Feeling Useful Again

By Kelly McKinnon

Four years ago I was a Project Manager with a New Zealand bank, building the infrastructure for a customer engagement programme. This was about understanding how customers felt when they interact with the bank and ensuring the bank always focused on a great experience. I loved the philosophy of what our project was doing - making people feel good!

It was a busy role, coordinating many people in a corporate environment and communication was key. Our project was completed in July 2007; the infrastructure was built and being handed over to the people who would operate it as an ongoing programme. My work on this project was drawing to a close.

On a winter evening in July 2011 I’m preparing to tell a room of people what happened to me in July 2007, about an event that dramatically changed my life and meant the loss of my ability to work as a Project Manager.

All I know about our audience is they are part of a NSW traffic offender programme. Before sentencing they must complete a seven week education programme, facilitated by the Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) which includes presentations given by the police, other organisations and HeadEast. Tonight I will be presenting to them as part of HeadEast's presentation.
In my mind I’ve conjured up a mob of scary people... *they don’t want to be here, they talk amongst themselves, some are angry.* I’m extremely nervous and as each person walks in I smile warmly, eager to create some friendly connections in this sea of faces.

Jim Pescud starts the evening explaining his role as Community Access Worker with HeadEast and gives a presentation on acquired brain injury. He then invites Ed Mahony to join him and through the course of an interview we learn about Ed’s experience of a traumatic brain injury following a road accident in the Southern Highlands. Prior to his accident Ed was a Geotechnical Engineer and studying for an MBA; unfortunately his injury means he’s been unable to return to engineering work or his studies. What strikes me about Ed is his wonderful optimism and refusal to allow his circumstances to get the better of him.

As I listen to Ed, I forget why I’m here... I’m as engaged with his story as the rest of the audience. When their interview is finished, Jim introduces me and I nervously come forward. I tell myself there’s one person here tonight who will be interested in what I have to say. I don’t know who they are but they are definitely out there; I have to believe that.

As I start the presentation I invite the audience to consider what Ed and I have in common. I explained that it relates to the earlier presentations given by Jim and Ed and you can’t tell by looking at us. As I speak, I notice some friendly faces looking back at me and think... *maybe there’s more than one interested person out there.*

I feel a little encouraged and tell the audience that what Ed and I have in common is we both have an acquired brain injury. I explain how my injury was caused by a bleed in my brain from a burst aneurysm and from the surgery to stop that bleed which saved my life. This happened on 6 July 2007 and was the last time I worked.

I tell the audience that while Ed and I may not appear to be injured in the same way, there are many similarities in how our acquired brain injuries affect our lives. Tonight I’d like to help them understand more about what it’s like to live with an acquired brain injury.

As I continue my story with hands shaking and voice wobbling, it doesn’t matter because looking out at our audience I find a sea of interested faces - my one anonymous friend has been joined by many.

I close the presentation with a
message about choice. I don’t know which of my choices led to an aneurysm and brain haemorrhage, but I make conscious choices now about how I look after myself to stay as healthy as I can. And the choices people in the audience make might influence whether they will get an acquired brain injury or cause one for someone else.

As I finish the presentation, my nerves fade away and I answer some questions from our friendly interested audience. As the people leave they thank us, one man telling us it was an inspiring session, another man coming to shake our hands.

I’ve done it! And learnt so much.

That I can get people to think differently about something, in a way that leaves them feeling good. And hopefully this will lead to safer, healthier behaviour.

That I’m still a capable person. For the first time in four years I feel a proper sense of achievement - that I can contribute and help people.

Being an observer of life isn’t the only option for me, I can participate usefully again.

What I also learnt was I didn’t need to create this mob of scary people in my mind! A more mindful approach would have helped me settle in the present moment and stop imagining scary things. And I could have looked upon our audience with more compassion. I now take a different view. They might have made mistakes - mistakes any of us could make - but they come to this education programme to make things better.

I really hope something I said will help them on that journey.

The Haiku  
By Pat Ledlin

Perhaps the shortest form of poetry is the Haiku. It has been in the Japanese Zen culture for centuries.

Each poem describes the minutiae of nature and seasons, a cloud, a wren, the flow of the river, a mountain cliff. It has simplicity and beauty. It knows when to stop. It is a source of contemplation.

Here is my first haiku. Why not create one too?

Spring

A sap green shoot

Pushes up slowly

Unfurling itself gently

In the warmer spring air.
On the 12th of August, Russell, Sam, Vince, and I met at HeadEast to make our way down to Centennial Park to participate in the second meeting of the Fishing Group. We met up with Tony Steiner, the coordinating volunteer from the Australian National Sportsfishing Association (ANSA), who teaches people with disabilities how to fish and helps facilitate the People With Disabilities Fishing For Carp Program.

It was not that cold but it rained off and on. The fishing gear, provided by ANSA, was all set up for us upon our arrival so we could start straight away when we got there. Tony showed us how to put bread, we used for bait, on the hook. We took a slice, removed the crust then rolled the slice into a little ball. We then stuck the hook through the bread ball securing it on the line.

After about a half an hour there, Sam had the first bite and hooked an eel. He almost got it up but it got away from him after putting up a good fight! When Tony handed me my rod I thought this is going to be easy, until I hooked a fish! I fought for 20 to 30 minutes, trying to get the fish in, it kept going backward and forward as I was winding the line. Eventually the fish wore out and I was able to finally bring it in. Tony got the net and brought the fish up. It was a carp and I was told it weighed about 5kg! Apparently carp can get up to 13kg!

After I had caught my fish we fished a little bit more before we all decided we had had enough and went home. Apart from the rain we had a good time!
At a recent Client Forum, members were eager to see what was available at the Powerhouse Museum. The decision was made and here we were outside. The weather that day was freezing and we had settled into a warm, sunny café for tea and munchies. Some produced the museum map. There was so much that we all wanted to view. The map seemed to be the best option to follow. It highlighted the treasures within.

First, we saw how folk travelled in the past, on horseback, rickshaws, buses pulled by horses, carriages, old trams, electrically powered vehicles and steam trains. There was even a featured wall with an old time table board which included train destinations, times and labels of station names. A huge wall of clocks displaying the times of many cities around the world caught my eye.

We discovered a section devoted to space journeys. Mars was on display. The spaceship America had returned with samples of Martian soil. Mars was depicted as dry, desolate and rocky like the central regions of Australia. The Americans had developed vehicles to travel over the Martian surfaces. The photos picked up by the vehicle were very interesting.

The musical instruments section fascinated me. The senior volunteers of the museum had gathered on a mat many sticks, thin beating utensils and percussion instruments. All were encouraged to try them and listen for the varying sounds and experiment with rhythms. In this display there were also old examples of many different kinds of instruments.

I found the robots in the robot section of the museum very creative. A video showed us a farmer moving cows and horses from paddock to paddock with an electronic device like a robot. Many robots live in this museum. Some can cook, hang out the washing, and do the housework and answer questions. We would all like one of these hard working robots at home!

What an adventure into ideas and places unknown!

Russell, Jim, Robbie (the robot), Robert, Pat, and Eirene
Carolyn Snowdon passed away peacefully in her home overlooking Coogee Bay on Thursday the 15th of September.

Carolyn joined HeadEast in July 2010 and quickly became involved in many of our activities. She joined the Croquet, Movie and Ten Pin Bowling Groups as well as working on the Newsletter Team, attending our Card Making Workshop and being involved in the management and organisation of the service by attending the Client Forum meetings. After only being involved in the service for a little over three months, Carolyn was elected to become a Client Representative to the Management Committee in November last year. This is such a testament to the confidence everyone had in her abilities and how quickly her cheerful demeanour affected those around her. Carolyn had a smile for everyone, she had great fun at the groups she attended and had a great eye for detail when editing the newsletter.

Carolyn touched the hearts of everyone she met with her warmth, vitality and love of life and nature. Walking around Coogee, Carolyn noticed everything around her with great joy: the clouds in the sky, the light on the ocean, the chirping of the birds and the flowers on the trees. She had a great love of life and sense of fun and adventure. Everyone at HeadEast will have many happy memories to cherish. Our thoughts are with her family at this time.

The Belvoir Street Theatre

By Robert Downie

Regular readers of HeadEast News will remember an article by Craig from last issue entitled A Good Day Out. One thought mentioned in this article was to go to a live play at the Belvoir Street Theatre. I will expand on this.

Why see a live play you might ask? There is a sense of being closer to the performers. If you go to the movies you may be in a front row seat but you are still a million miles away from the actors you have come to see.

Why this venue? The Belvoir Street Theatre is close to both Central station and for those who catch buses within easy walking distance from Elizabeth or Crown Streets. It is accessible to those who are in wheelchairs or suffer from sight difficulties through a stage door if prior arrangements are made with the theatre; making it very friendly to those with disabilities. An elevator also runs between
floors making access easy to the different levels of the theatre.

When? On the last Thursday of each season at 2pm the performers stage an unwaged performance that is free for pensioners. To access the unwaged performance one must present their pension card so postcodes can be recorded to receive the free ticket for the performance, this will also admit your carer if you need assistance. Alternatively, you can also attend the paid performances for which you will have to buy a ticket but this gives you flexibility to the times and day you might decide to see a performance. Please check their schedule of shows by visiting their web site www.belvoir.com.au or you can ring the box office on 9699 3444.

Light food and snacks may be purchased from the bar as well as a range of drinks including coffee, tea and assorted soft drinks and is a nice place to relax before the performance. There are toilets on this level although, not specifically a toilet for those with disabilities. The elevator runs between street level the box office and up to the upper seats of the theatre from the bar level.

The Belvoir Street Theatre had two award winning plays staged last year, Namajerra, about the life and times of the famous Aboriginal artist and The Diary of a Madman starring Academy Award winner Geoffrey Rush. The theatre holds a variety of different plays having a large range of subject matter which is interesting and entertaining, at least from my experience.

At the time of publication of this Newsletter there will be two more unwaged performances this year, Summer Of the Seventeenth Doll on Thursday the 10th of November at 2pm and As You Like It, by William Shakespeare, on Thursday the 22nd of December at 2pm.

The box office opens at 1pm and these events are very popular so get there early as there is usually a long line-up before 12:30pm. Then relax in the bar before they open the house doors!
Facebook is a social network where one can keep in contact with their friends and loved ones or make new friends with people in Australia or around the world through the internet. Internationally over 750 million active users, including companies, organizations, schools, sporting groups, sport fans, artists etc. There is something interesting for everyone.

Because of requests and interest in Facebook from HeadEast’s clients they decided to have a workshop on how to use it. Some of the clients were not sure how to do various things on Facebook so we learned how to add a profile picture, how to customize our page, and how to write an email or use the chat mode. We also learned how to use the security features like blocking of email address so no one can see it and how to block someone from accessing your page if they should be a problem in some way. We learnt one should be careful about what he or she says, as in some cases some people have gotten into trouble with the police for using Facebook in an inappropriate way.

As for myself I can keep in contact with friends I haven’t seen in a long time and with my cousins. I can use Facebook on my computer or on my mobile phone, so it is very convenient. If you are on Facebook you will always make new friends and learn lots of different things.

See it My Way

By Robert Downie

I wish that you could see,
The world the way I do,
If it was with my eyes,
That you could see it through.

If you could feel with my hands,
Then you’d know how I feel,
Even if my hands look different,
With problems I must deal.

If you could hear through my ears,
Noise at a different level,
Or maybe you’d hear nothing,
Would that thought just dishevel.

The smell of something different,
That sense may be gone,
No taste may accompany,
And you may feel forlorn.

I will see it your way,
Or at least I will try,
To reach forward,
And up into the sky.

So try to see it my way,
Take me as I am,
I want you to see me,
To see past all the sham.
Headway Illawarra invited Headway Bankstown and HeadEast to a bowling contest. Over the years, we have challenged each other in racing sprints in Centennial Park and other activities. This invitation was to lawn bowls. Now, we have serious contenders because Russell, Craig, and I are competent indoor bowlers and joined by Ed, Eirene and Hormiz, who try very hard, felt confident in accepting the meet. In the end it turned out lawn bowls is much different to 10 pin bowling!

Two carloads of bowlers left Sydney and set off to Wollongong. We were directed to the bowling green not far from the Headway premises. Our many southern friends were there. We were divided into teams and the bowling manager took time to give us a lesson and share useful tips to succeed. All players were allotted different colours for the team...yellow, blue, red, white etc so that we would recognise our team. We tossed the ball down the green until we got the hang of it. One must aim for the white ball at the end, called the jack. This can be very tricky. Some did it easily and had good control. Others improved as they tried.

Soon it was lunchtime so we went back to Headway quarters, where our friends served us with a healthy lunch of salads, chicken, fried rice, buns, pizza and a soft drink... Most welcome and appetising!

Before we split up it was time for awards. Trophies were distributed. They were of gold metal figures of a bowler, ready to throw the ball. Of course, we came home with some trophies!!!

The trip back was spectacular. We came via Bulli Pass and could see the ocean, bushland and city below. Jim passed on his knowledge of the area, its history and beauty. Thank you to our staff at HeadEast and Headway for another fun day out!
The "Great to be Alive" Croquet Cup

By Garrey Maxwell

Recently the HeadEast Croquet Group’s annual award, the “Great to be Alive” cup, was awarded to Carolyn Snowdon for being the best and fairest player.

Carolyn only started playing within the last twelve months but she picked up the game very quickly and provided some real competition for the seasoned players.

Carolyn’s enthusiasm and bright demeanour have been infectious to the group. The award was presented to Carolyn at our regular Wednesday meet on the 10th of August by Fay Stove who is a senior club member.

The name of the “Great to be Alive” cup was christened by Pat Ledlin and has been awarded for the last seven years to the best and fairest player.

Deidre, Penny, Pat, Carolyn and I play Golf Croquet at the Coogee Croquet Club on Wednesday mornings, depending on the weather. The croquet club is located on Bream Street, Coogee. We start playing at approximately 10:00am.

One of my favourite highlights of our morning is lunch at Coogee following the game but I also love the competition, fun, laughter and companionship.

The Coogee Croquet club charges $65 per year and $5 per visit green keeping fees. This is a special rate for HeadEast members. We welcome new members: please contact Deidre if you would like to find out more about joining us. Her number is 9389 6406.
This meditation comes from a very special meditation practitioner, Stephen Levine.

Stephen Levine has written a number of fantastic books on meditation and spiritual practice. A favourite of mine is *Who Dies?* This particular meditation, *Soft-belly*, has come from the *A Year to Live*.

Stephen’s work is extensively focused on death and dying, illness and drastic changes in one’s life.

The Soft-belly meditation is often used by Stephen with his client’s; it is an obvious favourite of his.

According to Stephen, “*Soft-belly is a trigger for our letting go. Softening melts the armouring over the heart, experienced as hardness in the belly. Each time we remember to be present, to be mindful, we soften into the moment. Softening becomes a call to the heart that it’s safe to be alive in the body once again. Soft-belly brings an end to our fear of fear.*” (*A Year To Live*, pg. 33)

**Instructions for Meditation**

Taking a few deep breaths, feel the body as you breathe in. Feel the body expanding and contracting with each breath. Focus on the rising and falling of the abdomen. Let awareness receive the beginning, middle and end of each in-breath, and of each out-breath, expanding and contracting the belly.

Note the constantly changing flow of sensation in each inhalation, and in each exhalation. And begin to soften all around these sensations. Let the breath breathe itself into a softening belly. Soften the belly to receive the breath, to receive sensation, and to experience life in the body. Soften the muscles that have held the fear for so long. Soften the tissue, the blood vessels, and the flesh.

*Letting go of the holding of a lifetime. Letting go into Soft-belly, merciful belly.*

*Soften the grief, the distrust, the anger held so hard in the belly.*

*Levels and levels of softening, levels and levels of letting go.*

*Moment to moment allow each breath its full expression in Soft-belly.*

*Let go of the hardness. Let it float in something softer and kinder.*

*Let thoughts come and let them go, floating like bubbles in the spaciousness of Soft-belly.*

*Holding to nothing, softening, softening.*
Let the healing in. Let the pain go. Have mercy on yourself, soften the belly, open the passageway to the heart.

In Soft-belly there is room to be born at last, and room to die when the moment comes.

In Soft-belly there is the vast spaciousness in which to heal, in which to discover our unbounded nature.

Letting go into the softness, fear floats in the gentle vastness we call the heart.

Soft-belly is the practice that accompanies us through the day and finds us at day’s end still alive and well.

Red Dog Movie Review

By Robert Downie

I have the great pleasure of being able to review the movie Red Dog, it is based on a true story. This is Australiana at its best with outstanding performances by both the human and animal cast.

It is your last chance to catch the acting skills of the late great Bill Hunter although he only makes a brief cameo appearance. Noah Taylor is also in the cast as are a number of familiar faces from film and television and of course stealing the show is the Red Dog of the title, called Koko.

There are some movies that take you on a roller-coaster ride of emotions and this is one of them.

The story is set in the 1970’s in the mining town of Dampier in the Northern part of Western Australia. There is nothing much there except for a caravan park, the mines and a pub. The miners are a pretty tight group; they have to be within this situation.

The arrival of the red dog of the title changes their lives somewhat as it goes from miner to miner becoming friends with all and becomes the mining camps dog. It is searching for someone to be its owner. The search is ended when a new miner arrives at the camp that the dog instantly is attracted to whether it’s the motorcycle he is riding or something else, we don’t know. We follow the adventures of the dog and truly those of the miners as they come to terms with life out West.

I think I have already revealed too much but watch for the fight scenes between the caravan park cat and the red dog, truly epic in proportion..

So to quote Molly Meldrum do yourself a favour! Go see this movie you’ll be glad you did.
How to Get Into Your Favourite Live Venue

By Russell Potter

So you want to see your favourite band or entertainment act but you have an acquired brain injury effectively admitting you into that most exclusive and rarefied of groups: People with a Disability.

So what are your options in pursuit of this quest? This article will attempt to provide some (hopefully) useful advice on this issue using a two-pronged attack. Firstly, the author will chronicle his own experiences in attending several performances in one of the smaller band venues catering to the more groovy alternative music scene.

Secondly, the author will then detail people with disability facilities, access in one of the larger stadiums in Sydney: the Sydney Entertainment Centre (also known colloquially as the ent-cent)

The smaller band venue of choice was The Metro, located on George Street between Goulburn and Bathurst streets in the city. There were actually a quite intimidating number of steps between the street and the venue entrance but, fortunately, there was also a moving chair-lift intended for people with disabilities to use.

After flashing my disability pension card we, (my wife Erin and I) were escorted to the venue’s area for people with disabilities which was located in its raised stalls area. It had quite terrific, unimpeded, views of the performance from its vantage point above and to the side of the stage.

Most important was the fact that this position was quite separate from the mosh pit which was, as usual for this type of venue, quite vigorously patronised the whole evening.

As for the Entertainment Centre, it has what might be described as a myriad of facilities and services for people with disabilities (known as, in the ent-cent’s lovely jargon, as special needs) patrons, including, but not limited to, level parking, special needs toilets, special needs lifts and special needs seating, not to mention special needs taxi access, just in case said patron still doesn’t feel special enough!

Overall, it seems there are, indeed, a great number of options available to make a person with a disability patron’s experience easier when embarking on such an adventure. The secret to getting access is just to ask the venue preferably before you get there and find out any special protocol one might require.
Youth and Road Trauma

By Ed Mahony

The Community Education Team consisting of Jim, Scott, Laya, Kelly and Ed attended the Youth and Road Trauma Forum at Acer Arena on the 23rd June. The forum is facilitated by Westmead Hospital and is in its sixth year. The primary objective is to reduce the fatality and injury rates of young drivers, riders, pedestrians and passengers.

In 2010, 73 young people aged 15-24 years were killed on NSW roads, averaging one young person per week, another 842 were injured with profound consequences for themselves and their families.

The program included a real crash scenario, lectures and demonstrations. There were guest speakers who had suffered serious injuries themselves who shared their experiences with the forum.

It is estimated 12,000 students (year’s 10–12) will have attend the forum and hopefully will have gained a clear understanding of the responsibilities entailed in becoming a driver.

In my opinion such a forum is something that everybody should attend before they obtain a drivers licence.

Feeding the Senses

By Robert Downie

Abdul, Craig, Robert, Pat, Jim and Eirene in the gardens

You may think this an unusual title for an article about a HeadEast client outing but read on and discover why.

September’s HeadEast client outing was to the Botanical Gardens. We met at the Woolloomooloo Gate just down from the Art Gallery, this visually stimulating part of the city took us away from the ugliness, of the buildings which make up the CBD.

Spring is the right time of year to go to this spot as many flowers are in full bloom. The proximity of the harbour gives a fresh smell and so the perfumes of the flowers are not adulterated by the street smells.
which are part and parcel of city living.

The feeling of grass beneath our feet heightened the pleasure as I’m sure you’d agree grass feels better than concrete and smells a whole lot better.

The sounds of flying foxes passing overhead and birds in their nests feeding their young, add to our enjoyment of nature’s moments of delight.

This setting gave those of us in the current photography course a chance to try out our skills by taking close-ups of flowers and fountains and other sights such as bats hanging in trees and cacti in bloom. A statue of a mare and her foal was also something that interested many of us.

Those to whom I am referring were Abdul, Eirene, Craig, Jim, Pat, Scott, Vashti and me. It was a beautiful spring day, sun shining, people out jogging or walking or just resting on the grass.

We ate our lunch at the relaxing, gardens cafe, shaded by umbrellas.

The thing that is great about the gardens is that you can get away from it all while still being in the city. This is but one of the many attractions of Sydney.
This shot was a medium format (6x6 cm) snap from the same roll of twelve exposures as my most frequently exhibited shot *Boy on the Beach*. I snapped it on MacKenzie’s Beach, a continuation from the Southern end of Maroubra Beach, many years ago.

I was asked if I spoke to the toddler, depicted in the photo. I replied that *it was my habit to move on the very next instant after clicking my camera’s shutter* - as if it was an amateur, candid photographers requirement to vacate the scene, as soon as the image was captured.