

BLITS E-Newsletter - February 2009

Message from the Chair

Welcome to the latest edition of BLITS E-News.

In this issue of BLITS E-News we offer a number of interesting and relevant articles and a few brief reflections on some of the notable events of the last 12 months. This includes, as promised in the December BLITS E-news, interesting extracts from the Australian Employers Network on Disability's (AEND) recently released publication 'Opportunity'.

A new feature is introduced in this edition of BLITS E-News, aptly named 'Powerful Profiles'. Through this feature we will offer profiles on outstanding people in our community from every walk of life, people who are inspirational and whose stories dynamically illustrate the powerful role people with disabilities play in every aspect of our community, including business and professional environments. In this first feature we profile the delightful Jess Irwin, who, as part of the International Day of People with a Disability staged a breathtaking photographic exhibition at the Canberra Centre.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt congratulations to Margaret Spalding, CEO of Koomarri who has been awarded on Australia Day this year the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for her tireless devotion and services to people with disabilities in the ACT and surrounding region. Anyone who has had the privilege to know Margaret and see the results of her hard work knows how appropriate this recognition is.

In closing I acknowledge those who have experienced great loss in the recent floods in Queensland - and in particular - the devastating fires in Victoria. On behalf of the BLITS board, I extend our condolences for those who have lost their lives. Our thoughts are with their family and friends - and with all those people who have lost so much. It is evident from the support that has flowed into Victoria that businesses have responded powerfully and quickly to this catastrophic event. This shows a real commitment to doing what they can, to contribute to the recovery of these communities.

Lois Ford

Chair

BLITS

Business Leaders; Innovative Thoughts and Solutions Lois Ford

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Graeme Innes AM
Human Rights and Disability
Discrimination Commissioner

Graeme Innes Celebrates the Achievements for People with Disability in 2008

As part of the 2008 International Day of People with Disability, 'Dignity and Justice' Breakfast at the High Court of Australia, Mr Graeme Innes AM, Human Rights and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, provided a keynote speech to an eager crowd representing a wide cross section of the community.

Mr Innes spoke of the first 12 months of the Rudd Government examining what has been achieved and what is still left to do in regards to discrimination against people with disability. The key achievement being the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

"The Convention provides Australia, with the opportunity to use its framework and contents as the foundation for goal-setting towards full equality and inclusion for people with disability" said Mr Innes.

"The Convention, with its built-in monitoring mechanism, provides an ideal foundation for a National Disability Strategy."

The great news is that development of the strategy is underway with public consultations taking place across Australia to gain input into shaping the National Disability Strategy.

Other noted achievements for the past 12 months include the review of media access, the agreement of a parliamentary committee to review immigration policy and discrimination and the release of the Access to Premises Standards which will lead the way for the design and construction of accessible buildings in Australia.

Mr Innes spoke openly of the areas of existing discrimination against people with disability and the remaining work needed to remove this discrimination. He called for governments to lead by example and implement active strategies to improve employment for people with disability.

Mr Innes finished his speech with the statement, "People with disability are not heroes, and are not victims. We are agents of our own destiny, seeking an equal place in the Australian community."

'Opportunity' - A Good Guide for Business

The Australian Employers' Network on Disability has released an inspiring new publication titled *Opportunity*. The publication communicates to Australian businesses the opportunities and benefits of involving people with disability in the workplace.

These opportunities are "too big for businesses to ignore. There are real and tangible benefits to be gained from understanding how your business can build 'disability confidence'" says Suzanne Colbert, CEO, Australian Employers Network on Disability.

The figures say it all and Suzanne Colbert continues, "In 2008 the gross disposable income of people with disability in Australia is estimated at A\$54.5 billion" and with " 20% of the Australian Population with disability", it is easy to see why Australia's most successful companies are already welcoming skilled and talented people with disability and reaping the benefits.

Disability confidence is about businesses understanding how people with disability relate to their business as employees, customers, suppliers and stakeholders. The booklet seeks to encourage businesses to develop disability confidence and use this confidence to break down barriers for people with disability, creating an inclusive culture.

Parliamentary Secretary for Disability, the Hon Bill Shorten believes "The time is right for business to start seeing people with disabilities as an important customer and skills base. *Opportunity* includes tips on becoming confident about meeting the needs of employees and customers with disability"

Opportunity also provides important statistics, case studies and a checklist of actions businesses can take to make their products and services more accessible.

"We hope this booklet inspires you to assess your organisation's disability confidence and commit to taking the small steps that make a big difference" said Ms Colbert.

To access a copy of *Opportunity* and for more information on how your business can become more disability confident, visit www.disabilityconfidence.org.au/

2008 International Day of People with Disability (I-Day) Activities

I-Day is an opportunity around the world to raise awareness of disability issues and celebrate the contributions that people with disability make everyday in our community. A range of events and activities were organised across Canberra to celebrate I-Day in 2008.

Celebration Breakfast

In keeping with this year's theme, and to celebrate Australia's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 17 July 2008, DACT hosted a 'Dignity and Justice' Celebration Breakfast at the High Court of Australia. 70 people enjoyed the atmospheric breakfast which featured a keynote speech from Mr Graeme Innes, Human Rights Commissioner and Disability Discrimination Commissioner.

Other guests who attended the breakfast include Mr Bill Shorten MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities; Senator Gary Humphries Senator for the ACT; Professor John McMillan ACT Ombudsman; Ms Amanda Bresnan MLA; Ms Mary Porter MLA; Ms Linda Crebbin, General President Civil and Administrative Tribunal; Ms Mary Durkin, ACT Disability Commissioner.

A Different Focus Photographic Exhibition

'A Different Focus' was staged in the Glass Floor Exhibition Space, Canberra Centre, from 12.30pm, Wednesday, 3 December until Sunday 7 December. The exhibition featured the brilliant photographic work of Jessica Irwin - a professional photographer based in Erina on the New South Wales central coast who is diagnosed with severe spastic dystonic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, significantly affecting her mobility, upper and lower limb movement and verbal communication. Jess who works in the photographic studio of Ken Duncan, now has a range of photos on display in the foyer of the National Convention Centre in Canberra.

'A Different Focus' also featured the work of local photographer Jenni Heckendorf, who, like Jess Irwin, was born with severe spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, significantly affecting her mobility, upper and lower limb movement and who, like Jess Irwin, relies upon assistive/adaptive technology mounted on her wheelchair to capture photographic images.

"To see two highly creative women with a disability exhibiting their work to such a wide public audience reflects what I-Day is all about." Said Minister for Disability and Housing, Mr John Hargreaves

The work of both photographers provided thousands of Canberrans with an opportunity to view and appreciate professional photography which captures life from a truly different focus.

Sunday Fun Day Community Festival

Sunday Fun Day Community Festival was a free community event that took place on Sunday 7 December at Stage 88 Arena.

Close to 200 people enjoyed great music and entertainment provided by acclaimed Australian performers Mic and Jim Conway who performed 'A Salute to Captain Matchbox', the songs that made them famous in the 70s. Other performers included New Zealand boogie pianist Jan Preston and Elly-May and Mahalia Barnes, Daughters of Jimmy Barnes, who performed acoustic soul music.

The event, sponsored by **Go Troppo Fruit Markets Fyshwick**, featured The Great Strawberry Eating Competition which gave kids the chance to win cash prizes for eating the greatest number of strawberries in their age group.

Sunday Fun Day provided a range of access facilities including an audio hearing loop and accredited signer for the hearing impaired, disabled vehicle access, disabled seating and disabled toilets.



Family Fun - The Sunday Fun Day Strawberry Eating Contest

'Powerful Profiles'



Photographer Jess Irwin

JESS IRWIN - a Photographic Force

To coincide with International Day of People with Disability, on 3 December 2008, Disability ACT staged a photographic exhibition entitled 'A Different Focus' in the Glass Floor Exhibition Space, The Canberra Centre. The exhibition featured the brilliant photographic work of Jessica Irwin - a professional photographer based in Erina on the New South Wales central coast who is diagnosed with severe spastic dystonic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, significantly affecting her mobility, upper and lower limb movement and verbal communication.

Despite these physical limitations Jess has found ways to express herself through photography and other more adventurous pursuits. Jess considers herself a "real daredevil" and in her spare time enjoys nothing more than skydiving or riding in a water ski tube.

Jess who works in the studio of acclaimed Australian photographer Ken Duncan, maintains a positive and truly inspiring approach to photography.

"What I want to get across to other disabled photographers is that they shouldn't be disappointed when they see wonderful photographs taken by able bodied photographers at locations that are not accessible to wheelchairs - leave those locations for the photographers who can walk or climb. You have a world of wonderful locations and subjects right in front of you. All you have to do is see them."

The exhibition was a first for Jess in publicly displaying her work to a wide audience and provided the people of Canberra with an opportunity to view and appreciate photography which captures life from a truly different focus.

It also gave Jess the opportunity to establish herself as a recognised professional photographer. The level of interest in the exhibition was so great that the National Convention Centre offered the foyer area of the Convention Centre to continue to display Jess' work. Jessica's website is www.dare2bu.net.au

National Disability Awards

BLITS congratulates the 2008 National Disability Award recipients. Winners were announced on 3 December 2008. The 2008 recipients are:

Amethyst Barnbrook - Go Getter Award

(Young person, aged between 12 and 25 years, who has made a significant contribution to improving the lives of people with disability)

Sarah Cullen - Young Community Contribution Award

(Young person, aged between 12 and 25 years, with disability who has made a significant contribution to their community)

Bill Bradley - Community Contribution Award

(Person with disability who has made a significant contribution to their community)

Katherine Fisher - Inclusion Award

(Person who has made a significant contribution to improving the lives of people with disability)

Anne McDonald - Personal Achievement Award

(Person, either with disability or caring for someone with disability, who has overcome adversity to achieve personal goals).

Congratulations to the 2008 award recipients!

For more information about these awards go to: www.idpwd.com.au/awards.asp#2008AwardRecipients