



Thank you for the music

Peter Muntz spends an afternoon with RVIB's Sue Coull and finds there is more to music therapy than masquerading as teapots and aeroplanes.

Extract of article which appeared in the Education Age supplement on 4 August, 2003.

The familiar singsong of child's play is wafting in from the playground. A gentle breeze flickers the pages on the music stand. Dave Brubeck's 'Take Five' rests open in front of the piano.



▲ RVIB music therapist Sue Coull with young student, Matthew

It's lunchtime at the school for the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB), but there's no time to rest for music therapist Sue Coull. "I'm one of those people who's always doing three things at once," she says, with an apple in one hand and a video camera in the other. "I'm preparing a presentation on music therapy for the Australian Music Association."

Coull, who is also president of the Australian Music Therapy Association, has been with RVIB since 1994. RVIB has incorporated music therapy into its program since Australia's first therapists graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1981.

There's no doubt that Sue Coull loves her job. Her self-described position description reads much like that of a

Play School presenter: "Sit down, play the piano, sing songs, have fun!" Of course, there's more to being a music therapist than masquerading as teapots and zooming around the room in aeroplanes of make believe.

Coull uses a number of techniques including creative improvisation and composition to help students develop their language and motor skills as well as promoting confidence and self-expression. "We focus on the skills that they do have and help them build on those skills," she says.

"Matthew is one of my success stories," she says, pointing him out in the playground. "Music in particular

has had a real impact on him." Matthew, 10, has cortical vision impairment - a rare condition, which causes irregular disruption to the part of the brain that processes vision. "Sometimes he behaves completely blindly, other times he can see quite well," Coull says. "Because his music skills are so good I use those to

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RVIB

> *Vision: To be the leading provider of services, resources and information which enable people who are blind or vision impaired to maximise their independence and quality of life.*

Welcome to another edition of RVIB News. I would like to take this



opportunity to let you know about discussions that RVIB has had with two other blindness agencies about the possibility of merging the three organisations.

Representatives from the three governing bodies in the blindness and vision impairment sector - Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB), Royal Blind Society (RBS) and Vision Australia Foundation (VAF) - met in May last year and decided that: "The quality of life of Australians who are blind or vision impaired will be enhanced by one organisation rather than by individual blindness agencies acting independently."

We agreed that it made sense to use our combined resources to deliver better services at a local level and we've put a lot of thought into the mission, vision and values of a proposed new organisation based on this thinking.

This means that we're working towards an organisation, which would in the future offer many benefits for our clients including: new or additional services, opportunities to secure more funds from government and corporates to invest in new services, an increase in the possibility of obtaining greater national exposure, national sponsorship opportunities and national advocacy, a greater

influence on government policy and a reduction in the duplication of services.

So far a process has been implemented to ensure that each of the three organisations' Boards are in a position to make a considered and well-informed proposal to their (voting) members. The process has included research, collection of data, collaboration and exploration of information across the three organisations, input from consumers and the development of proposals for consideration.

As a result of this process, we are pleased to advise that all three governing bodies have unanimously agreed to proceed to merge and have signed a Heads of Agreement. Final approval for the merger is subject to a positive vote from members.

RBS held a special general meeting on 17 July, 2003 for its members to agree to a resolution that requests the NSW Attorney General to commence the process to convert the RBS Act to enable RBS to change its status from a Body Corporate to an incorporated company. There was overwhelming support for the resolution.

After working through all the regulations, a recommendation to merge will be put to the voting members of each organisation. The merger will only go ahead if members vote in favour of it. The details about any special members' meetings will be available on RVIB's web site and in client newsletters. Members will also be advised by

letter. Although the dates for these special meetings have not yet been finalised, they are likely to happen sometime during the next six to nine months.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this process, I encourage you to contact either myself on (03) 9522 5282 or Michelle Bourke, PR and Communications Manager on (03)9522 5230. Please be assured that we will keep you informed of all major developments throughout the process.

We are confident that the planned merger will benefit all our clients and that it is in the best interests of people who are blind or vision impaired throughout Australia.

On behalf of the RVIB Board, staff and myself I would like to thank you for your continued support in helping make a difference to the thousands of people who are blind or vision impaired across Victoria.

Yours sincerely



Doug Kent
Chief Executive Officer
RVIB

Carols of yesteryear

In 2003, RVIB initiated a history project to document its rich and proud past. This process has uncovered some fascinating information, including photographs and programs from the organisation's biggest annual fundraising event - RVIB Carols by Candlelight. Michele Prentice, RVIB History Group member, reports.

For the past 65 years, RVIB Carols by Candlelight has been part of the Australian Christmas tradition, and has formed a proud chapter in the history of RVIB.

The originator of what became known as 'Melbourne's Traditional Yuletide Festival' was radio veteran, the late Norman Banks MBE. With the support of 3KZ, the first Carols were held in 1938 at the Alexandra Gardens and attracted 10,000 people. According to a report, "precisely at midnight the choir of thirty voices, accompanied by the famous Metropolitan Fire Brigade Band, commenced. The unusual candlelit setting and the beauty of the carols, won the immediate affection of the assembly and a new tradition was born."

In 1939, Mr Banks organised the Carols on a more elaborate scale. The program ended with a reproduction of the chimes of London's Big Ben at midnight. Almost 40,000 people attended.

Christmas in 1940 was an unforgettable occasion. The report states, "We had been at war for more than a year and with the grim reminders of allied reversals in Europe and the growing casualty list of our own forces, 60,000 people attended and much of the proceeds of the evening were given to the Red Cross."

Then came the 'brown out' year when wartime restrictions and the threat of a Japanese invasion necessitated a transfer to a nearby Baptist church.

In 1942, Gladys Moncrieff, Australia's then 'Queen of Song' appeared on the program and since that occasion, many

famous artists have been associated with Carols, including Madame Florence Austral and Gilda Grauen - a famous opera singer.

Exploring Carols from the past is a fascinating journey through this Christmas Eve tradition, and offers important insights into the history of Melbourne.

If you are interested in becoming involved with the RVIB History Project, please contact **Michele Prentice** or **Patsy Vizents** on **(03) 9522 5222**, or email rvibhistory@rvib.org.au



▲ Cover of the 1955 Carols program

Countdown to 66th Carols begins



Tickets to this year's Christmas Eve tradition, RVIB Carols by Candlelight, will be on sale from 9:00am on Saturday, 8 November through Ticketmaster 7.

Presented by Qantas and featuring top Australian talent, each year over 30,000 people attend the event held under the stars at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.

RVIB Carols by Candlelight is broadcast live by sponsors the Nine Network and Radio 3AW.

This year, RVIB is set for another sell-out event, so people are advised to buy tickets early through Ticketmaster 7 on 136 100 to avoid disappointment.



Carols launch - your invitation

In the lead-up to Carols, you are invited to preview some of this year's talent at the event launch, held at Federation Square at 11:00am on Tuesday, 9 December. See some of your favourite stars live on stage and bring the kids along to meet Santa at this free event, which will set the scene for RVIB Carols by Candlelight on 24 December.

Corporates open doors to a vision impaired workforce



▲ Local Member of Parliament for Prahran, Mr Tony Lupton offered his backing and support to RVIB Employment Services. L to R: Robyn McKenzie (Employment Co-ordinator), Mr Lupton, Robert Allen (Employment Co-ordinator) and Kath Mackay (Manager, RVIB Employment Services - currently on maternity leave).

Today, people who are blind or vision impaired work in a range of industries, including finance, administration and manufacturing and, with the right equipment and support, loss of sight is no barrier to most kinds of work.

This was one of the key messages being touted by RVIB's Training, Technology and Employment Services (TTE) at their recent corporate information evening.

The evening was well attended by corporate representatives from a range of sectors, and included ANZ Bank, General Electric, Alfred Hospital, Diversity at Work and Dromana Estate. Councillor Melina Sehr, the Mayor of Stonnington, was also present to lend her support to the event.

Throughout the evening, guests had the unique opportunity to observe adaptive technology displays, learn training techniques, and tour the various departments of RVIB. The tour also included ASSIST- the only industrial skills training centre of its

kind in Australia. Attendees also heard about the support that RVIB can offer employers, including work site assessments, recommendations for adaptive technology and ways to access potential funding to cover any equipment costs.

The evening was a great success and very encouraging responses were received.

RVIB is also pleased to report that local Member of Parliament for Prahran, Mr Tony Lupton (pictured), has also shown his support. He met recently with Employment Services staff and hopes to boost the involvement of local businesses in the employment of RVIB clients.

■ For those interested in learning more about employment for people who are blind or vision impaired, RVIB runs bi-monthly information sessions at its Prahran site. For bookings or further information call RVIB Employment Services on (03) 9520 5555 or email employment.Services@rvib.org.au.

Microsoft lends support to RVIB



RVIB would like to thank its new supporting sponsor, Microsoft, for providing generous funding to help the organisation meet its information technology needs.

The provision of server software, application software and improved operating system software has been invaluable in the overall upgrade of RVIB's information system.

The new technology has created a more stable and user-friendly network for staff, and Microsoft's enhanced accessibility features will also directly benefit clients who access computer training facilities at RVIB College and at the adaptive technology resource centre based in the Eastern Region.

RVIB values the contribution of its corporate sponsors, who help the organisation provide its vital services to people who are blind or vision impaired throughout Victoria.

Microsoft

RVIB Events

RVIB For Sight Week

**“Breaking down the barriers - our vision is independence”
8 - 12 September, 2003**

▶ RVIB will be celebrating its annual statewide awareness campaign, 'For Sight Week', from 8 to 12 September, 2003. A number of fun events and educational activities are planned to increase community awareness about what it means to live with blindness or a vision impairment and to highlight the achievements of a number of RVIB clients. If you would like to become a corporate sponsor for For Sight Week, please call RVIB Corporate Development / Sponsorship on **(03) 9520 5529**.



Hoyts movie fundraiser Sunday, 12 October 2003

▶ Treat yourself to a Hoyts movie experience and help raise money for RVIB. Hoyts are donating \$1 from every ticket sold on Sunday, 12 October to RVIB, for any film viewed at a Hoyts' Cinema in Victoria. For details please call **Jayson Hanrahan** on **(03) 9522 5240**.

High Tea at The Windsor 11 September, 2003

▶ To celebrate RVIB and its work over the past 139 years, you are invited to attend the Windsor Hotel for high tea in the Grand Ballroom. A traditional high tea will be served and a guest speaker and entertainment will add further highlights to the day. For bookings please call **Ian McDonald** on **(03) 9522 5218**.

Victoria Day

RVIB was delighted to have been involved with the 152nd Victoria Day celebrations held at the Melbourne Town Hall in June.

The annual event celebrates the formation of Victoria and recognises members of the community who have made a significant contribution to public life.

We are pleased to report that this year, RVIB's CEO, Doug Kent, was appointed as the Deputy Patron of the Victoria Day Council.

Young RVIB client Chrissie Brincat made a wonderful presentation at the award ceremony about RVIB's work in the community.

RVIB's Christmas in July



More than 40 friends and supporters of RVIB gathered for an afternoon of fine food and entertainment at the organisation's annual Christmas in July luncheon at Tatra Restaurant in the Dandenong Ranges. The warmth of an open fire, traditional Christmas fare and singing of carols created a wonderful atmosphere, and RVIB thanks all guests for joining in the festivities and showing their support. *Pictured: Organiser Ian McDonald (centre back) with RVIB client and speaker Wanda Edgerton on left, with guests.*

Turn chores into charity

Do your grocery and liquor shopping at any **Ritchies** store and 1% of the money you spend will be donated to RVIB. Simply complete a Ritchies Community Benefit Card, nominate RVIB as your charity and each month RVIB will automatically receive your shopping credits.

*For more information on this simple way to help RVIB raise much needed funds, please call **Kerri Guyett** on **(03) 9522 5232**.*

RVIB launches new web site

RVIB has launched a new, fully revised and updated web site which can be visited at www.rvib.org.au.

The new site provides comprehensive information about RVIB's services, and includes regular updates on latest news and events.

The web site was designed to be compatible with adaptive technology making it fully accessible to people who are blind or vision impaired.

Online donations at www.rvib.org.au

You can now make a donation to RVIB via a new online facility at www.rvib.org.au.

A secure link from RVIB's web site to the National Australia Bank means that you can quickly and easily show your support and help make a difference to people who are blind or vision impaired throughout Victoria.

Did you know?

Did you know that by wearing a tie too tight you could be increasing your risk of eye disease?

A US study has found that a tight tie constricts the jugular which raises pressure in the eyeball and could lead to glaucoma.

(Information courtesy "The Herald Sun", 20 July, 2003, page 2.)

Look out for cataracts -RVIB partner warns

An alarming number of Australians aged 40 or over are involved in car accidents each year as a result of poor eyesight, according to Dr Mark Medownick of the Medownick Laser Clinic, one of RVIB's corporate partners.

Cataracts are a common cause of vision loss, critically affecting more than 36,000 Australians, and are occurring more frequently because of increasing levels of exposure to ultraviolet light and an ageing population.

Cataracts often go unnoticed because they develop gradually and people learn to live with changes in their vision such as slight blurring, or dropping out of the colour blue, which affects how other colours are judged. This poses a significant risk to people, particularly when eyesight falls below legal driving requirements.

Cataract operations are among the most common surgical procedures in the world, and are performed on more than 120,000 Australians each year. Medownick Laser Clinic can perform cataract operations, and employ the newest surgical techniques. Eye drops are used to anaesthetise eyes rather than needles, and the operation only involves a micro incision with a surgical diamond knife. Patients usually leave the clinic without an eye patch, so they can see immediately after surgery.

To detect early signs of cataracts, people should have their eyes checked regularly. For more information please call Medownick Project Manager, George Kazanis, on 0407 305 540.

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help him in the areas that he's not developing so well in."

"I might just go and get him now," Coull says, already half way out the door.

Matthew hesitates as he enters the music room, sensing the shift underfoot from concrete to carpet. He makes his way unassisted to the piano until Coull says: "Stop! What's that on your left?"

"A tape recorder," he replies some moments later.

"It's like a tape recorder," Coull says. "It takes pictures as well as sound. It's a video recorder."

Coull is warm and articulate. She speaks carefully, working every one of her actions into their conversation. And not a single object in the room is left undescribed. To the sighted outsider this habit seems patronising. For Matthew, however, it is welcome confirmation of a largely unseen world.

"Just move your chair a little bit closer to the piano," Coull instructs, bringing Matthew in view of the video camera.

"Aaahh," Matthew cries. His tracksuit pants have become caught under the leg of the chair.

"What do you need to do?" Coull prompts.

"Stand up," Matthew replies.

"And move your chair," Coull says.

"Independence is the key to everything."

Their session begins with a short exercise identifying some black line drawings of different instruments.

"What's that?" Coull asks, holding the book an inch away from Matthew's face.

"A tambourine," he replies, without hesitation.

"And what colour is it?"

"Blue."

"We encourage him to learn to use the vision that he's got," she says.

Matthew begins to beat out a series of rhythms on the drum. In this call and response exercise, Coull simply repeats Matthew's rhythm on the piano. She then begins a Leo the Lion-type jingle on the piano. Matthew gradually joins in with his own accompanying rhythm. His playing is full of dynamics and subtle nuance, capturing the essence of Coull's melody. "Wha haa," Matthew roars after the final crescendo.

Matthew then moves to the piano for 'The Song about Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow'. Before he begins, he feels his way up and down the length of the keys. With Coull's assistance he finds the first note. Matthew's playing is definite and controlled. He thumps out the chords while his paper-thin voice wavers on each note of the melody.

"Today is Monday, yesterday was ... Saturday," Matthew hesitates.

"The notes are right but the words are wrong," Coull sings. "What's the other day of the weekend?"

"Sunday ... and tomorrow will be Tuesday," Matthew finishes, before launching into a spirited a cappella rendition.

"I don't think we've ever sung that on a Monday before," Coull says. "So you really had to think about what yesterday was and what tomorrow will be."

"Easy peasy," Matthew replies, with a glint in his eye.

"Easy peasy my foot!" Coull exclaims.

"It took a bit of thinking didn't it?"

"Well thank you for coming to music today Matthew. Will we sing the goodbye song, 'Thank you for the Music'?"

"I love that song," Matthew exclaims.

"I love that too," Coull replies.



RVIB

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