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### Season's Greetings

2011 has been busy for the ACEDisAbility Network. The following is just a sample of the many things we have been doing:

- Eastern Metro Inclusion Project
- Development of a DIY training manual
- Completion of the "Better Than it Was" report
- Training for the Sticky Institute, City of Whitehorse neighbourhood houses, City of Casey, Braybrook Network Neighbourhood Houses, Royal Yacht Club, Altona Library & North West Metropolitan ACEF.

We wish you all the best for the Christmas break and hope to see more of you in the coming year.

### News

#### Robyn Murray Award

In 2011 the Community House Association of the Outer Eastern Suburbs (CHAOS) Network founded the Robyn Murray Award in memory of Robyn Murray, former Executive Officer of Japara Neighbourhood House and Manager of Glen Park Community Centre who passed away on 18 September 2010.

Robyn was well known as a person who was passionate about inclusion of people of all abilities and lived and breathed her convictions every day. The award recognises people who truly embrace the principles of inclusion in their work.

The 2011 Winners were Louisa Philp nominated by Orana Neighbourhood House and Tracey Verburgt nominated by Coonara Community House.

Nominations for the 2012 Awards will open in February 2012. Please contact the CHAOS Network office for more information.

Leanne Herman (Manager, Coonara Community House on left) and Tracey Verburgt on the right).



## Good practice stories

### Being Connected is What it Takes

Claymates, pottery students' all time favourite class at Wavlink, turns out exceptional pieces of work every week. Wavlink Inc. is proud to have amongst its ranks people whose obvious dedication to their own art is palpable .



Here Len Thesinger, pictured, shows by his depth in concentration developing the pattern prior to glazing and firing. Len from his example demonstrates just how important this class and the medium used, is to him. Len started in Claymates in 2010 and has progressed to an amazing standard.

Len says that he thinks this piece is going quite well and that he is hoping to sell it so funds can be raised for Wavlink.

Len has shown what immersion and concentration can do when you have a passion for your art. The pottery tutor, Yani Escobar says 'Working with Len has been an inspiration, one that we are keen to showcase and demonstrate just how important inclusiveness in our community has been to everyone.' [Visit the Wavlink website www.wavlink.org.au](http://www.wavlink.org.au) for further inspiration.

### All the right moves

It's often surprising how one thing can lead to another.

Steve wanted to play chess with some of his friends from **NEAMI** (a psychiatric rehabilitation service organisation) so he approached the Avenue@ Eley Neighbourhood House to start a Chess Club. They welcomed him and his friends and the club was promoted to attract more members. Chess proved popular and other people from the community joined. The Chess Club is now a vibrant part of the Avenue@Eley program.

Further to this, Steve has become one of the house volunteers and now drives their bus for them. He has become such a valued member of the neighbourhood house community that they are looking to involve him in further activities.

## Myths and facts about people who are blind or have low vision

- **Myth:** Blind people live in a world of total darkness.  
**Fact:** Only a small percentage of vision impaired people see nothing at all. Darkness is the eye telling you that there is no light on. People who are (totally) blind do not have the ability to see light, or darkness. They see nothing at all.
  - **Myth:** You need to speak louder when talking to a blind person.  
**Fact:** Blind people have poor eyes not ears. Talk to them as you would to anyone else. When in a room with several other people use their name so they know you are speaking to them and not someone else.
  - **Myth:** Blind people can always identify you by your voice.  
**Fact:** Some people have very distinctive voices, but most do not. It is more difficult to recognise people by voice when walking outside or in a busy room. Blind people are no different from everyone else; except that they are unable to see that someone is speaking to them. When you meet a vision impaired person, introduce yourself by name. If you know their name use it, then they will know that you are speaking to them and not someone else. This is particularly important if there are other people within the vicinity. To further attract their attention, gently touch their upper arm with your hand. When you are leaving, say you are going away. Nobody likes to find that they have been speaking to an empty space
  - **Myth:** Blind people have special gifts: a "sixth sense."  
**Fact:** People who are blind or have low vision are not endowed with a sharper sense of touch, hearing, taste, or smell. To compensate for their loss of vision, many learn to listen more carefully, or remember without taking notes.
- Myth:** Most blind people are proficient in Braille and own a guide dog.  
**Fact:** Only a small percentage of blind or vision impaired readers are completely fluent in Braille; many know enough Braille for functional use, such as reading notes and labels. Most people who learn Braille as adults do not develop the skill to read rapidly. Only a small percentage of blind or vision impaired people use a dog guide. When the dog guide is harnessed, it's on duty. Once out of harness, the dog relaxes because it's off duty.
- **Myth:** Blind people cannot use computers  
**Fact:** An increasing number of vision impaired people use computers. Some use large text or modified colour displays. Others use audio screen readers and a further group have electronic Braille displays. Many blind and partially sighted people have access to specialist software which enables them to use standard office programs, browse the Internet and communicate by email.
  - **Myth:** Blind people do not enjoy TV or theatre  
**Fact:** Not true. Some blind and partially sighted people can see quite a bit of a television picture. It depends on the usefulness of any remaining sight. People who are both blind and deaf can now access teletext using an electronic Braille pad.  
Theatre is a social experience as well as a show. Looking forward to going out with friends is often part of the enjoyment. As with television, the spoken and sung words often contain enough information to support the story..

## Tip sheet for working with students who are blind or have low vision

Although most people with vision impairment are not totally blind, not being able to see well has an impact on communication and learning. Remember:

- It is hard for someone with vision impairment to identify body language – this can lead to misinterpretation. It also means that they cannot pick up the cues that someone else wishes to speak
- They may not be able to identify the speaker just by their voice
- They may not be able to ascertain who else is present in the conversation
- They are not able to take advantage of visual aides and displays.

### Strategies for working with people who are blind or have low vision

Identify yourself and ask others in the room to do the same so that the person can locate them

When talking in a group/ classroom address people by name.

Explain sudden noises

Don't shout. People who are blind or vision impaired are not deaf.

When seating a person who is blind or vision impaired guide their hand to the back of the chair and allow them to seat themselves.

Talk about what you and others are doing

Show the person where things are placed and let them pick up and feel objects, where appropriate.

Don't move objects without telling the student

Don't leave doors ajar. Close or open them fully.

If you are leaving, tell the person where you are going, who is still with them and when you will be back. It is very embarrassing to find you are talking to someone who isn't there

Give clear directions, don't talk about "here" and "there"

Speak directly to the person not through another person

It's OK to use words like "look" and "see"

It's OK to refer to colour when talking to the student.

Let the person have hands-on experiences whenever possible. Don't force the person to touch new things if they are unsure about them.

Ask if the person needs help rather than assuming they do and accept "No" if they don't.

Don't leave the person unless they know where they are

Don't push or steer the person, let them take your hand or elbow

Do not pat or play with an assistance animal unless it is out of harness and therefore no longer working

Explain visual aides and displays

Have written material in the students preferred format e.g. Braille, electronic, Large Print

Use large fonts - Arial 18 ( if that is the students preferred format)

Access electronic formats and screen reading technology for students who are blind

Use a volunteer reader

Allow for additional time to access alternative formats

Describe emotions and visual demonstrations

Ensure inclusion into class discussions and group work

Ensure all directions are verbal rather than visual e.g. go and sit with Tom who is at the back of the classroom on the left