

BLITS E-Newsletter July 2010

Message from the Chair

Welcome to another edition of the BLITS E-news.

The last few months have seen a flurry of activity, bringing us to the end of the financial year. BLITS has been a part of this, but there have been a number of great initiatives coming from other groups, such as National Disability Services and the ACT Social Enterprises Hub.

With July here already, it's time to start thinking about the **2010 Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards**. The date for your diary is **Thursday 7 October** and to get the ball rolling, BLITS has officially opened the awards by calling for nominations.

Nomination forms can be downloaded from these links: [Nomination form \(PDF\)](#) [Nomination form \(Word\)](#)

Award categories options are listed on the nomination forms and more information is available on the Inclusion Awards Website at www.inclusionawards.com.au

We know that the profile of the Awards - and what they seek to achieve - is growing each year so can I ask that you keep in mind any business, organisation or individual you may know who is deserving of a nomination.

In this issue of BLITS E-news, we focus on Australia Disability Enterprise, and specifically what's been happening with social enterprise in the ACT. This is a truly exciting area, and one that is getting great momentum right across Australia.

I am delighted that BLITS is a supporter of local initiatives and I congratulate everyone who is engaged in developing and delivering on great opportunities for people who are otherwise excluded from mainstream employment.

As well, you'll read about a Champion, Mirinda Lawrence, the recent Australian Disability Enterprise Expo and an update on BLITS Two Inch Lip, an accessibility awareness raising program for business.

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

This newsletter can also be found on the BLITS website in the E-News section. The BLITS website (www.blits.org.au) provides font size variable controls for user convenience. In this issue:

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 - **An Interview a Champion - Mirinda Lawrence**
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Ronnie's Succulent Snails - A Growing Industry

Ronnie loves sport, animals and his family. He is 21 years old and has lives in Canberra. Ronnie has a moderate intellectual disability and serious chronic epileptic condition. Due to the nature of his disabilities, traditional employment options have not, to date, been an option for him.

Ronnie and his family were determined to find a sustainable career that would help support his physical, mental and social development. Give the nature of Ronnie's high and complex support needs, this career would preferably be one that would allow him to work from home.

After months of research, Mirinda Lawrence (see Interview with a Champion in this newsletter) came up with the idea to start a business breeding, growing and supplying snails for consumption in restaurants - and Ronnie's Snails was born.

Through Mirinda's determination and relying on expert assistance from the ACT Social Enterprise Hub this business was launched in April this year.

ACT Social Enterprise Hub manager Mandy Richards said, "This was an innovative and practical idea for a business, one that perfectly suits Ronnie and the family and one that can continue to develop for many years to come. This business has the potential to really expand and provide an improved quality of life as well as generate an income not only for Ronnie but possibly others in the future.

"Providing business mentoring and various other forms of business support via pro-bono corporate partners such as Papercut graphic design and Walter Turnbull is vital for start-up social enterprises. This support is a key component to assisting people with disabilities to access employment in an equitable manner. Thanks to Government and philanthropic support from business leaders in the ACT community, we are delighted to see this business successfully launch and begin operations."

Story Links

For more information, news stories and details about Ronnie's Succulent Snails:

[Ronnie's Succulent Snails](#)

[ABC Riverland News - video and text interview](#)

[Riot ACT news items](#)

[Snails Bon Appetite](#)



Interview with a Champion - Mirinda Lawrence

To date this article slot has been dedicated to our public BLITS Champions and this will continue later this year, but for this newsletter we want to profile a Champion of another sort, a mother and resourceful Champion for Ronnie Lawrence, of Ronnie's Succulent Snails.

As you know probably already know from the extensive media coverage Ronnie's Succulent Snails has attracted over recent months (see the story in this issue for more information and links)

As explained in the preceding story, Ronnie is a 21 year old with moderate intellectual disability and serious chronic epileptic condition. Mirinda worked with Ronnie to conceptualise and start this snail supply business.

Here is a little of what Mirinda had to say:

Mirinda, how did the idea for Ronnie's Succulent Snails come about?

As a family, we decided that a home-based business that Ronnie could actively be involved in but remain in an environment where his high and complex needs could be met would be our best option. In fact, it was really the only employment-based option for the immediate future. From this seed of an idea, I started researching options. Dog walking and several other ideas appeared and were dismissed for a variety of reasons. We looked at hydroponics, biscuit manufacturing and a range of other options not related to animals, before I stumbled on the idea of a snail farm. We needed something that was simple enough for Ronnie to do and something where others are not dependent on his service. Due to his medical condition we cannot guarantee that he will provide a service on a regular basis, so we needed some inbuilt flexibility.

How did you start?

I was attending a regular meeting with the Department and happened to mention that I had this business idea I thought would really work. One of the managers attending this meeting immediately suggested an introduction to the ACT Social Enterprise Hub, where I met Mandy Richards. (Mandy Richards is the manager of the ACT Social Enterprises Hub). Things just took off from there. Mandy was marvellous, she provided encouragement and advice and brought in one of the Enterprises Hub supporters, Walter Turnbull. Walter Turnbull provided financial and business planning advice giving us a sound basis on which to proceed.

After this, we applied for an ACT Innovation Grant - which we were fortunate enough to win! With this seed funding, encouragement and professional advice this business started to become a reality.

What happened next?

I started looking for a business partner, someone to take us on as their supplier, and found one! Snails Bon Appetite is a well-established and proven commercial supplier of snails for restaurants all over the country. After a number of meetings, climbing a rather steep learning curve and setting up the equipment we were off and running. While we are happy to sell to local

restaurants and chefs who need live product, we needed a larger primary purchaser. 'Snails Bon Appetite' provided training, material supply (specialty feeding and detoxing snail food) and ongoing support.

Detoxing? It this important?

Oh yes, I mentioned the learning curve before. Snails are a terrific protein and food source, but they need to have a special diet and preparation regime before they hit the plate. But as well as the special detox food we also provide a range of foods natural to the snail's environment - lettuce and other green vegetables. The local IGA supports us here by providing a regular supply of this produce. All to make sure the snails develop into the best possible quality for end consumption.



When did you launch the business?

We held the formal launch of the business in April this year and thanks to Mandy and terrific media and event management by Jane Speechley (also of the ACT Social Enterprise Hub) it was a terrific success. The logo design and invitations were provided by PaperCut (another ACT Social Enterprise Hub supporter). We attracted a lot of attention and we were inundated with media coverage.

What has happened since the launch?

We have been expanding our production equipment and our first greenhouse was completed shortly after the launch. Right now we are continuing work in this direction, winter is the right time for this as the 'herds' are asleep - hibernating.

Where to you source your stock?

Two avenues really, we canvass people to let us collect their snails, this rather than use nasty poisons that are bad for our environment and can be dangerous or even fatal for pets, especially dogs. Just call us and we will collect your snails for you! The second way is through breeding, one snail will produce an average of 100 eggs, twice year. We must grow them to standard and food and safety requirements, but between these two methods we believe we can grow a sustainable supply business.

What have been the benefits, for Ronnie, the family, for you?

We love getting outdoors and having a regular focus that takes us there, but on a broader level, it is great to offer Ronnie another level of purpose, ownership and another kind of sense of belonging. But I must admit, now that we are set up - we also have great fun doing it.

Any advice for families in similar situations?

If you are looking for a starting a business for similar reasons as we had, find something that fits in terms of interest and your particular situation, but also look outside the box.

I cannot say it is easy at first, it can even be a bit daunting, but if you are determined, it can be done. And remember, there is so much help around now, so much more than before, as well as an increased focus on people with disabilities and an increased awareness of how business can get involved.

Thank you Mirinda!



National Disability Services *Purchasing with Purpose - Australian Disability Enterprise Expo!*



National Disability Services, Australia's peak body for disability services, recently hosted an industry event showcasing the capabilities of Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs).

The Purchasing with Purpose Expo featured more than 40 different ADEs covering such diverse business lines as printing, packaging, cleaning, catering, branding and even e-cycling. With a strong focus on increasing Government procurement from ADEs, the Expo was launched by The Hon Bill Shorten MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, and attracted an audience from ACT and Federal Government, the private sector and the not-for-profit sector.



In his speech, Mr Shorten noted that there are some 600 ADEs providing meaningful employment for more than 20,000 Australians with disability. Stressing the important quality of life benefits that employment can bring, Mr Shorten urged people to support the sustainability of the ADE sector through their purchasing choices.

"Buying from an ADE is a great way to support employment opportunities for people with disability because it's not about spending more money," National Disability Procurement Manager Louise Gray, said. "It is simply a matter of thinking about your suppliers and, where possible, choosing an ADE."

ADEs are commercial organisations with a strong business focus, able to deliver high quality goods and services nationally. A full list of all Australian Disability Enterprises is available at www.australiandisabilityenterprises.com.au/.

If you missed this Expo - find a list of exhibitors and their contact information at: [NDS Purchasing with Purpose Exhibitors](#)



Café Ink Offers Opportunity and Great Product

Café Ink, the latest accredited social enterprise to be formally launched this year in Canberra, was opened by Chief Minister Jon Stanhope on 10 June at the Woden Library.



Café Ink is a social enterprise providing job opportunities for those in need, and providing this employment in a vibrant and supportive environment.

During the official launch Chief Minister Stanhope said, "Businesses like Café Ink provide opportunities for some of the most vulnerable and isolated members of our community to participate in the workforce, Café Ink is an example of how social inclusion can be achieved in the workplace with the right combination of market knowledge, opportunity and goodwill."

Café Ink Manager Matt Gallagher put forward his views, "Café Ink provides a mix of social interaction and employment opportunities for people who have previously been excluded from traditional employment pathways and proves that this can be accomplished in a successful business environment.

"The development and launch of Café Ink has been made possible through assistance provided by the ACT Social Enterprises Hub and unwavering support by the Hub manager, Mandy Richards."

ACT Government Policy Announced

The occasion of the launch of Café Ink brought an unexpected bonus. The Chief Minister took the opportunity at the launch to announce plans for the ACT Government to change its tender process to favour organisations that employ people with disabilities and the long-term unemployed.

"This ACT Government initiative aims to break down some of the barriers faced by people with disabilities wanting to enter the workforce by making it easier for organisations that employ people with disabilities to win Government contracts," Mr Stanhope said. "The changes will mean that ACT Government departments and agencies must consider the social benefits of awarding contracts to such organisations alongside some of the more competitive requirements."

Next time you find yourself in the Woden area, stop in for a coffee at the Woden Library's Café Ink, lunch or a light meal and support this terrific business.



BLITS Two Inch Lip

BLITS has recently contacted over 80 businesses in the Canberra CBD area. Some of these businesses currently offer a reasonable level of accessibility. Unfortunately a number do not.

The purpose behind this program is to raise awareness of seemingly insignificant barriers; such as a small two inch lip at the entrance to the business and a range of other barriers making entry by sensory or mobility impaired individuals difficult or even hazardous.

Where businesses have reasonable access at the point of entry, a range of additional suggestions to improve accessibility concerning the inside the premises were provided along with strong the rationale for doing so.

Where businesses currently have obvious problems even at the point of entry, the initial contact explained how this negatively impacts the business, offering suggestions for improvement here as well hints and tips across a range of other common access problems.

BLITS is in the process of conducting door to door follow up of these initial contacts to press home the importance of improving access for all members of the community.

Watch this space for more information next issue. Thanks to Belinda Gunn of the Citizen's Advice Bureau for her advice on the Two Inch Lip program.

The ACT Social Enterprise Hub



An initiative of Social Ventures Australia, The ACT Social Enterprise Hub was formally launched in June 2009 by a partnership made up of:

- **Social Ventures Australia (SVA);**
- **PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC);**
- **The Snow Foundation;**
- **Mental Health Community Coalition (MHCC);**
- **ACT Health, and;**
- **The Department of Housing and Community Services ACT.**



On July 29 the Hub is celebrating its first formal year celebration of this initiative with partners, supporters, social enterprise teams and other interested parties.

Since inception the following businesses have commenced with the support of the Hub and several more are in research or development phase.

Noah's Ark Childcare Centre - A childcare centre www.noahsarkresourcecentre.com

Café Ink - Café (eat-in or takeaway) and catering service www.wcs.org.au

Ronnie's Succulent Snails - Snail farming for the restaurant industry www.ronniessucculentsnails.com.au

Paperworks - Production and decoration of fine hand-crafted paper products www.paperworks.org.au

Burrnju Aboriginal Corporation - An Aboriginal art gallery www.aboriginal-arts.com.au

Happy Birthday and Congratulations to the ACT Hub!

The ACT Social Enterprise Hub was established under Social Ventures Australia with the help of PricewaterhouseCoopers, the Snow Foundation, the Mental Health Community Coalition, DHCS and ACT Health.



Thank you to Mel Hill, Mel Hill Photography for providing BLITS W-News images.

www.melhillphotography.com

