

BLITS E-Newsletter - July 09

Message from the Chair

Welcome to the July 2009 edition of BLITS E-news - for this issue, I'm standing in as Chair for Lois Ford, who is currently on leave.

Significant announcements in recent weeks include the commitment for an ACT Companion Card and a call for nominations for the 2009 Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards. Both these initiatives involve the BLITS advisory board and work is underway to get both up and running.

The work of BLITS was greatly boosted by the first of the Champions Round Table events which took place in May. The Round Table events are a new activity for us and we are delighted with the success of the first one, focusing on tourism. Thanks to BLITS Champion, Simonne Shepherd, General Manager of Australian Capital Tourism, who addressed a gathering of who's who in ACT tourism. More about this later.

Read more about each of these stories - along with a piece about a recent address at the National Press Club by Bill Shorten MP Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services. This was an interesting speech in which he put some perspective around many of the challenges people with a disability face and talked about potentially innovative ways to move into the future.

E- news continues with our regular features An Interview with a Champion featuring Dr Colin Adrian, Chief Executive of the Canberra Institute of Technology and Powerful Profile - Patrick Horne, Australian Table Tennis Champion and high ranking Australian International sports representative.

I trust you will be inspired by what you read here -as always your feedback and ideas are very welcome.

Andrew Whale

Acting Chair

BLITS

Business Leaders; Innovative Thoughts and Solutions

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ACT Companion Card Announcement
From left to right: Lois Ford, Chair of BLITS, Trevor Robinson, Chair, Disability Advisory Council, John Hargreaves, ACT Minister for Disability and Christine Faulks, CEO, Canberra Business Council

ACT Companion Card Announced

In May, the ACT Minister for Disability, John Hargreaves formally announced, the ACT Government's commitment to introduce the Companion Card for Canberra.

This scheme is designed to provide fair and equal access for people with a disability who require attendant care to attend movies, sports events, shows, galleries or other events. Essentially it provides for a 'two for one' admission fee for venues or events.

The Companion Card scheme is not only about the feel-good factor of assisting people with disabilities to realize basic human rights. There is clear evidence that suggests that businesses who participate in the scheme do increase their turnover.

BLITS is in the process of spreading the word to ACT business of the value in getting on board with this initiative.

We encourage those Canberra businesses who have a ticketing system as part of their operation to sign up. The Card will be launched in August. More information about becoming a Companion Card Business Affiliate is available at www.companioncard.act.gov.au



**Jon Stanhope, Chief Minister
Australian Capital Territory**

Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards

Nominations for the 2009 Awards are now open. The Awards recognize the contribution of business, organisation, department, team or individuals who 'go the extra mile' to include people with disabilities.

A change in the nomination process for this year means that anyone can make a nomination without completing the full nomination process. This year will also acknowledge the work of Margaret Spalding, with the introduction of an Award in her honour.

For more information and nomination forms visit www.inclusionawards.com.au.
or email the Awards Coordinator on manager@blits.org.au

- Nominations close 3 of August 2009

- Award Submissions close 7 September 2009



Dr Colin Adrian

An Interview with an ACT BLITS Champion:

***Dr Colin Adrian
Chief Executive
Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT)***

Dr Colin Adrian signed on as a BLITS Champion in early 2008. We caught up with Colin to ask about his experience thus far and what it means to him to be a BLITS Champion.

Colin, tells us about your first impressions when you joined BLITS as a BLITS Champion.

Knowledge of, interest and involvement in the disability sector were essential in my role as Deputy Chief Executive in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. It was in that role that I had the advantage of being involved in the early discussions about BLITS and the opportunity to watch it develop from the earliest stages. Having this initial involvement and seeing how this different approach to interacting with business and the disability community could produce positive results for individuals was rewarding, and also touched me deeply.

After moving to the CIT as Chief Executive, I was delighted to be asked to become a Champion. I saw this as an opportunity to stay directly in touch with BLITS and continue to support the organisation and most importantly, the BLITS objectives.

The CIT won an Inclusion award in 2008, can you tell us more about that?

In my new role at the CIT it was immediately impressive to learn of the work already underway to ensure equality of access for all students, including those in the disability community. I was amazed that CIT had not previously considered entering the

Institute for an award in the Chief Ministers Inclusion Awards. It was clear the staff and management had been pro-active and genuine about the role they played in ensuring a positive experience for those with a disability in the education sector. For example CIT's dedicated Disability Support Officers have actively supported the highly successful Post School Options Expo. The Institute has also produced a comprehensive Resource Handbook for Teachers of Students with Disabilities.

Nonetheless, and despite the CIT winning an Inclusion Award in 2008, I saw this position as an opportunity to further work with employees and management here to continue to improve access and opportunities for students with a disability.

Where do you see the opportunity for the CIT now?

We want to continue to increase our focus on the transition phase, the transition between students exiting the school and college system and entering the workforce and in many cases further training and study. This can often be a difficult phase for any student - for a student with a disability there is an extra degree of challenge. Looking closely at this, we identified a growing demand for enhanced student support and equipment tailored to meet the needs of students with a disability.

While funding is always an issue, and there are great demands on the Canberra budget, the CIT did gain additional funding from Government in 2008/09 to support customised student support programs and to provide additional adaptive software and computers that can be accessed by students with special needs at any CIT campus.

How does the CIT assist in relation to its own workforce?

The Institute provides a highly supportive environment, a supportive workplace. We currently employ more than 30 individuals who self identify as having a disability. This is a significant number, but we employ more than 900 people in total and feel we can do more, not only to be as inclusive a workplace as possible, but also to encourage greater participation of people with a disability in our workforce.

We are doing all we can to attract employees with a disability into the Institute and have recently signed an agreement with Advance Personnel with the objective of increasing the numbers.

Another great opportunity for us to assist in increasing the participation of people with disability in the workforce was to support Jackmail. We got involved at a production team level to assist with the DVDs to promote Jackmail and this has helped achieve a positive outcome for Jackson and his family.

Do you see private sector business attitudes changing?

Yes I do, primarily in three areas.

The strongest areas of change relate to issues concerning physical access. I think the city today is quite different from five, 10 and certainly 20 years ago - in terms of respect for people with physical disability and in many areas in terms of access.

Secondly, employers in general have improved in terms of awareness of the array of disabilities and the need to meet their needs.

And lastly, there seems to be some improvement in terms of pay and position. In the past, employers have seen people with a disability as being only suited for low level, low paid work. The reality is that people with a disability can fit a wide array of employment opportunities and contribute fully in the workplace. I encourage staff and students to have a 'no limits' attitude.

It must be said, we still have a long way to go and we cannot underestimate the task ahead, but there seems to be definite signs of momentum and more positive examples and results.

What will be the main drivers to this change in your view?

No doubt several aspects of business awareness and acceptance are vital to drive this change - a mixture of sustainable commercial benefit, moral responsibility, legal entrenchment of human rights and the discovery of social benefits derived by making inclusion part of the business culture and policy.

Training is of course also key, providing people in the disability sector with the best training not only prepares them for the workforce but empowers them to have a greater say and array of skills than they might have had otherwise.

Effectively raising awareness remains of fundamental importance - we need to actively encourage good news stories and promote the outcomes of those examples, not just via the media, but on an individual basis also. To some extent that is how the Champion program works, reaching people in key positions to become, if not quite achievers, peaceful activists and catalysts for change.

About Colin Adrian

Colin Adrian arrived in Canberra 1977 for a three month visit - and never left. He has raised two boys, now 26 and 21. He and his partner Lorraine enjoy the Canberra lifestyle, regional wines and dining. Colin loves cooking, reading and gardening. A former marathon runner and A-grade tennis player, Colin is passionate about Canberra and its promotion.

DISABILITY TOURISM = SMART THINKING

As mentioned in the Chair's message, the Champion Round Table events are a new initiative for BLITS. A number of the BLITS Champions have agreed to host industry based round tables focusing on their area of expertise.

The aim is to create a highly focused environment examining both the opportunities and the barriers which surround the goal of improving the presence and participation of people with disabilities particular business sectors.

In early May, Simonne Shepherd, General Manager of Australian Capital Tourism hosted our very first event. A summary of the outcomes of this event is covered here.

The Tourism Industry Round Table was attended by representatives of Canberra's key attractions attractions and hotels including The Australian War Memorial, The National Zoo and Aquarium, Crown Plaza, Country Guesthouse Schoenegg, Hyatt Hotel Canberra, Australian Capital Tourism and the Tourism Industry Council ACT.

"We know that as the population ages the number of people with a disability is expected to increase.

"Considering that, it makes sense for the tourism industry to think now about how it is approaching this market" Ms Shepherd said.

"Hosting the mini-round table provided a great opportunity to get together with key people in the ACT tourism industry to really examine how accessible, marketable and inclusive we are to people to a disability and those that travel with them."

While information on current accessible tourism offerings in the ACT and region is available through the Canberra and Regional Visitors Centre, the group identified the need for further consideration by individual operators on their product offering in relation to accessible tourism.

"Through the round table, participants were encouraged to consider what business opportunities could be available to them in this segment"

Industry members participating in the round table expressed an interest in investigating how their product may be included in the marketing planned for the soon to be launched 'Companion Card' initiative.

"In the coming months, the Federal Government will release a National Tourism Accreditation Framework.

"Along with our industry, we will look at how we can use the framework to be more 'disability friendly' and ensure appropriate information is readily available, particularly via our website.

"The group was also mindful of the need to talk directly with people who have a disability when considering any future product development."

"Any business that isn't accessible or welcoming of people with disability is sure to be missing out on a large number of potential customers."

Did you know?

> That in Australia in 2003-04, it is estimated those tourists with a disability spent between \$8000 million and \$1100 million; and

> People with a disability sustained between 51,820 and 77,495 direct jobs in the tourism industry. That's 11.6%- 17.3% of direct tourism employment.

> An estimated 3.7 million trips per year are taken by individuals with a physical disability, totaling to some 29.8 million nights

> The total amount spent by all people with a disability on their last holiday adds to approximately \$472 million Australia wide.



Simonne Shepherd

Simonne Shepherd became a BLITS Champion in 2008. Simonne is General Manager, Australian Capital Tourism. She joined Australian Capital Tourism on 30 July 2007 and comes to the ACT with over 20 years experience in the tourism industry, both at a national and international level.



**#1 Ranking Australian Table Tennis Champion
Patrick Horn with parents Stephen and
Rosanna**

Powerful Profile - Patrick Horn

Patrick Horn is a young man with an amazing talent. He is currently ranked number one in Australia for Table Tennis - Class 6*. Patrick has held this title for several years now and has an international world ranking of 49.

Patrick has represented Australia in several international table tennis events for athletes with a disability, in Korea in 2005 and 2007, Germany and Italy in 2006, Malaysian in 2006, and Darwin and Hong Kong in 2007. At the Arafura Games this year in Darwin, Patrick came home with gold, silver and bronze medals. Patrick also competes in local able-bodied competitions.

Patrick's table tennis career started when he was just 9 years of age, all thanks to his grandfather who is credited with allowing Patrick to play on his own table tennis table Sydney.

Later, Patrick and his younger sister Thea were regularly taken to the ACT Centre in Kingston on Saturday's for coaching. Patrick clearly remembers Arthur Wilks OAM giving him his first real lessons. But playing is not easy for Patrick, who has cerebral palsy and difficulties combining the balance and quick response time required for the game.

Patrick is working towards selections for the next Paralympic Games in London and is also lobbying for the inclusion of table tennis for athletes with a disability in the Commonwealth Games (currently it only allows women class 1-5 -wheelchairs- to participate).

Between his busy schedule of training, travel and competition, Patrick also finds time to promote the sport and encourage others to try it. He holds a formal Coaching Level Qualification and is involved in coaching sessions conducted at the ACT Table Tennis premises for high school students with a disability.

"Playing table tennis has always been a lot of fun for me. But I take it very seriously too and hope to represent Australia in London in 2012. And if not then, well, there are always the next Games", said Patrick

Patrick is also working to establish another regular table tennis group in Kingston on Tuesday mornings, with additional coaching sessions conducted on a one-to-one basis early Monday afternoons.

"Come and join me in Kingston in the ACT table tennis centre and we'll have a hit".

Table Tennis is a Paralympic sport. Athletes are classified into 11 classes, depending on the skills required for the sport and their ability (functional classification). Classes 1-5 are assigned to competitors who sit in a wheelchair while competing. Classes 6-10 are assigned to competitors who stand to compete and Class 11 is for all athletes with an intellectual disability.

Bill Shorten MP - The Right to an Ordinary Life

Earlier this year (April 2009), Bill Shorten MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services delivered an address to the National Press Club of Australia on the rights of people with disability to an ordinary life.

Mr Shorten spoke on how equality and better opportunities for people with disability can be achieved but emphasised the difficulty of the task, "Because it involves a change in the way we look at things; an honest appraisal of ourselves, a fresh approach to how we treat others, a deeper understanding of what it is to be part of humanity."



Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services Bill Shorten addresses the National Press Club of Australia

This change in attitude must come collectively from all members of the community.

"In a sense, impairments are not what disables people. What disables people is society's attitudes towards the impairment.

"That attitude - and the passive discrimination that comes with it - is one of the main reasons why people with disability are often defined by their disability, and not by their unique humanness."

In finishing his address Mr Shorten described what Australia should be like for all people including those with disability. He described an Australia where supports are easy to access and tailored to an individual's needs, where people are not judged based on their disability, where public buildings and transport are accessible and where the funding to make this happen is seen by society as a valuable investment and not a cost.

To read the address in full: [Bill Shorten National Press Club Address](#)

Recyclery - Riding the change of Sustainability and Inclusion

In a small workshop at the ANU, The Recyclery is transforming pre-loved bikes into functional gems. With a strong sense of environmental sustainability, this venture offers skill development, practical work experience and employment opportunities for people with disability.

The Recyclery was formed as a co-operative venture between the Canberra Environment and Sustainability Resource Centre, ANUgreen and LEAD Development Agency with support from the CPS community Foundations.

The idea is simple, old dusty bikes are donated, staff and volunteers replace and repair parts, apply a bit of grease and the end result is a functional and stylish bike available to anyone who needs one, improving access to low cost, sustainable transport.



Tim Sands at Recyclery

Jeff Thompson from LEAD who was fundamental in conceptualising and establishing the program further explains, "The Recyclery has two bike mechanics/support workers in paid positions - during the week 20 people who have a disability volunteer and six people with disabilities are paid workers. We have about five to 10 volunteers from the community and great support from Community CPS who send staff to help out on working bees and at the ANU Market day."

The Recyclery is a great skill building activity for people, focusing on recycling, rebuilding parts and pulling bikes apart for spares. LEAD also employs people with a disability to build bikes and trains people who have shown an interest and skill for working on bikes.

The future looks good for the Recyclery as Jeff explains, "LEAD is hoping to develop Recyclery to become a bike repair and spare parts hub for Canberra - we have established links with local bike retailers and plan to get people trained and working in the bike repair and retail industries."

The level of public support for this inclusive and sustainable venture can be seen in the demand for bikes, "We can't build bikes fast enough! We've recently added an extra mechanic to try and up our output of bikes."

For more information contact: www.recyclery.com.au

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