



RVIB exports knowledge and expertise abroad

The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB) will export knowledge and expertise to the United Arab Emirates following the signing of an agreement with a Dubai-based blindness agency.

RVIB Chief Executive Officer, Dr Douglas Kent and RVIB College Manager, Mr Chris Edwards attended the recent launch of *Tamkeen* to formalise the relationship between the two organisations.

Under the agreement, RVIB's Training, Technology and Employment Services has sold a number of courses, assessment tools and information resources to Tamkeen that will give the new agency the boost it needs to commence providing services to people who are blind or vision impaired in Dubai and surrounds.

Tamkeen – an Arabic word meaning “enabling” – will specialise in adaptive technology training, vocational English training and employment placement and is the first service provider of its kind in the UAE.

Dr Kent says that Tamkeen looked at a number of international agencies when seeking assistance and for RVIB to have been approached is wonderful recognition of our expertise.

“It is extremely satisfying to play a role in ensuring that Tamkeen gets off to the best start and that will, in turn, enable its clients to access the very best in services and support in the region,” Dr Kent says.

“The collaboration between our two agencies is fitting because we have such similar aims and goals and strive to provide the very best services, resources, support and information to people who are blind or vision impaired.”

He says that RVIB recognises the benefits that collaboration, with organisations that have common goals and objectives, can have for clients.

“The sharing of knowledge and expertise, particularly when it can help others live a more fulfilling life, is one of the most satisfying things an organisation can be involved in,” Dr Kent says.

“The collaboration we have formed is a timely reminder for RVIB just how far we have come as a provider of blindness services and how well they have evolved. We want to help *Tamkeen* reach that point in time as well.”



▲ RVIB CEO Dr Douglas Kent with Tamkeen's Director of Knowledge Village, Dr Abdulla Al Karam

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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.*

CEO's message



The merger process is reaching its final stage and the Scheme of Arrangement Booklet is almost finalised. This Booklet is the document used to support the legal process for the Scheme of Arrangement. It is a lengthy document incorporating all relevant information relating to the existing agencies and the combined organisation. The three agency boards signed-off on the content to the Booklet on 13 April 2004. The initial business name of the merged organisation will be RBS.RVIB.VAF Ltd.

Steps in the merger process are:

1. Lodging the Scheme Booklet with the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) to enable their review. This occurred in the week commencing 26 April 2004.
2. After review by ASIC the Scheme Booklet will be lodged with the Federal Court in early May.
3. NILS or the agency will arrange for the Scheme Booklet to be sent to all eligible members of RBS, RVIB and VAF in the preferred format. Please note, membership applications for eligibility to vote on the merger at the Special General Meeting, close at 5:00pm on Monday, 17 May. Those submitting membership applications after this date, will be admitted as members (subject to meeting the

criteria contained in the RVIB Memorandum and Articles of Association), but will not be eligible to vote on the merger at the Special General Meeting, which is expected to be on Thursday, 24 June.

4. The proposed dates for the Special General Meetings (subject to change at ASIC's and the Federal Court's discretion) are:

- VAF at 10:00am on Thursday, 24 June 2004
- RVIB Ordinary Members at 2:00pm on 24 June 2004; and RVIB Life Members at 4:00pm on Thursday, 24 June 2004
- RBS at 10am on Friday, 25 June 2004

5. Venues for meetings will be advised in the Booklet.

6. Proxy forms will need to be lodged by:

- VAF 10:00am on Tuesday, 22 June 2004
- RVIB Ordinary Members at 2:00pm on Tuesday, 22 June 2004; and RVIB Life Members at 4:00pm on Tuesday, 22 June 2004
- RBS at 10.00am on Wednesday, 23 June 2004

7. The second court hearing to approve the Scheme is expected to occur on Tuesday, 29 June 2004.

One section of the Scheme Booklet is the independent expert's report that has to provide an opinion as to whether the merger is in the best interests of members.

This report concludes:

"After giving due consideration to the above advantages and disadvantages we consider that the Scheme of Arrangement is in the best interests of members as RBS.RVIB.VAF Ltd will be better positioned to achieve the stated objectives of RBS, RVIB and VAF than the individual companies continuing to operate as autonomous entities."

We have also received letters of support from Blind Citizens Australia, Retina Australia and the Deaf Blind Association.

As the CEOs of the three organisations, we also remain committed to keeping you, our valued supporters, informed of developments on a regular basis.

If you have any queries or comments about the proposed merger please call the Nexus Infoline on 1800 355 335 or email nexus@rvib.org.au.

Yours sincerely

Dr Douglas M Kent
Chief Executive Officer, RVIB

RVIB Events

EYE BALL – 26 JUNE 2004

▶ RVIB and VAF are joining forces to host this year's annual fundraising ball, *Eye Ball*, at the Grand Hyatt Ballroom on Saturday, 26 June 2004.

A major fundraising initiative of RVIB and VAF, the event will offer a fun and glamorous night of entertainment. Music will be provided by the Peter Sullivan Big Band and other leading Australian performers.

Tickets to this black tie event are \$150 per person and tables of ten can be purchased at the discounted price of \$1250.

For more information contact Julie Robson on (03) 9522 5230 or email julie.robson@rvib.org.au.

MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER – KEN WOODWARD – 19 MAY

▶ How would you feel if you lost three of your five senses – including blindness – in a workplace accident and then discovered that the accident could easily have been avoided? What would be the impact on your family, friends, colleagues and company?

Ken Woodward, direct from the UK, shares his inspirational story from accident victim to passionate advocate for workplace safety.

This event will be held at Ormond Hall on **Wednesday, 19 May** from **2:00pm to 4:00pm**. Tickets are \$50. For details or to book a ticket call Corey Nassau on **(03) 9522 5296** or email corey.nassau@rvib.org.au.

RVIB applauds legislation availability in audio format



The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB) is supportive of a new service that will see state legislation available on audio CD.

Victorians who are vision impaired now have greater access to the law than ever before thanks to an Australian legal first – legislation on compact disc for people who are blind or vision impaired.

The CDs are word-for-word digital readings of legislation and effectively offer people who are legally blind equal access to legislation for the first time.

The service has been developed with RVIB's assistance and RVIB College Manager, Mr Chris Edwards says that he is enthusiastic about the project.

“Making legislation available in an alternative format is an important step toward improving the accessibility of all sorts of specialist information, legal or other, to people who are blind and vision impaired,” Mr Edwards says.

“I like that it is available in the everyday CD format and now anyone, even someone with a simple fencing dispute, can now access the law direct – it's that easy.”

Every Victorian statute can now be ordered with a phone call to Information Victoria and produced on demand. The cost is just \$11 per statute including GST plus postage and will be delivered within two working days.

The company behind this is Anstat; the publisher of all Victorian State Government hard copy legislation, which developed the product to celebrate its 25th anniversary.

Not only is the CD more portable, durable and affordable than the Braille equivalent; it is easily updateable – vital in matters of law. Legislation for people who are vision impaired on CD will assist legal practitioners, law students and disability advocates who are blind or vision impaired.

The concept is easily adaptable to legislation from other states and federal legislation. Orders can be placed through Information Victoria on 1300 366 356.

Kickstart to employment with CJP

Ten enthusiastic people with an interest in the community have commenced full-time work with the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB) as part of a government initiative.

The Community Jobs Project, funded by the Department of Victorian Communities, offers each participant 15 weeks of employment with RVIB and provides valuable workplace experience.

RVIB Employment Coordinator and CJP supervisor, Mr Robert Allen, says he is delighted with the progress that the CJP team is making – particularly as it is the first attempt at full-time work for some of the participants.

“The skills and expertise of the entire team is of a very high standard and they are all working extremely hard and cohesively to achieve great results,” Mr Allen says.

“There are six project areas underway and in many cases they are being completed ahead of the

projected timeline. Each of the projects utilises the research, administration, writing and planning skills of participants and it is very exciting to be part of CJP.”

Some of the projects aim to raise community awareness about living with blindness and vision impairment, whilst others will produce valuable resources specifically for people who are legally blind.

“Information packs and booklets that will improve access to information, on areas including sport or tertiary education, are being assembled and we expect will be well received by the vision impaired community.”

As part of the project, an open day is planned for early July. RVIB's Training, Technology and Employment Services will open its doors to the public and more information about this event will soon be available from the RVIB web site.

Talking up the airwaves



▲ Scott Nixon, CJP participant

Community Jobs Project participant and RVIB client, Scott Nixon is talking up the airwaves as part of a mentoring placement at Melbourne's NOVA 100 radio station.

Scott is taking part in the Willing and Able Mentoring Program (WAM), an initiative of Deakin University and the University of Melbourne.

He says the aim of WAM is to give young people the opportunity to obtain some hands-on experience in an industry of their choice by offering them an eight-week placement.

“At the moment I'm touring the station and getting to know the key people in the office,” Scott says. “I'm asking as many questions as I can and am getting a lot out of the experience.”

Scott says that the idea of one day working in commercial radio is a dream of his and being able to learn firsthand about how a station, like NOVA, runs is a solid step forward.

“Everyone, including my WAM mentor and NOVA morning presenter Dave Williams, has been very supportive of me and of my prospects in the industry,” he says.

“My next goal is to put together a polished audition CD and then to start contacting as many radio stations as I can. NOVA has offered to help produce that and I'm delighted.”

▼ RVIB Employment Coordinator and CJP supervisor Robert Allen (back row, far right) with CJP participants (back row, L to R) Ben Gritt, Dion Cole, Dean Calder, Scott Nixon, Victoria Emmett, (middle row) Melanie Edge, Riki Domagalski, Tony Allen (guest), Natalie Jones and (front) Rachael Simons (absent: Sarah Medcraft)



Little steps to learning

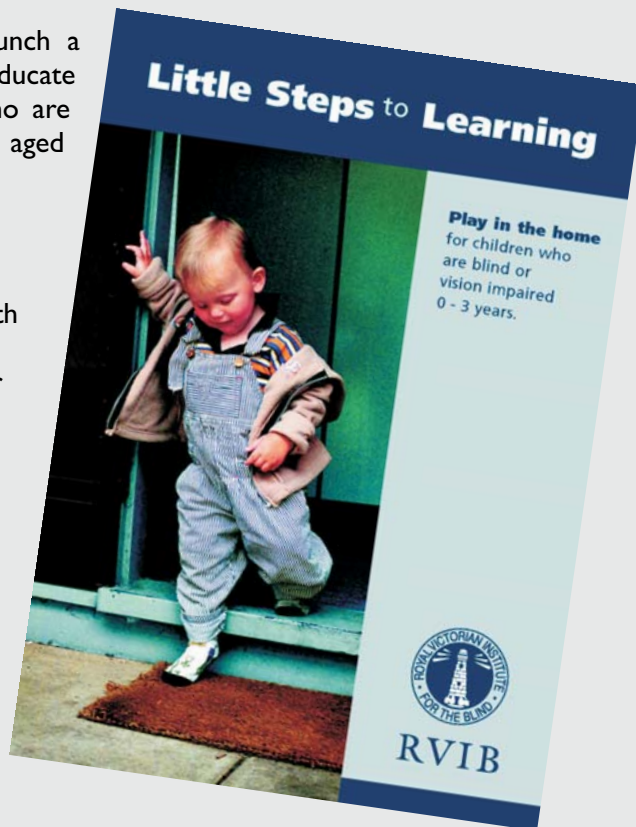
RVIB is preparing to launch a handbook that will help educate and support children who are blind or vision impaired aged birth to three years.

Little Steps to Learning identifies the learning differences of children with a vision impairment, and specifies creative ways for families and educators to interact with them.

The book was written by RVIB teachers Liz Haughton and Sandie Mackevicius, following the success of their first handbook – *I'm Posting the Pebbles*. The new publication explores ways to provide play experiences for children and to promote development in all areas, through everyday routines.

The book outlines ideas and materials for playing and describes how to set up a stimulating environment, so the child can learn and become independent. Resources referred to in the book are items that are readily found in the home, are inexpensive to buy, or easy to make.

Some of the topics covered include achieving milestones and developing physical skills; music, language and developing a love of literature; experiences in the community; and the family unit including siblings and grandparents.



The publication will address the needs of families, carers and educators of children who are blind or vision impaired, and those who may also have other disabilities.

Little Steps to Learning will be used by early childhood educators at RVIB and is available to parents, other teachers, and care workers.

For more information about the book, contact Sandie Mackevicius on (03) 9761 0011.

Calling music lovers



If you love Melbourne, enjoy beautiful music and would like to support a worthy cause, then *Classically Melbourne* is for you.

The Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund and radio station 3MBS FM have joined forces to gather some of Melbourne's most gifted classical musicians to produce a unique CD called *Classically Melbourne*.

Featuring performances by the *Melbourne Symphony Orchestra*, *Orchestra Victoria*, *Australian Chamber Orchestra*, *Academy of Melbourne*, *Slava Grigoryan* and the up and coming *Flinders Quartet*, the CD highlights Melbourne's rich musical culture.

The profits of each CD sold will go directly to the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund which supports over 200 health and human care service agencies – including RVIB – from public hospitals, agencies working with drug addiction and homelessness, to services for the disabled, aged, youth, families and children.

The CD is priced at \$19.95 (plus \$2 postage and handling).

To order your copy of *Classically Melbourne*, call **Ron Dann** at RVIB on **(03) 9522 5206**.

RVIB launches rural health campaign

RVIB has embarked on a rural health campaign as part of its commitment to providing services, support and information throughout regional Victoria.

RVIB Community Development Coordinator, Ms Fiona Smyth will spend five weeks travelling around Victoria conducting information sessions, seminars and workshops to educate people on what it means to be blind or vision impaired.

During her travels Ms Smyth will address healthcare professionals, community groups and schools and says she is keen to shed some light on the issues that surround blindness.

“RVIB has a strong commitment to community education and we recognise the importance of creating a campaign for greater Victoria,” Ms Smyth says.

“It's important that healthcare professionals understand blindness and are aware what RVIB can do for clients. Equally, it's important that the wider community be made aware of these issues and how to access our services.”

RVIB has 14 offices spread across metropolitan and regional Victoria.

The rural campaign will cover Traralgon, Benalla, Wangaratta, Swan Hill, Horsham, Ballarat, Rochester, Portland and Winchelsea.

The RVIB rural health campaign is now underway and will run until 21 May 2004.

Demand doubles for Australia's biggest specialty library



The popularity of the National Information and Library Service (NILS) – Australia's largest library for people who can't read standard print – has jumped following an upgrade to over 37,000 titles including more favourites and talking books on CD for a clearer sound.

With almost all new titles in the top 20 genres preferred by people who use the service, the revamp has been so successful that loans more than doubled recently, with extra staff employed to cater to the greater volume of requests.

“Everyone loves the collection *too* much,” says NILS Chief Executive Officer Jane Evans, explaining that a turnaround time of six to seven days initially became the norm as demand grew.

However the time lag quickly shrank back to three to four days, with NILS now working to send borrowers their next batch of books within two to three days of receiving the last.

The improvements began in 2002 when Vision Australia Foundation contributed their collection to the combined libraries of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and Royal Blind Society in a joint venture between the three blindness agencies.

Further steps were taken to makeover the service after a recent phone survey revealed that borrowers wanted to read more popular new books.

“Since I found out the library had new books, I've read a story from the latest *Goosebumps* series in braille,” says Sydney bookworm Andrew Head, 13, who also loves classics like *The Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter books. “It's good to get away into stories.”

Andrew is one of over 18,000 people of all ages who rely on NILS for talking and braille books, magazines and audio-described videos – circulated across Australia by mail, free of charge.

For more information about NILS call 1300 654 656.



RVIB

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