BCA Inform 5th April 2022 7:30pm

Employment

Co-hosted by Deb Deshayes, General Manager Projects and Engagement and Nicole Willing, Project Manager ‘An Eye to The Future’.

This session provided an update from the ‘An Eye To The Future’ project about their work, and featured guest speakers who are blind or vision impaired who shared their personal journeys through employment and education.

Host Deb Deshayes opened the event with a welcome and an acknowledgment of country. Nicole Willing then provided an update for the ‘An Eye To The Future’ project. They recently held expressions of interest for people wanting to do internships, for which they received an overwhelming response. The project will continue to host various events throughout the year, including the upcoming Business Roundtable and speaking events at expos around the country.

Dan Verhoeven was the first guest speaker for the session. Dan spoke about her personal experience with disability. She was born with hearing impairments and as a teenager started experiencing issues with her sight. It wasn’t until years later that she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. Dan worked in various roles including pubs, retails, and a disability care home whilst studying nursing at university. Dan worked as a nurse in various roles after finishing her degree. She was open with her employers and co-workers about her diagnosis. In her roles she often received the adjustments necessary to do her job, which included working day shifts, having torches available, and having adequate lighting. As her sight deteriorated, she began shifting away from nursing, working in different roles in the health sector. Eventually Dan ended up in the disability and advocacy sector, and joined BCA as a project officer.

The second guest speaker was Robyn McKenzie, who details her experience with juvenile macular degeneration. Robyn talked about her experience going to a boarding school for the blind for a few years before returning to mainstream school. She loved sport and was very active in the school teams. At the time, Robyn never usually disclosed her vision impairment until it was necessary. This changed later on when she entered tertiary education and her vision began to deteriorate. Robyn talked about her employment journey. As a child she had a million things she wanted to do when she grew up, and says that even now she is always changing her mind about what she wants to do. She always loved the arts and learning languages and decided to go to university to pursue further education as an interpreter. However, even at 17 Robyn knew she wanted to be employed. She felt she was behind her peers due to her lack of work experience. She made the decision to stop her studies and began working at the local hospital making the beds. She realised that she wanted to pursue a career in health sciences and went back to university. As a student she joined several committees as a disability advocate. Her profile as an advocate grew leading her into the disability sector. She went on to become an education and employment consultant, leading her to her role at BCA later on. After her time at BCA, she worked various management roles including at AFDO managing ILC projects.

Renee Hedrick was the third and final guest speaker. She is a project officer in the ‘An Eye To the Future’ project, responsible for helping candidates with applications and throughout their internships. She explained more about the project and how it works, along with their vision and aim. The team provides support to interns and candidates, but also provides a lot of education and resources to employers and businesses. Their goal is to break down stigma surrounding people who are blind or vision impaired in the workforce. There is no cost involved to either party. There’s a very diverse pool of candidates – from people who are just entering the workforce, to people with various qualifications and years of experience. This is one of the keys to the program’s success, providing flexibility and ensuring the perfect match between candidates and employers.

Finally, Host Nicole Willing thanks all the guest speakers for opening up about their journeys through employment and opens the room for discussion. Attendees ask questions about ‘An Eye To The Future’ and details of how to get involved. People can still [apply for our internship program](https://eyetothefuture.com.au/internship/) and join our waitlist until the next round of applications opens. Businesses are also welcome to get in contact if they want more information about getting involved. We also have [resources for employers available on our website](https://eyetothefuture.com.au/employers/), and we invite those who are interested to [attend our roundtable](https://bit.ly/3tUFc1W) on 21st April.

If after listening to this session you have any questions, or If you have any further feedback on employment or our ‘An Eye To The Future’ project, please reach out to the BCA team and we will find the most appropriate person to answer your questions. You can reach the team via email bca@bca.org.au or by calling us on 1800 033 660.