

## DWE NEWSLETTER

April 30<sup>th</sup> 2010

**Introduction:** Hello readers! Welcome to our newsletter. Last year was the anniversary of Louis Braille's birth and so as a tribute to his contribution to the blind, this month's newsletter will have a focus on blindness and vision impairment. This week is also our anniversary of being in business for 12 months!!! It's been a most enjoyable and fabulous year! We would like to thank all of you for being loyal followers, friends, colleagues, clients and other interested parties along our journey.



Any feedback or contributions are most welcome.

**Soapbox:** As you may be aware from last month's newsletter we were very proud to sponsor an 'Athletes with a Disability' (AWD) race at the recent Ballarat Gift meeting on April 11<sup>th</sup>. As it often does, Ballarat provided us with unseasonal, wintry conditions – not conducive to runners wearing singlets, silk tops and skimpy shorts. All that aside, as sponsors we were introduced to each finalist before the race – each one expressed their heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for our support and to have the opportunity to be included into an athletics Victorian Athletics League's Pro circuit race meeting of that caliber. Congrats go to winner Chris Mullins (*1 gold Paralympic medal*), 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim Sullivan (*10 Paralympic gold medals*) and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sean Roberts (*T37 under 16, 100m Australian record holder.*) The feedback from other sponsors, organisers and athletes was overwhelmingly positive – as it should be. We will continue to support this race into the future.

After speaking to the runners, I was proud and frustrated all at the same time – I have to ask the question – why aren't more AWD races included in every one of the VAL's meetings? Why is it up to a disability consultancy such as ours to sponsor this race, why aren't other VAL meetings and their respective sponsors interested? Perhaps there is a need to spread the word – 'Access All Abilities' workers, what do you think - how can we make this happen?



**Other news:**

### World Honors 200th Anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille

France and the entire world honor on Sunday the 200th anniversary of the birth of French inventor Louis Braille. Louis Braille created "Braille" - a world-wide system effectively used by blind and visually impaired people for reading and writing. Braille is read by passing the fingers over characters made up of an arrangement of one to six embossed points. It has been adapted to almost every known language.

Louis Braille was born on January 4, 1809. He became blind at the age of 3, when he accidentally stabbed himself in one eye with one of his father's workshop tools and got an infection, spreading to his other eye. At the age of 10, Braille earned a scholarship to the Royal Institution for Blind Youth in Paris, one of the first of its kind in the world. Braille, a bright and creative student, became a talented cellist and organist. At the school, the children were taught how to read by feeling raised letters - a system devised by the school's founder. However, with this system the students never learned to write. Another disadvantage was that the letters

weighed a lot, making the books sometimes weigh over a hundred pounds.

In 1821 Louis began inventing his raised-dot system, finishing at age 15, in 1824. The system allowed the recognition of letters with a single fingertip, consisted of patterns making it easy to learn, and offered the possibility to both read and write an alphabet. Braille later extended his system to include notation for mathematics and music. The first book in Braille was published in 1829.

**'Blind and Busy'** compiled by Rebecca Maxwell

As a tribute to this momentous anniversary, Rebecca Maxwell has published a book called 'Blind and Busy' which is a social history of Braille users in Australia. There are approximately 50 stories by Braille users who celebrate the independence that Braille gives them. I quote from the preface,

*"This morning as I walked past the kitchen bench, I felt a container that had been left out. The label was in a position where I could read it without effort. It said 'oats'. What struck me about the experience was just how effortless it was to brush my fingers over a series of dots and gain that information. It gave me a glimpse of what it must be like for people with sight. The taking in of information must be amazingly effortless if one's eyes are automatically scanning the environment. It brought home to me what a precious gift Braille is."*

*"Like music, Braille has survived the advent of every form of technological innovation and today it is as essential in the lives of people who are blind as it was 200 years ago."*

Rebecca Maxwell lives in Melbourne, writes poetry and is the President of the Society of Women Writers, Victoria and is an active member of the Yarra Council Disability Advisory Committee. For more information about where to find this book, contact the publishers, Palmer Higgs Pty Ltd or check out the Website: [www.palmerhiggsbooks.com.au](http://www.palmerhiggsbooks.com.au)

## **Technologies**

As a follow on from the Braille story, it is clear that technology will not replace Braille but simply enhance communication options for people with a vision impairment. Here are some examples that may be of interest to you:

**Screen Readers** - A screen reading system for use with a computer such as Microsoft Windows or Apple Mac consists of a voice synthesizer and a screen reading program. A screen reading program translates the written text displayed on the screen for the voice synthesizer which then reproduces the text as speech. A screen reader will also read back other information that may be present on the screen such as menu options.

**Mobile phones recommendations for people with a vision impairment** -Below is a list of features to look out for in mainstream phones available from the various mobile phone dealers which will make them easier to use for someone who is blind or has low vision:

### **Keypad buttons:**

- Buttons that make a noise when pressed.
- Buttons that can be felt individually. Look for buttons that are large, well spaced and are raised, i.e. not flush with the surface. A tactile marker on the number 5 button is also helpful.
- Buttons that are large enough. People who are blind may need space for a tactual marker (bump-on, velcro, Braille label, nail-polish, puff paint or Loc-dot).
- Buttons that light up to enhance contrast.

- People with low vision will benefit from buttons with good contrast and clear print. They may like to draw contrast outlines around the buttons. Different coloured covers can be purchased for some phones to enhance contrast.

**Screen:** Phones with colour screens tend to offer better contrast. They also allow you to adjust the brightness and other display settings like colour scheme to improve contrast (eg. blue instead of orange).

Large print fonts are available in some phones. This is sometimes called the "Large Font" feature.

#### **Dialing and memory:**

- Check that "Contacts" can be accessed easily with only one or two button presses.
- Speed dials are where commonly used telephone numbers can be programmed into the number pad of the phone so that dialling can take place with one or two button presses.
- Voice dialling is where the phone recognises the person's name when you say it (and automatically rings the number from the memory.) The recording has to be very clear and the person using the phone also has to be very clear as it tends not to work in a noisy surrounding.
- A phone that speaks back to you when you select a number from the "Contacts" list. Most phones will not speak back the number being dialled, but some can speak the person's name as well as other prompts such as "please say name", or "now dialling".

#### **Other features:**

- Size of the screen is not important for a person who is blind, but size of the print and clarity is important for a person with low vision
- Does not turn on accidentally. Look for a keypad lock or a lid that flips over to protect the keys.
- Ease of answering and hanging up. A flip cover that opens to answer and closes to hang up is easiest, or an obvious button to press with a sound signal. On some phones any button (except the button to hang up) can be pressed to answer a call.

### **International Seeing Eye Dog Day 2010 - 28 April 2010**

Today we celebrate International Seeing Eye Dog Day, and pay tribute to the important role these special working dogs play in the lives of many people who are blind or have low vision. Seeing Eye Dogs Australia (SEDA) officially opened on 10 April 1960 in Wonga Park, in Melbourne's east. Fifty years later, Seeing Eye Dogs continue to assist people throughout Australia.

With more and more Australians losing their sight each year, the need for Seeing Eye Dogs is growing rapidly. The number of Australians who are blind or have low vision is set to double to 600,000 by 2020. SEDA - a division of Vision Australia is relying heavily on the community to meet this demand.

In this, their golden anniversary year, SEDA is aiming to recruit 5,000 new puppy sponsors to help cover costs associated with raising and training puppies to assist people who are blind or have low vision. It costs around \$30,000 to train a Seeing Eye Dog however anyone can become a puppy sponsor and contribute as little as a dollar a day towards these costs.

To support Seeing Eye Dogs Australia call 1800 787 797.

## "Blind Courage" campaign - Blind cyclists make world history

Photo: The team completed their epic trip outside the Sydney Opera house and Harbour Bridge. Lorin and Dean Nicholson were given a police escort and a hero's welcome as they cycled into Sydney over the long weekend, ending their four week marathon.



The brothers, who are both legally blind, have completed a gruelling 4,000 kilometre trek across Australia, enduring all types of weather and terrain as well as a locust plague.

"When we were riding through the plague in the Riverina, we had to dodge the swarms of insects. The main thing was to make sure our mouths were closed!" joked Lorin.

About 100 people, including the media, friends, family and Vision Australia staff greeted the duo on the forecourt of the Sydney Opera House. They have been riding tandem push bikes, along with their sighted pilots and support crew, throughout the adventure and also made time to stop at Vision Australia centres along the way.

The boys were warmly welcomed at Vision Australia's Enfield centre this morning. Staff turned out to say thank you and Vision Australia CEO Gerard Menses expressed his gratitude and admiration via video link.

So far, the "**Blind Courage**" campaign has generated more than \$154,000 worth of media coverage and raised \$20,000.

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