****Blind Citizens Australia Parent News (February 2014)

**Welcome to the** February **2014 edition of Parent News!**

**In this edition you will find the following items:**

* New Editor for Parent News
* Rights in Tertiary Education: Tips and Tricks
* Australian Disability and Indigenous Peoples’ Education Fund (ADIPEF)
* Department of Justice Disability Leadership Scholarship Program 2014
* Vision Australia Bursary
* 12th WBUAP Onkyo World Braille Essay Contest 2014

**Introducing New Editor: Thai Nguyen**

I’d like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new editor of Parent News. For those of you who don’t already know me, I’ve been working in the role of Victorian Advocacy and Policy Officer with Blind Citizens Australia since 2012.

One of my roles during my time at BCA has been to assist various students and parents of children who are blind or vision impaired with education-related issues ranging from primary school level to tertiary education. I have found that one of the biggest barriers that students face is not being aware of their right to access education on an equal level to their sighted peers.

The challenges that students who are blind or vision impaired often face when entering university include: access to course materials in preferred format, lack of adjustments made to teaching delivery and assessments, problems arranging work placements, and attitudes of teaching or administration staff as well as attitudes of other students. One of the most powerful tools that individuals have found in dealing with these issues is having sufficient knowledge about their rights and being able to communicate their needs in a manner that is constructive and effective.

From a survey conducted by Blind Citizens Australia together with Vision Australia, previous students believed that the following information would have been useful to know when they had first experienced a problem:

* Rights of students with disabilities
* The education provider’s disability policy
* Financial supports available
* Grievance and complaints processes
* Adaptive technology available to students with disabilities

Stay tuned for more Tips and Tricks on being a powerful self-advocate! You can find me at our National Office in Melbourne, so feel free to get in touch and say hi!

**Rights in Tertiary Education: Tips and Tricks**

Thai Nguyen, Advocacy and Policy Officer

Transitioning from high school to university or TAFE can be a challenging time for students. For students who are blind or vision impaired, the challenges of entering university will be unique from those of other students. To ensure a positive learning experience, it is highly recommended that students plan ahead and engage with the right supports prior to starting the course.

Below are some tips and strategies to consider when starting tertiary education:

1. **Be prepared prior to starting**

Seek out orientation and mobility instruction early to navigate around the campus and find out where your lecture rooms are located. Get in touch with your faculty, teaching staff and disability liaison unit officer before you begin any new studies. Get to know who you should talk to and make a connection with them so that you will feel confident to approach them about any adjustments required during the course of your studies.

1. **Discuss your needs**

Make your learning needs known to receive adequate support and special consideration entitlements. By doing so, you will have an opportunity to find out about disability-related services, support, research and other information. This also creates an opportunity for educating others about disability and its impact.

It may also be useful to seek an orthoptist report, as documentation that explains in plain English, your eye condition, functional vision and any other relevant advice on factors such as preferred formats and seating and lighting requirements.

1. **Create a learning support plan**

The disability liaison unit officer will be in charge of supporting your disability needs and will write up your disability learning plan that will be supplied to teachers and integrated into your learning. This learning support plan may include reasonable adjustments such as: receiving learning materials in alternate formats, assistive technology, time allowed to complete tasks, ensuring the environment is safe and accessible, environmental conditions (for example lighting and glare), and teachers verbalising visual activities (such as board writing, video presentations). As your needs may change over time, the learning support plan can be adjusted throughout your time of study to suit your needs.

1. **Know your rights**

It is useful to know your rights as a student with a disability. As a student with a disability you have the right to an education that is equal to your sighted counterparts. It is important to have a basic understanding of your rights under the *Disability Discrimination Act (1992*) and the *Standards of Education (2005).*

The *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)* makes it unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against someone because that person has a disability, and ensures people with a disability have the same educational opportunities as everyone else. The DDA protects against discrimination in education in the following areas: admission (that is accepting a person with a disability as a student on less favourable terms or conditions than others), access and harassment.

The *Standards of Education* place a responsibility on education providers to make reasonable changes to accommodate the needs of a student with disability. You can use this as a guide to discuss what adjustments are required and reasonable for your particular circumstances. For instance providing written material in an alternate format (such as electronic text or Braille) to allow a person who is blind or vision impaired to access a university lecture.

It is also important to be aware of your education provider’s disability action plan. This is often located on the university website. The action plan is a way to plan for the elimination of disability discrimination and will be useful to refer to when advocating for your needs.

1. **Speak up if your needs are not being met**

If you find that your needs are not being met, take the appropriate actions to speak to the right person in a timely and appropriate manner and with a clear goal in mind.

As many adjustments require time to prepare, an early conversation allows for ample time to implement adjustments and if necessary, time for you to remind relevant staff of adjustments in case they aren’t made.

You can have discussions in person, on the phone or over email, but it is good to get commitment to adjustments in writing from the disability learning unit officer or teaching staff. It is vital that you communicate clearly, are assertive and firm, while also being polite and respectful.

1. **Making a complaint**

If you continue to find that your needs are not being met and have brought up the issues continually, you are able to make a formal complaint through internal and external complaint processes. It is advisable that you exhaust all internal mechanisms within your university or TAFE before you escalate further to external means.

1. **Get support and other perspectives**

You could consider talking to others about what happened and their thoughts about what you might do about the situation. You might find it particularly helpful to discuss your issue with another person who is blind or vision impaired, who may have also encountered a similar situation. Utilising advocacy services or community legal centres may also be of assistance. Should you wish to obtain any advocacy support for an education-related issue, contact the Blind Citizens Australia National Office on: (03) 9654 1400 or toll free on 1800 033 660.

Below are some other examples of organisations that may be of assistance; please note that there may be other relevant organisations within your state or territory:

* **Youth Disability Advocacy Service:** is a Victorian advocacy service that provides one-on-one support through individual advocacy and that also works on broader social issues affecting young people with disabilities through systemic advocacy. For further information see their website: <http://www.ydas.org.au/> or telephone: (03) 9267 3755 or toll-free 1300 727 176 (from outside of Melbourne) or 03 9267 3733 (advocacy).
* **People with Disability Australia Incorporated (PWDA):** is a national peak disability rights and advocacy organisation. Our primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability.PWDA provides information, advice, referral and services, and short-term individual and group advocacy assistance for issues that affect people with a disability. For further information see their website: <http://www.pwd.org.au/> or telephone: (02) 9370 3100 or toll free 1800 422 015.
* **The Australian Human Rights Commission** is the national statutory body that has the responsibility for investigating alleged infringements under anti-discrimination legislation, including breaches of the *Standards of Education*. For further information visit their website: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/> or telephone: (02) 9284 9600 or **Complaints Infoline:** 1300 656 419.
* **The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC):** is an association of state community legal centre organisations in Australia; its members are the state and territory peak bodies of community legal centres. Please note that the National Association of Community Legal Centres does not provide legal advice but has created a database of community legal centres in each state and territory. Community legal centres provide free legal services including information, referral, advice, casework assistance, community legal education, and policy and law reform. To find a community legal centre near you, visit their website: [www.naclc.org.au/](http://www.naclc.org.au/) or telephone: (02) 9264 9595 for further assistance.

**Australian Disability and Indigenous Peoples' Education Fund (ADIPEF)**  
This fund was set up to assist indigenous and non-indigenous people with a disability to participate in education programs through small grants of up to $2500. This fund will assist people with disability to gain empowerment through access to formal and informal education programs. Grants are provided every six months with applications being considered at the end of March and September each year. For further information visit their website: <http://www.adipef.org.au/> or telephone: (03) 9429 4210.

Department of Justice Disability Leadership Scholarship Program 2014

The Department of Justice provides financial support to people with disability who are undertaking full-time or part-time studies in a justice-related field in Victoria. Students undertaking study in any of the following fields: law, criminology, para-legal studies, psychology, social work and other justice-related fields are encouraged to apply. Applications for the 2014 Disability Leadership Scholarship Program will

close at 5pm on Monday 31 March 2014. For more information contact Mr Peter Heazlewood at the Diversity Issues Unit by phone: on (03) 8684 1706 or visit the website: <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/utility/careers/disability+scholarship+program>.

# Vision Australia Further Education Bursary

Each year, Vision Australia awards further education bursaries to a select number of students who are blind or vision impaired to assist them in purchasing adaptive technology to assist them in their studies. Bursaries are available to students of any age who are enrolling to study in a certificate IV TAFE course or higher, or an under-graduate or post-graduate degree through university. Talk to staff at Vision Australia, about the application requirements for the further education bursary and upcoming bursary application dates on: 1300 84 74 66.

# The 12th WBUAP Onkyo World Braille Essay Contest 2014

Blind Citizens Australia has been appointed the National Onkyo Selection Committee (NOSC) for Australia. The contest is sponsored by the Onkyo Corporation Ltd. and the Braille Mainichi in Japan, and is implemented by the World Blind Union-Asia Pacific (WBUAP).

This is an annual project with cash prizes awarded to the best seven entries received with the main prize, “the Otsuki Prize” being $US 1000. Other prizes are for “Excellent Works” ($US 500) and “Fine Works” (either $US 300 or $US 200) depending on the age group.

Participation in the contest is open to anyone who is blind or vision impaired, is over 14 years of age, and lives in the World Blind Union-Asia Pacific Region. Entries are divided into two age groups: persons between the ages of 14 and 25 years; and persons from the age of 26 years upwards.

If you enjoy writing Braille essays, or know someone who does, then please carefully read the Terms and Conditions (see website link below). Entries must be submitted in Braille to the BCA National Office, Ross House, Level 3, 247-251 Flinders Lane Melbourne 3000 by **15 May 2014**. A computerised copy of your entry would also be helpful. If you have any questions please phone BCA on: (03) 9654 1400.

This year the essay topics set by the WBUAP are:

* What I can do, or have done to change public attitudes towards blindness;
* The challenges of living with blindness; and
* The experiences encountered and the challenges facing, a blind person in a music career.

For further information including Competition Terms and Conditions please visit the BCA website: www.bca.org.au

# Get the Word Out!

Do you know of a parent, visiting teacher, aide, government department or individual who should be receiving Parent News? Ask them to call us and we’ll make sure that they are on the receiving end of this publication! We are happy to provide Parent News in standard print, email, on audio CD, as a data CD or in Braille.

# Contact us

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