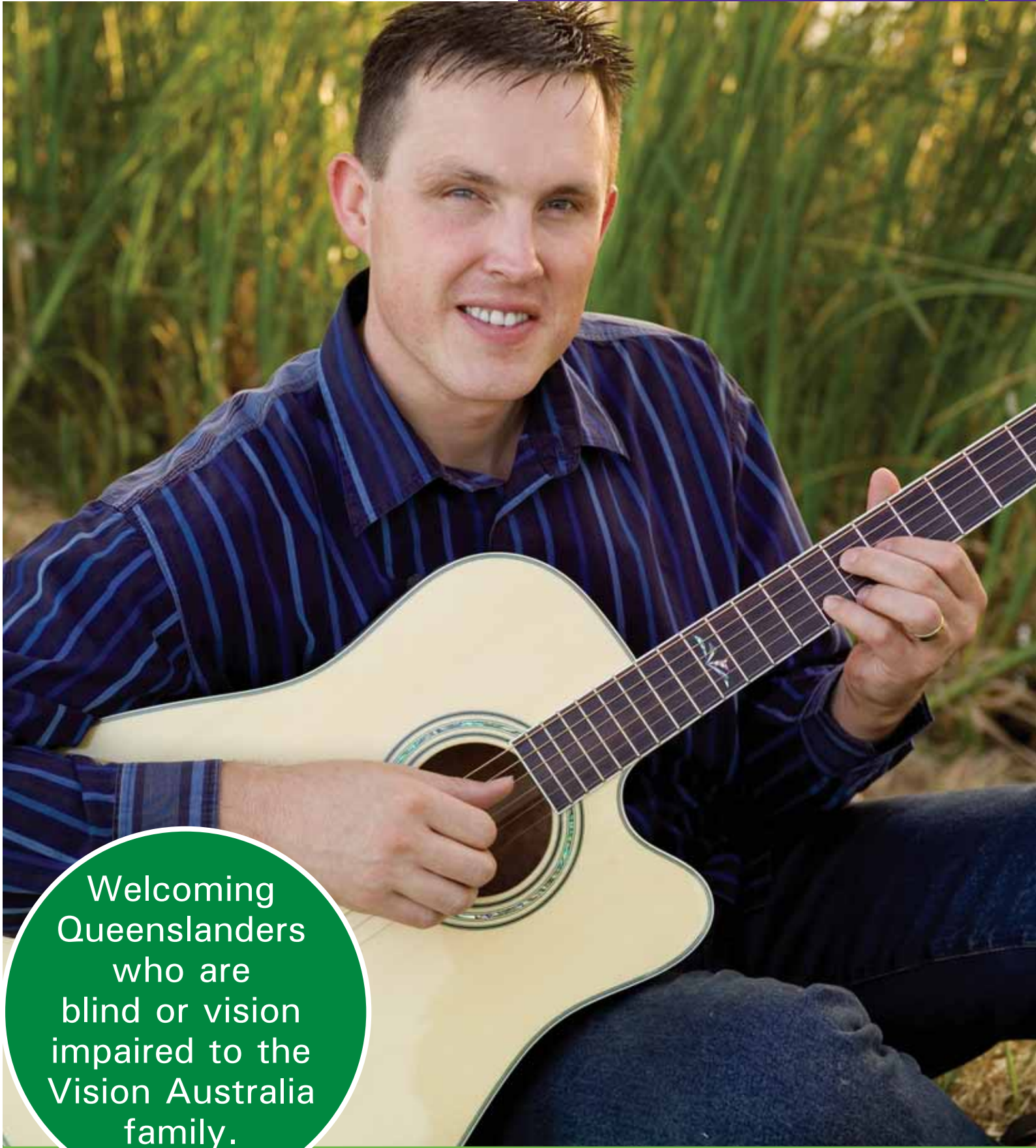


**vision
australia**

blindness and low vision services

NEWS

AUTUMN 2007



Welcoming
Queenslanders
who are
blind or vision
impaired to the
Vision Australia
family.

incorporating



Royal Blind Society
a vision to share



RVIB



Vision
VISION AUSTRALIA FOUNDATION



Royal Blind Foundation
queensland

Queensland joins us

Vision Australia extends a warm welcome to new clients in the Sunshine State following our amalgamation with Royal Blind Foundation Queensland (RBFQ).

This move will provide Queenslanders who are blind or vision impaired with a much wider variety of services.

“As a national organisation, Vision Australia is ideally placed to fulfil our vision of a better world. A vision of a world where people who are blind or vision impaired can achieve everything they hope for,” said Vision Australia CEO, Gerard Menses, after members of RBFQ voted to join Vision Australia on 5 December 2006.

“We are delighted that RBFQ members have united with us in this vision. We are excited to move forward with them to achieve unlimited possibilities for people who are blind or vision impaired.”

Vision Australia is now the nation's leading provider of services for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Employer of the Year

Vision Australia had more cause to celebrate in December, winning the Prime Minister's National Employer of the Year Award.

The award, which recognises valuable contribution in providing employment opportunities for people with a disability, was accepted by our CEO, Gerard Menses (pictured), at a Parliament House ceremony. “This award is external recognition of our positive culture of being a living partnership between people who are blind, sighted or have low vision,” he said.

Vision Australia was commended for providing employment opportunities and training programs. We also demonstrated innovation in employing people with a disability.



Young Queensland clients and their friends taking part in Sunnies for Sight Day.

In addition to maintaining the range of services now offered in Queensland, Vision Australia will introduce a variety of new programs that are currently available to clients in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria.

New programs to be introduced to Queensland include tele-link, a telephone peer support program for clients, and Vision Australia's Felix Library, with its book kits specially designed for children who are blind or vision impaired.

Queenslanders can now also become involved in our Client Representative Council, access Vision Australia's Information Library Service and apply for Further Education Bursary Awards, which provide adaptive technology to students.



Travellin' man

Lorin from achieving his goals. With support from Vision Australia, he completed Year 12, went to college and pursued his first love – music.

Lorin became hooked on the guitar at 13, studying a number of different styles. Now a master of the instrument, he has released three acclaimed CDs and was nominated for a Golden Guitar Award at the 2005 Tamworth Country Music Festival. He took part in this year's festival, just weeks after performing with Anthony Callea at Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight®.

On moving to Queensland in 2002, Lorin began his travelling school program. The idea came after his father-in-law, Trevor Donaldson, who is a teacher, asked him to speak to his students. "The kids were inspired and really opened up to me," he recalls. "My message is that you can succeed no matter what challenges you face. It's all about making Australians more accepting."

Although the dad of four spends a lot of time on the road, he still uses our Information Library Service and receives equipment advice from us: "I still like to drop in to Vision Australia to catch up with what's new."



It's hard to pigeonhole Lorin Nicholson. But when Vision Australia organised a vocational assessment for him 20 years ago, in retrospect the recommendations were not far off the mark. "It helped me to realise what my abilities and talents are," he says.

Lorin was told he would be suited to sports medicine and psychology, and in a way he's done both. Having worked as a remedial therapist treating Olympians, Lorin is now a motivational speaker who educates and entertains school children nationwide.

Like his younger brother and sister, the Tamworth-raised Brisbane resident was born with retinitis pigmentosa. Although blind, nothing stopped

Anna's animal studies on course

Anna Briggs has just embarked on her final year of an Animal Science degree at Melbourne University, which has become more manageable since she received a Further Education Bursary Award.

The 21-year-old from Ringwood, Victoria, has been a Vision Australia client since infancy as the result of a condition known as coloboma. As a child, Anna received orientation and mobility training as well as school support. In adulthood, she has used our employment services.

"Although the course has a lot of practical components, everyone I know was really encouraging when I chose to do it," Anna says.

The bursary paid for Anna's CCTV and laptop. The 2007 Further Education Bursary Award winners will be announced in March.



What a life!

Adrienne Howley is unstoppable. In her 82 years she has encountered many obstacles, but has refused to let any of them deter her.

For example, when she began to lose her vision a decade ago she decided it was time to finish her Arts degree at the University of Newcastle.

“I was going to the uni library to do research for a book. Then I thought ‘If you can get in there, why not finish’. I attended every lecture,” she says. “I had to really apply myself. The adaptive technology staff helped, but it was hard work.”

Adrienne graduated in 2005, more than 20 years after beginning her degree at the University of Queensland. By this time she was no stranger to learning, having travelled to India, Nepal and Thailand to study Buddhism. Ordained by the Dalai Lama 25 years ago, she is now the most senior Buddhist monk in Australia, and her books on the subject have been translated into five languages.

As a young woman, Adrienne was a nursing orderly in the army, then a civilian nurse. In her forties she was diagnosed with cancer. Her



response was to board a cutter and sail the world for four years, working all the way.

Now living in Lorn, New South Wales, Adrienne is a Vision Australia Newcastle client and a member of our Regional Client Committee. “When I realised I needed help I went to Vision Australia. It’s opened up a new life for me.”

She is currently working on her autobiography, which follows a booklet on vision loss, *Now You See It, Now You Don’t*. “Everyone’s story about how they lost their sight is different, so I put in my experience plus that of others,” she says. “I kept it as light as possible to show that life goes on.”

“The hardest thing is to ask for help. But once you get over the first hurdle, your world opens up.”



Photo courtesy of The Southern Highland News.

Harrison leaps ahead

Harrison Hillman-Byrne is among the thousands of children who recently started school: the difference is he advanced straight into Grade 1 after completing a transitional term last year. Yet for this six-year-old from Mittagong, New South Wales, the path hasn’t been straightforward. He is blind in his right eye and only has 10 per cent vision in his left eye due to retinitis pigmentosa.

Harrison has received years of support from Vision Australia and Mittagong Preschool, which we recognised with a 2006 Making A Difference Award. Our Wollongong staff helped develop his tactile and braille skills at the preschool and will monitor his school progress.

“With such support he’ll continue to develop and grow,” says his mother, Sarah (pictured left with Harrison). “Everyone who meets him looks forward to seeing what he’ll do down the track.”

The Toongabbie trailblazer

He's run the New York Marathon and climbed Mount Kilimanjaro; now Charlie McConnell can add trekking the Kokoda Trail to his list of achievements. Charlie, who is blind, completed the epic walk late in 2006 with his friend Ellis Janks (pictured right of Charlie).

"This walk has it all," Charlie says. "There's running water, which I love as you know you're getting somewhere when you hear a creek up ahead. At night there are the sounds of the jungle – birds, wild dogs. Then there are the smells of the earth and the feel as you go along and kick it up and there's the interaction with others on the trail. Their expectations and admiration help you go on."

Charlie and Ellis created a series of calls to assist with the guiding process. For example, if a tree that was shin-high and angled left to right was over the path, Ellis would call "step over, shin left".

The trek was a deeply moving experience for Charlie: "On the third day we reached territory



“As a team we motivated each other, and that’s what life’s all about – you urge each other on.”

where there were war relics. It made you think ‘hang on, I thought I was doing it tough but I’m not carrying a heavy pack and a rifle’.”

Having acquired computer skills at Vision Australia's Enfield centre and attained a TAFE Teleservice II Certificate, Charlie is working in an Australia Post call centre. And he believes the lessons of Kokoda can be applied to daily life: "There are four words on the memorial on the track – courage, endurance, sacrifice and mateship. They sum up the Kokoda experience. Even at work the same thing applies."

Visit www.visionaustralia.org.au and click on 'Our Stories' to read more about Charlie.



In the driver's seat

Ernie Drew of Lara, Victoria, is well known in the local car community for his restoration work. But unlike his fellow Geelong Corvette Club members, the 55-year-old can't drive his masterpieces. Diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at 13, he turned in his licence 20 years ago when his sight deteriorated.

Before restoring cars, Ernie worked as a carpenter, ran a mixed business and owned boarding kennels. He also spent four years working as a volunteer computer trainer at our Prahran centre. "It's tactile work. I always liked doing things with my hands and I realised life wouldn't stop because I'm vision impaired," Ernie says. He has helped to build and landscape his home, using aids from Vision Australia such as a talking spirit level and measuring tape.

Now the owner of an '85 Corvette, Ernie will take part in the annual In The Driver's Seat Day at Sandown Motor Circuit on March 25. This day enables people who are blind to drive a dual-control car under the supervision of an instructor.

Pioneer honoured

Congratulations to Enfield volunteer Cliff Jackson (pictured with our Chair, Dr Kevin Murfitt) who received the inaugural Vision Australia Client Service Award at our Annual General Meeting.

Cliff, who is vision impaired, has donated his time to Vision Australia for 10 years. He is a strong believer in peer support, forming the first Vision Impaired Persons support group in St George, New South Wales, nine years ago. He has since helped to start 22 groups around Sydney, with a combined membership in excess of 420 people.

Cliff also volunteers for Vision Australia's Speakers Network, visiting aged care facilities and community groups to talk about our work.

The Client Service Award recipient is chosen by Vision Australia's Client Representative Council.



Did you know that it costs Vision Australia \$97 per hour to teach a child independence in daily living skills?

An easier way to give

If you appreciate Vision Australia's work, why not become a regular donor. You can choose to give a gift of a nominated amount on a monthly basis either by credit card or direct debit. It's a convenient way of giving as it saves you time and cuts down Vision Australia's administration costs, allowing us to direct more funds into vital employment, orientation and mobility, library and children's services.

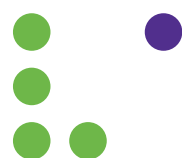
And as a regular giver you will receive updates about the work we do, as well as an annual receipt at the end of the financial year. All donations are tax-deductible. To sign up visit www.visionaustralia.org.au and use our secure online payment page or call 1800 42 20 77.

Thank you for your support

Vision Australia is a living partnership between people who are blind, sighted or vision impaired.

Community support enables us to assure that people who are blind or vision impaired can access and fully participate in every aspect of life they choose.

If you or someone you know needs vision support, please call us on **1300 84 74 66**.



**vision
australia**

blindness and low vision services

Combining the skills and resources of five leading blindness organisations to create one national voice, Vision Australia is committed to delivering exceptional and efficient services that open up exciting possibilities for our community.

**For more information or to make
a donation call 1300 84 74 66
Website: www.visionaustralia.org.au**

ABN 67 108 391 831 ACN 108 391 831