Centre.

Professional Development Activities Term 4, 2008

For workshop sessions, please BYO laptop.

Professional Development Event and Activities 2008	Date
Expo 2008 - @ SVRC	Friday 28 th November
SVRC Christmas Morning Tea	Wednesday 3 rd December

PD for 2009

The PD programme schedule for 2009 is now available. If you would like to know what's on next year and get some dates in your diary here is the link:

<http://www.visiontech.svrc.vic.edu.au/PD2009.doc>

Companion Card

At our most recent Support Group get-together, one of our ex-students, now at tertiary level, told us about the Companion Card. He said, of all the cards he carries, he gets the best value out of this one. The Companion Card is a State Government initiative, issued to people with a disability who are unable to access community activities and venues without attendant care support. You may not think this would apply to many of our students, but, if they can prove they have a permanent and significant disability and that they need help when they go to an event with things like finding the toilets, locating their seat, then this card will allow them to take a companion, free! This young man goes to the Boxing Day Test each year with a companion, and several other sporting and cultural events.

The Companion Card is not issued to every person who has a disability. The card is issued to people who have a significant disability and can demonstrate that they would not be able to participate at most venues and activities without a companion, and that this need is life-long. An application form can be downloaded from <http://www.companioncard.org.au/cc/ccdownloads.htm>

For more information go to www.vic.companioncard.org.au.

Inside This Issue

1	PD Activities, PD 2009, Companion Card
2	Venue Access, Report: Vision Loss Support Group Meeting, What You Need Now – WYNN software from Quantum
3	Swish on Saturday
4	Research on how to speak to children – slow down! BCA – State Convention
5	Study Groups, Good News for Orientation and Mobility, IJOM, Dickinson Literary Award, Fun Talking Calculator
6	New Perkins Braille
7	AAPVI-Parent Impact, Have you seen the new AAPVI Website?
8	Staff and Student News

Venue Access

Did you know that most venues will provide you with information about accessibility and make provision for people with disabilities including vision impairments. They often have a contact number for information about venue access, audio description, parking or public transport to their venue. Some examples which Visiting Teachers and parents have brought to my attention recently include:

The Arts Centre

Disability Access information <http://www.theartscentre.com.au/utilities/accessibility.aspx>

Rod Laver Arena – If you are attending an event at Rod Laver Arena you can enquire about accessible seating including seating towards the front for people with vision impairments.

Special Needs Bookings for Rod Laver Arena Phone: 03 9286 1208

MCG –for information about venue access and acceptance of Companion Card

<http://www.mcg.org.au/sitecore/content/MCG/Website/Events/Facilities/Disability%20Access.aspx>

Report on Vision Loss Support Group Meeting, Sept. 13, 2008

From Marion

A select group of 20 attended the meeting at the Statewide Vision Resource Centre on Saturday afternoon to hear from Veronica Reid, from CentreLink. Veronica explained the various concessions and allowances available to people with vision impairments and the processes one needs to go through to obtain them. As a result of Veronica's talk, we are going to update the listing on our website. She told us about the Disability Support Pension (previously called the 'Blind Pension'), Carer Allowance, Carer Payment, Youth Allowance, Mobility Allowance and more. We found out about eligibility, appeal processes and where to go for help. One of the parents made a very good point that she and her son found out what they were eligible for through word-of-mouth. All VTs should make it their job to ensure that all families have checked on their eligibility for such concessions and allowances. A phone call to or appointment at CentreLink, to check their details may be all that is required. We'll provide an updated list of concessions and allowances in an upcoming Bulletin.

Thank you to our two lovely baby-sitters, Cristina and Isabelle, and all the families who provided yummys for afternoon tea. Thank you also to Annette, who really keeps this group going.

What You Need Now – WYNN software from Quantum

The lovely Trevor Boyd gave us a demonstration of this terrific software at our Skill Power workshop on September 16. We really should be looking at this as a tool for many of our students. WYNN is designed for students with learning disabilities, but has many features which make it ideal for students with vision impairments, especially if they are struggling with literacy and technology. It is basically a talking word-processor with many additional features, and it's very easy to use. WYNN includes very easy to use picture icons for menus. It highlights words as it speaks, you can adjust the print size up to 60 point), spacing, colour (text, background and highlighting colours), and the speed and type of voice. The voices are wonderful including one with a very Australian accent and expression. You can get dictionary definitions of any word (spoken), mask areas of text, and use all these facilities to browse the web. You can insert recordings and types 'footnote' in text and even convert text to MP3 and DAISY audio files, just from a menu selection. WYNN is about \$900 for a single user, or a whole school can use it for about \$3,000. Call Trevor at Quantum Technology (03 9545 4104) for more information or a demo disk, or see WYNN demonstrated at our Expo on November 28th.

Swish on Saturday

A report from Year 9 student Cassie.

Swish is an Australian sport similar to both Table Tennis and Air Hockey. It was invented in 1958 by a blind person. It isn't a blind sport, but the only sport in the world that blind people can play on a truly equal level; unlike other sports, one doesn't need to wear a blind fold, or have someone help them. Players hit a small ball with a bell inside back and forth along the Swish table using paddle-like bats, until one team manages to hit the ball off the other team's end of the table. The winner of a game is the first team to reach eleven with a variance of two. We also play games of singles.

Every Saturday a group of blind and vision impaired people meet at Vision Australia, 454 Glenferrie Road Kooyong. We play Swish from 11:00 until 3:00, with a break for lunch from 12:45-1:15. The Saturday group is not only a chance to learn how to play Swish, it also is a great opportunity to meet new people and catch up with old friends and to learn and improve leadership skills as there is a committee run by junior members. The aim of this committee is to learn basic skills needed for the business world.

Access to Vision Australia is easy as it is just opposite Kooyong Station, and there are trams running along Glenferrie Road, with stops outside Vision Australia. We encourage anyone to come along to Swish; we're always happy to teach new people how to play.

Anyone can give Swish a go, no matter if you are blind, vision impaired or have full vision. When Meredith (Visiting Teacher) came along to Swish a month or so ago, her and I won both games we played. Meredith said she had a great time and intends to come again soon.

If anyone is interested in coming to Swish they can contact Brent Franklin on his mobile: 0412 704 749 or at work on: (03) 9263 2444.

Below: A picture of Cassie and Visiting Teacher, Meredith Walsh, paddles in hand, enjoying a game of swish.



Research on how to speak to children – slow down!

When it comes to speaking to children, the issue is not speaking up; rather, it's slowing down, according to Wichita State University audiology professor Ray Hull. Hull has been researching and offering his expertise on the rate of adults' speech and the processing capacity of the maturing central nervous system in young children. Hull found that adults who speak too rapidly can overload children's central nervous systems and, in turn, inhibit their ability to learn. He was recently featured in a January edition of *Advance* magazine, a national speech-language-audiology publication, discussing the effects of rapid speech on the learning process. According to Hull, the average adult speaks between 160 and 170 words per minute (wpm) while the average child age 5 to 7 can process speech at a rate of only 124 wpm. When teachers and parents speak too quickly for children to understand, learning can be hindered. What may appear as inattention is simply not being able to process what was said.

"If [the new concepts] are not being given to them at a rate that allows their central nervous system to process the information with efficiency, then that places those children in jeopardy," Hull told *Advance*. "They're not going to do as well in understanding and retaining the information." The solution, Hull said, is to slow down. "When you slow the rate of speech down from 170 wpm to 124 wpm, vowels and consonants and sounds of speech become more precisely articulated," Hull said. "We begin to articulate speech with a greater execution, so we are doubling the understandability of what is being said." Hull believes there would be fewer diagnoses of auditory processing problems if teachers would simply slow their speech.

Another problem that Hull suggests impairs learning is square and rectangle-shaped classrooms filled with desks and chalkboards because of hard surfaces' tendency to reverberate and distort sound. Combine this with mile-a-minute speech, and you've added more difficulty in speech understanding. "Classrooms do strange things to our auditory systems and distort speech," Hull said. "Cut down on reverberation and amplify a teacher's voice, and I think people would be amazed at how children would learn."

In addition to teachers, Hull said parents can benefit from this research, too. Rather than speaking to their child at their average rate of 160 wpm, slowing speech to a rate of 120 wpm, or a rate in line with the maturity of their child's central nervous system, would alleviate frustration on both ends.

For the full article and links go to www.wichita.edu/thisis/wsunews/news/?nid=307

For more information, contact Ray Hull, (316) 978-3271 or at ray.hull@wichita.edu.

BCA-State Convention 18-19 October 2008

Do you know what to do in an emergency? Ever wanted to get some tips and tricks from others about how to make the most of low tech products? Want to build your confidence to successfully volunteer or gain employment??

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA), the peak national advocacy body of and for people who are blind or vision impaired, will be exploring all of these topics and more at the upcoming Victorian State Convention at the Bell Tower, 1845 Sturt Street, Ballarat.

Sessions include beauty and fashion; depression and how to successfully combat it; entitlements that are available locally, in your state and nationally; isolation and loneliness; recreational activities that you can take part in within your community; what it means to be a carer or have a carer and an update of the activities and work undertaken by BCA.

The Convention will be preceded by Blind Citizens Australia Annual General Meeting on Friday 17 October 2008. Registration and program details are available for download from <http://www.bca.org.au/convention/conv2008v.htm>

Or phone for more details from Blind Citizens Australia on (03) 9654 1400

Study Group

The Vision Australia Study Group will be once again meeting on Wednesday 15 of October and then the third Wednesday of each month thereafter. This is an opportunity for tertiary students in Victoria with a vision impairment to meet, share their experiences and gain study skills and learning solutions. Those seeking to study in the near future are also welcome. This service is free and will be held at Vision Australia 201 High Street Prahran between 1.30 and 4.00 pm. Please RSVP by ringing Max Bini on (03) 9520 5555 if you are interested. In this session there will be discussions about the transition from study to employment as well as any matters the participants wish to raise.

Good news for Orientation and Mobility

The one year Graduate Diploma in Orientation and Mobility will be offered at La Trobe University again in 2009, in collaboration with Guide Dogs Victoria. We have received approval to offer the course to overseas applicants for the first time. We hope to be part of equipping O&M Instructors and Community Based Rehabilitation Fieldworkers in the Asia Pacific region to work more effectively with people of all ages who are vision impaired. You can find more information on the course through the GDV homepage link at: <http://www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au>.

For more information on scholarships, see: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/scholarships> .

Applications for the course close on 14 November 2008.

From Lil Deverell lil.d@guidedogsvictoria.com.au

IJOM - The International Journal of Orientation & Mobility

The first Journal of International O&M is now available and is free for those in Australia
The International Journal of Orientation & Mobility (IJOM) is a peer-reviewed journal that explores issues and contributes new knowledge to the field of Orientation & Mobility (O&M) (including Guide Dog Mobility). The IJOM seeks to strengthen dialog within the O&M field around the world and to facilitate communication among instructors and service providers from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

The International Journal of Orientation & Mobility (IJOM) web site can be found at:

<http://www.ijorientationandmobility.com>

Dickinson Literary Award

Vision Australia is proud to announce it's sponsorship of the Vision Australia Dickinson Literary Award and the launch of this terrific competition. Open to people who are blind or have low vision of all ages, the awards are a great chance to show off your creative talents! Prizes will be awarded to the best Fiction and Non-fiction pieces across three age groups – 24 years and older, 16-24 years, and under 16's.

Another prize will also be awarded to the best autobiographical piece on living with blindness and low vision from any age group. There are seven prizes in total - each of a Vision Australia Equipment Solutions voucher to the value of \$500! If you are blind or have low vision, please consider having a go.

For more information, including how to enter, visit: www.visionaustralia.org/literaryaward, or phone: 1300 84 74 66.

Entries close on 31 December 2008 so get writing!

Fun Talking Calculator

For a fun talking calculator for young children try

<http://pbskids.org/cyberchase/games/calculator/index.html>

New Perkins Braille

The new Perkins Braille is here, well not quite here, as it's not available in Australia yet but a new generation of Perkins Braille has been released in the United States. It sports a new look with lots of new features including lighter weight, less force needed to press the keys and according to the APH web site, much quieter! The picture below shows the parts of the new Perkins braille and the new colors - APH Blue, Midnight Blue and Raspberry.



- **Easier to hold and carry** - 25 % Lighter than the Classic Perkins
- **Quieter** – Keystroke noise is reduced, plus the end-of-line bell is audible but muted
- **Gentle Touch Keys** – Less force required plus keys are lower and easier to reach
- **Easy-Erase Button** – Push it to erase the entire braille cell
- **Easy-Grip Handle** – The Braille base is also a handle
- **Reading Rest** – The back panel can be raised to provide a flat surface for reading the page; a raised line on the left side guides the paper into the braille
- **Front Panel Margin Guides** – Easily accessible; no more reaching around the back
- **Highly durable** - Due to a combination of metal inner frame and parts, and high-impact polycarbonate outer shell
- **Paper-Feed Knobs** - Easier to hold and turn
- **High contrast colors** - Between keys and Braille body for low vision users
- **Environmentally friendly** – uses recyclable plastic and less oil
- **Sleek design** - With tactile-friendly materials
- **Cool colors** – Raspberry, Midnight Blue and APH Blue
- **Fits most common size paper** – 28 cells; fits up to 8 ½ inch wide and 14 inch long paper (21.6 cm W X 35.6 cm L)

The international launch of the *Next Generation* Perkins Braille is scheduled for early 2009.

A list of re-sellers will be made available on the Perkins web site at that time. For more information: <http://www.perkins.org/nextgeneration/>

AAPVI - Parent Impact

Recently the President of AAPVI, Gayle Skinner, travelled to Germany for an international conference. There she made a presentation entitled “The Role of Parents in their Child’s Education; What Significant Impact are Parents Associations having Around the World?” Here is her report:

Report on VSB Conference - Hanover Germany, July 14 – 18th 2008 XXXIV Kongress “Teilhabe Gestalten”

The conference title translates roughly into providing skills for participation and community involvement. I attended the conference as the President of the Australian Association for Parents of the Vision Impaired and as the parent representative of ICEVI Pacific Region.

This was at the invitation of Susan LaVenture – Executive Director of NAPVI (America) and the driving force behind the creation of an International parent support body. Paul Manning of PVI NZ was also invited as was the ICEVI Pacific Region representative but was not able to obtain financial support for his attendance at this conference.

I presented with Susan and Guila Seidel (Israel NAPVI children) about “The Role of Parents in their Child’s Education; What Significant Impact are Parents Associations Having Around the World.” We presented a power point covering the formation of our respective national organizations with information about collegiate organizations from countries not in attendance such as New Zealand, Malaysia, Netherlands and Philippines.

Each representative spoke of her personal journey as parent in a family with a vision impaired or blind child. The audience appreciated the frank personal stories. These always attract the interest of medical personnel and educators as they set the scene for the importance of parent support groups. The presentation then moved into details of the formation of the International Parent group in Malaysia at the ICEVI conference in Kuala Lumpur in 2006.

This VBS conference in Hanover also afforded the opportunity for board members to meet face-to-face and to conduct a board meeting where we worked on a 3-5 year plan of goals, objectives and budget for the development of IAPVI. The discussions and meetings with Susan and Guila highlighted the progress of the work done by ICEVI Pacific Region. We are well advanced with our program of Education for All with strong representation from all stakeholders with the particular inclusion of parent representatives at forums, in all email contact and communication and in seeking parent opinion and perspective in planning and policy development.

The other ICEVI regions have not yet reached this stage of input. ICEVI Pacific Regional key stakeholders should be commended for their forward and inclusive thinking in recognizing that parents have a key role in the education of all children, but particularly those who are blind and vision impaired.

Gayle Skinner
President
Australian Association for Parents of the Vision Impaired.

Have you seen AAPVI’s new website?

<http://www.aapvi.org.au/>

IF YOU KNOW PARENTS OF A STUDENT WITH A VISION IMPAIRMENT
PLEASE CONSIDER ASKING THEM TO
JOIN UP AND SUPPORT AAPVI

“IN UNITY IS STRENGTH”

SVRC Staff and Student News

Welcome back to the final term of the year everyone - I hope it doesn't go too fast!! Amongst the comings and goings Rita, Denise and Faye are back after their exciting adventures overseas. E-text extraordinaire, Ben, is leaving us at the end of the week for a well earned holiday travelling to Malaysia and India before taking up a new position in Canberra at the start of 2009. We wish him all the best for the future and hope he has enjoyed his time at the SVRC!

Kishan is now a star of the stage after having appeared at the Fringe Festival in a three person play! If you want his autograph look out for the big star above his computer, I'm sure he'll be happy to oblige.

Speaking of performing artists we currently have three other members of staff who recently performed a braille ensemble to farewell Dawn at the end of last term. The picture below shows Deb, Leanne and Toni, all wearing red clothes with large black cardboard dots attached to their hands. As they read a poem in honour of Dawn the braille was formed to spell out the words. Very tricky but impressive! Everyone at the SVRC would like to thank Dawn for her contributions and we hope to still see her from time to time.



Finally

Thanks to Deb Lewis, Marion Blazé, Maria Elford, and all those who contributed to this edition of The Bulletin. Thanks also to the fabulous team of proof-readers, stuffers and mailers. If you have something you would like included in 'The Bulletin', or you would like to receive the bulletin by email please contact:

Lyn Robinson (who can be emailed at lynrobin@svrc.vic.edu.au).

BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA



DRAFT VICTORIAN/TASMANIAN STATE CONVENTION PROGRAM

Busting the Myths

Saturday 18th October – Sunday 19th October 2008

**Preceded by Blind Citizens Australia
Annual General Meeting
Friday 17 October 2008**

**Venue:
The Bell Tower
1845 Sturt Street, Ballarat**