

## BLITS E-Newsletter - October 09

### Message from the Chair

**Welcome to the October 2009 edition of the BLITS E-news.**

September has been humming with activity - and more on that in a moment.

First, a quick reminder to all about the 2009 ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards presentation and cocktail party. I understand that judges have had a tough task in selecting winners, saying they have been highly impressed with the quality, number and variety of nominations this year - which just shows that momentum is growing.

It all happens at 6pm on Thursday 22 October, Great Hall, Parliament House.

For a booking form and more information go to [www.inclusionawards.com.au](http://www.inclusionawards.com.au) (tickets are still only \$40 per person/\$25 concession).

I look forward to seeing you at this very prestigious event.

Major achievements this month include the launch of a key policy strategy for people with disability: Future Directions; a very successful BLITS Round Table and the launch of the ACT Companion Card.



### Future Directions: Towards Challenge 2014

More than 150 guests gathered at the sparkling new Belconnen Arts Centre right on the lake's edge for the launch of Future Directions: Towards Challenge 2014 on 23 September. This document sets out clearly and simply, the policy direction across ACT Government and community for disability policy and service delivery over the next five years.

The strategy is based around six clear statements outlining our priorities that evolved out of extensive consultation with the community and government. Future Directions is a bold strategy that sets a positive course for people with disability in the ACT. I encourage you visit [www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability\\_act/sgg](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability_act/sgg) to find out more.

On deck for the launch were Mary Porter MLA representing ACT Government, inspiring guest speakers Gail Aiken (managing director of mpowerdome), Sally Richards (BLITS board member and founder of JACKMail) and Trevor Robinson, Chair of Disability ACT. The MC was Hamish MacDonald in his first official task as a new BLITS Board Member (see more below).



**Glenn Keys, BLITS Board Member and Co-Founder Aspen Medical**

### The BLITS Round Table 2009

I was delighted that our most recent BLITS Round Table in September was part of the ACT Government's Business in Focus Month. The Round Table events are one of the major ways that BLITS meets its aim to let ACT businesses know how they can start to engage with people with disability as customers, clients, employers and employees.

The event was held at the National Press Club, welcoming business delegates from a broad range of industries, key disability service providers and community members.

Presentations from BLITS board member Glenn Keys (Co founder Aspen Medical), BLITS Champion; Chris Peters, CEO of the ACT Chamber of Commerce and Mandy Richards from the ACT Social Enterprises Hub provided background and got discussions happening around the room.

We are already hearing about steps towards new opportunities for business engagement with people with disabilities and the board is looking forward to supporting and promoting these outcomes.



**Kate Pickering, BLITS Board Member and ACT Branch Manager Drake Medox, speaks with Round Table Delegates**

## Launch of the ACT Companion Card

This month also saw the launch of the ACT Companion Card program by Minister for Disability, John Hargreaves at the Dendy Cinema in Civic.

The Card is for people with disability who require attendant care support to go to ticketed activities, events or venues. Participating businesses issue a cardholder with a second ticket for their companion at no charge. The program is a practical way to increase opportunities for people with disability to be part of social and recreational life that so many of us take for granted.

The occasion was marked with the presentation of the first card in the ACT to Robert Altamore. Speakers at the launch included Chris Faulks, CEO of the Canberra Business Council, Trevor Robinson from the Disability Advisory Council while Andrew Whale, director Disability ACT steered the proceedings.



BLITS has had a major role in the 'behind the scenes' work on getting ACT businesses to sign on to the program. As Chris Faulks said so clearly - "the Companion Card is good for business". The program already has more than 30 businesses on board and we look forward to seeing many more businesses take up the opportunity. For more information visit [www.companioncard.act.gov.au](http://www.companioncard.act.gov.au)

## New BLITS Board Member

I have great pleasure in welcoming a new member to the BLITS board. Hamish MacDonald is a Senior Sport Consultant for the Australian Sports Commission and one of Australia's most accomplished and respected Paralympians.

Hamish brings with him a vast knowledge and understanding of state, national and international sports business and connections with a multitude of aligned sports industries. His enthusiastic support of BLITS objectives and his determination place him in a perfect position to work with business to make a difference for people with disability. For more about Hamish, please read the Powerful Profile in this edition of BLITS E-News.

## An Interview with a Champion

This month we feature our founding BLITS Champion, Dr Chris Peters, CEO of the ACT Chamber of Commerce. Chris has been with us from the start and at last we have an opportunity to tell you more about him and his commitment to BLITS as a Champion.

I trust you will enjoy finding out more about BLITS in our e-news. As always, we'd love to have your comments and ideas email us at [info@blits.org.au](mailto:info@blits.org.au)

Lois Ford

Chair

BLITS

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## ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards

When: Thursday 22 October, 6pm

Where: Great Hall Parliament House

Tickets: \$40.00 / \$25 for people with a disability

Booking form: [www.inclusionawards.com.au/](http://www.inclusionawards.com.au/)

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## One Year On...

### Australia's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Sunday 16 August 2009, marked the first anniversary of Australia becoming internationally legally bound by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This was a significant milestone in the protection and recognition of the rights of people with disabilities at an international level.

According to the United Nations the Convention has the potential to change the quality of life of 650 million people worldwide who have some degree of disability.

In Australia the Convention will impact on the twenty percent of Australians that identify as experiencing some level of disability. David Heckendorf, a person with a disability currently undertaking a PhD on Law and disability further explains the features of the Convention. "It is similar in nature to a contract between countries to take positive steps to ensure that people with a disability can enjoy the same rights and freedoms that other people take for granted."

"The Convention identifies approximately twenty-five rights and freedoms, some of which are expected to be fully realised immediately, such as the right to be free from cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. Other rights are expected to be progressively realised, such as accessibility to public buildings and transport."

David believes that the ACT is on the way to full compliance with the convention thanks to its antidiscrimination and human rights legislation; however we still have a way to go.

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**Dr Chris Peters**

## An Interview with an ACT BLITS Champion

Dr Chris Peters AM

Chief Executive

ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce

*Dr Chris Peters was a 'founding' Champion of BLITS. Attending the first Business Leaders Round Table in 2005, Chris has continued to support BLITS in a myriad of ways since that event. He and the Chamber co-hosted the first BLITS networking business function in 2006, Business after Business at the Dendy Theatre. Chris was awarded an honorary Doctorate by the University of Canberra for services to business this year.*

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

### **Chris, why is it important to you to assist BLITS?**

In a relatively small city like Canberra we have an advantage over larger cities as many members of the community are not only in a position to contribute but they can see the effect of their efforts. As the primary focus of BLITS and therefore their audience is the business community and given my interest and commitment to assisting the business community, the fit of this relationship is more than appropriate. In short, I believe by assisting BLITS in any way I can I am also assisting both the commercial and the social aspects of our community.

In addition to this, Canberra benefits from being one of the best educated cities per capital in Australian, but like the rest of Australia, we have a proportion of our society which is totally marginalised. I believe anyone who can contribute to improving this situation in any way to strive for a more just a more equal community has a responsibility to do so. I am lucky enough to be one of those people so I will continue to do what I can.

### **How do you think the Champion program has developed so far?**

I think the program has given BLITS an opportunity to extend their reach beyond their initial resource base.

By selecting a range of Champions from a variety of industries the message penetration is maximised at a leadership level. The leaders are using their own networks to encourage business operators and owners to think about the value to them, their business and the community more broadly about the value of engaging with people with disabilities at all levels.

**How do you see the Chamber of Commerce providing support?**

People with disabilities have a wide range of skills to offer the business community and some businesses know this, but frankly, most do not. Skill shortages in the workforce are often an issue. The more that can be done to raise awareness not only of this option, of how to seek out and employ people with disabilities and of the support available to ensure access barriers are removed, the better.

**What so you see are the largest barriers to employment for people with disabilities?**

Changing attitudes through education is everything. While there is evidence of some positive change by employers there is still an overriding attitude that employing people with disabilities is too hard, too difficult. We need to more clearly explain the options and open the virtual doors to employment but most of all send the message that we ignore between 17% and 20% of the workforce resource of our community.

**What do you think are the current priorities?**

There are wide ranges of service providers delivering assistance to people with disabilities and in some cases to employers engaging people with disabilities, but I do not believe it is easy for employers to find the options quickly or even understand the range of services available. Providing an easy to access point where options were provided and where options were packaged to suit a variety of needs in a range of situations would be a constructive start to remedy this situation. This would also provide a powerful communication point that peak business industry bodies could promote.

**About Dr Christopher Peters AM (Chris)**

Chris represents business on over 20 ACT government boards or committees, including 3 statutory authorities. He is on the Board of several public companies and a number of community organisations including: CEO of the Retail Traders Association ACT and Region, Deputy Chairman of the Tourism Industry Council (ACT and Region), Managing Director of the Australian Industry and Defence Network, Chairman of the Multicultural Business Chamber of Australia and Chairman of the Indigenous Business Chamber of Australia.



**Hamish MacDonald**

## Powerful profile - Hamish MacDonald

*The Powerful Profile this month features Hamish MacDonald, a Senior Sport Consultant for the Australian Sports Commission and one of Australia's greatest and most respected Paralympians.*

Hamish is a member of the Australian National Paralympic team and is currently the World Champion in seated shot put. He has competed in every summer Paralympic games since 1992, holds two gold medals and was named the 2003 Male Athlete with a Disability of the Year after breaking his own World Record in at the 2002 World Championships. Hamish went on to retain his World Title at the 2006 IPC World Athletics Championships in Holland.

As well as being an exceptional sportsman, Hamish is also an exceptional person. He works at a local, national and international level to educate others, raise awareness, and dispel common myths regarding people with a disability. Hamish is currently a member of the International Paralympic Committee Athlete Commission. He has also been involved with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) since 1998, travelling to two refugee camps on the Thai/Cambodian border. Hamish also represented the World Anti-Doping Authority (WADA) at the 2003 South Pacific Games as an athlete ambassador to help raise awareness of drugs in sport.

Hamish recently travelled to several islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific to implement sports programs for athletes with disabilities. A legend both on and off the track, Hamish MacDonald is a true inspiration to us all.