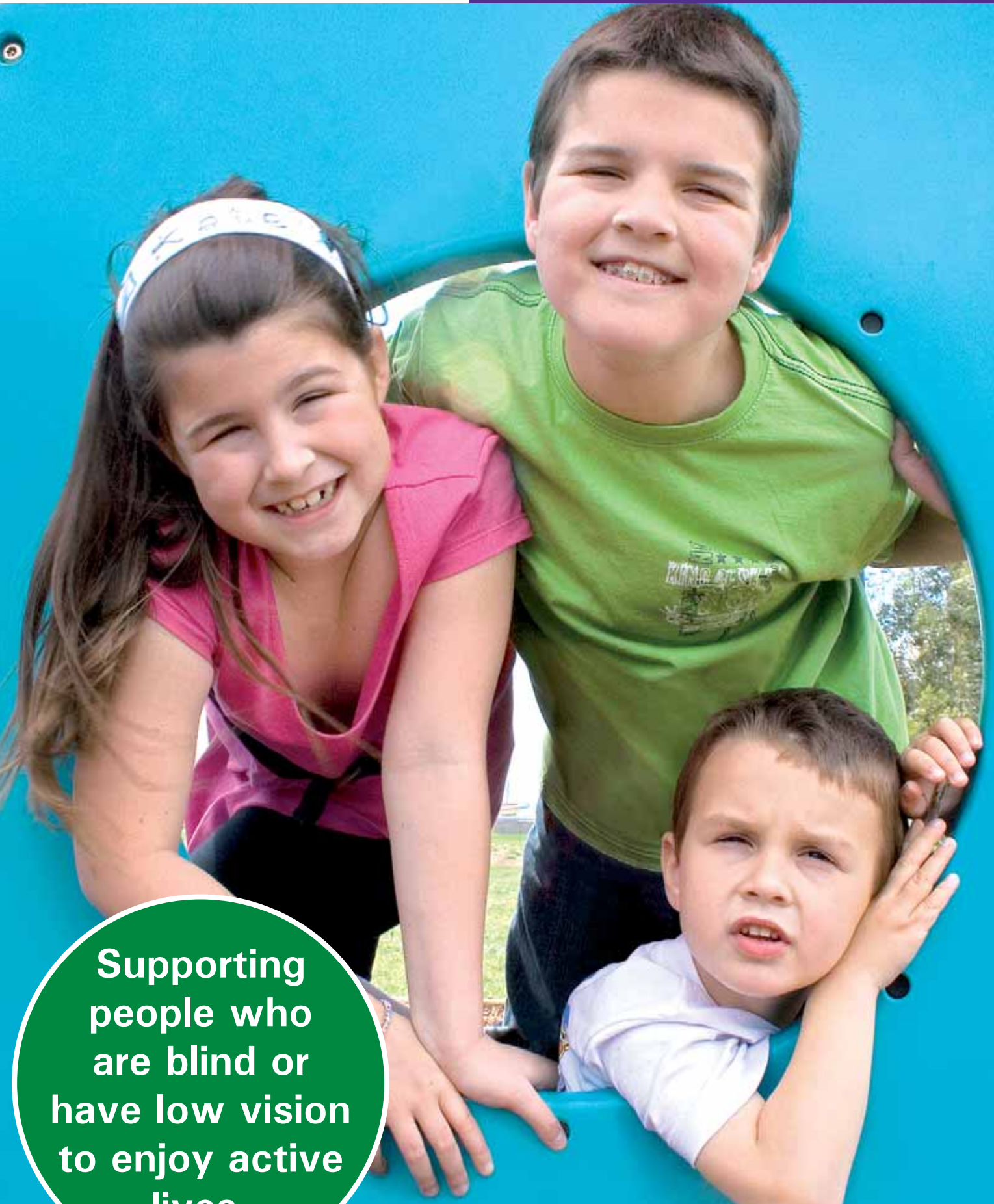


**vision
australia**

blindness and low vision services

NEWS



**Supporting
people who
are blind or
have low vision
to enjoy active
lives.**

SUMMER 2007/08

June has nailed it!

Four years ago June Combey had not so much as hammered a nail. Today she sits down to her meals at a dining setting she made herself.

The 80-year-old crafted the table and chairs after completing a woodworking course at Vision Australia's Prahran centre. June was diagnosed with macular degeneration in 1998 and is legally blind.

"It [the vision loss] all happened very suddenly," she says. "People fear blindness, but when you come to Vision Australia you realise that all's not lost."

June was attending braille lessons at Vision Australia's centre in Prahran, Melbourne, when she heard about the woodwork course.

Over a year, clients learn safety techniques, how to use tools such as a talking tape measure, as well as furniture-making skills. On completing the course, they can work on their own projects at our Prahran workshop.



"When you come to Vision Australia you realise that all's not lost."

"I thought I would give it a go," June says. "The first thing I made was a unit for my tapes."

Every week since 2003, June has travelled three hours each way by train and tram from her Spargo Creek home to our Prahran workshop. The set of table and chairs has been her biggest project.

"The chairs were quite intricate, but I wasn't put off. I just thought 'I'll just have to face it'," she says, adding that she valued the support offered by Vision Australia workshop staff member Daryl Barnett. "I couldn't have done it without him."

June is now making a large kennel for her dog Jessie.

Vision Australia Industrial Skills Trainer Andrew White is impressed by June's dedication. "She's a great source of inspiration for our female clients," he says. "We now have quite a few women taking part in our woodwork course."

Fast as lightning

Three years ago, Vision Australia client Tammy-Jo Sheehan of Brisbane was playing blind cricket when a team-mate (David Truong, pictured with her) told her about a game that was fast, fun and enabled people of all sight levels to compete equally.

Within days the teenager, who lost her vision at age 10, was playing her first game of Swish.

Swish is a modified version of table tennis for people who are blind or have low vision. It is played on a table that is bordered by 6cm raised sides. The "net" is a 75cm high opaque board that is raised 8cm above the table. Players hit a plastic ball containing bells between the board and the table.

"At first it was hard as the game is very fast," she says. "You rely on your hearing and reflexes."

In the three years she has been playing Swish at Vision Australia's Woolloongabba centre in Brisbane the 17-year-old has competed in two Australian championships.

Tammy-Jo lost her vision suddenly after an adverse reaction to antibiotics. Subsequent



operations caused her to miss a lot of school.

To improve her job prospects, she recently completed Vision Australia's Stepping Forward employment and training initiative.

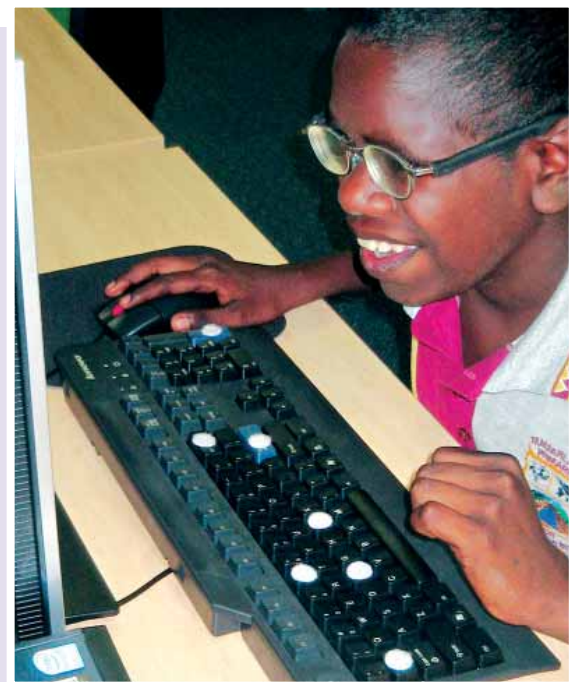
This 26-week course enables young people who are blind or have low vision to study business skills and gain paid work experience.

Tammy-Jo gained her work experience at our Woolloongabba centre: "I really enjoyed it. Hopefully I'll now find a job or study."

Getting tech in the Territory

Donovan Mato (pictured) from Katherine is one of 10 Northern Territorian students who recently participated in the Step-up Programme at our Darwin centre. Run in conjunction with the Northern Territory Education Resource Centre for the Vision Impaired, the initiative assists young clients to access information using modern technology.

Vision Australia Adaptive Technology Consultant Camille Fong Lim was pleased with the progress of the students, some having travelled long distances to attend the course. "They loved it," she said. "It's worth it just to see a five-year-old go from having no exposure to computers to using a mouse and typing using all fingers within three days."



Swing your partners

Wanda Egerton could convince anyone to take up square dancing. The pastime has been central to her life for 35 years, leading to travel, friendship and even marriage.

“He always says that I kept running into him all the time!” says Wanda of her square dancing husband Allen, who is a braille proof reader at Vision Australia’s Kooyong centre.

Not only is square dancing a lot of fun, it’s also an ideal activity for people who are blind or have low vision.

“I love it!” says Wanda, who is blind as the result of being born prematurely. “It’s great for people who are blind as it’s ‘touchy-feely’. You’re always holding someone’s hand and you just have to listen to the caller.”

Wanda and Allen have danced in front of 4,000 people in Canada and have also dosadoed in Japan and the United States.

Wanda recently led a group of 14 dancers (including brother-in-law Ross Egerton, pictured



with her) at a Come ‘N’ Try Day for seniors held at our Kooyong centre.

“It was a great opportunity to show people who are blind or have low vision that they can have a go at anything,” she says.



Solutions for Brisbane clients

Clients visiting our Woolloongabba centre can now pick up products that make their daily activities much easier. Large print calendars, talking clocks, liquid level devices and magnifiers are among the stock at our new Brisbane Equipment Solutions outlet.

At the outlet’s launch, legal officer Cecily Barker (left) commended Vision Australia for offering more choice to local clients. “Through Vision Australia I’ve been able to trial equipment such as a CCTV monitor and Fusion, a gadget that assists me to read hard copy.

“I also have low-tech devices such as phone markers that indicate where numbers are on my phone. All of this equipment assists me to perform everyday activities independently.”

Moving up in the world

When Richard Carbone found out his Grade 5 class was going on a school trip to Canberra in November he was both excited and nervous.

He knew the trip would involve escalators – something the 12-year-old from Melbourne's Werribee had yet to feel comfortable using.

Richard is legally blind, due to optic atrophy, and has been a Vision Australia client for most of his life. Because Richard is unable to see the steps, using an escalator has always been a challenge.

Malcolm Fraser, a Vision Australia Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instructor, was called on to help.

"Richard has good mobility skills and uses his remaining vision well," Malcolm says.

"But for someone with low vision, using an escalator can be scary."

They set a date to meet at a local shopping centre. Despite being anxious, Richard said "Let's do it" and took on his first challenge – using a travelator (a moving rampway).

They started by going up very slowly. After repeating the process a couple of times, Richard and Malcolm went down the travelator. Once Richard had the hang of it, he tried the escalator – again, going up first and then descending.

"We had to take small steps," says Malcolm. "But he achieved his goal very quickly."

Understandably, Richard was ecstatic: "It was good to know I could go away with my mates."

"I was scared at first but soon found out how to go up and down."



Young clients Matthew and Lillian are seen here taking a break after competing in a race at a Vision Australia Athletics Fun Day.

Organised by Children Services staff at our Enfield centre in Sydney, the day enabled young clients to meet other children who are blind or have low vision. These days are now regular school holiday events at Enfield.

Spreading her wings

Earlier this year Kirrily Brooks of Dubbo, New South Wales, decided it was time to leave home.

A lifelong Vision Australia client, Kirrily is blind due to Leber's amaurosis, which affects retinal development. Yet the 24-year-old was determined this would not stop her from moving out.

Thanks to the support of Kylie Nash, an Occupational Therapist at Vision Australia's Orange centre, Kirrily now has her own flat.

She says that while the experience has been a challenge, it's been worthwhile. "It's been difficult as I haven't got Mum and Dad at my call when I need them, but I've begun a new chapter in my life," she says.

"After six months I had to decide if I wanted to extend the lease. I knew in my heart that going home would be a step backwards."

Kylie has helped Kirrily to master household tasks such as cooking, cleaning and folding sheets.

"Living alone does pose challenges," Kirrily says. "For example, when I stack dishes I don't always put things close together. So Kylie has taught me to stack the washing-up together in one pile."

Kylie is full of praise for both Kirrily and her parents: "She is so motivated and with the endless support of her parents, Ray and Cheryl, is achieving so much."

"I've gained so much independence," Kirrily adds. "I'm very capable and have many abilities and will use them."

Kirrily is studying Community Welfare at TAFE via distance education. She also plays piano at a nursing home and works with children who have special needs.



"I have gained so much independence since leaving home."

Gifts from the heart

Stuck for a gift idea? Consider a voucher that enables the recipient to support Vision Australia. They are available in various denominations from www.KarmaCurrency.com.au

There are also plenty of products in the Vision Australia range, including large print calendars and diaries featuring the artwork of clients such as Jack (right). To order visit www.visionaustralia.org/giftideas



70 years of Christmas magic



Jayne and her children – 10-year-old Jacob, Kate, aged 8, and Nicholas, 5 – are all legally blind. They were all born with aniridia, a condition that affects iris development.

With our support the children are growing in confidence daily. A Vision Australia teacher ensures Kate and Jacob keep up in the classroom, while Nicholas is regularly visited by one of our Early Childhood Educators.

They can't wait for the big night. Kate is particularly keen to hear her idol Anthony Callea (right), the event's Ambassador.

Don't miss your chance to be part of this show, presented by Myer. You can also join in the fun at the Federation Square live site.

For tickets call

1300 136 166 or visit

www.ticketmaster.com.au.

Family passes are available and kids under three enter for free.

For more information visit

www.visionaustralia.org/

carols or phone

1300 84 74 66.

If you can't make it to the show, tune in to

Channel 9 or a radio station in the Southern Cross

or Vision Australia Radio networks.



Australia's most magical Christmas event, Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight™, is turning 70, and you're all invited to join in the celebrations.

The Law children (above) are counting down the days until the Christmas Eve show at Melbourne's Sidney Myer Music Bowl.

"For us Christmas starts with Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight," says mum Jayne. "It's great to know the night helps kids like mine."

Let us wrap your presents

Give yourself a break from wrapping gifts this Christmas and help Vision Australia in the process. If you visit participating Myer stores in New South Wales, the ACT or Victoria from December 7 until Christmas Eve, Vision Australia volunteers will decorate your Myer-bought presents in return for a small donation.

Last Christmas the Myer Gift Wrap initiative raised over \$66,000, and with stores in the ACT and New South Wales on board this year we're hoping to top that figure.

For more on Myer Gift Wrap, visit **www.visionaustralia.org/giftwrap**



To donate call 1800 42 20 77 or visit www.visionaustralia.org

Danijela makes a big impression



When Dame Elisabeth Murdoch met six-year-old Vision Australia client Danijela Zebic the philanthropist's smile said it all. The pair struck up a friendship at the launch of Have Cane Am Able, which Dame Elisabeth – the project's Ambassador – hosted at her Cruden Farm property in Langwarrin, Victoria.

Have Cane Am Able funds enable Vision Australia to train people who are blind or have low vision to move about safely using a cane.

Thanks to her cane, Danijela, who was born blind, is able to lead an active life, just like her friends. "I use my hands and a cane to see," she says.

Your kind support enables us to change lives. Thank you!

Become a regular donor

Vision Australia's regular giving programme enables you to donate a nominated amount each month by credit card or debit card. This method save you time and cuts down out costs, enabling us to direct more funds into essential services.

Sign up at www.visionaustralia.org/donate or call **1800 42 20 77**.

Or you can fill in the form below and post it to: **Locked Bag 3012, Burwood, NSW 1805.**

Donor details

Name: _____
Address: _____

Email: _____
Phone: _____

I wish to join Vision Australia's monthly giving program.

Please accept my regular monthly donation of:

\$10 \$20 \$35 Other: \$ _____

Please debit my: Mastercard Visa
 Amex Diners **each month**

Card no: ____/____/____/____ Expiry date: __/__/__

Name on card: _____

Signature: _____

Send me a direct debit form to debit my bank account.

(Complete credit card details or enclose cheque/money order).



incorporating

