



**vision
australia**

blindness and low vision services

NEWS



**Your
generous
support is
changing lives
nationwide.
Thank you!**

SPRING 2009

Nurturing friendships

Every Wednesday afternoon, 10 gardeners from across Victoria and New South Wales down tools and head inside to talk to each other about their favourite topic – plants.

They are among the hundreds of Vision Australia clients who take part in special interest groups that connect with each other by phone.

We have discussion groups devoted to football, beauty, books and employment to name but a few subjects. Telelinks are also conducted in languages other than English.

One of our gardening telelinks is facilitated by Ann Miller, a Melbourne volunteer who has supported Vision Australia for many decades.

“Everyone in the group knows and appreciates plants, myself included,” she says.

“They all gardened for many years before losing their sight in later life.

Gift of a lifetime

Thanks to loyal supporters like Ann, Vision Australia can provide services to thousands of people who are blind or have low vision.

Some loyal donors choose to leave a final gift to Vision Australia in their will. This lasting dedication enables us to continue to fund programs and make a positive impact on so many lives.

To find out how to make a bequest to Vision Australia, please call

1800 42 20 77

or visit www.visionaustralia.org



Ann Miller with our Coordinator Telelink Programs, Maria Markou.

Thanks to your support, we operate 110 telelink peer support groups nationwide.

“And everyone has their own methods of gardening.

One lady even learnt to feel the difference between weeds and her plantings, which is quite impressive.”

The peer support group offers keen gardeners a chance to swap planting tips and techniques as well as share their experiences with other people who are blind or have low vision.

Ann has witnessed many friendships grow and flourish over the past three years.

“It’s a social group, so people talk about how they are. In fact, they discuss everything but the kitchen sink.

“I have met the most inspiring and positive people through this group.”

In May, Ann received a Vision Australia 10-year service badge in recognition of a decade of community work.

She is also strong supporter of our Further Education Bursaries and braille program for preschool children who are blind.

Thank you for supporting Vision Australia!

Canberrans come together

This year's Vision Australia Canberra Morning of Celebration highlighted the organisation's diversity, with clients of all ages, supporters, tertiary students, staff and volunteers gathering together.

It was one of many such celebrations held at Vision Australia centres in May and June.

During the ceremony, Public Trustee Andrew Taylor presented our Chief Executive Officer, Gerard Menses, with a cheque for \$26,630 from the Eric Crawford Memorial Fund.

Mr Crawford died in 2004 but his name lives on through his charitable fund, which is administered by GreaterGood and the Public Trustee ACT.

Vision Australia is investing the funds into children's futures through our Stepping Towards School program.

Children in the ACT will also benefit from the generosity of the Sally Sinisoff Trust Fund.

Thanks to such support, Vision Australia is able to provide vital services to children like two-year-old Jackson, who is legally blind (pictured here with his older brother, Jesse).

Our specialists are working with Jackson's family to ensure he reaches those preschool milestones.



**Top: Jackson Prout and his brother Jesse
Above: GreaterGood Trustee's Representative Doug Gillespie, our CEO Gerard Menses and the Public Trustee for the ACT, Andrew Taylor.**

They are also assisting staff at the child care centre that he attends.

As Jackson grows, we will work with his family to ensure he is equipped to start formal education.



PHOTO: NEWSPIX

Lilly learning more by the day

Nothing is going to stop two-year-old Lilly from Ivanhoe, Victoria.

Born blind, the little girl uses her other senses to explore her world. She has already learned to walk and is using a long cane for independent mobility. Lilly is now being immersed in braille through our early childhood Felix Library, which features innovative story kits featuring braille (pictured) and audio books.

The toddler recently touched thousands of Victorians when her story, accompanied by a photo of her meeting Seeing Eye Dog Nelly (pictured on our cover), appeared in The Sunday Herald Sun. With your continued support, Lilly is sure to go far.

Keep in touch at www.visionaustralia.org

Penny takes the lead

Vision Australia Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Instructor Penny Stevenson is one of those rare people who landed her dream job.

"I've dreamed about doing this since I was a kid," she says. "But I always thought I couldn't be an O&M Instructor as no blind person does that!"

Penny was born with retinopathy of prematurity, a condition that affects retinal development. She received her first cane at 16 when she suffered significant vision loss.

Penny has a "lot of strings to her bow" having studied arts, psychophysiology, outdoor education and teaching before deciding "O&M was achievable".

In May she finished her Diploma of Rehabilitation Studies at Massey University in New Zealand in conjunction with the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind before starting work at our Essendon centre.

Penny is the first instructor in Australia who uses a Seeing Eye Dog.

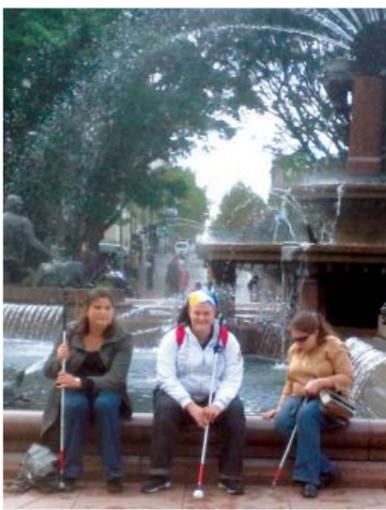


With your help Vision Australia is training more O&M instructors just like Penny.

"I use my remaining vision well and listen to the sound of the cane on the ground. Most people I teach don't realise I'm vision impaired," she says.

"In terms of which mobility aid people should use I've used a cane and have a Seeing Eye Dog, so I'm open to both. There's a different choice for different people at different times."

For more information about the amazing work of Seeing Eye Dogs Australia (a division of Vision Australia) visit www.seda.org.au.



Anna Russell, Catherine O'Leary and Dejsha Morris in Hyde Park.

Out and about in Sydney

Finding your way around a city can be challenging if you are blind or have low vision. However, a group of young long cane users from the Illawarra discovered that armed with the right information and attitude it is possible to safely explore a busy place like Sydney.

Working in teams, the group travelled by ferry, train and even monorail to locate landmarks such as Hyde Park.

"These excursions are a great way for clients to enhance their mobility and independence skills and make friends," says Paul Hartley, Orientation & Mobility Instructor at our Wollongong centre.

This excursion was one in a series of outings for young people who are vision impaired. Thanks to our supporters' generosity we can train more Australians of all ages to independently move about.

Thank you for supporting Vision Australia!

Celebrating our new centres

Vision Australia has opened the doors to two new centres servicing the south-east of Sydney and the Dandenongs in Victoria.

These new centres form part of our commitment to providing local services to people living in areas of greatest need.

The Dandenong centre officially opened on 12 May at a Morning of Celebration that included the presentation of volunteer service badges and Further Education Bursaries to tertiary students who are blind or have low vision.

Later in the month, 100 clients, supporters and local dignitaries attended the opening of our state-of-the-art Caringbah centre.

As with the Dandenong centre, the launch was part of a Morning of Celebration that included the presentation of Making a Difference Awards to organisations and individuals who have gone that extra mile for our community, and the launch of our online Equipment Solutions store.

Vision Australia thanks all of our supporters who contributed towards funding these much-needed new service centres.



Above: Our CEO Gerard Menses, Dandenong Team Manager Sandie Mackevicius (second from right) with peers Carol Unger and Lorna Walters.



Right: Sutherland Mayor, Cr Lorraine Kelly with our Chair Dr Kevin Murfitt at Caringbah.



Encouraged by Dame Edna

Like many artists, Cathy Wade cherishes the time she spends at her easel. Due to low vision, however, the Mirboo North grandmother can only paint in "short bursts".

Yet Cathy perseveres, in part due to encouragement from fellow artist Barry Humphries.

"I did a Dame Edna painting that he wanted to buy, but I couldn't part with it," she says.

Humphries met Cathy backstage at one of his Melbourne shows and signed the painting.

"He told me whatever I do I must keep painting," she says.

Cathy is one of 12 Vision Australia clients whose art features in our 2010 large-print diary and calendars, available from \$10 as of 15 September at our centres or by visiting www.visionaustralia.org/shop

Keep in touch at www.visionaustralia.org

Access all areas

Armidale student Elliott Agnew was in Year 10 when he realised his vision was deteriorating.

On the football field he didn't always see the ball coming towards him and during art class it was taking longer for his eyes to adjust in the dark room.

Although diagnosed at 13 with retinitis pigmentosa, a condition that causes retinal degeneration, his vision loss two years later still came as a shock.

It took Elliott many months to come to terms with his deteriorating sight, particularly the fact he would never drive.

However, within a year he was back on track and thinking about pursuing a career in psychology.

He is now studying a Bachelor of Psychological Science at the University of New England – something he says would be impossible without the technology funded by Vision Australia's Further Education Bursaries.

The bursary provided Elliott with a laptop, screen magnification and screen reading software, which he uses to go over his online lecture notes, as well as a portable handheld video magnifier.

"The technology has been extremely useful," he says. "I use it every day. I honestly don't know



PHOTO COURTESY THE ARMIDALE EXPRESS.

86% of our bursary recipients qualify, compared to the 72% national average.

Elliott Agnew wears glare-reducing glasses and uses a video magnifier to read print.

how I would have coped with all the reading had it not been for the Vision Australia bursary."

Congratulations to all of this year's 22 recipients and many thanks to the generous bursary donors who are helping them to achieve their goals.



Performer David Campbell helping out.

Myer Gift Wrap needs you!

Vision Australia is once again seeking volunteers for our Myer Gift Wrap Christmas fundraiser.

Last year's efforts at Myer stores in New South Wales and Victoria raised a tremendous \$80,000.

With Myer's continued support and your help, this year will be even more successful.

Funds raised from wrapping Myer shoppers' Christmas gifts go towards Vision Australia's Children's Services.

All training is provided, so why not get into the festive spirit and wrap with your family and friends for a fantastic cause.

To help us out call **1800 42 20 77**.

Thank you for supporting Vision Australia!

Scott steps up to work

The philosophy of “do what you love” has paid off for 21-year-old Scott Preston whose passion for music landed him a job.

Scott, who has low vision due to cone rod dystrophy of the retina, was very shy when he first approached our Employment Services team in Brisbane for support.

When our staff found out the highlight of his week was attending guitar lessons at the Music Cavern in Beenleigh they struck upon a starting point for Scott’s job search.

Scott volunteered at the store to gain work experience. In mid-2008, Vision Australia Employment Consultant Robert Raiteri organised a Government wage subsidy so owner Noel Camilleri could employ Scott for six hours a week.

Vision Australia installed magnification software on the store’s computer, brought in a larger monitor and a CCTV. We also gave Scott a voice recorder to use instead of pen and paper.

After a 13-week trial, he was offered a permanent position. At first Scott was most comfortable carrying out back-office duties, but as he grew in confidence so did his level of interaction with the customers.

“Being employed has really brought Scott out of his shell,” says Robert. “It’s great we could tap into his interest.”

Scott recently completed our 26-week Stepping Forward job-seeking program for people who are blind or have low vision, which is funded by the State Government’s Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative.

This program gives participants the opportunity to study Business Certificates II and III modules; receive technology and job-search training and hear from guest speakers such as employers and businesspeople who are vision impaired.



Scott using a voice recorder at Music Cavern.

“I picked up a lot of tips on the course, especially keyboard techniques that have helped me to work faster,” says Scott.

All job-seekers followed up the theory with 16 weeks of full-time paid work experience and are now ready, willing and able to work!

Clever solutions

Vision Australia’s Equipment Solutions team is always searching for practical gadgets and clever technology that makes life easier for the 300,000 Australians who are vision impaired.

Equipment Solutions shops at our centres and online offer everything from handheld magnifiers to hi-tech barcode scanners (below).

The device, which reads barcoded information aloud, enables a person who is blind to shop independently or organise their wardrobe.

We make the right equipment solution easy.

To explore our range, visit www.visionaustralia.org/shop or call 1300 84 74 66.



Thank you from little Emily

Thanks to Vision Australia's generous supporters our 2009 Winter Appeal raised more than \$1 million in much-needed funds.

You may recall, the campaign featured the story of Emily, who is blind. Thanks to community kindness, Vision Australia and her family are teaching the two-year-old to learn through sound, touch and smell.

"Emily is a bright, inquisitive and determined girl," says her Vision Australia Occupational Therapist, Lorraine Mitchell. "She is preparing for preschool and is thriving on becoming more independent."

This year it will cost us more than \$23 million to support Australian children who are vision impaired.

Vision Australia particularly appreciates your generosity during what has been a financially challenging year for many Australians.

If you wish to support more Australians like Emily now and into the future, please consider joining our Live the Vision regular giving program.

Visit www.visionaustralia.org/pledge or call **1800 42 20 77**.

You can fill in the form below and post it to:
GPO BOX 9802, IN YOUR CAPITAL CITY



This gorgeous photo of two-year-old Emily captured a lot of hearts.

Yes, I would like to:

Be a Live the Vision partner, with a monthly donation of:
 \$20 \$30 \$50 \$100 My choice: \$ _____

Give a one-off gift of:
 \$20 \$30 \$50 \$100 My choice: \$ _____

Receive a Christmas Gift Catalogue.

Title: _____ First name: _____

Surname: _____

Address: _____

Suburb: _____

State: _____ Postcode: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

I'm happy to receive emails from Vision Australia:

Please debit my:

Mastercard Visa Amex Diners

Card no: _____/_____/_____/_____

Expiry date: __/____

Name on card: _____

Signature: _____

Send me a direct debit form to debit my bank account (monthly donations only).

I would like information on making a bequest.



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