Welcome to the inaugural issue of the SWDN newsletter. This newsletter was conceived out of feedback from members. Many of our members have expressed a desire to participate in SWDN activities but said they were unable to do so because of time constraints. This e-newsletter was designed to ensure that all members are kept informed of activities and to provide a means for members to be involved and interact without leaving their offices.

I hope that you will enjoy reading the newsletter and will find it extremely helpful. I am hoping to get a lot of feedback and information on the sorts of things you would like to see in the newsletter. This newsletter is for you, and I want it to be something that we can share in and be proud of!

Editor

Rebecca Loftus
Message from the Secretary

Hello Members and friends of the Network. I am now into my second full year as Secretary of the Management Committee and despite some hiccups I could not be happier with our progress.

The 2003 event, which will be remembered as much for its Senior Staff Forum as for the sensational feeling of renewal generated over the three days, marked a turning point for the Network.

The Department, our Department, can now see very clearly that the Staff with Disabilities Network via its Management Committee and Advisors is capable, professional and just maybe, essential, to the Department meeting its broad goals. What all this means in reality, is that, we will now be expected to provide high quality training and networking events every time. As Secretary I know we have the ability to meet these new expectations, I also know that 2004 will be busy, time consuming but ultimately rewarding for all.

The biggest news from a developmental point of view is the cementing in of the Staff with Disabilities Mentor Program into the Departmental plan. This means that a Mentor Program for Staff with Disabilities is expected by the Department to be a part of each year’s activity to be reported on like other Departmental initiatives. Importantly, the Network Management Committee is recognised by the Department as being responsible for the administration, management and oversight of the Mentor Program.

2004 will also see the Network reach out to the regions with the establishment of a ‘Satellite’ Network. Starting this year in Western Sydney and the Hunter the Network aims to localise itself and by developing and strengthening these Satellites, strengthen the Network as a whole.

I would like to finish this first Newsletter for 2004 on a serious note. Organisational units should not use resources, or the lack of them, to deny access to Network events, for their staff with disabilities. Apart from travel monies (which are budgeted for and paid for ALL staff attending authorised training events) organisational units incur no other costs for these events. The Network pays for accommodation, meals, training costs, materials, speakers and venue fees.

And finally, the Network and the events it organises are endorsed and supported by the department, don’t be put off, by knee jerk responses of the uninformed.

Your Secretary

George Peterson
Welcome to the inaugural issue of the SWDN newsletter. As you may be aware, the Network has been undergoing changes and a new management committee was elected last year at our three-day conference. Since that time, we have been working on several projects that will help to move the Network forward and hopefully more fully engage our members.

**MENTORING**

Something that many of you will not be aware of is the current status of the mentoring project. The pilot phase has been completed and a report written and submitted to management. The project has been so successful that management now require us to undertake this project each year. We are looking to expand the project to include more of our members as well as senior and other staff who do not belong to the Network. In coming months you will be contacted in regard to the program and asked whether you wish to participate and at what capacity.

**SATELLITE GROUPS**

Another new initiative that the committee is working on is the development of satellite groups within the Network. Many of you have told us about the difficulties in travelling to Sydney for SWDN functions so we are developing satellite groups that will bring SWDN activities to you. Initially, we will be setting up satellite groups in Western Sydney and the Hunter. This year we are planning several workshops and informal meetings in these areas to include as many of our members as possible. As we expand the Network we will be launching satellites in other regions and including more professional development activities in each area.

**FEEDBACK**

We will be sending out a questionnaire in the next few weeks to get feedback from our members about the Network, the mentoring program and professional development activities. This will be sent out via email in the coming months and we would like all members to respond as candidly as possible. We need to know what your needs are and this questionnaire will allow us to make changes and improvements to the Network.

**Letters and Emails**

As this is our first issue, let me take the opportunity to invite you to comment on the Network. The SWDN management committee wants to get feedback from you and is interested in any questions, comments or suggestions you might have. Please direct these to the editor –

Rebecca.loftus@det.nsw.edu.au
Implantable hearing aid: a new choice

A Sydney man is the first Australian to receive a revolutionary hearing aid system known as The Retro-X. The system, which is implanted, delivers sounds without blocking the ear canal and is sure to suit thousands of people who find some of the old devices cumbersome.

Like thousands of Australians, Kevin Roche struggles to hear in noisy settings. He hates to admit it, even though it affects others as well.

"They find it quite frustrating in that I keep asking them to repeat the story or ask what has been going on," said Kevin Roche, the first implantable hearing aid patient.

But the last thing Kevin wants is a hearing aid. Ear specialist Phil Chang says many view hearing aids as an unwanted admission of disability while others who want to wear one, just can't.

"It does block the whole of the ear canal and in some patients that predisposes to outer ear infection," said Dr Phil Chang, St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney.

Now, for the first time in Australia there's a totally new choice. Not to be confused with a cochlear implant, this technology involves a titanium tube, which is surgically inserted in the skin crease behind the ear to connect, out of sight, into the front ear canal.

A patient simply attaches a tiny amplifier to the tube at the start of the day and sound is transmitted directly into the hearing canal without blocking the front of the ear.

"I would have to say this represents the biggest advance in hearing aid technology in more than a decade," said Dr Chang.

The half-hour procedure can be done under local anaesthetic. Doctors, however, stress this is for selective patients with high pitch hearing loss. But that is the most common type of deafness, so the device could benefit thousands whether their problem is related to ageing or exposure to noise.

Contact:
For more information visit your local GP who will refer you to a specialist audiologist.

Web link
www.gyrus-ent.com
SPOTLIGHT

In issue #1 we are interviewing Rebecca about her experiences in the SWDN.

How long have you been with the SWDN?
About 16 months maybe? I am in a WorkAble position so the team contacted me almost straight away.

What was your initial contact like?
Friendly, and I remember it being very open and accessible. I have to admit that I wasn’t really interested in the Network initially because I didn’t see myself as “disabled”. But once I got involved, I realised that it wasn’t such a stigma and there was lots I could learn and do through the SWDN.

What has your experience with the Network been like?
Great. I feel really at home with the other members. They don’t make me feel like an oddball and there are never any hassles about getting adjustments made or anything like that. I also feel supported and more able to contribute my skills without worrying.

Have you been to any professional development activities with the SWDN?
Yeah, I went to the three-day conference last year which was terrific and I have also participated in the mentoring project too.

Tell us about your participation in the mentoring project, how was it?
Great. As a mentor I was able to assist a colleague to sharpen her skills and have access to more opportunities at work. It has really helped my mentee, and myself too. I have developed some good skills and am looking forward to participating again.

In what role?
Any role really. Mentor, mentee, organiser, tea lady .... It was great and I just want to be a part of it.

You’re on the management committee too, aren’t you?
Yep

What’s the news from there?
Oh heaps of stuff is changing and we are trying to increase our profile. We’ve set up some working parties and I am on the Promotions one. Lots of work, but I hope it will pan out well.

Is there anything you want to say to our readers?
Just welcome, and I hope this newsletter works out well. Get your friends to join the SWDN too! We need more members and if everyone recruits just one friend, we’ll be on our way ....
FAQ’s

Joining the SWDN

1 – Can my non-disabled friends join the SWDN?

The SWDN was developed as a network for staff with a disability. Occasionally, we might invite someone with specific expertise who does not have a disability to assist us in some way. But this is temporary, and they cannot be full members.

2 – Is the SWDN open to departments other than DET and TAFE?

At the moment, no but we are looking to expand when funds allow.

3 – Who do I need to refer people to in order to join up?

Our CEO, Patricia Richardson or our Secretary, George Peterson.
Well, hello everyone and welcome to the first edition of Steve’s techno tidbits. I guess the main purpose for this section is to try and review, from a hands on perspective, the latest gadgets and gismos out there for people with disabilities. I’ll try to explain my findings both positive and negative in a language that everyone can understand, even those “Techno Wally’s!”

Oh dam! There goes my mobile again; it’s probably someone sending me another “SMS”. Hang on, I’ll be right back and we’ll continue with my first review and….

Ok, I’m back and it was nothing important, just Telstra trying to sell me a different mobile phone plan. Pardon? What was that you said? You wish that mobile phones were accessible to vision impaired/blind people, especially the use of the SMS facility?!

Well, enter ‘Mobile Accessibility and Talks’, two software programs that do exactly that. They offer access to most of the features of today’s series 60 mobile phones, and yes you will have access to the ever-popular SMS facility as well. Now if you don’t mind I’d like to have “My two bobs worth”. I’d also like to point out that this is not a comparison of the two products, I’m just speaking from my findings and letting you decide, you know “horses for courses” and all that stuff.

Firstly I’d like to start with ‘Mobile Accessibility’

Well once installed on your Nokia 3650 this proves to be a very handy user-friendly application. What is an application, I hear you say?

An application is a software program; in this case that allows access to most, but not all, of the features of the mobile phone. I guess that the logic behind this is to keep it nice and simple and aim at a market of users who just want to have access to the basic features. You know, the “KIS method”. Oh there I go talking in riddles “KIS” simply means keep it simple.

Anyway after installing the software on the phone, which was quite painless, I was quite happy with the quality of the voice even though the volume was a little quiet.

I found the navigation of the menus quite easy following a logical left to right sequence using the jog dial on the phone. Once you find the menu that you require you just down arrow to make your choice and then press ok.

Although you don’t have access to all features in the phone, I guess the features considered the most important can be accessed in a very logical and user friendly way. A couple of features that come to mind are being able to adjust the contrast of the colour on the screen, which is great for people with low vision.
Another great feature, which has eluded vision impaired/blind users, is to be able to have the program read out the battery level, which can help to eliminate that age-old problem of getting caught with a flat battery. Oh and yes, it does read and even let the user compose their own SMS messages.

Ok that’s enough waffle from me on Mobile Accessibility. There will be more web sites and technical information about both phones at the bottom of this article

Now, bring on Talks for the Nokia 9210, 9200, 3650 and ..... 

Ok, where do I start? What do I say? When I installed the Talks software and turned on my mobile phone, I was pleasantly surprised when I heard the very familiar speech synthesiser Eloquence. Anybody who uses either of the world’s two most popular screen reading programs, Jaws or Window Eyes, would take to this software straight away.

The other difference noted in this program is the flexibility it has, because unlike an application, which is restricted, this is an actual screen reader and simply reads out the information on the screen no matter where you go in the phone settings.

This means that not only can you change the ringing tones, but also you can even compose your own. You also have access to the Infra red function which enables you to transfer data from your PC to your mobile phone. A couple of other features that come to mind are having the option of short cut keys to carry out functions with out having to go in and out of menus i.e. adjusting volume speed of the voice etc. It was also great to have access to the calendar, which apparently could be transferred to your Microsoft Outlook calendar on your PC.

Well that’s enough from me, have I teased you enough? Do you want to find out more information? Maybe even download a demo to try it out? All of those questions will be answered below.

Oh there’s just one more thing, remember I said that this was not a comparison of the two products? When making that all-important choice, it all just depends on what your needs are and what you can afford. Much like any purchases we all make!

Anyway I’d better go, my mobile is ringing again, I wonder who that is? I’ll just have the voice read out the phone number on the screen.
Oh, its Telstra again, don’t they ever give up?

All enquiries
Stephen Belbin - Specialist Advisor - assistive technology
Hunter Institute TAFE
Phone: 4923-7185
Mobile: 0409-000-100
Technical Articles

Two new packages that can make some Nokia phones talk to you.

TALKS, Screen Reading Software for the Nokia 9210i Mobile Phone

The Nokia 9210i with TALKS screen reading software is the world's first accessible mobile phone. For the first time people with a vision impairment or print disability can now easily do what they have always wanted to be able to do.

• Check missed calls
• Check dialled calls
• Check received calls
• Send and receive text messages
• Check network coverage and battery status
• Utilize the cell broadcast feature
• Manage contact information and dial numbers directly from the phone book
• Customize phone settings according to personal preferences.

Once loaded onto the Nokia 9210i, TALKS has all the basic functions of a PC Screen Reader and gives you the ability to:

• Type keyboard echo by letter, letter/word, word or none
• Read letter, word, and line
• Continuous read from the cursor
• Read last prompt
• Read current focus on screen
(Talks gives you the option to listen to them again)
• Load and unload Talks
• Change speech rate, pitch and volume
• Change punctuation settings including none, some, most and all
• Spell phonetically (A equals Alpha, B equals Beta and so on)
• Keyboard learn mode so you can tell what the keys do without them activating
• Read time/date
• Access help
• Read the status of your battery and signal strength

For more information on TALKS for the Nokia 9210i go to the following link:
http://www.talx.de/index_e.shtml
Cost of product: $690 plus the mobile phone if required.

Further enquiries contact the RVIB Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind.
Phone: 1800-458-555
Mobile Accessibility - Making your Nokia 3650 & 7650 Talk
Nokia 3650
Nokia 7650

Now your mobile phone can talk to you.

One of the problems facing vision-impaired people is the use of the mobile phone. It is designed basically on visual concepts, without considering the needs of blind and partially sighted people.

Mobile Accessibility is a computer application, which makes the mobile phone accessible in different ways and allows its uses to be adapted to the needs of people who have a problem seeing the mobile phone screen. Mobile Accessibility has a powerful voice synthesizer designed by the Swiss company SVOX, which allows simple access to all the uses of the mobile phone. Mobile accessibility does not need any additional external adaptive device to work. Once loaded in the mobile phone it is fully functional.

Features
• Allows SMS and multimedia (MMS) messages to be sent, received and read.
• Allows entries on the list of contacts to be added, removed and updated.
• Gives access to the list of calls received and dialling of any of these numbers at the simple touch of a button.
• Know who’s calling you with the press of a button.
• Operation of alarms.
• Access to the call log (missed calls, numbers dialled,).
• Automatic start-up when phone is switched on.
• Allows ringing tones to be associated with contacts.
• Reading of battery level and network signal strength.
• Available in several languages: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Japanese.
• And many other additional features.

Mobile Accessibility is already available for:
List of 2 items
• Nokia 3650
• Nokia 7650

During 2003 it is planned to support:
• Siemens SX1
• Samsung SGH-D700
• SPV SmartPhone.

For more information on Mobile Accessibility go to the following link:
http://mobileaccessibility.codfact.com/
Cost of product: $350 Plus the Mobile Phone if required.

Further enquiries contact the RVIB Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind.
Phone: 1800-458-555
Calendar of Upcoming Events

March 30 – Western Sydney Satellite Group Informal Lunch
April 28 – Hunter Institute Satellite Group Informal Lunch
May 4 – Western Sydney Satellite Group Official Launch
May 27 – Hunter Institute Satellite Group Official Launch
June 4 – Submissions close for issue #2 of SWDN newsletter
June 11 – Issues date for issue #2 SWDN newsletter
June 30 – Management Meeting

Submissions

This newsletter is your forum and we welcome any stories, photos, suggestions and questions.

Contact the editor rebecca.loftus@det.nsw.edu.au

Closing date for submissions for Issue #2 is the 4th June