

BLITS E-Newsletter April 2010

Message from the Chair

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

February and March have been interesting and productive months for BLITS. Our annual review and strategic planning sessions have kept us busy, taking stock of 2009, and making plans for 2010. This process is an opportunity for the BLITS team to critically review what we've achieved, working through what worked, as well as what could have been done differently.

We also sought to identify more clearly where we see opportunities for BLITS to focus its efforts for 2010. BLITS has a clear set of objectives and we were mindful in our planning to make sure that our work would continue to keep these firmly in sight. A snapshot of what came out of planning sessions can be found on the BLITS website at: www.blits.org.au/strategic-plan.php. While it's important to have a blueprint to go forward with, I believe our strategic plan is a dynamic document, and as such we need to be open to building in opportunities as they arise throughout the year.

As part of looking back and charting our course for the next 12 months, we were encouraged by feedback that shows that more and more Canberrans are becoming aware of BLITS, who we are and what we do. Making a mark takes more than goodwill. It takes time, expertise and perseverance and it is very satisfying to see that our work, though the people we connect with, is - slowly but surely - making a difference for people with disabilities in the ACT.

Many of you will know that the annual ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards is a key event in the BLITS calendar. Our sponsors are critical to the continued success of this event and in what BLITS is striving to achieve out in the business world. We were delighted to host an informal lunch in March to say thanks to our valued sponsors. Chief Minister Jon Stanhope was in attendance and graciously acknowledged the sponsors important contribution, extending his personal thanks to those involved.

As always we bring you a mix of information and articles of interest to keep you on top of what's happening with BLITS.

We invite you to get to know BLITS Champion Jeremy Lasek. Jeremy is a familiar face across communications and media circles in the ACT, but his commitment to supporting the BLITS values and objectives may be a little less well known. Jeremy is another terrific supporter for our cause.

You can also find out more on recent commendations to Drake Medox, the National Convention Centre Canberra and the Canberra Theatre Centre for their role in improving quality of life for people with disabilities.

I trust you'll enjoy this edition - feel free to pass the word to colleagues and friends - and let us know your comments and ideas. Email us at info@blits.org.au

Lois Ford

Chair

BLITS ACT

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An Interview with an ACT BLITS Champion



Jeremy Lasek

Executive Director
Chief Minister's Office
Arts, Communications, Events and Protocol Division

Background

Information:

Jeremy Lasek arrived in Canberra in 1992 to take up the news director's position with WIN-TV. In 2000, Jeremy joined the National Capital Authority as the Director of Promotions. Jeremy was appointed to the position of Director Communications with the ACT Government in 2003. In 2008, Jeremy was seconded from his role in the ACT Government's Chief Minister's Department as Executive Director of Arts, Communications, Events and Protocol to become Chief of Staff for the Chief Minister of the ACT. He recently returned to his high-profile role in the Chief Minister's Department.

We caught up with Jeremy to ask about his experience thus far and what it means to him to be a BLITS Champion.

Jeremy, why did you agree to become a BLITS Champion?

I feel my family and I are very fortunate, having arrived from England as migrants to the best country in the world in the late 1960s, we feel privileged and, compared to many others, have faced very few obstacles in life. This has generated a sense of responsibility in our family, to contribute where we can - and to change for the better - to help those in society who do have to battle, because of disabilities or any other disadvantages. When I heard about BLITS, what the program is trying to do and how - it was a no brainer for me to accept the invitation to come on board.

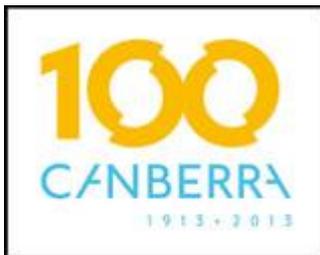
How does Disability intercede with your work life at present?

I work in the exciting and challenging government area of Arts, Communications, Events and Protocol, working closely with a group of experienced and passionate people. In the arts area, we have a Community Arts Office which employs three arts community officers, an Indigenous Arts Officer, an Arts Ability Officer and a Multicultural Arts officer. Through these three positions we aim to provide the necessary capacity, mentoring and assistance to ensure we can affect positive outcomes in the arts arena for many of the disadvantaged members of our community.

Personally, what would you like to see change?

The ACT arts grants program provides millions of dollars of funding. It would be good to see a greater slice of that funding in future going to assist people with disabilities in our arts community. We have 20 key arts organisations in the ACT most of which are run with minimal resources and several run outstanding programs for people with disabilities. Locally, we have come a long way in recent years. At the Canberra Theatre Centre there have been major improvements to improve access and this resulted in a national award. The Canberra Theatre also has selected presentations which are audio described for the vision impaired and live captioned for hearing impaired patrons. The brilliant new Belconnen Arts Centre has been constructed on one level to improve access and a hearing loop has been installed both in the foyer and the dance studio floor. The Watson Arts Centre recently saw a ramp installed to allow users and visitors to access the main building.

It is pleasing that nationally, the Cultural Minister's Council has released a National Arts and Disability Strategy to improve access to the arts to improve access to the arts for people with disabilities, both as participants and as professional artists.



Where are the new opportunities in the Events sector?

Well, as you might have noticed, March 12 this year marked Canberra's 97th birthday - meaning we are getting ready for a year-long celebration in 2013 - the city's Centenary celebrations or 'Canberra 100'!

We are building a truly exciting program with Robyn Archer AO as Creative Director. This is a terrific opportunity to take accessibility and engagement with all of the community to new levels. I can assure you that Robyn and I are determined that everyone has access to this celebration and the events that surround it.



In particular I am keen to see all of our event teams concentrating on identifying the options for people with disabilities to participate as performers, entertainers and artists. These events might be taking place on the Big Stage (Stage 88) or in a multitude of smaller venues throughout the city. Anyone who knows Robyn Archer would know this is something she would also fully embrace.

Are there any Arts organisations that currently include or provide for people with disabilities?



The Arts sector the world over struggles to survive. But there are certainly some terrific examples. I am pleased that *Legs Dance*, *Music for Everyone* and the *Marsden Arts Group* were all winners in the 2009 Inclusion Awards and the *Radiance Dance Project* was also nominated. *Music For Everyone* offers a program of music for people with disabilities in two areas: group activity classes for teens and adults and individual music therapy sessions for children and adults. The Tuggeranong Arts Centre hosts the *Messengers Program*, an early intervention youth program catering for young people at risk of social isolation and/or suffering depression which promotes youth resilience through art, drama, dance, film and writing.

It does seem somewhat ironic that those with minimal resources are often the ones trying the hardest to make a positive change for people with disabilities!

What other industries connected to the Arts or Events sectors are in a position to help effect change?

Arts and events rely on a broad range of people with operational, administrative and logistical skills to stage performances or events. These include all the important back of house work, scene operations, contractors and food and beverage suppliers as well as the administrative roles. These are filled by volunteers, traineeships, internships or part time employees. There is no reason that people with disabilities cannot be included as important contributors in many of these key areas. It is particularly pleasing that the ACT Arts Fund has supported special one-off projects to support people with disabilities. These include funding to the Mental Health Foundation to assist with the costs of supporting a group of people living with a mental illness to perform a theatrical work based on their experiences. People with Disabilities Inc assist with costs of employing professional artists to teach people with disabilities theatre and film-making skills.

At a business level what do you think is the current priority if we are to increase the level of engagement with people with disabilities?

Private enterprise is just that - privately run. We need to explain, convince or coerce leaders in our business community that they can make a difference as an individual. Most people can make a difference somehow, no matter who you are or what your situation is, everyone has something to give.

Let's not leave it to those with the least to do the most. The interesting thing is, and I speak from personal experience, by expanding your every day work and business life to include all members of the community in your every day work life, invariably one finds a myriad of unexpected rewards.

New Roads to Employment for Students with a Disability

A new collaborative approach between two ACT businesses has resulted in exciting employment outcomes for young people with disability. Combining specific job training with work experience provided by a dedicated employment agency as a gateway to job placement is leading to new and sustainable employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Kate Pickering, Manager of Drake Medox Canberra and Jacky Ryles, Director of Capital Careers have come up with this simple but successful formula for getting that foot in the door for jobseekers with disability.

'It all started with a question' says Kate, 'What would happen if an employment company provided on the job training experience in office works for people with disabilities - would this translate into more placements for these individual? As it turns out the answer is encouraging to say the least.'

Kate Pickering and Drake Medox have offered their own on the job work experience program in office skills for Capital Careers graduates. 'As a result of this initiative, placements into the job market are starting to happen where there simply weren't any before', says Jacky Ryles.

'This approach is providing beneficial work experience to people fresh out of Capital Careers training programs, adding to their level of personal confidence and providing a real work situation in which to practice their new skills. As Kate is personally so hands on in the program at Drake, she gains a level of insight and understanding about each individual that, combined with her knowledge of the current job market in Canberra puts her in the ideal position to find employers who are open to thinking outside the square when it comes to employment solutions.' says Jacky.

As a result, three businesses have offered to participate in a pilot project where three young students who have successfully completed both the training at Capital Careers and work experience at Drake Medox will shortly undertake a nine week rotational placement. Essentially this provides nine weeks of paid employment with each employer whilst supported by workers engaged by Kate.

'The principles behind providing this direct training and experience and identifying the employment solutions works. The concept may be simple, maybe even obvious, but it is critical nonetheless', says Kate. 'When it comes to finding a sustainable job match, the overriding elements for successful employment remain constant. The job must be of real benefit to the employee and to the employer, it must be remunerated on an equal pay basis and if job tailoring is required, it has to be thought through and effective. But at the end of day - this approach will work and everyone benefits'

Please note: If you or your business or organisation is interested in exploring employment solutions including students or experienced individuals with a disability call:

Kate Pickering, Drake Medox: p: 02 6249 7366

Article notes: Capital Careers is a registered training organization with specialist skills in training people with disability. Certificate courses in Information Technology and Business are funded by ACT Training and Tertiary Education.

National Convention Centre - Hearing Loops for Six Venues

In a significant step to increase accessibility for all patrons of the National Convention Centre, the latest in hearing loop technology has been installed in the major meeting rooms and theatres in the Centre.



I-AMP amplifiers and receivers are in place in the Royal Theatre, Ballroom, and the Bradman, Menzies, Nicholls, and Sutherland Theatres. The induction loops will improve the levels of hearing and comfort for the hearing impaired.

Induction loops increase the intelligibility of amplified sounds for people with a "T Switch" activated hearing aid, and will be of benefit to hearing impaired patrons attending the theatre, conferences, concerts, private functions and banquets.

"The Centre is delighted to take this step, just one more thing we can do to keep improving and making sure we provide the best access possible to our facilities", says Cindy Young, Manager of the National Convention Centre Canberra.

Canberra Theatre Announces New Range of Access Products

The Canberra Theatre Centre has announced a new range of access products and services for patrons visiting the theatre.

As an ACT Companion Card business affiliate, the Centre now offers the following facilities throughout the year (selected shows):

- * **Real time audio descriptions** of shows or performance activities (between dialogue) via personal headsets - commentary provided by 'Vision Australia' operators
- * **Tactile set tours** for the benefit of blind and vision impaired patrons, and
- * **Live captioning** for the deaf and hearing impaired



Other access services are available for all shows such as headsets to aid hearing and dedicated wheelchair spaces.

The Canberra Theatre contributes to the whole of the Canberra Community by ensuring it engages with the 45,000 Canberrans who live with a disability by providing appropriate access to their range of services and entertainment.

Canberra Theatre Centre access diary: www.canberratheatrecentre.com.au/season2010/access.html

A recent partnership with IRT has ensured this program is continues to develop. The Centre's Access Sponsor, IRT is Australia's largest not-for-profit, community based aged care provider.

ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards - Sponsors Thanked

Sponsors of the 2009 ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards were formally thanked by the Chief Minister, Mr Jon Stanhope during a lunch at the China Plate Restaurant in Civic on Wednesday 10 April. A number of the winners of the 2009 CMI Awards were on hand to join in the proceedings.

Principle Sponsors Drake Medox, represented by Branch Manager (Canberra) Kate Pickering and MAXimus Solutions represented by Executive General Manager Australia John Gaudry were among the sponsors, Inclusion Award winners present and Department executives present.

Also present and thanked were Miranda Garnett (Koomarri), Ivan Slavich, Paul Walshe, (ACTEWAGL), Doug Edwards and Trish Wilkins, (PRIME Television), Eoghan O'Byrne, (Canberra FM) and Julie Hamilton (Mirrabooka).

B2B, Capital magazine, The Canberra Times, The Crown Plaza, Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG) and Mirrabooka were thanked but unable to attend.

Inclusion award winners present and honoured were award winners:

* **Raytheon Australia**, Jessica Thomas, - Chief Minister's Award for Excellence and Medium to Large Business Category

* **Legs Dance**, Sam Steadman - Small Business Category

* **Canberra Connect**, Anthony Polinelli - Government Agency Category

* **Mpowerdome**, Gail Aitkin - Sports Category

* **Marsden Arts Group**, Barbara van der Linden - Arts Category

* **The Canberra Labor Club**, Glenn Wallace - Hospitality Category

* **Music for Everyone**, Vivienne Winther - Education and Training Category

* **Eric Martin and Associates**, Eric Martin - The Margaret Spalding Award for an Individual

The Board of BLITS once again thanks all our valued sponsors of the ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards and congratulates the winners of the 2009 Awards