

The Bulletin

Statewide Vision Resource Centre

Number 15

Friday 11th September 2009

This issue was edited by Lyn Robinson, Resource Teacher, Statewide Vision Resource Centre.

Professional Development Activities for Term 3 and 4, 2009

Professional Development Event 2009	Date
SPEVI Day	Monday 5 October
Educational Expo – Access Technology Options This day is suitable for teachers, aides, therapists, parents/care-givers, visiting teachers, students and members of the wider community	Friday 27 November
SVRC Christmas Morning Tea	Wednesday 2 December
Dot Power for 2010 Kinder and Prep Braille Readers and their Teachers, Aides & Parents	Monday 7 December

*All Skill Power days - **BYO laptop** and lunch. For a complete list of the Professional Development offered by the SVRC go to: <http://www.visiontech.svrc.vic.edu.au/PD2009.doc>

Support Skills Program 2010

I am writing to thank you for your valuable feedback regarding the current Support Skills Program and what you would like to see included in the continuation of the Support Skills Program by the Statewide Vision Resource Centre in 2010. We are finalising the 2010 Support Skills Program and making sure it contains and continues the valued components you have identified.

The feedback about the program was enormously positive. Many families said that they valued everything about the program. Nearly all of the families who responded identified the importance of the opportunity for students to mix with vision impaired peers. The IT and access technologies were also highly regarded. Many families reported that they appreciated the vision specific program – and that staff understand the vision-related needs of students, and genuinely care about each student and their family. Families also appreciated the intensive 1:1 or small group nature of sessions and the links that are made with the vision impaired community.

Sessions that were reported to be most beneficial were: IT, sport/PE, music, daily living/OT, art, braille, library and research skills, communication and self advocacy.

The feedback given has been taken into account as we plan the new Support Skills Program for next year. It is evident that the Support Skills Program is a responsive program that develops and innovates in partnership with students' needs, and this will be the way forward with the program next year.

Best wishes and looking forward to continuing the partnership with you all.
Deb Lewis and the staff of the Statewide Vision Resource Centre

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Jaws Tandem! What is it?

Jaws Tandem is a new feature in Jaws 10, which allows one Jaws user to connect to another Jaws user's computer for the purpose of assisting with a technical issue or to provide assistance or training. The Jaws Tandem options can be found in the Utilities menu of Jaws.

The Jaws Tandem Centre, allows one Jaws user to connect to another Jaws users computer anywhere in the world via an internet connection. Currently the use of Tandem Centre is free, but subscriptions to extensively use this service will become paid in the future. Freedom Scientific do say that there will always be a certain amount of free time per month, available to everyone. Nobody can connect to your computer without your explicit permission.

To learn more about Jaws Tandem, do the following:

1. Press Insert J to open the Jaws menu.
2. If Jaws runs in the taskbar, press Alt plus H to open the help menu. If Jaws runs in the system tray, just press the letter H to open the help menu.
3. Down arrow too and press enter on "Jaws help topics".
4. Press the letter J until you reach the "Jaws Tandem" book.
5. Press the right arrow to open the book, use the down arrow to explore the list of topics.
6. To read a topic your interested in, press enter on the topic, then press the F6 key to move to the right hand side of the screen to read the help text.
7. Once you've read the text, press F6 to move back to the list of topics.

Create your own lined paper

A great tip from visiting teacher, Brian Hewat, is this website for creating lined paper.

Another option for "green line paper" is to go to a website where you can create your own note paper. You can create lined or graph paper with any thickness or colour of line.

Writing and Note-taking Paper Options:

- Notebook
- Lined
- 3-Line Penmanship
- Double Lined Penmanship
- Cornell Lined
- Cornell Graph
- Cornell Music
- Chinese Character Guides
- Calligraphy Guideline
- Genkoyoushi (Japanese Character)

This site has ruled, dotted, graph and many other types of paper.

The following link will take you to the free online graph paper website, scroll down to the bottom of the page for the note paper link <http://incompetech.com/graphpaper/>

Thanks Brian for letting us know about this website.

Editor's Tip: you need to make the line weight, which is measured in points, quite big to get the thickness required. Try something like 150 points or more!

Bionic Eye Research in Australia

The Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA) is a key research partner in Bionic Vision Australia (BVA), a consortium of world leading researchers from Australia, collaborating to develop an advanced bionic eye that will restore useful vision to people with advanced retinal diseases.

Who will benefit from the bionic eye?

People with severe vision loss caused by diseases affecting the retina such as age-related Macular Degeneration and Retinitis Pigmentosa will benefit.

Who are the Bionic Vision Australia partners?

Bionic Vision Australia brings together a unique consortium of researchers, electrical and biomedical engineers, communication technology experts and eye specialists:

- The University of New South Wales (UNSW) School of Biomedical Engineering
- CERA ophthalmologists and researchers from the Macular Research Unit and the Population Health Unit
- The Bionic Ear Institute's extensive experience in the stimulation of auditory nerves is being applied to research into the bionic eye
- National Information Communications Technology Australia (NICTA) engineers are involved in developing the second prototype
- The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital (RVEEH) is the clinical partner in the BVA consortium and will be the site where the first human trials are conducted
- The University of Melbourne is involved through the University's Department of Ophthalmology, the School of Engineering and in offering administrative support services.

What are the specific aims of Bionic Vision Australia?

By 2013, BVA intends to have the first generation bionic eye ready for implantation. Using 100 electrodes, it will allow people with severe vision loss to see the contrast between light and dark shapes and navigate around them. This bionic eye will be an improvement on current technology that has been experimentally implanted in Europe and the USA.

In 2014, a second-generation device that will give recipients the ability to recognise faces using 1000 electrodes will be developed.

To register your interest in the bionic eye contact: Dr Chi Luu (BH) 03 9929 8172

To find out more about CERA's role in the development of Bionic Eye technology including an interview with Professor Robyn Guymer go to: <http://cera.unimelb.edu.au/>

Private Vehicle Rates 2009-10

This information provides the current DEECD reimbursement rates for private car usage and are based on the ATO rates. These rates allow for the total running costs of the car, including decline in value, petrol, insurance and repairs, so you cannot claim any of these costs in addition to the specified rates per business kilometre

Private Vehicle rates per business kilometre

Engine ordinary car	Rotary engine car	Rates
1600cc (1.6 litre) or less	800cc (0.8 litre) or less	63 cents
1601cc-2600cc (1.601 litre-2.6 litre)	801cc-1300cc (0.801 litre-1.3 litre)	74 cents
2601cc (2.601 litre) and over	1301cc (1.301 litre) and over	75 cents

How I got myself a volunteer reader

By Maranatha Sao-Mafiti

As with anything in life, the best advice is to never restrict yourself. If one option doesn't work, keep trying until you succeed. That was the case for me when I went through the process of getting myself a volunteer reader to work with me at Statewide, reading out print Maths so I could begin transcribing in the UEB Braille Maths code. However, as was the case last week, I read through Braille copies of transcribed Braille Maths worksheets, checking it against the print copies that my volunteer reader had, to determine whether the content was correct. More importantly, though, I read through the Braille copies of the worksheets so I could familiarize myself with how the Maths was set out and hence have a better idea of how to set out sums, for example, when it comes time for me to begin my Braille maths transcription.

To backtrack for a moment, then, one of the tasks that Deb Lewis, manager at the Statewide Vision Resource Centre, set me was to get myself a volunteer reader. I was happy to oblige her and I soon went to work, first phoning Young Blind Citizens Australia. I was informed that I would need to contact Vision Australia, as one of their many roles includes dealing with requests for volunteer readers.

Not at all put off or any less determined, I phoned Vision Australia, told them who I was and the reason for my call, and they eventually put me through to none other than my orientation and mobility instructor of Vision Australia's eastern regional office. My O&M instructor explained that she is also my key worker, meaning that she was now able to deal with any requests I might have.

Within days, I received an email from my O&M instructor-cum-key worker, to which was attached a client request form which I filled out, giving the address of Statewide, outlining the role of the volunteer reader, when and at what time they should start and how long they were required. Currently, a gentleman has responded to the ad and I will get in contact with him shortly to introduce myself and explain to him that he would only be needed if, for some reason, my regular volunteer reader cannot work on the Tuesdays that I'm at Statewide.

In the meantime, I emailed one of the staff at Deakin University's Disability Resource Centre, asking her if she knew any notetakers who would be interested in working at Statewide as my volunteer reader, and adding what the role would entail. I received a reply in good time and was informed that someone, who is employed at the university as a notetaker, was interested in the role. Consequently, I telephoned this person, introduced myself and informed her, after I had emailed Deb to let her know that I had succeeded in obtaining myself a volunteer reader, that she was to begin at 9am on the following Tuesday. Presently, as of tomorrow, my volunteer reader will be two weeks in to her new role, and judging by what I will need to transcribe and proofread tomorrow, it looks like a lot of work, yet challenging and fun at the same time.

I did not, however, limit myself to Vision Australia and Deakin University in my search for a volunteer reader. I also contacted my old school and will follow up this contact if things didn't work out with my current reader; she had a friend who was in search of a job like being a volunteer reader. I was glad that I had yet another option to fall back on in case something went wrong.

To reiterate what I said at the start, then, in anything you have to do in life, always try several options until you succeed.

It does work.

Truly.

Louis Braille Celebration: Where's The Library? Teaching Braille Reading with a Meaning by Anna Swenson

Anna Swenson an educator in the field on vision impairment reflects over her years of teaching braille to young students and how far we have come since the days of Louis Braille.

“It was my first week as a teacher in the new resource room for young braille readers. I had spent all summer gathering materials and setting up my classroom. Proudly I showed the principal around the room, pointing out the stacks of basal readers in braille, the shelf of fine motor manipulatives, the acorns and brightly colored fall leaves on the "feely board," and the slightly tattered play kitchen acquired from a departing teacher. The principal paused and scanned the room thoughtfully. "But, Ms. Swenson," the principal said, "where is your classroom library of books for the children to read?" I was stunned, both by my glaring oversight and the implications of her question. What was the point in teaching children braille, if there was nothing for them to read?

After five years as an itinerant teacher working primarily with middle school students, I was highly unqualified to teach beginning readers. Building a classroom library was the first of an ever-expanding array of new challenges that awaited me. Yet, it is the one that has remained with me the longest. Throughout my 30 years as a teacher of students who are visually impaired, I have taken great pleasure in creating motivating reading materials and selecting braille books that my students want to read. It is my belief that providing children with enticing, well-written books builds the foundation for a lifetime of reading enjoyment.

The early 1980s, when I started as a resource room teacher, was still the era of phonics workbooks, basal readers, and scripted lessons. Soon, however, the whole-language movement began to challenge traditional methods with its meaning-based orientation to reading and writing. Emergent reading behaviours, such as turning pages, reciting text from memory, or scribbling a "message" with a crayon, were encouraged as approximations of mature reading. Authentic children's literature that used colourful words and interesting plots replaced the stilted, controlled vocabulary of stories that were common in basal readers, and young writers were encouraged to express their thoughts using "temporary spelling," a process by which children write letters that match the sounds they hear in words. The advent of the whole-language approach was a turning point in my teaching career. Watching my students' progress and their enthusiasm for the new methods and materials convinced me that a focus on meaning was central to literacy instruction.

Meaning-oriented instruction does not negate the need for discrete skill-based learning in areas such as braille character recognition and phonics. In my view, beginning readers need a balance of skill-oriented and meaning-oriented instruction. Skills taught in isolation, however, should be integrated into meaningful reading and writing contexts as soon as possible. The ultimate goal for readers of any age is to derive meaning from text.

Choosing the right book

Selecting a book to transcribe for a particular student is like shopping for the perfect gift in a well-stocked store. Teachers of visually impaired students can browse through titles at an appropriate reading level to find a book that will appeal to a particular child. They evaluate the role of illustrations in comprehension of a particular text. Teachers also compare the contractions in the book to those their student already knows. Teaching contractions as they appear in students' books can be highly effective because of the emotional connection between the contraction and the story. "Kathryn," a second grader who loved horses, had great difficulty distinguishing the "ea" contraction from the letter "a" until she read *Keeker and the Sneaky Pony* (Higginson, 2006). So enthralled was she by the antics of Plum, the pony, that she began identifying the "sneaky contraction" in other words with considerable success.

Recognizing the lack of early reading materials in braille, the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), initiated the Early Braille Trade Books Project. Scheduled for release this fall, sets of 12 to 14 print books will be packaged together with braille labels in contracted and uncontracted braille.

Teachers who purchase sets of books for their beginning braille readers will have access to a web site providing information about each book, including a summary, the reading level, connections to the core and expanded core curriculum, level of teacher support required, frequency of specific contractions, and suggested prereading and follow-up activities. In addition, teachers will be able to maintain an online list of the contractions individual students have mastered and search for books that match a student's contraction knowledge. As the number of early braille trade books increases, beginning braille readers will have greater access to the stimulating and informative books enjoyed by their sighted classmates.....

We have come so far since Louis Braille and his schoolmates read by laboriously tracing embossed letters on the pages of massive tomes. It is a reflection of Louis Braille's genius that his simple, versatile braille alphabet is used in our technological era, remaining virtually unchanged. Thanks to Louis Braille's invention, I was able to fill my first classroom library with books transcribed manually by volunteers. Thirty years later, I provide the students on my itinerant caseload with computer-generated hard copy and refreshable braille books from a wide variety of sources. Much as we value the increasing number of resources, however, the art of teaching reading still lies in the ability to engage learners with text. Our challenge as teachers of visually impaired students is to connect children with braille in meaningful ways, fostering a lasting love of reading and books. From JVIB Online: [Where's The Library? Teaching Braille Reading with a Meaning-oriented Focus](#)

JVIB Online

Find more interesting and thought provoking articles in the August edition of the JVIB Online *Assistive Technology Competencies for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments*

Derrick W. Smith, Pat Kelley, Nancy J. Maushak, Nora Griffin-Shirley, and William Y. Lan
Use of Assistive Technology by Students with Visual Impairments: Findings from a National Survey-
Stacy M. Kelly

*Knowledge and Skills for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments Supervising the Work of Paraeducators-*Sandra Lewis and Amy R. McKenzie

*Universal Design: Online Educational Media for Students with Disabilities-*Wendy Sapp

*Hope and Social Support in Adults Who Are Legally Blind at a Training Center-*Caitlin Singletary, Mary Ann Goodwyn, and Alice P. Carter

Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness <http://www.jvib.org>

Insight Education Centre for the Blind and Vision Impaired

An update by Gayle Clifford

An application has been submitted to the VRQA for the registration of a new Education Centre for Blind and Vision Impaired Students in Victoria. It is expected to open in January 2010 and will be located at the Best Chance site, 583 Ferntree Gully Road, Glen Waverly. The education centre will have a primary school; cater for dual enrolled secondary students and a support skills program.

The Insight Education Centre's Mission is: To empower students who are blind and vision impaired and those who may have additional disabilities to achieve their highest level of independence and potential through the provision of quality education services including access to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, the Expanded Core Curriculum and necessary therapy services.

For further information please contact Gayle Clifford on mobile 0425 863180 or email

cliffgaz@optusnet.com.au.

Technology Workshop: EasyConverter

On Monday 31st August, Steve Bennett from Dolphin U.K. visited the SVRC and spoke about the EasyConverter software programme from Dolphin. This software is a one stop shop for producing materials in alternative format. Using the one piece of software you can produce DAISY, braille, MP3, etext or large print. EasyConverter has OCR software incorporated into it so you can scan and edit your master file in the one software package. Scanned worksheets can be cleaned up and priority order given to the different parts on the page.

If audio materials are your choice then word documents can be converted into DAISY or MP3 files. The DAISY books use a synthetic voice. There are two Australian voices which come with the software.

The following information is from the Dolphin Website:

What is EasyConverter?

EasyConverter quickly creates Large Print, MP3, DAISY and Braille versions of learning materials that can either be scanned from paper, or input from Word, PDF, HTML, Nimas, Kesi, DAISY Xml, text or image files.

Who uses EasyConverter?

EasyConverter is designed for use in schools, colleges, universities, small or large companies and government organisations. EasyConverter is simple to use for those with no alternative format creation experience, and is equally suited to experienced professionals looking for a single flexible high quality altformat creation tool to meet the needs of dyslexic, visually impaired and learning disabled students.

Website: <http://www.yourdolphin.com/productdetail.asp?id=25>

References from Marion and Geoff

As promised at the recent Visiting Teacher PD, Marion and Geoff have provided some further materials which have been uploaded to the SVRC website.

Magnification in your pocket - Marion Blazé <http://www.svrc.vic.edu.au/Magnifiers.doc>

Septo Optic Dysplasia (SOD) and Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH) Reference Material – Geoff Bowen <http://www.svrc.vic.edu.au/RefPD28Aug.doc>

Drawing on the braille

Visiting Teacher, Tess has sent us a copy of So What About Drawing? Instructions for Drawing Using the Braille Writer by Marie Porter. Tess writes: They are really cute, and came through to me from Michael Donnelly, Art teacher at Burwood.

Here is a sample:

RABBIT

Directions:

1. Space, s twice, WH.
2. Space, GH twice, AR, EN, IN, i, c twice, e, EN.
3. Space, s, space 9, WH.
4. Write OW, space 10, dots 4-5-6, s, WH.
5. Space, WH, space 9, AR, e, i.
6. Write THE, x, 3 hyphens, AR, OW, 4 hyphens, o.

This rabbit takes 6 lines down and 14 spaces across. It is a side view of a bunny lying down with its ears straight up and its fluffy tail behind. The back is hunched up a bit in readiness to jump.

If you would like a copy please contact Lyn at the SVRC. lynrobin@svrc.vic.edu.au

Back to Burwood - Celebration

Vision Australia invites current and former students, clients, staff and families to an afternoon function to celebrate the rich history of Vision Australia's School in Burwood.

Bring along a blanket and picnic, and join us for an afternoon of entertainment for a chance to meet friends from the past and present.

A sausage sizzle will also be available.

Please bring an item of memorabilia of your time at Burwood with you.

Date: 24 October 2009

Time: 11am - 3pm

Address: Vision Australia, 333 Burwood Highway

RSVP to Irene Sumbera by 25 September on 1300 84 74 66 or email

irene.sumbera@visionaustralia.org

SPEVI Day 2009

FINDING THE BALANCE:

Life skills, technology and education

Term IV – SPEVI Day

The first day of Term IV is our “combined agencies” PD Day.

Date: Monday, **October 5, 8.30am to 3.45pm**

Venue: Vision Australia, 454 Glenferrie Rd, Kooyong

Theme:

Cost: \$44 for members, \$55 for non-members

For more information, contact your SPEVI Victorian Counsellors:

Dean Johnston: Orientation & Mobility Instructor with Guide Dogs Victoria

dean.j@guidedogsvictoria.com.au 9854 4444

Garry Stinchcombe: Assistant Head of School, Vision Australia School

garry.stinchcombe@visionaustralia.org 9808 6422

Marion Blazé: Education Officer for Vision, Statewide Vision Resource Centre, Department of Education & Early Childhood Development marionblaze@svrc.vic.edu.au 9841 0807

Download the program and registration details from:

<http://www.svrc.vic.edu.au/SPEVIDayregd09.doc>

Blind people may see with their tongues

Perth Now, September 02, 2009 03:35pm

BLIND people may soon be able to see with their tongues and the help of an electric lollipop, scientists say.

The extraordinary technology takes pictures filmed by a tiny camera and turns the information into electrical pulses which can be felt on the tongue.

Tests show that the nerves send messages to the brain which turn these tingles back into pictures.

People using the device, which resembles a pair of sunglasses attached by cable to a plastic lollipop, say that with fewer than 20 hours training they can make out shapes and even read signs.

Scientists say learning to picture images felt on the tongue is similar to learning to ride a bike.

The BrainPort vision device is expected to be available for sale later this year.

It collects visual data through a small digital video camera about 2.5cm in diameter that sits in the middle of a pair of sunglasses worn by the user.

Source: <http://www.news.com.au/perthnow/story/0,,26017402-5008620,00.html>

About vision impairment

Class teachers wishing to develop a unit of work for students about vision impairment and blindness might like to refer to the following:

- Look Out Marcus! - a book/website developed for teaching students about vision impairment: view online <http://www.lookoutmarcus.com.au/> which has wordfind, word pronunciations and all sorts of things to support the teacher; or you can order a free print copy from Guide Dogs Victoria
Look Out, Marcus! has been created for use in the classroom, to help children aged 8 - 14 and their teachers to understand the challenges of living with low vision.
- A school program for year 4-8: <http://www.nei.nih.gov/education/visionschool/index.asp>
- from Australian orthoptists - something that the students could explore themselves (the kids section) which has a simulation of what people with various impairments see: <http://www.optometrists.asn.au/kidsvis>
- Braille Bug: braille site for kids: <http://www.afb.org/braillebug/>
- 3VI: teacher resources: http://www.3vi.com.au/3VI/teachers_resource.htm
- Contact details for Guide Dogs Victoria re a speaker with a vision impairment: 9854 4444

Staff and Student News

Student News from Helen Caldwell

I recently had the privilege to go to a show by the Boroondara Scouts & Guides in which my student Nicole was performing. The show was called "What could go Wrong?" and was about the children of two families thrown together for a weekend without their parents. The show was funny and lively and gave everyone a chance to shine. Nicole was dancing and singing and she even had a short solo. I was a very proud VT! Well done Nicole! The picture below shows the performing group called the Desdemona Patrol. Nicole is second from the left on the top row.



Also newsworthy - Johanna from Balwyn High School was in the cheerleading squad which recently won the State Championships. As her brother would say "Another win for a V.I. kid!"

Name and Fame

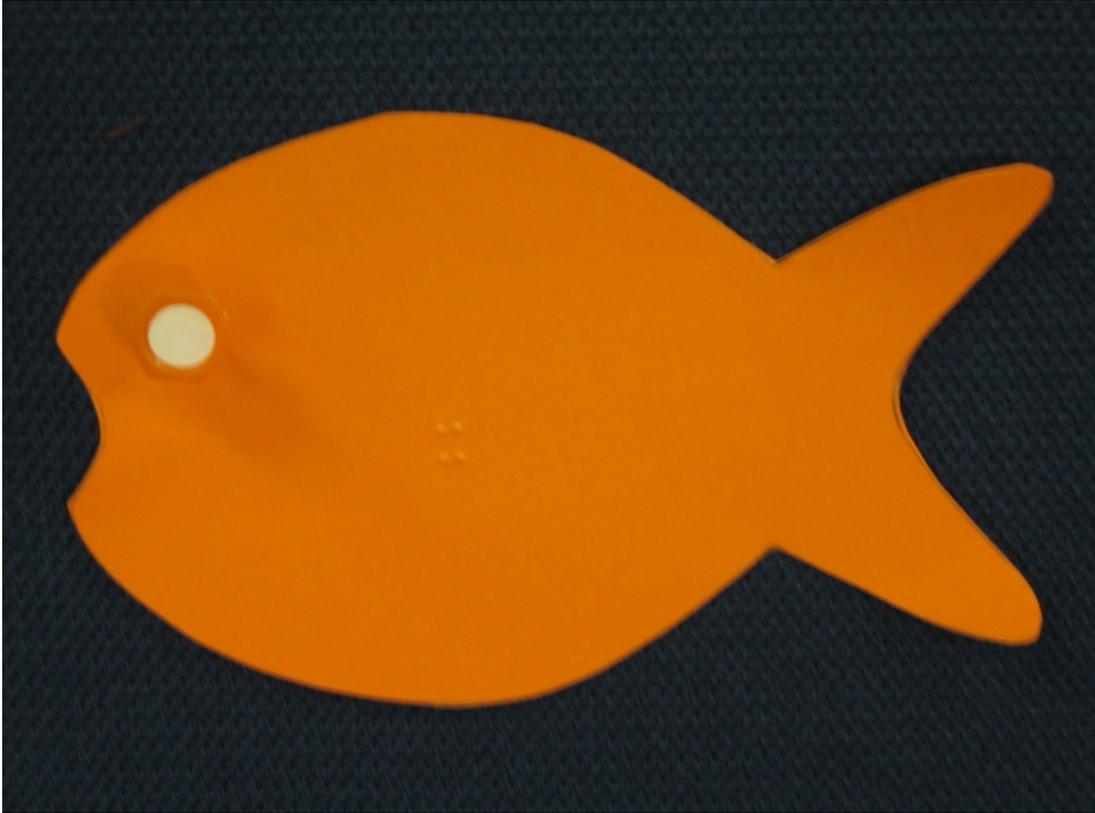
Congratulations to Rory, Leanne and Barb for being the first visiting teachers to get their requests in for next year.

More Congratulations

Congratulations to Tarryn and her team for coming second in the State Callisthenics Finals.

Fishy Tales

A visiting teacher recently had her car broken into. The thieves stole some money and in the process scattered the contents of her car including some “braille fish” throughout the local neighbourhood. The visiting teacher was last seen picking up soggy braille fish from her neighbours’ gardens. Luckily the braille department has come to the rescue and produced some more braille fish!



Have you seen this braille fish anywhere? Last seen wet and forlorn in local neighbourhood garden.

VIPA Inaugural Meeting

Vision Impaired People’s Aid (VIPA) is a foundation that will be supporting and assisting people with vision impairments, their families and friends. The VIPA inaugural meeting will be held at the Frankston Library Community Room, 60 Playne Street, Frankston on Monday 21st September 2009 at 1.30 pm. Entry is via the stairs located next to the Toy Library or take the Frankston Arts Centre lift to Level 3B. For enquiries phone Leanne on 0419 551330

Finally

Thanks to everyone for their ideas for this Bulletin particularly Mark Tainsh, Brian Hewat, Marion Blazé, Deb Lewis, Jeni Blake, Rita Farrelly for contributing to this edition of The Bulletin. Many thanks to our proof readers, Dianne Skillern and Leeanne Terry for their assistance. For those of you taking school holidays we hope you have a great holiday.

Don’t forget we appreciate your input.

If you have something you would like included in "The Bulletin", please contact:

Lyn Robinson lynrobin@svrc.vic.edu.au

To Read the Bulletin Online: <http://www.svrc.vic.edu.au/bulletins2009.html>