

**Quote of the month:**

**"I don't have to go begging charities....It feels pretty degrading to have your partner pay for everything....The best part is meeting people and being out...." The Age, 30/5/07, page 16.**

**What is this person talking about? Her job, selling The Big Issue. She is wheelchair-bound and can only communicate using a pointer. The quotes from the article highlight what ADDE is all about – creating a society where people with disability can find their niche in the world of work.**

**CONTENTS:****Presidents report****Simon's story****Out of the shadows – the barriers facing the blind****Stephen Gianni Churchill Fellowship report – the German Model****The World According to ME!****Peter's job application story****Budget Highlights**

**This issue of our newsletter shows people's struggle to find work. Peter Rickards' report shows lots of activity on the part of the ADDE committee resulting in the start of some fantastic projects. He has also found time to write a piece about his experience applying for work, telling about the difficulty of disclosing ones disability in job applications.**

**Simon's (assumed name) story on his struggle to get workers compensation for injuries sustained while at work and the**

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**subsequent difficulties in finding work show the realities of coping with a disability.**

**An article from The Sydney Morning Herald reminds us all about the barriers blind people face in seeking work. The stats from Vision Australia show the stark reality of discouraged unemployed – 5 times the national average.**

**Stephen Gianni from Leadershipplus contributed to our February newsletter with a summary of his Churchill fellowship experience in England and has another instalment about the German model showing the all encompassing program of legislation and how it promotes people with disabilities to positions of Leadership.**

**Please don't miss the article by Alan Bartlett entitled 'The world according to ME!' A very concise, well written piece which follows the theme of the systemic problems of DSP (Disability Support Pensions) and how they make it difficult for PWD to look for work.**

**A few 'wins' for the disability employment sector in this years state budget finishes this newsletter – enjoy the read and send me your comments, responses, ideas and stories.**

**Kathy Leitch – editor (kathy\_leitch@hotmail.com)**

## **PRESIDENTS REPORT**

“We have been kicking goals”, which is a good analogy for this time of year.

First our National Forum on employment and disability is scheduled for Wednesday July 18 in Melbourne and will follow the 1<sup>st</sup> national disability advocacy conference at which representatives from all around Australia will be attending. This will enable us to piggyback off this conference to minimize expense for delegates. This forum ADDE is hosting (with support from Australian Ethical Investment Ltd) is for representatives of State and National networks and organizations to further develop a coordinated approach to advocacy, information sharing, and developing practical solutions to employment and disability. If you represent such a network and would like to attend contact me for further information, and application form.

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Second big project, which will get under way in the next few months (managed by Equity Research Centre), is our major research project to study levels of employment of people with disabilities in the disability agency sector in Victoria. This project has been made possible through tremendous support from Reichstein Foundation, Helen McPherson Smith Trust, and ANZ Trustees. Although this research will be Victorian based because these trusts have a Victorian focus, we hope the research will have national implications. Some of the questions to be asked are:

- ❖ How well are disability agencies leading from the front in employment of PWD?
- ❖ What good and bad employment practice/s are out there?
- ❖ Do agencies have pro-active and measurable employment targets for PWD?
- ❖ Does volunteering by PWD with disability agencies lead to paid employment within those agencies?
- ❖ What can and should be done to improve employment outcomes and lift the bar?

Thirdly ADDE has received funding from DVC (Department of Victorian Communities) under their “Social Enterprise Program” to develop a business plan. We are looking at ways to undertake this process in a participatory way and to also develop skills and training for people from our disability and diversity target groups who are unemployed or under employed, who can take the business plan forward into the future. Will keep you posted as thinking and ideas translate more into reality.

The accompanying photo shows Peter Rickards (ADDE President) and Amanda (ADDE Vice President) being presented with the Certificate denoting our grant to do the ADDE Business Plan, from the Social Enterprise funding program. Fiona Richardson (middle), State Member for Northcote presented the certificate to ADDE at ACL (Action for Community Living) offices.



## **SIMON'S STORY**

Joined the Government Mental Health Services in 1966 in a 1200 bed Hospital, covering admissions from South Australia & The Northern Territory. As a Registered Psychiatric Nurse I covered all areas including Acute, Sub Acute, Chronic and Gerontic. Worked twelve- hour shifts of various configurations. Late 70's, transferred to General Hospital setting-- One of first group of males to enter the female gender specific domain. Returned to Psych until relocating interstate in 1982, joining the Community Health Services / Mental Health. Serving in O.H.S. & Gerontic and later, acute areas until I had to retire in Nov 2005 due to being unable to full fill my duty statement.

In that span of time it has been my privilege to have met and worked beside some wonderful people. I experienced a lifetime of human tragedy but also personal fulfilment. I also had to contend with incidents that resulted in injuries to myself, and others. The majority were reported and achieved satisfactory recovery. Others, seemingly minor in

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nature, have contributed to some of the chronic conditions that plague me from time to time while some continue to have a place in my daily existence. A reminder to myself that all incidents can and should be recorded under the act of various State legislation but are dismissed as inconsequential by yourself or sometimes, persons in-authority.

Two incidents that led to my failure to continue on in my profession follow. Cutting short my expectations of continuing until I wanted to leave/ retire, instead prematurely ending my personal and financial expectations that would end far short of my projected future needs. Incidences occurring in the early 90's and mid 90's all in the line of duty, produced an injury of a chronic injury to my left knee. Diagnosed as meniscus tear. This resulted in being unable to weight bear and reduced mobility. Experiencing ongoing pain and discomfort and decreasing operational mobility as was essential to my chosen career. I was unable to work.

Rehabilitation was commenced, ran the full gamut including physical, hydrotherapy, weights, special exercise, and of course medications for which I am grateful. Limited response to accepted treatments and minor surgical interventions.

Regarding rehabilitation. Funds that are set aside for any persons rehabilitation have a financial limit. If you are injured the funds are being used to support your return to the work place. Meaning that the system is geared to people that recover from the injury and return to the work place. But in cases that become long term and involve ongoing rehab with signs and symptoms still presenting. The funds available naturally dwindle, so treatments costs etc will end up coming out of your pocket. Back to work with limited hours program, restricted contacts etc but the only thing changed was that the right knee became just as painful, due to being under increasing pressure from carrying the load away from my injured left knee. Specialists were consulted with the cause stated as loss of approx 1/3 articulate cartilage.

Gov Insurance Medical Officers responded with " Disputes liability to pay compensation" on treatments, medications consultants etc. As time continued without any further improvement, I had no option but to consult with a Professional legal person, In an attempt to clear this never ending saga. I was extremely lucky, as I had at all time the full support of my G.P.

Ongoing with The Public Prosecutor another 2 years with threats of court action if no result was forthcoming. If you did choose to challenge your case in court armed with supportive documents and specialist who are willing to substantiate or support your claim there are **No Guarantees**. **The Public Prosecutor** will have their armful to present to the court, confident they are equal to the task or they would not be there in the first case. The decision handed down may not be in your favour and perhaps you could incur all court costs. Not all rehabilitation system /funds are alike so every scenario would be different based on variations involved.

The Dept offered interviews for alternative placement but offered nothing at each sitting with the interview coming to a close within 5 mins.  
Result 1- Chronic pain associated with loss of mobility [planning of least impact] leading to further frustration, reduced income, depression, insomnia, reduced ability for any future employment, a very restricted social life and the enemy of all, stress!, which never leaves.  
Result 2- Relocated to Victoria in June 2006, following in the footsteps of the younger 'set', who had found employment here.  
Still applying for positions if...if... I fit the criteria!

## **OUT OF THE SHADOWS: THE BARRIERS FACING THE BLIND**

Source: Sydney Morning Herald

Adele Horin

March 26, 2007

AN ALARMING 63 per cent of potential workers who are blind or have low vision are unemployed or too discouraged to look for work, figures released by the leading blindness agency, Vision Australia, show.

This is five times the national average. "We were shocked at the high rate, particularly of discouraged workers," said the chief executive of Vision Australia, Gerard Menses, who released the report at a forum on blindness in Canberra some weeks ago.

The survey, the first of its kind, shows that 53 per cent of those who want a job have given up looking because they are too disheartened.

Even 34 per cent of those with postgraduate degrees were unemployed.

Mr Menses said such levels were unacceptable in an age when advanced technology had lessened many of the barriers blind people faced at work.

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For example, screen readers that used a synthetic voice to read emails and internet text had revolutionised employment possibilities.

"There's still a perception among employers that disability is a liability rather than an asset," he said. "There's a need to raise awareness that with some simple adaptive technology blind people are as productive as sighted people."

Jason Merkley, 32, is a high school teacher at Mercy Catholic College in Chatswood. Although he is legally blind - having lost about 98 per cent of his vision when he was 20 - he teaches English and history to more than 150 students, including at HSC level.

Mr Merkley has worked in Canada and France, and he was surprised to find how hard it was to get a job in Australia. "But I'm a highly motivated and persistent person," he said.

He listens to school English texts on audio, and his screen reader technology allows him to hear poetry - and other material - on the internet. It also reads out loud the essays that his students email to his laptop. Also, a super screen magnifier allows him to use the small amount of vision he has left.

As for controlling the classroom, Mr Merkley said: "I don't see but I know exactly what's happening in my classroom. I catch them doing wrong through listening. I can hear a note being passed across a desk. But I can say the students never take advantage of my lack of sight."

The school's principal, Ray Paxton, said Mr Merkley was the best candidate for the job. "We had seen him teaching here as a student teacher. He's excellent. The only issues were how we could best support him - and getting the message through to students that they couldn't play with or pat his guide dog, Whisky. It's a working dog."

The survey, based on interviews with nearly 1900 blind people of working age, revealed 26 per cent were unemployed in January compared with a national average of 4.5 per cent. But this figure increased to 63 per cent when discouraged workers were included compared with a national average of 14 per cent.

Mr Menses said a lot of unintended barriers were put in the way of blind people, such as online application forms and requirements to have a driver's licence. As well, many were directed to ordinary Job Network

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providers and not the specialised disability employment services.

Vision Australia has begun a television and radio advertising campaign to motivate potential job seekers and raise the awareness of employers.

## **SUMMARY OF LEADERSHIP AND DISABILITY – THE GERMAN MODEL**

This Jack Brockoff Churchill Fellowship was awarded and undertaken in 2006. It explored the connection between Leadership and Disability. In the course of the Fellowship, three countries were visited (United Kingdom, Ireland and Germany). If there was a continuum that described how nations attempted to promote people with disabilities as leaders, and at one end we had “through relationships” and at the other “through legislation”, Ireland would sit clearly at the relationships end, Germany at the Legislative end. German model appears on the surface to be all pervading and producing strong outcomes for people with disabilities (6 to 7 percent of the total workforce severely disabled),

### **b. THE GERMAN MODEL**

This model has a stand-alone place in the Fellowship report because it is so unusual in covering all of the areas touched on in the report.

#### Background to the German System

The end of the Second World War saw a large proportion of the population disabled. They were either returned service men or general members of the population who were injured during the war. There was an immediate push for these people to be employed in open employment. This, combined with the German cultural drive for all initiatives to come from a strong legislative base, has produced a German system that is founded on a medical model with large amounts of legislative underpinning.

#### The Model

The model is based on two things. The first is a requirement that a person be “severely disabled” to be eligible for the benefits offered. This means that you have to reach 50 points out of 100 due to your disability. For example, chronic hepatitis only gives you 40 or so points, however chronic hepatitis with inflammation gives you over 70 points..

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Secondly, all employers are encouraged to employ people in the 50 points or more category. They have to reach a target of at least 5 percent of people with disability in their work forces. This applies to those businesses with over 20 employees.

Those organisations that don't reach the target pay a tax for each person they haven't employed, for example between three and five percent - 105 Euro per month for each person not employed, between two and five percent - 180 Euro per person per month not employed and under two percent - 260 Euro per person per month not employed. All of the money raised goes into a fund that pays for equipment and workplace modifications.

This system is widely accepted and supported. Any business that has people with disabilities employed numbering more than five percent has to have an election that chooses a representative from the disabled workers. The representatives advocate for the rights and responsibilities of the disabled workers and those who could be potential applicants in an application process for new positions within the organisations.

The Ministry for Economics and Technology (Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie) were particularly informative and have provided large amounts of legislation and legislative guidelines. They are of the view that the system is extremely effective. They cite the comparison between the UK and Germany. The UK has between one and two percent of the workforce who are considered to have a disability and Germany has between five and six percent (approx. one million people). In addition the view of many in the disability sector in the UK is that a large number of people on the fringes of disability are defined into the working disabled population. With the medical model as used in Germany this is not possible.

The Ministry also indicated that people in the disabled workforce were spread evenly throughout the hierarchy of employing organisations. They were found in leadership roles in the same proportion as they were to be found elsewhere in the organisation.

Leadership by people with disabilities is also promoted through the elected representatives process. These elected officials representing the rights of people with disabilities are connected to senior leadership of the organisation. They not only protect the rights of those already working in

the organisation, but also ensure that intake and recruitment processes are encouraging of people with disabilities.

The German system could have also been described in the next section - Leadership and the Public Service, as it applies to all employers, public, private and community sectors.

An organisation in Germany has formed itself around disability and media. Their main objective is to have more images of people with disabilities shown in the mainstream media. Dr Peter Radke is the Director and also is an actor and a member of the National Committee of ethical standards.

They produce programs for a free-to-air TV show and two programs for private TV channels.

## **7. OTHER INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES**

Dialog im Dunkeln (Dialog in the Dark) is a concept that has enormous potential as an “outward bound” type experience that uses people with disabilities to engage with the non-disabled world. It takes people who can see through a series of environments that are absolutely dark. The only aid is a white cane and a guide who during the course of the experience lets one know that they are totally blind.

The experience lasts for ninety minutes and traverses the following environments:

- A forest with running water and a foot bridge,
- A fruit and veg open air market,
- A streetscape with parked cars, bicycles and a building site,
- A boat tour actually on the water, and
- A bar where drinks are purchased and consumed.

The concept has been running in Hamburg for six years. It is booked for three months in advance. It takes 32 groups of 10 (approximately) people per day. Dr Andreas Heineke founded the concept after two life experiences. Firstly, in observing his family made up of both Jews and Nazis, he wondered how groups became oppressed and oppressors and secondly, after having a person who was blind as a mentee in journalism, he felt that he learnt more from the person than he was able to offer.

The project, as described above, has been replicated around the world. The Hamburg model runs on a 14% government subsidy. The visitors are

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in the main, from schools. However, the potential to expand the business is currently being piloted. Do<sup>^</sup>rte Maack, Head of Education and Anke Herrmann International Affairs, Dialog in the Dark, explained that the original concept has the three aims of:

- Employment of people with disabilities in business,
- Change the attitudes of visitors to the exhibition, and
- Cause broader understanding of difference.

The businesses that are interested in using Dialog in the Dark in more complex ways can now buy seminars that are facilitated by people with disabilities. The seminars are built around team building and communications. The groups are taken through the exhibition in small groups and then alone. The groups then analyze what happened during both tour scenarios. The communications session is lead by a person with intellectual disability who requires the group to rewrite a complex text into plain German.

## **THE WORLD ACCORDING TO ME!**

By Alan Bartlett

### **Why we won't get jobs and why we make employment figures look *terrific!***

*I have been considering the issues around employment incentives and disability as we watch with interest as the national unemployment rate plummets. These issues I have highlighted here, are not a panacea, but they are the ones that are immediate to my experience.*

*The real barriers confronting long term disability pensioners getting jobs and off welfare have been created by federal government controlled Centrelink support. The way disability support payments are set up can be a big disincentive for people to participate. While government support payments are doing this, the employment rates proclaimed by the Federal Government aren't a reliable indication of unemployment in Australia. Just getting started on the pathway from welfare to work for a disability support pensioner can pose disincentives and barriers.*

*People on DSP often need support to look for work using expertise from the job network. They may need assistance in employment areas such as workplace modifications and wage subsidy to improve their employability. However, people are reluctant to register for support with a disability employment network provider. The process of registering for*

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*help requires a long and complicated process with Centrelink. For a long term DSP recipient this process involves a full review of the disability pension entitlement and a work capacity assessment. The review is confronting because it means obtaining a full medical assessment of your disability. This is time consuming and for permanently disabled people a real pain and intimidating especially so if you are blind and with both eyes removed. A disability in this sort of case would be blatantly obvious to the most inexperienced observer. Centrelink can't even manage to make these simple observations themselves.*

*When you go for a review they nicely remind you that a review of your income support payment could lead to a cancellation or suspension. This is a real turn off for someone to seek the assistance of a disability employment network provider. This disincentive to start seeking employment must have some affect on the employment statistics. Even after you have registered for assistance and managed to qualify for assistance the government still does not include you on the unemployment figures.*

*If you were able to find work, the disincentives continue. If you found full time work, you would no longer qualify for your pension and benefits. Then there is no support for you. You must go it alone as a working person. If the job does not work out or you have to leave for any reason, you would have to face the consequences. A good incentive for work is that your pension would automatically be reinstated if your paid work stopped. After some years in the workplace, at present, this would not be possible. A disability pension recipient should always be able to receive pension when they stop working.*

*This is important because People with disabilities find it harder to find work and it takes longer. Finding suitable work and job accommodation can take some time and investigation*

*The Australian government could make it a lot easier for people with disabilities to get jobs if it changed the legislation so that people did not lose their pension income entitlement when they re-entered the workforce.*

*This disincentive I imagine causes productive people with disabilities, to be afraid to leave their comfort zones. Just because a disabled person gets a job doesn't mean they or their partner don't need support. I challenge you to consider this following scenario, the circumstances of which are based on real people I know.*

*If two disabled people were in a married relationship and one of them got a job it may negatively affect their relationship with each other and therefore pose a disincentive for a transition from welfare to work. If one*

*person in this relationship landed a job worth sixty plus thousand, then suddenly they would now be responsible financially for their non-working partner. Neither person would have access to pension concession medical or utility and transport concessions. In some cases medical expenses would skyrocket. No more being bulk billed at the local medical centre. They would have to pay full price for medications. The costs of having a disability would not have changed during this transition to work. The costs of their disability may have increased especially if they were providing care for each other before the job commenced. However, their personal and economic relations will have changed to one of worker and dependent. Now the non-working ex DSP pensioner would lose their income independence in this sort of scenario. They would need to rely on the good will of the working person to support them properly with less than formal and secure social accountability. This is yet another disincentive for disabled people to seek high paid employment.*

*I am a supporter of Australians having dignity of choice, risk and power of self-determination. There are many reactions to disability and the government should have a flexible system to cater for the needs of people to make life choices rather than trying to make choices for people. No wonder we won't get jobs and we make employment figures look terrific. The Federal Government's understanding of the employment market is limited as a person only needs to work 1 hour per week, according to our government's internationally accepted employment guidelines, to be no longer classified as unemployed. We really need a register of underemployed Australians to get a clearer picture of how much work is being done. If the Federal government changed the way it sees employment and how it supports people returning to work then we might be able to move forward.*

## **ONE OF MY EMPLOYMENT STORIES**

**By Peter Rickards**

About a year ago I applied for a job entitled Metro Access at a council in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, without declaring that I had a vision disability, and was short-listed for interview. At the commencement of the interview I stated that I had a severe vision loss. One of the interview panel expressed the view that I was less than honest by not stating that situation in my initial application. If I had done so I am sure my application would not have been short-listed.

These Metro Access positions and Rural Access positions in country areas are funded across Councils by the Victorian State Government to open Local Government services and facilities to people with disabilities, so one would assume that there would be some pro-activity around trying to appoint people with disabilities to these positions.

I did not get this job, and subsequently I rang the responsible Officer to ask if someone with a disability had been successful in gaining this position. I was told “NO”.

My research discovered that this Council had a specific stated objective in their Disability Access and Inclusion Policy to make their work force “more diverse and inclusive”.

I emailed this information together with a request to be sent a copy of the policies and strategies in place to achieve this stated objective.

The reply from the HR Manager was “That “the Council did not have any such policies or strategies”.

Where is the “leading from the front in employment of people with disabilities” by State and Local Governments? Why should not funding for these types of positions be given to Councils with conditions attached around pro-actively seeking to appoint PWD to these positions? After all if PWD cant be sought and appointed to positions such as these what hope have they of being successful in applying for other jobs which have nothing to do with disability?

## **HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS YEARS STATE BUDGET**

- **\$500,000** to improve the recruitment, retention and promotion of people with a disability in the public and community sectors.
- **\$1.6 million** for a disability traineeship scheme to increase the number of people with a disability employed by the Victorian Government.