Lachlan explores the world of literacy through braille

Taylor is thriving at school

The future of hearing services for all Australians
It’s hard to believe we’re almost half way through the year! Much is happening and I hope you enjoy reading this edition of The RIDBC Quarterly.

In this issue we introduce our new Virtual Miles Program which helps support children with vision or hearing loss living in regional and remote areas of Australia, and we share stories of Lachlan and Taylor who are making great progress with the support of RIDBC.

You may be aware that in February, the Government announced its intention to formally examine a proposal to ensure a strong and viable future for Australian Hearing. This proposal was put forward by a consortium, led by RIDBC, Macquarie University and Cochlear Limited, for the possible transfer of Australian Hearing into non-Government ownership.

The Consortium’s driver is the wellbeing of all Australians with hearing loss. Should Government decide to transition Australian Hearing into non-Government ownership, the Consortium’s intention would be to work with, and build upon Australian Hearing’s significant achievements, continuing to improve services for Australians with hearing loss while also minimising the significant health and social impacts of hearing loss. More information about the Consortium approach is included in this issue of The Quarterly.

In April we held our annual RIDBC Book, Toy & Music Fair. Thank you to our dedicated team of volunteers and for the generous donations from individuals, community and corporate partners, who made this event such a success.

Finally, this month RIDBC holds its 155th Annual General Meeting where we launch our annual review of RIDBC in 2015 – a year of significant achievement and strategic development for the organisation. To read the Annual Report, go to ridbc.org.au/annual-report.

We are extremely grateful for your ongoing interest and support for RIDBC.

Chris Rehn
RIDBC Chief Executive
Lachlan explores the world of literacy through braille

Lachlan’s early intervention program with RIDBC has supported him to develop the concepts, language and physical skills needed to develop his Braille reading and writing skills.

When Lachlan was only four months old his parents, Cameron and Janine, were given the news that he was completely blind.

“We suspected Lachlan had a vision problem when he was just 6 weeks old, but had no idea he was completely blind,” said Janine. “When the doctor started explaining that Lachlan would use a white cane and be a Braille reader we were nervous about what the future held for our baby boy.”

Lachlan began receiving services from RIDBC Early Learning Program (Vision Impairment) at 5 months of age.

“RIDBC is such a huge part of our lives, it would be hard to imagine what it would be like without their help and support. When Lachlan was a baby, we were shown ways to encourage Lachlan to play, move and explore his environment, which doesn’t always come naturally to a child who is blind,” said Janine.

Structured play activities and learning to play with specific toys helped Lachlan to develop finger strength and dexterity in readiness for braille.

“RIDBC has shown us activities to assist Lachlan to develop his finger strength for using Braille, for example, pulling suction toys off a table and pushing and pulling golf tees through polystyrene blocks,” said Janine.

Lachlan continues to progress at preschool.

“Since attending RIDBC’s VisionEd preschool from the start of this year, Lachlan is enjoying finding the Braille signage and asking what the words say,” said Janine.

“My husband Cameron and I are currently learning Braille through RIDBC’s UEB Online course. This course enables sighted people to learn Braille and will allow our family to gain the skills needed to help Lachlan with reading and writing in the future.”

Cameron and Janine are optimistic for the future.

“Our dreams for Lachlan are simple. We want him to have a happy childhood and would love for him to attend the local primary school with his big brother Joshua,” said Janine.

To learn more about UEB Online visit uebonline.org.
Earlier this year, Senator the Hon. Matthias Cormann, Minister for Finance, announced that Government would formally examine a proposal put forward by a Consortium comprising RIDBC, Macquarie University and Cochlear Limited, for the possible transfer of Australian Hearing into non-government ownership to ensure a strong and viable future for Australian Hearing.

RIDBC, Cochlear Limited and Macquarie University have the expertise, history and relationships to elevate and extend the services offered by Australian Hearing, creating a world-leading model of best-practice to develop and deliver services to support those with hearing loss.

The driver of the consortium is the wellbeing of people with hearing loss and ensuring they continue to receive world-class services that dramatically improve their lives.

The Consortium model provides a governance and ownership structure for Australian Hearing that will preserve, protect and extend upon hearing services for all Australians, should Government decide to transition Australian Hearing into a non-government environment.

The Consortium's proposal will honour Australian Hearing’s original intent; safeguard clients of the Community Service Obligation (CSO) program including children, the elderly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and complex adults; address areas of service growth and unmet need; and ultimately provide an enhanced service and improved hearing health outcomes for all Australians.

This is an exciting time for RIDBC, enabling us to support even more people with hearing loss across Australia. We are committed to working with industry, government and stakeholders to ensure the best outcomes.

In the last Quarterly, we released RIDBC’s 2016-2020 strategy which outlines a new era of service development and delivery for people with vision or hearing loss. We are committed to reaching more people through expansion and partnerships, delivering best practice and securing RIDBC’s future. More details on our strategic intent can be found at ridbc.org.au/strategy.
A journey made easier with RIDBC

RIDBC Virtual Miles Program ensures that geography doesn’t create an additional barrier to learning for children with vision and hearing loss living in regional and remote areas of Australia.

RIDBC has launched its Virtual Miles Program, a regular giving program that encourages donors to sponsor a number of virtual miles each month, ensuring geography doesn’t create an additional barrier to learning for children with vision or hearing loss. The Program helps to reduce the costs and burden of travel faced by families living in regional and remote areas of Australia.

“Over 1,000,000 kilometres of travel – time, expense, disruption to family, work and school life are saved each year through the delivery of therapy, education and other services through RIDBC’s remote video conferencing service. Families on our services hail from as far away as Jabiru in the Northern Territory; Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland; Bellerive in Tasmania and Broome in Western Australia,” said Tracey McCann, Head of RIDBC Teleschool.

RIDBC Teleschool provides vital education and support to families living in regional and remote areas across Australia, using high quality videoconferencing technology in the family home or at other local facilities.

“The benefits of this remote service delivery include minimal disruption to family life, and sessions that are delivered at a time when both parents can participate, even on weekends and across different time zones,” said Tracey.

RIDBC Teleschool services include remote mapping of cochlear implants; braille tuition and vision loss support; intensive regular individual sessions; information about hearing and vision loss; listening and spoken language development; Auslan support if required; parent networking and information group parent sessions; a lending library with child and parent resources; and transition to school and school support.

We would like to say ‘thank you’ to our generous supporters and to those who have recently joined our Virtual Miles Program. If you would like to help RIDBC continue to provide vital education and support to families living in regional and remote areas across Australia – just head to ridbc.org.au/virtualmiles to join the Program.

RIDBC Teleschool supports children like three year old Stanley (pictured above), who live in remote areas of Australia, with ongoing remote mapping of cochlear implants and integrated therapy services.
Taylor is thriving at school
Diagnosed with hearing loss at two years of age, Taylor is excelling at school with support from RIDBC Gosford’s broad range of services.

When Taylor’s hearing loss was diagnosed, it came as a shock to mum, Amanda.

“Taylor was diagnosed with heart disease and a cleft palate when she was a baby, so as she grew up any speech and language issues were attributed to that,” said Amanda.

When Taylor was a year old a series of ear infections started to raise concerns.

“She had 20 ear infections in one year,” said Amanda. “It was then we were referred to Ear, Nose and Throat surgeon, Associate Professor Catherine Birman, which was just the best thing. Dr Birman tested and re-tested Taylor’s hearing and that’s when we found out she had hearing loss.”

During this time Amanda had her second daughter, Bodhi, who was diagnosed with hearing loss through newborn hearing screening and began receiving support from RIDBC Gosford when she was seven weeks of age.

“Having Bodhi on service with RIDBC Gosford made a huge difference,” said Amanda. “We’d had such a great experience with them - we had faith in the fact that we had the right service provider and that with early intervention we could start getting Taylor onto a good path with good progress.”

Taylor is now learning to listen and speak with two hearing aids, and transitioned to ‘big school’ this year.

“When Taylor received her second pair of hearing aids the difference was out of this world,” said Amanda. “We put them in her ears and the first thing that came out of her mouth was, ‘I can hear mummy!’ It was bittersweet.”

“When we started with RIDBC Taylor’s speech was almost 12 months delayed. When she started to access sounds through her hearing aids, life changed. With RIDBC it’s like there is this beautiful, big umbrella of support over your entire family– everything from speech therapy to occupational therapy to assessment to diagnostics.

“The idea of her transitioning to school was initially stressful, but RIDBC has just been fantastic supporting us through the process. Taylor has settled in at school beautifully and is enjoying many new adventures!”
Fundraise for RIDBC!

Sight & Sound for Kids Lunch 2016
Help raise much needed funds for RIDBC Hunter, coming soon ridbc.org.au/ssl

City2Surf
14 August – Join us and team RIDBC at the 2016 City2Surf ridbc.org.au/city2surf

Coleman Greig Challenge
21 October – Challenge your colleagues at The 2016 Coleman Greig Challenge ridbc.org.au/colemangreig

RIDBC Wine Gift Pack
Order a gift pack of four premium wines by Lisa McGuigan and support RIDBC ridbc.org.au/WineGift

For more information on how to participate in events and fundraise for RIDBC visit ridbc.org.au/events

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