



**vision
australia**

blindness and low vision services

NEWS



**Celebrating
all our
Vision Australia
Further Education
Bursary
recipients.**

winter 2007

The key to information



Our bursary recipients have a higher rate of employment post-study.

Seventeen students who are blind or have low vision are now finding their university and TAFE course material easier to access thanks to Vision Australia's Further Education Bursaries.

The bursaries, which have been awarded to 120 students since 1995, provide funds that assist Vision Australia clients participating in further education to buy adaptive technology. This includes computers with speech output, electronic braille terminals and equipment for electronically scanning printed material.

Bursaries were handed out at ceremonies in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

Queensland recipients Arthur Chawner and Caitlin McMorrow received their bursaries in February at a special event at Brisbane's Royal on the Park. The occasion also marked the launch of Vision Australia services in the state, including the



Feelix Library and Do It Yourself kits for parents of very young clients.

In Melbourne, members of the Vision Australia family gathered at the Victorian College of the Arts for the presentation of bursaries to (above, from left) Daniella Taranto, Anne Black, Chris Hooper, Michelle Stevens, Paul Jones, Lindsay Heaven and Daniel Searle, plus Stephen Hayes and Peggy Soo (in absentia).

Bradley Ford, Nastasia Campanella, Matthew McLaren, Keaton Humphries and Rodney Burns (below, from left), plus Ephraim Tsun (in absentia) were awarded Vision Australia Further Education Bursaries at the State Library in Sydney.

Vision Australia CEO Gerard Menses and Chair Kevin Murfitt, (both pictured above, centre) spoke at the ceremonies. Mr Menses emphasised that the bursaries greatly increase a student's chance of finding work on completion of their studies.

Dr Murfitt spoke of his own university experience: "I hope the students are as excited as I was when the door to independent study was unlocked."

Vision Australia thanks the generous donors who support this program. For more information visit www.visionaustralia.org/bursaries

Working out beautifully



David signed up for adaptive technology, computing and touch typing courses at his local Vision Australia centre. This training led to a work placement as a purchasing officer.

Soon after Vision Australia helped David to find a full-time administrative job in telecommunications. He stayed with the company for 12 years, working in seven different roles until taking a redundancy in 2006.

Like many of his mates, David Eveleigh was keen to land an apprenticeship after Year 10. It wasn't until he applied for one at a Newcastle plant that he discovered he had lost some of his sight to Leber's optic neuropathy.

Within six months, 90% of his sight had gone. Looking back, David says the support of family, friends and Vision Australia helped him to deal with this tough time.

He worked in the manufacturing job for six months, spending the last two months in an office role, which was considered safer. "I think I was lucky," he says. "I had good support and dealt with it the best I could."

Again, Vision Australia stepped in to help this family man (pictured with wife Tania and son Nathan) by assessing his needs and training requirements, and targeting suitable work fields.

Within six weeks Vision Australia was adapting his new workspace in a RailCorp customer relations centre. He uses a CCTV, magnifier and magnification software to read work material.

"Vision Australia gives you the confidence to take on new challenges," says David. "Their support means a lot to me and my family."

Vision Australia has honoured RailCorp with a Making A Difference Award for its enlightened approach to employment.

Vision Australia employment report a first

According to a recent Vision Australia Employment Report, 63% of people who are blind or have low vision that want to work are unemployed – that's around five times the national average. The groundbreaking report, released at a Parliamentary Dinner in March, was undertaken to establish an accurate level of employment levels nationally among people who are blind or have low vision. To read it, visit www.visionaustralia.org/employment

Local shares his knowledge

Speaking to Ted Thorburn it's hard to believe he has ever been anything but positive. The 55-year-old from Mossman, Queensland, is a mentor, poet and inspiration to many people in his region, particularly those who are blind or have low vision.

But Ted has had his share of struggle. He went through a tough "loss period" when glaucoma claimed much of his vision.

Born with the eye condition, he had "fair" vision in his youth when he worked and travelled throughout Australia. Ted lost his sight in his right eye after an operation in his late thirties. "And over time my left eye went out in sympathy," he says. "I floated about for a few years."

The turning point came in 2000 when he joined a local support group for people who are blind or have low vision.

"I became involved in committees and voluntary work," he says. "I also discovered the computer was accessible and this opened up a whole new world. I now have precious little vision and use a cane for mobility, but I'm enjoying life again."

As well as volunteering with Indigenous and youth groups as a mentor and literacy support worker,



Ted is in the Mossman Blind and Visually Impaired Group, which he co-founded. He also serves on Vision Australia's Client Representative Council.

He is studying Business Information Technology at TAFE and would like to teach adaptive technology in remote areas. In his spare time Ted tandem cycles, writes, plays keyboards and reads books from Vision Australia's Information Library Service.



Stan's safe crossing

The determination of Victorian Vision Australia client Stan Johnson has made crossing a busy Essendon road much safer for locals.

Late last year, after six years of lobbying, Moonee Valley Council in Melbourne gave approval for a pedestrian crossing to be installed on Albion Street. The crossing will enable clients to safely cross from a bus stop to the Vision Australia Essendon centre.

Stan was recently acknowledged for his hard work with a Vision Australia Making A Difference Award.

Making a difference

Stan (below, left) and Syeira (right) are among the many individuals, businesses and community groups who recently received a Making A Difference Award.

The annual awards are our way of thanking members of the public who make a positive impact on the blindness community.

This year Vision Australia recognised almost 90 individuals, businesses and organisations for their flexibility and adaptability in responding to people who are blind or have low vision.

The first ceremony was held at our Wollongong centre on 11 May and events continued at Vision Australia centres throughout June.

For more information about the awards and this year's award recipients, visit www.visionaustralia.org/makingadifference



Fun and games

For Syeira Ferguson of Ulladulla in New South Wales, necessity was the mother of invention. Two years ago Syeira, who has been blind since age 12 as the result of a brain tumour, was asked to bring games to share with her friends at a camp.

"I had games for people who are vision impaired but none that could be played with sighted friends," she says.

This gave her the idea to develop a range of board games for her Year 12 Design and Technology major work. With a tactile chess board bought from Vision Australia's Enfield centre as inspiration, Syeira set about adapting eight common games, including Scrabble and Chinese checkers.

"I used a braille labeller to print letters for the Scrabble tiles," she says. "And I placed braille on the playing cards; the tape is clear, so a sighted person can see the print."

Although Syeira's games toured New South Wales as part of a schools exhibition, she has decided not to pursue a career in design. Instead she is studying theology in Canberra.

Syeira divides her time between the coast and her aunt's house near the university, but hopes to move out on her own soon. "When I'm ready I'll ask Vision Australia to help me with independent living skills and equipment," she says.

Syeira received a Making A Difference Award at a ceremony held at Vision Australia's Wollongong centre on 11 May.

**Read more
Making A
Difference
stories in our
Spring issue.**

A gem of an idea, says Ruby

Ruby Wood has lived in the same Melbourne house for almost 60 years. When she was declared legally blind in 2005 due to age-related macular degeneration, the 86-year-old feared she would have to move: "I didn't want to go. I didn't want to lose my independence."

"I had a little peripheral vision so could still get about," she says.

"The worst thing was that I couldn't read. I would go to the club to ask a friend to read my bills and letters, or I had to get my neighbour to help."

Vision Australia has adapted Ruby's house to make it easier for her to live there. We placed a white non-slip strip along her back steps for better visibility and put tactile markers on her stove so she can feel the settings – little things that have made a big difference.

We also provided Ruby with a large-face watch, a large-button phone and liquid level, a gadget which tells her when a cup is full.

"It's just amazing how this CCTV has changed my lifestyle."

But her favourite piece of equipment is the closed-circuit television (CCTV) that Vision Australia installed for her late last year. Ruby simply places text – be it on a



medicine bottle or in a book – on a plate and the image is displayed on a monitor at eye level.

"I was amazed I could read again. I was so pleased I could look up my friends' addresses to send them Christmas cards without any help," she says. "I'm a lot more confident now and feel more independent."

Giving back

Ruby recently spoke at the Vision Australia Kooyong launch of ROTating CCTVs about how we helped her to obtain and use a pre-loved CCTV. ROTating CCTVs, a joint project with the Rotary Club of Prahran, aims to create a borrowing system for recycled CCTVs.

Prahran Rotary Club recently received a Vision Australia Making A Difference Award for its work on this project.



From left: Des Jones and Geoff Heaps from Prahran Rotary, Vision Australia's Julie McConnell, Ruby Wood, Vision Australia CEO Gerard Menses and peer support worker Muriel Rutledge.

Luck in the leaves

The winner of Vision Australia's Lottery No. 6 may have seen a brand new Holden Astra CD Coupe five-door hatch coming her way in her morning cuppa — for Lindel reads tea-leaves.

Still, the Vision Australia client was taken by surprise. "I buy tickets to give back to your wonderful organisation," she said.

The win came during a busy week for Lindel, coinciding with the launch of her third book, *Time for Tea: The Gentle Art of Reading Tea-Leaves*. The book celebrates the art of afternoon tea and the age-old practice of using tea-leaves to predict the future. The book will soon be available to buy through Vision Australia's Christmas Catalogue.

If you think a win is on the cards, take part in a Vision Australia Lottery. Tickets are 3 for \$30 (minimum), \$10 for each extra ticket. Call **1800 42 20 77** or visit www.visionaustralia.org/lottery



Inspired to give

Abraham Knopov, a Vision Australia client from Sydney's Coogee, is just one of many generous donors who contributed to our Autumn Appeal. Abraham, who has macular degeneration, has been giving to Vision Australia since 1993.

"When I read about the three children (the Allambys, who were the faces of Vision Australia's Autumn Appeal) I had to help. I understand what they're going through." The Allamby children have Stargardt's disease, which, like macular degeneration, causes the deterioration of central vision.

Welcome, Minister

Joe Hockey, the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, recently visited our Kooyong centre in recognition of Vision Australia being named a 'Workplace Innovator' by the Office of the Employment Advocate. This followed the implementation of an "inspirational" unified workplace agreement.

During the visit, Mr Hockey (seen with Vision Australia Service Partnerships Manager, Chris Edwards) showed particular interest in our Equipment Solutions area where staff demonstrated a liquid level, talking clocks, screen-reading and magnification software and a CCTV.



Garden of sensory delights

As every green thumb knows, there's more to plants than just appearances. To truly soak up the beauty of a garden you have to smell and feel the plants.

This is just what students at the Vision Australia Education Centre in the Melbourne suburb of Burwood do in their new sensory garden.

Volunteers from National Australia Bank (NAB) have transformed a wasteland at the centre into an exciting garden featuring a variety of scented herbs and bushes.

The volunteers even installed a water tank and pump to ensure the garden flourishes year round. "It's great for NAB to be able to deliver something tangible and lasting to Vision Australia that will be of benefit to the school and its students," said Michelle Sutherland, Manager Operations and Reporting, National Australia Bank.



Bank staff raised the funds to buy plants through their Casual Dress Fridays and acquired a \$2,000 charitable community grant.

"The amazing work of the NAB volunteers highlights the true meaning of Vision Australia," said Ian Moore, Acting Manager Burwood Education Centre.

If your group or workplace would like to help, call 1300 84 74 66.

Early detection can save your sight

Although macular degeneration is responsible for almost half of all cases of severe vision loss, 78% of Australians have never had their macula checked. Early detection can save your sight. During Macular Degeneration

Awareness Week, 25 June to 1 July, Australians are urged to have a check-up. For more about this week and other events related to blindness or low vision, go to www.visionaustralia.org/events



blindness and low vision services

How to contact us

You can drop into your local Vision Australia centre, call us on **1300 84 74 66** or email vanews@visionaustralia.org

