Hi again!

As you will no doubt know, the SWDN 2 day PD event ‘New Directions’ took place in October. For those who couldn’t attend I wanted to let you know how it all went.

So, this special issue is dedicated to New Directions and the segments include feedback from participants. These features have replaced many of our normal newsletter editorials for this edition only.

The format of the Newsletter has also changed. We are now trialling a text only format and a complete format. The former is specially designed for access by screen reading programs and the latter contains photos and images.

I hope that you enjoy the changes and I look forward to more helpful feedback!

Editor
Rebecca Loftus
Our intrepid members Berinda and Bruce undertook extensive investigations before recommending we trial a new venue this year: the Rooty Hill Holiday Inn.

It was worth it: the facilities and service were exceptional. Our varied needs including some extremely specific dietary or access needs were well catered for. In fact, the venue went out of its way to accommodate our needs and did their utmost to rectify any concerns.

Overall, feedback regarding the venue was extremely positive from participants. It also proved considerably more economical than other or previous venues so the Rooty Hill Holiday Inn is definitely on our list of preferred venues!
The People

Member’s attendance and enthusiasm contributed significantly to the success of this event. Many took the opportunity to network which, according to feedback, is most valued. Accordingly we intend to make networking a more prominent feature of future events.

Many members also expressed a desire to do more within the Network. This was great to see and it will give the Committee an opportunity to make more use of skills within the SWDN and to ensure that the Network keeps moving forward.

The Program

Welcome and Opening Addresses

For the first time we had an Aboriginal representative welcome us to the land on behalf of the local indigenous community. Kim Curtisnewton performed this duty on behalf of the local community. Kim also gave us an insight into her own indigenous heritage as part of the community who dwell near the sea in the north of the state.

After welcoming us, Kim gave us some information on the events she has been attending that relate to the SWDN. The first was a forum arranged by the United Nations.

Former Secretary’s address – George Peterson

I would like to thank the Management Committee for giving me this chance to speak. This speech is the one I should have given when I was elected Secretary because I felt a sense of what difference will it make? pervading and I worried about a membership who were so despondent.
Someone needed to remind the Committee and the membership that Networks work.

Today I want to give you a potted history of my more than twenty years in the disability movement and I hope reinforce for people the importance of networks.

But before I do I think we need to remember one very important fact. Change in our society is enacted in Parliaments. BUT - When it comes to issues of living with disability, the vast majority of politicians know NOTHING. Yet over the last 25 – 30 years these same people have introduced significant change and attempted to lead community attitudes in directions we activists would never have thought possible.

So Why? Why so much change in this quarter of a century and not the three quarters before. I argue that it is primarily because in the first 75 years of our federation there were NO organisations OF people with disabilities.

In the period since 1975 organisations run BY people with disabilities have replaced those run FOR people with disabilities at the forefront of change for their peers.

Let your mind wander back to December 1981, the International Year OF the Disabled, and you will discover me George Peterson, carrying on, trying to live a life pretending I am not handicapped by my obvious disabilities. You must know that teenagers with obvious disabilities hate mirrors, not because they show everything to the world, but because they reveal everything to the self.

It’s nearly Christmas and my school life ended weeks ago and I knew, if no one else did yet, that I WAS NOT going to university. While job hunting through my local paper I read a public announcement about the starting up of a resource centre FOR the disabled.
The people who had the idea had called a meeting and asked people with disabilities who were interested to attend on the fourth Monday night in January, 1982.

For reasons I did not quite understand then, I attended that meeting, and since then, countless other fourth Mondays and second Tuesdays. It was a life changing event. That night I was reunited with a childhood buddy and we both began a political ride that took us to Macquarie Street, putting a fire under Neville Wran and on to a national stage with real change about to happen.

It was heady stuff – travelling the state and talking with my disabled peers, all with the aim of nothing less than CREATING A BETTER WORLD!!

Does anyone in this room really believe that the non-disabled majority, left to their own devices i.e. without networks of people with disabilities prepared to take risks and speak out, would have gotten around to significantly altering the circumstances that confronted people with disabilities every day?

Does anyone in this room think that the 40 cents per hour paid to people with disability in sheltered workshops was not a true demonstration of how valued those people were by the rest of society?

I will argue with anyone that, without networks of people with disabilities, growing out of the Independent Living Movement in Berkeley (US) and Stoke – Mandeville in the UK and elsewhere, the last 30 years in Australia might have continued on like the first 75, as far as disability policy was concerned.

So for the doubters, both here today and back in your workplaces, if ever you needed proof that change happens because people of like minds work together to achieve it, the following list can be sprouted mantra like;

- The Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme!
The closure of hideous 19th Century institutions that made no differentiation between disability and mental illness, treating everyone equally poorly!

The implementation of Attendant Care – against the financial objections of the monolithic Home Care Service of NSW.

Abolition of the invalid pension and replacement by a disability related support payment. Crucial to making part-time work viable for us with disabilities.

Change to the 1904 Education Act, which gave SPECIFIC powers to the principals of state primary or high schools to reject ANY enrolment on the grounds of disability alone!

I could have found another dozen crucial legislative and other changes that have been driven by people with disabilities but that is not the main point.

The reality is that the growth of networks of people with disabilities was the crucial developmental leap made in Australia and by linking, where appropriate, with like minded networks of their non-disabled peers they were able to organise and achieve change.

Now bring this back home to TAFE.

The Departmental decision to officially recognise and support a network of staff with disabilities in the late eighties must have resulted from some agitation by staff of the day.

To me the original motivation is irrelevant, what remains crucial is that the network has life. It lives and breathes, here today.

It therefore has the capacity to CREATE, to ENGINEER, to STEER change for the better.

The development and subsequent endorsement of the Staff with Disabilities Mentor Program is just another in the long line of ideas, concepts and policies that PEOPLE
WITH DISABILITIES (PWD) have invented or co-opted to benefit themselves and their peers.

However the forces of status quo are fighting back as the 21st Century rushes on.

I predict that the next group of PWD who band together for change, will be those who are being injured today (at work and play) and discover that the society they thought would help them has already decided not to!

George Peterson  
Foundation President of Disabled Peoples International (NSW)

Former Secretary Management Committee SWDN

Mentoring

This session was a chance for participants to share their experiences. As this is the second year of the Mentoring program, one of the key issues discussed by participants was the benefits of having been both a Mentor and a Mentee. Participants who have been both gave insights into the growth and learning that they experienced in both roles.

Interestingly, some said that they had learned more as a Mentor, because their Mentees gave them insights into different strategies and ways of dealing with a variety of situations!
Another positive aspect of the program has been the way that it has worked within workplaces. Many managers and colleagues are noticing the differences in staff and the new skills they have acquired.

Participation also displays a willingness to undertake professional development and this gives the workplace a better qualified and more able worker which is a great bonus to any workplace. Many managers have been quick to realise this.

VISA project

The VISA project was based on the SWDN Mentoring Pilot Project. It developed and exceeded its objectives which were to increase the job opportunities and participation level of a vision impaired staff member (Gwen Isaac). Rebecca Loftus developed this project in conjunction with her Senior Counsellor, John Felvus and, of course, Gwen.

The project, VISA (Vision Impaired Staff Adaptation) had two main aims; to assist Gwen to expand her job opportunities and level of participation within the Granville College of TAFE, and to provide her colleagues
with an awareness of disability issues along with strategies to deal with problems that could arise.

The project involved workplace based training, professional development and mentoring. The intended outcomes were achieved and the project has been extended in length and scope. It was included in the 2004 TAFE Quality Awards Showcase and has been placed on the Employment, Equity and Diversity Division’s (Premier’s Department) website as an example of best practice.


**SWDN**

As the SWDN has been undergoing some changes over the past 12 months or so, the Committee took the opportunity to talk about them, their rationale and the effects they are expected to have on members.

*Stephen Belbin*
*Contact for Hunter Institute*

Stephen explained his role as Technical Advisor to the Committee and outlined the projects he has been involved in that assist members to access information quickly and easily. Of prime importance has been his work on the SWDN web board, the Mentor and Mentee chat rooms and the work that has gone into making technology accessible for members.
Rebecca Loftus  
Secretary  
Contact for South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE.

Rebecca outlined her role and emphasised that any member can contact her with issues that they may have. This can include things like getting a new member into the SWDN, ensuring that members get the information they require on equity issues or giving feedback about the SWDN newsletter that she edits! She described her role as the centre of the wheel that links each spoke to the others.

Kylie McCormack  
Contact person for Illawarra and south region

Kylie talked about the new Committee structure that has been developed to better meet SWDN member needs. The Committee structure has decentralised so that there is a smaller central state committee, which has contact with state managers and so forth. The remaining Committee members will concentrate more on direct member contact through state wide satellite groups.

Bruce Morgan  
contact person for Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE (the best way to contact him is by email)

Bruce explained that the Hunter and Western Sydney satellite groups have been so successful in giving members greater support and input into the Network that the program has been extended. In 2005, it is hoped that there will be more satellite groups springing up at Institutes and state offices throughout NSW. In each case, the group will be run by a contact person who will be a contact for members, will facilitate training and feedback to the State Committee. This will hopefully expand our membership and give existing members more input into the SWDN.
Berinda Karp and Bob Craig

Contacts for Western Sydney Institute of TAFE

Berinda and Bob outlined the successful events that were run in the Western Sydney Satellite group, including informal lunches and workshops on mentoring. Members have given really good feedback on these meetings indicating they found them to be a good chance to network and develop themselves.

Felicity Fries
Contact person for the Sydney State offices and for the Southern Sydney Institute.

Because of the success of our Mentoring project, SWDN is going to run it every year. In terms of cost and benefit, it appears that running projects like Mentoring will be the best way to show our development and our potential. As such, the SWDN will be looking to run projects alongside Mentoring in 2005 and beyond. Felicity asked for input from members via the satellite groups and for maximum feedback so we can improve the projects we do to maximise outcomes and impact.
**Kim Curtisnewton**

*Contact for New England (Contact through email)*

Kim outlined the successful outcomes of the Mentoring project. She also emphasised the need for member participation to ensure its success.

**Trish Richardson**

*Executive Officer*

Trish then ended the session by talking about the need for members to feedback questions and directions for the committee to develop. Many questions were raised by members and the result was an unscheduled brainstorming session on day 2.

**HREOC**

Karen Toohey from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) came and discussed the Commission’s role and how they can be accessed. The key piece of information was that each case is assessed by a HREOC person and is then taken up or referred on, based on its merits. HREOC deal with all cases of discrimination and equity, and their role is to educate, advocate and push for systemic and structural changes when required.

Most of the cases that are dealt with by HREOC are resolved through mediation and both parties are reconciled under the appropriate legislation. Contact in the first instance should be with HREOC once individual efforts have failed to resolve a situation.
**Resumes**
*Geoff Geogan*

Geoff gave us an excellent overview of creating the most appealing and professional resume. He pointed out that the first few seconds that a potential employer views your resume can be crucial as to whether you get an interview. He explored format and content of successful resumes and held a very informative open discussion. Participant feedback on this session was extremely enthusiastic.

**Employee Assistance Program (EAPS)**

Tony Conway talked about the assistance that is available to staff of DET and TAFE. All staff (except casuals) are entitled to 6 hours of free counselling in a calendar year. The counselling is confidential and conducted by registered psychologists. Further sessions can be arranged but generally you can only get 6 hours in any calendar year. Presently, more sessions are available if the issue is related to the restructure.

EAPS deals with all kinds of issues including workplace stress, relationship and psychological issues (like depression or anxiety). The most important thing to bear in mind is that this type of support is not monitored by managers or supervisors. They will, of course, be notified that a staff member has used the service for so many hours, but names and details are not provided, so the service is completely confidential.

EAPS has a web site and each college has brochures on the service but if staff have trouble locating the information, they can go to their college’s Counselling Unit. They generally have copies and can provide details about the EAP service.

Hypothetical – employment scenario

A scenario was presented in 2 different ways. George Peterson was applying for a job and in one interview the panel did not deal appropriately with him and in the second their approach was far more appropriate. The presentations were humorous and exaggerated to give the audience a clearer idea of the many pitfalls of interviewing.

In the first interview, it was clear that the panel had not prepared an accessible venue and that the selection criteria were not intrinsic to the job. In a sense, the questions inadvertently eliminated applicants with a disability. In the second interview it was clear that the panel were behaving in an appropriate manner and had thought through the relevant issues.

The scenario caused great debate and raised many issues about discrimination, equity and legislation. A question was raised about disclosure and it was explained that we do not need to disclose our disability unless we need reasonable adjustment in the interview. The selection process should only look at merit - not disability.
**Adaptive Technology**

Stephen Belbin introduced participants to new technologies designed to assist people with disabilities. Amongst other things he demonstrated the use of scanner technology used to voice print and aids for daily living like mobile phones with voice. He was followed by Graham Smith who introduced participants to adaptive keyboards and mouse variations. These items assist the user to navigate and control computer technology.

Telstra also had a display at this workshop. They had brought along a TTY machine (which is a keyboard that is attached to a phone), a lamp that is connected to the phone (so when the phone rings, the light goes on) and displayed services such as large print or Braille copies of Telstra bills. These technologies are low cost and assist people with disabilities to make full use of Telstra’s services.

**ANY COMMENTS OR FEEDBACK?**
Please direct these to the editor
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