



RVIB news

A Child's View

**THE AGE, Saturday Extra
Saturday January 19th, 2002
Extract of an article by Amanda
Dunn**

It's early morning at the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind school, and the children are concentrating on finding a crab at the end of a braille trail. Sitting on the floor in front of teacher Melinda Mitchell-Daws, small bodies have accidentally thrown themselves on top of one another - knees sticking into backs, arms connecting with legs - and each is facing in a slightly different direction. This, says Mitchell-Daws, is something she's constantly trying to drill into them: look up at the person who is speaking, not down at the floor. You can't see them, she reminds them, but they can see you.

One of the children... is Kimberley Black, a vivacious little girl who is carefully tracing the braille trail with an index finger, divining words from the tiny bumps punched on the page.

'Is this on pretty paper?' she asks in a whisper, lightly rubbing a corner of the page between her fingers. It is, just for a moment, a jarring question, given that Kimberley's eyes, right from the moment she came into the world eight years ago, have been able to identify only the faintest glow of light from the dark.

As with all things she understands but has never seen, Kimberley has learnt to fashion meaning for words mostly through sound and touch and, to a lesser extent, taste and smell. It's hard to imagine what the world must look like to her.

However, she is very clear about what she looks like: 'I have brown hair', she says, giggling and tossing her head from side to side, 'and I have blue eyes'. When asked what blue is, she simply says that it is the colour of the sky....

....Independence is a key word at the

RVIB school, and an important part of the fostering of that independence is interacting with, and learning alongside, sighted children. Kimberley is in a 'reverse integration' class, which includes eight sighted students from St Scholastica's College across the road, who spend a school year at RVIB.

One of the challenges for Mitchell-Daws is to teach the sighted children to resist the impulse to 'parent' the RVIB students, the instinct to equate disability with helplessness.

...The artwork displayed on the walls is



▲ Making sense of her world: Kimberley Black

tactile, often 3D, with cork, weathered glass and felt among the favourite materials....In metal bookshelves are neat rows of braille books with tactile illustrations: fur, felt and even sand give blind children a sense, through their fingertips, of how the story unfolds.

Physical education...is a vital part of the school program....The key to sports lessons, says the school's principal, Maree Littlepage, is reassuring the children that they are in a safe environment and will not hurt themselves.

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Message from the CEO



It was your generosity that made the 2001 RVIB Carols by Candlelight such a success. Thousands of people across Australia tuned in to watch the 65th Carols.

An RVIB client, 16 year old Lauren Hayes, performed, singing 'When a Child is Born', and was outstanding. We are very proud of her achievements, and expect to hear a lot more of her.

Already this year we have celebrated some major achievements. In February, RVIB, in conjunction with National Australia Bank, launched an audio ATM at our premises in High Street, Prahran. The first of its kind in Australia, this machine will enable people who are blind or vision impaired to have greater access to banking facilities. Our clients regularly complain of the difficulty of banking independently and safely. Accessibility, navigation and reliance on visual prompts to complete transactions often means that banking is impossible without relying on a sighted person. We look forward to working with NAB to develop new ways of making banking easier and more accessible.

We are looking forward to another exciting year with new developments in training and technology, and a new calendar of fundraising events. As always, thank you for your valuable and continued support. If you have any questions about RVIB or the services that we offer please call us on 9522 5222.

Sincerely,

Doug Kent
Chief Executive Officer

In the early intervention program, low-vision children as young as two are taught basic life and social skills. Parents, too, come here for support - to learn what their child can or cannot do, what their potential might be, and how they can best help them. Kimberley says blindness does not pose big problems. There are some things, she concedes, such as running or catching a ball or playing chasey when no one is making a noise, that are difficult.

But on the other hand, she gets her own back when it's bedtime and her brothers ask for night lights to stop their imaginations getting the better of them. This is Kimberley's moment of triumph. 'You're just big sooks because you're afraid of the dark!' she teases.

RVIB Heritage Day Trip & Luncheon

On April 10, 2002, RVIB will be holding a very special day for supporters of RVIB at a very special price.

A visit to Heritage Hill, one of Melbourne's oldest historical sites, will be followed by a three-course lunch at the elegant Clover Cottage, famous for its delicious cuisine and fabulous gardens. Book your place now!

Heritage Hill, in Dandenong, is an historical property comprising rare examples of 19th and 20th century architecture. There will be the opportunity to walk around Laurel Lodge, and visit the Benga Lodge History Centre. St James Anglican Church boasts splendid grounds and wonderful stained glass windows, as well as its famous pneumatic electric organ.

After morning tea at Heritage Hill, a scenic drive will bring everyone to Clover Cottage in Berwick. There will be plenty of time to wander through the beautiful, restful gardens of this unique Victorian property after a delicious three-course lunch topped off with Clover Cottage's extraordinary desserts.

The day will cost only \$45, including all meals and transportation. Numbers are strictly limited, so book now by calling **Kerri Guyett on (03) 9522 5229**.

They Dared to Date

The first RVIB 'Dare To Date' Ball took place in February and was a wonderful success with guests dancing and dining until the small hours. Just before Valentine's Day, the over 28's singles event aimed to play cupid, computer matching guests with others of similar interests to make up dining tables of ten. This gave guests five opportunities to be introduced to someone who could be their Valentine.



▲ Guests had a fantastic night

A sumptuous three-course dinner with champagne and wine set the evening off and music by 'Pogo' had the crowd up dancing all night.

Sponsored by Gold 104.3 and Carlton Crest Hotel, Dare to Date looks set to become part of the RVIB events calendar.

Thank you to major sponsors Gold 104.3 and Carlton Crest Hotel. Also to the Herald Sun, Interflora, Ernest Hillier Chocolates, Victoria Racing Club, Chadstone Shopping Centre, and Energizer.

Carols 2001 *Photo gallery*



▲ The magnificent Myer Music Bowl in lights



▲ Performers enjoy the on-stage celebrations



▲ Carols is a Christmas tradition for many families



▲ RVIB client Lauren Hayes with host Ray Martin

We Thank You

Your contribution to RVIB makes a difference to thousands of people across Victoria who are blind or vision impaired.

For information about our services or events call (03) 9522 5222 or visit our website at www.rvib.org.au.