

BLITS E-Newsletter - April 2009

Message from the Chair

Welcome to the April 2009 edition of the BLITS E-news.

I would like to express my heartfelt sadness at the passing of Margaret Spalding. For many years Margaret has been a leader in the ACT for improving the lives of people with a disability, and for the past 10 years as the Chief Executive Officer of Koomarri.

Through her pure passion for improving the lives of others and her great knowledge, Margaret was able to achieve great impact and influence in the community. Margaret's unique position allowed for the growth of strong interface between business and human services. Individuals such as Margaret take on immense social responsibility out of their own belief in the greater good which holds so much importance in achieving social change and better opportunities for the disadvantaged.

The current President of Koomarri, James Service and the immediate past President, John Mackay have both provided their own words of tribute, these can be found in this issue of BLITS E-News.

Also in this issue you will find the regular 'Powerful Profiles' feature - this month we profile David Heckendorf, a man who has never allowed his disability to stand in the way of great achievements, be it his studies, his role with the ANU Law School or his involvement in human rights issues.

Please enjoy the new segment 'An Interview with an ACT BLITS Champion'. This issue we feature BLITS Champion Cindy Young, Manager of the National Convention Centre Canberra, who has embraced the BLITS principles of inclusion in her everyday work leading to exciting opportunities and so-ventures.

Don't miss the article on the Canberra Indoor Rock Climbing Centre and the great work they are doing to integrate disability into their day to day business activities. Last and certainly not least we cover the second anniversary celebrations of JACKmail. Both of these stories are terrific examples of how disability and business can come together for the benefit of business and the wider community.

Enjoy the issue and please feel free to provide your comments or suggestions via the BLITS website contact facility at www.blits.org.au

Lois Ford

Chair

BLITS

Business Leaders; Innovative Thoughts and Solutions

In this newsletter:

- Tribute to Margaret - James Service and John Mackay
 - An Interview with a BLITS Champion
 - The Adventures of Rock Climber Boy
 - Powerful Profile - David Heckendorf
 - Jackmail - More than just a business
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Margaret Spalding OAM



Margaret Spalding OAM

Tribute from James Service, President Koomarri

Margaret was true champion for the welfare, safety and personal development of those in our community with disabilities. She had this incredible network of people and friends at all levels of the community, who she could cajole, prod or simply tell what needed to be done, how it needed to be done and by when!

How could you say no to someone so passionate about Canberra, Koomarri its clients and their families? You simply did not say no Margaret!

Margaret had an intuition about where problems lay in disabilities services and their delivery, what the solution should be and how it should be achieved. She was widely sought in the sector by Government, politicians and provider networks for her counsel, experience and passion.

Margaret taught the people of Koomarri to care, how to help and to want to help no matter how tough the individual circumstance or need was. She inspired people to fight for those less fortunate in our community.

Koomarri and those who it helps will be forever the better and stronger for her leadership, vision and selfless dedication.

Koomarri and its people are stronger than ever before and as Koomarri goes forward over the years and decades to come the families of its clients, many of whom are ageing, can feel comforted by the legacy of security that Margaret has left.

It was not all work; Margaret had two sons whom she doted on, three grandchildren she adored and five siblings, including a twin brother. Margaret had a great sense of humour and fun and was a loyal and warm friend.

Margaret will be sadly missed by all who knew her whether professionally or personally, she is irreplaceable!

Tribute from John Mackay AM, Immediate Past President, Koomarri

Margaret was a great networker and had a rare gift for uniting people in a common cause.

She was a serious business leader in our city, a tribal elder if you will. She was several times nominated for business leadership and partnership awards and under her leadership, Koomarri won many prestigious community inclusion awards.

Her contribution to Koomarri has been prodigious to say the least. The quality of life of Koomarri's 400 clients with disabilities and their families has been significantly improved over the past decade as a direct result of Margaret's leadership and hard work. Margaret has placed in concrete a future for Koomarri for at least the next 50 years. This is vital for the ageing parents of many of our current Koomarri family members.

In short, I don't know of a single person who has made a more significant contribution to the Canberra community than Margaret has over the past decade. Margaret was recently awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in significant recognition of her contribution.

How could I sum up her many qualities? An almost impossible task, so let me mention the top five:

1. Great passion and insight into the aim of enabling people with mental and physical disabilities to lead full and abundant lives;
2. Knowledge and experience of disability field, qualities regularly relied upon called upon by policy makers and practitioners; locally, nationally and internationally;
3. Great resourcefulness, leadership skills, and determination (very much an "iron fist within a velvet glove" approach)
4. An ability to garner strong support from business leaders, politicians and government officials
5. A fantastic sense of humour and a genuine love of all us all

We will never stop missing Margaret, but we can take heart in the knowledge that she bettered our community and enriched our lives as no one before her. May this knowledge ease the pain of this loss and provide the lessons we need to in some small way fill the gap left by her passing.

An Interview with a BLITS Champion - Cindy Young



Cindy Young

Cindy Young
Manager
National Convention Centre
InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG)

Cindy Young signed on as a BLITS Champion in early 2008. We caught up with Cindy to ask about her experience thus far and what it means to her to be a BLITS Champion.....

Cindy, tell us about your first impressions when you joined BLITS as a BLITS Champion.

Deciding to become a BLITS Champion certainly did not make me an instant expert at 'all things disability', in fact, becoming a Champion opened up a window of disability awareness for me.

I previously thought I had a relatively accurate idea of the realities people disability face on a day to day basis - but I have to admit there were gaps in this understanding. Perhaps most importantly I had no idea that there existed such an enormous awareness 'blind spot' about people with disability in the business community. In broad terms the average business person is unaware of the significant market force and potential workforce hidden in the part of the community with disabilities.

How did this change your perceptions?

Becoming a BLITS Champion has changed my focus - now I see the issues more clearly, but I also see the potential (and sometimes obvious) solutions. More recently I have been in a situation to act and put into effect some of the solutions.

Can you provide an example?

Yes, I can. I recently had the opportunity to meet Jess Irwin, an amazing woman. Jess is a brilliant photographer who presented staged a photographic exhibition entitled 'A Different Focus' in the Canberra Centre on the occasion of the International Day of Disability, December 2008.

Jess has severe spastic dystonic quadriplegic cerebral palsy. She was an inspiration to me at so many levels, her spirit, her humour and personality and her work. She also impressed my associates at the National Convention Centre and we were delighted when she accepted our invitation to display her images at the Convention Centre after the exhibition concluded. Several of the pieces not sold at the original exhibition were sold from the Convention Centre display.



***Emma Papas and Daniel Connaughton,
National Convention Centre Employees***

Another good example is Daniel Connaughton. Daniel is 19 years old, and has Downs Syndrome. I met Daniel's mother, Karen Connaughton, at a BLITS function last year, and she subsequently asked me to consider providing work experience for Daniel. Daniel Connaughton started working with us in October 2008 on a work experience program while he was studying at Lake Tuggeranong College.

Daniel graduated from LTC in December 2008 and he is now a member of the NCC's paid casual staff, assisting with banquet set ups and preparation tasks. Daniel is a terrific young man and he as keen as would be any young man to get a start. He is part of the team now and we look forward to seeing him each week and the positive energy and enthusiasm he brings with him.

Cindy, you work for a multinational organisation, how did they respond to these initiatives?

Yes, that's right, the company is the InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG). They have been great, the organisation has a strong policy of community and cultural support and encourages managers and staff of all their properties to look for ways to best serve the local community.

About Cindy Young

Cindy's experience in the hotel, hospitality and tourism industry is in short, comprehensive and exemplary. 22 Years management experience Cindy has a genuine interest in the wellbeing of Canberra as a strong and vibrant city and as such, is a strong advocate for further developing the connection between disability and business.

Cindy's son Danny, his wife Emma and their daughter, Zoe, (Cindy's pride and joy) also live in Canberra. Cindy spends her spare time with her family and friends, Dragon Boat racing on Lake Burley Griffin and travel to unique destinations.

The Adventures of Rock Climber Boy



***Sheree and Isaac Henley (front centre) and friends
at the Canberra Indoor Rock Climbing Centre***

When Sheree Henley first contacted The Canberra Indoor Rock Climbing Centre to get her Son Isaac involved in rock climbing, she could not have anticipated the support she would receive.

After the initial contact with the Centre, Sheree worked with Isaac's occupational therapist to develop a plan so that Isaac would be able to enjoy rock climbing. Isaac has a severe disability effecting his communication and physical movements. With financial support from Tandem and support from some volunteers the idea has become a reality. Sheree placed a notice in the Centre for people interested in assisting Isaac and 6 people volunteered, 3 of them Centre staff members.

With this support Isaac has achieved great results in a short amount of time. He can now reach for hand holds and place his feet to move up the wall without being prompted. The goal for Isaac to reach the top of the wall without assistance is well within reach with the support of the staff and volunteers.

Sheree has been thrilled with the support that they have received and believes the most satisfying aspect has been, "seeing the volunteers learn to understand Isaac and brainstorming ideas to solve problems." Sheree believes that there are simple steps that businesses can take, just like the rock Climbing Centre, in furthering the inclusion of people with disability. "Modifying the way you define an activity and modifying the physical environment can enable many more people to participate."

The venture is another great example of how business and disability can come together and achieve great results for all.

"Having people with disabilities coming to the centre is good for staff becoming better teachers and better communicators, it's good for other clients learning to share, cooperate, help others and understand diversity. It's good for the person with a disability learning an activity that keeps them healthy, they learn to communicate with other people, they make friends and it's good for business - more clients = more income and a sustainable business future."

To find out more about Isaac's experience and for more images visit [Rock Climber Boy](#) or visit the Canberra Rock Climbing Centre website at www.canberrarockclimbing.com.au

Powerful Profiles - David Heckendorf



David Heckendorf

The academic achievements of David Heckendorf can only be described as remarkable for any Australian. David holds two Bachelor degrees in Philosophy, Sociology and Law and a Graduate Diploma and Masters Degree in Law. What makes David's achievements more remarkable is the fact that he has Cerebral Palsy that limits his physical abilities and capacity to speak clearly.

Throughout his studies David has faced challenges that are rarely considered for the majority of students. He describes his inability to take lecture notes, transport, access to written material and the physical effort required for all aspects of study to be the biggest hurdles. An example of the physical effort required is the way he types one key at a time with his head-pointer.

"Receiving my Masters Degree is my proudest moment. It took a lot of hard work and drive" he says. In addition to his academic achievements, David describes being admitted to the Supreme Court of the ACT as a legal officer as "a real honour and my proudest accomplishment."

David is currently undertaking a Ph.D. looking at how disability and law connect and intersect. A subject in which David, with his study history and as a person with disability, holds great knowledge and insight.

As well as his Ph.D. studies, David spends his spare time as a disability activist with an active interest in human rights. He has made submissions to Senate inquiries regarding a number of Bills and was even quoted in the Senate Report on the Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

David is encouraged by how far Australia has come in improving the rights of people with disability. However, he sees that there is still much more work to be done. Speaking of the barriers still facing people with disability and how he would like Canberra to change, David says "I, and people like me, are still second class citizens. Physical access is still a major barrier for people with disability being included in the community. There are still so many places where people can't go within the nation's capital. I think the Centenary of Canberra in 2013 should be a target date for making Canberra as accessible as possible for people with disability."

JACKmail - More than just a business



Jackson Richards of JACKmail

An event to celebrate the second anniversary of JACKmail and the official launch of the JACKmail business DVD took place on Thursday 26th March at the National Convention Centre.

JACKmail is a courier business servicing the ACT which was conceived by Sally Richards as a post school option for her son Jackson West, a young Canberran with a profound intellectual disability with autism. JACKmail offers Jackson a meaningful way to engage with the community through incorporating his interests and abilities.

Two years on and JACKmail has grown from dream into reality as a viable and sustainable business. While there have been challenges along the way, Sally is proud of the hard work and support that has made JACKmail what it is today.

Sally believes that the support of the businesses has been fundamental to the success and has simplified and streamlined much of JACKmail's work. "The businesses that JACKmail has as valued customers have been professional at all times under all circumstances".



Sally Richards and Paul Donohoe at the celebration of the 2nd anniversary of JACKmail

The JACKmail business DVD was produced through generous funding from the CIT and is a useful resource for raising awareness within the business sector of inclusion of people with disability. The DVD presents the views of the businesses that work with JACKmail on their relationship with JACKmail and the importance of creating opportunities for people with disability.

Not only does JACKmail provide a stimulating and active option for Jackson it also demonstrates the positive way that disability can integrate into the business sector and community with benefits for all.

Sally has clear advice for businesses about the opportunities and benefits from employing people with disability, "take one person and make it possible for them to work for and with you. That's a beginning. From a beginning such as this, other things will grow."