

## LiveWire Low Vision

### April 2009 Edition

A newsletter for people living with Low Vision

*Welcome to our latest edition of LiveWire Low Vision. We hope you find it enjoyable and informative!*

*In this issue of LiveWire – Low Vision we look at the lives and stories of those who use Quantum Technology Low Vision Equipment.*

For many older Australians living with Low Vision the options of what to do next can appear very daunting. For many with deteriorating sight, looking at photographs of loved ones, reading the daily mail or newspapers, or making out times on the bus timetable can mean that independence is lost as well. Electronic Magnification is assisting thousands of Australians with Low Vision to remain independent.

### Finding thread brings tears of joy.

For the past 40 years, Christine Burgoyne has not been able to thread a needle or pursue her love of crafts. The problem began when Christine lost substantial vision in one of her eyes due to a brain tumor in her twenties. Most of the tumor was removed, but her condition has continued to worsen over time.

It wasn't until she reached her sixties that Christine came across

electronic magnifying machines that assisted her in being able to see again, in ways she could have previously only imagined.



Christine researched her options and after trialling the equipment, was so overjoyed at being able to thread a needle for first time in forty years that she burst into tears.

"It gives me joy because I know I can thread a needle again. I'm stubborn, I don't like to ask for help and now I

can do it on my own. You lose your independence when you lose your sight, but I have gained my independence back. I look at my Prisma with pride when I think about how much it has allowed me to do" said Christine. "It's fantastic. Life isn't so bad after all".



### **Enid's Sunny outlook creates a ClearView**

Enid Childs of Scarborough in Brisbane has Macular Degeneration. A degenerative disease of the Retina, Macular Degeneration (MD) is Australia's leading cause of legal blindness. Individuals who live with this disease lose their central vision, the fine vision that is used to read, write, recognise people's faces and drive.

Enid was a hairdresser for most of her working life, before turning her hand to running a book store. When her husband retired and Enid was diagnosed with cancer they decided to use their time to help

out at the rest home where her mother was residing – that was 25 years ago. Their time is now shared amongst seven rest homes within the Brisbane area where they organise outings and spend time with the residents.

"My husband drives the bus and I play the piano... it's wonderful to do something that helps others feel alive, to see them wake up in front of you."

Enid says her vision loss started its progression approximately 20 years ago. Now 86 years old, Enid was determined to not let her debilitating sight get her down.

"My vision impairment didn't affect me in the beginning, or rather, I wouldn't let it"

Over the past couple of months Enid found that the little central vision she had retained was diminishing. Being the truly determined and positive woman she is, Enid decided to look for something to help her to maintain her independence. Enid approached Quantum Technology and was shown several magnification devices. Enid settled on a Clearview+, she found that this equipment enabled her to continue to do the things she enjoys most; reading, crafts and of course, crosswords.

"The more independent I can be, the more quality of life there is for my husband as well".

"I don't feel isolated as much. Obviously my world is smaller than it was when I had my sight, but I can cope, I get on and do what I can. It's a state of mind"

A truly amazing woman! Enid has even written a book of poetry called 'A Slice of Life', all based on true events and characters. The books have even been supplied to different Diversional Therapists in several nursing homes;

"So they can entertain and bring a smile to their patients."



*Above: Enid uses her Clearview to fill out her crossword, a favourite hobby of hers*

## Search for sight creates a vision impaired scholar

Patricia Stillman was working as a nurse when she was diagnosed with the genetic eye disease Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP). RP affects the light sensitive cells called Photoreceptors which make up the retina and enable us to transmit images to our brain; plainly they enable us to see.

Unable to continue working as a nurse, but wanting to stay positive, Patricia took up study through the 'Absolutely Terrified Computer User' course. It was during this course that Patricia discovered a lack of support for vision impaired students. The more she studied, the worse her eyesight was getting and at the age of 32, Patricia was pronounced legally blind.

Patricia was no longer able to use a regular computer screen when she discovered that ZoomText computer software could be applied to a computer to increase the magnification of the visual field.

"It (ZoomText) makes all the difference. When I first looked at computers I couldn't see anything. Originally I was

using an electronic typewriter in conjunction with a CCTV, but you could only get five or six words on the screen" said Patricia.

With the help of ZoomText, Patricia went on to complete diplomas, a workplace certificate and a Bachelors degree. Patricia is now 61 and believes that without ZoomText she would have been really lost as the internet is now such a big part of her life.

Patricia has been a valued client of Quantum Technology for close to a decade.

"I'm now on version 9, but when I started I think I was on the very first version. It's just such a handy, easy program to use" said Patricia.

### **Ex-pilot resets his sights.**

91 year old Tuncurry resident Stan Sismey was diagnosed with Macular Degeneration three years ago. The ex air force war veteran was finding it hard to read general correspondence and began looking at electronic magnification options to allow him to regain his independence.

Stan found out about Quantum

Technology when he was being tested at the Vision Australia Low Vision Centre in Newcastle. At the centre he was able to spend a lot of time looking through adaptive technology solutions to suit him. Peter Varvel from Hearing and Sight Solutions, A Quantum Technology representative then bought down some portable units for trial. Stan said that after I had looked at all the others, it was the Eclipse that I liked the best" (Pictured with his Eclipse).

"Peter left it with me for a while I we could get used to it. One of the reasons I liked it was because I wanted to put it on a table and be able to move it. It's very handy, very easy to operate and easy to read the newspaper. You can move the print size to whatever size you wish." said Stan.

Stan likes to read the newspapers and his correspondence with his electronic magnifier and says that it adds a lot to his quality of life.



## Seeing beyond the struggle

Genevieve McLachlan lives in Upper Hutt, NZ, with her husband Bruce and her guide dog 'Hobbit'. Born with cerebral palsy and a visual impairment called optic atrophy, Genevieve, Bruce and Hobbit run a small but important business called Adaptive Technology Solutions.

Genevieve decided to start her own business because she was noticing more people with multiple disabilities seeking solutions in their everyday lives. She says that her aim is to be an inspiration to others.

"I have a disability, not just one but several and I have gone out and started my own business".

Her business specialises in assisting people with health and accident related vision impairments.

"I guess because I had it hard, I want to make it easier in whatever way I can for other people in

similar situations, to give them the information - it doesn't have to be a struggle now."

Whilst Genevieve gets a huge amount of satisfaction from their business and Bruce comes from a truck driving background where working with people with disabilities is a complete change, Genevieve says Bruce really enjoys seeing people's faces change when they realize that they can achieve their goals through the available technology.

"The technology I supply to help people, I use myself. It would be next to impossible to run my business without it. It creates a sense of comfort with my clientele."

If Genevieve can do it, so can they!



**Stella** is a sprightly 86 year old living independently on the Gold Coast. She recently purchased a "ClearView" electronic magnification unit which she uses daily.

Stella was an active and successful business woman, running her own Millinery business with 12 employees in the Block Arcade for over 38 years. Upon retiring in her late 60's, her vision started to deteriorate and she found she was unable to read standard print even with her strongest spectacles. Her correspondence began accumulate and had to wait till a friend or family member was able to read it to her.



By 2006 her vision loss was significant, and while she still had peripheral vision she couldn't read her mail, magazines and books or look at family photographs.

This all changed last year when she purchased a ClearView electronic magnifier. Stella uses her new reading machine every day for all manner of things such as reading the television guide and writing down the programs she is

interested in for that day, reading instructions on medication and other products such as hand creams, and very importantly, checking the use by date on food items. "I am amazed how much I now depend on the Clearview" she said. "I really don't know how I could cope without it."

### **Local student gets a better view of the classroom.**

Timothy Robinson is a 13 year old boy, he loves to read, play chess and also plays Swish – a sport, similar to table tennis, for people with a vision impairment. Being vision impaired Timothy's mum Sandra felt that his options were limited, that was until they found a piece of equipment called the Clearnote.

Timothy has a condition called Rod Monochromatism, this condition presents itself in patients by showing signs of colour blindness and extreme sensitivity to glare. In Timothy's case he wears red tinted glasses and uses tinted paper at school to protect his eyes from glare. Timothy also wears bifocal lens as his sight can change from one minute to the next depending on the environment. Timothy currently has approximately 15% peripheral vision and virtually no depth of vision. Timothy was just starting year

nine when he got his Clearnote and it was the first time he could select his subjects, he enjoys graphics and design and would eventually like to use his talents in these subjects to work for the Navy or within the design field.

The Clearnote unit which Timothy has been donated from the Variety Club of Queensland is a portable unit which will enable him to take to and from school, it will enable him to view the board from anywhere in the classroom, it will enable his books and assignments to be magnified on to his computer. Timothy can choose the contrast that suits him best to aid in reading of the work required for school. It eliminates the amount of time he will require from a teacher aid and makes him fully independent with his studies.

When speaking with Timothy's mum Sandra she said "He is going to be able to take this everywhere, the library, TAFE or University, it is just going to change his life".

Sandra said that Timothy's school has been an excellent support to the family and his case manager last year and his Advisory Visiting Teacher had both put in a lot of effort and

made the huge effort in organizing pieces of equipment for Tim and have been a great support to him.

Tim is not the only one who will benefit from the new technology; his parents will not have to spend as much time aiding him with his homework. It allows them to not have to find large print versions of his work books and dictionaries. It will give them a chance to see Timothy grow independent with his learning,

"It is very rewarding as a parent".

"It is going to be great to see him achieve what he



wants to achieve, he will be able to go and find his own information, and it will be all his own work."

"Tim enjoys school and he is a very independent and intelligent child, he can now excel regardless of his vision impairment, in some ways it levels the playing field, the buck stops with Tim now and he can excel, there is nothing holding him back". Said Sandra of her son.

**82 year old Jean McMahon knows that losing your sight doesn't mean losing your independence.**

In the face of a degenerating eye condition that Doctors have told Jean, there is no cure, she has found that you can still live with the little you have got. Jean is not completely blind but her vision condition can cause her to have double vision and her field of view is much smaller than those with good sight. Jean is amongst the thousands of Australians over 50 who live with Low Vision.

Low Vision means that traditional spectacles, contact lenses and surgical options are no longer of any assistance. There is one ray of hope from this cloud though; electronic magnification.

"The ability to continue to do things like read my mail, reading recipes so I can bake and cook, read the TV Guide, and do crosswords is fantastic. I can also keep in touch with family who live interstate and this year I was able to read all my Christmas cards"

Jean found her electronic magnification unit through a dealer for Quantum Technology.

"I thought he was an expert and was just making it look so easy, but he wasn't tricking me, it really

is that easy. The simplicity is extremely appealing and if I had tried the unit on that first day, I would have bought it right there."

"When you get older there can be limits with technology but this equipment doesn't push those limits, it is so simple to use. At first I thought I would never understand the technology. That I could never learn. I went very close to giving up but now that I have my magnifier and have learnt to live with the equipment, I don't think I could live without it, I use it everyday."

"It is amazing that there is such support out there for people with vision impairments"

**I can sing clearly now the rain has gone**

For song bird Marie McDonald losing her sight wasn't going to stop her singing.

When Marie McDonald was diagnosed with Australians leading cause of blindness, Macular Degeneration, two and a half years ago the feeling of devastation was instantaneous. Marie says having to give in her licence was just heartbreaking.

"I just cried, the thought that I could no longer be independent, I

couldn't go where I wanted when I wanted was dreadful."

Since Marie's diagnosis and coming to the realisation that there was little that could be done for her degenerating vision, Marie went in search of help.

"I went to a seminar with a friend that was being held locally and met Glenn, a Quantum Technology representative. At the seminar I saw lots of equipment so shortly after I called Glenn and he came to see me very quickly. He was able to offer me the appropriate equipment to assist me, and I wanted it immediately, he was able to do that for me."

Glenn Zerafa is a local to the area and it is a comfort to Marie that he is available to come and see her if she needs help or more information.

Marie enjoys singing in her choir group and volunteering at the local village, she is single-handedly responsible for all 400 of the Tall Bay residents receiving their birthday cards as well as working on and editing the village newsletter. She uses her handheld magnifier, the Compact+ to help her create these lovely birthday cards and the desktop unit, the Viva to edit and work on the newsletter and to read through songs for choir. All of which she

says would no longer be possible with her sight if she did not have the equipment.

"Volunteering is wonderful, knowing that you are helping people, you don't just sit at home and vegetate, it gives me so much joy to be able to continue with this work. I will keep going doing what I can for as long as I can. I dance and sing and have a laugh everyday"

"Some people get depressed when they lose their sight, I won't let myself. I have the assistance that I need to continue to live a happy, independent and fulfilled life with the help of a few magnifiers, and it really is wonderful."



## Vision Impaired Support Groups

Support groups exist to ensure that people who have vision loss or who have been newly diagnosed as blind or having low vision have the opportunity to meet with others who may be experiencing similar feelings.

Groups are held throughout Australia and often have interesting guest speakers, outings and other social activities that allow sharing of experiences and a chance to interact with others.

If you would be interested in joining a support group in your local area you can find details at <http://www.visionaustralia.org.au> or by calling **1300 847 466**

If you live in the New South Wales suburbs of Holroyd, Parramatta, Fairfield or Liverpool, a new support group is starting up at the Smithfield RSL Club on the first Tuesday of the month at 10:00 am.

For more information about this group or to get involved please contact Alan on 02 9636 8725 or [abornefe@bigpond.net.au](mailto:abornefe@bigpond.net.au)