



Message from the Chair and CEO

A man is told he has suffered a stroke

His wife, partner, family and friends by default become known as carers and they too have suffered a stroke!

Plans are delayed, relationships may be put on hold and the carers own health and well being may be put at risk.

People who care for others do it out of a fundamental love and concern.

Carers step in for however long it takes...

Two significant milestones in the last 12 months have heartened the work of BrainLink; **The Carer Recognition Bill 2010** and the announcement of the development of the **National Carer Strategy**, which give important credence by the Australian Government that the claims of carers are taken seriously. Not only are they taken seriously but it will be announced publicly and on record in legislation.

However whilst these are positive statements it must be so much more than symbolic words and at the heart of their foundation must be measurable outcomes that really make a difference to a carer's life. It cannot in isolation be the blueprint to make everything alright. The simple fact is that the strategy must also recognise there would be a much reduced burden of care if the person with the disability or illness was provided the full supports they require within the disability/health/aged care system in the first place.

So we are pleased that alongside the National Carer Strategy, the Productivity Commission has handed down its initial report into the **National Disability Insurance Scheme** and whilst it has solid backing from many, BrainLink continues to encourage strongly for the Federal Government to remain committed to establishing a system where individuals with a disability are responded to with what they need in a timely manner, despite reports it will be costly and require billions to fund. At the end of the day any one of us could find ourselves in need of services and care.

Ultimately it is time to make a real difference to the lives of people and families and whatever the system, BrainLink believes it must encompass all factors affecting the carer and the rights of people living with disability to be included and participate equally in all aspects of the community. This has been our message this year and it will continue to be into the future.

BrainLink continues to voice the above concerns loud and strong especially on behalf of individuals affected by acquired brain disorders. Experience shows us that community awareness of Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) and neurological disorders significantly lags behind that of other disabilities. People with ABI and their supporters consistently report that the lack of community awareness in the broadest sense (i.e. inclusive of government, service providers, community organisations, employers etc.) is the single greatest obstacle to full participation. The cognitive-behavioural challenges that many people with an ABI experience discourage them from social participation precisely because those challenges are not understood as being a function of their disability and following is often outright exclusion for the carer as the commonest consequence.

In feedback from BrainLink families elevated stress, anxiety, and exhaustion levels were reported by all the carers.

Many of the carers were being treated for some form of health problem with the majority reporting sleep difficulties.

- 20% of the carers are being treated for depression.
- Significant grief and loss issues were also reported by all of the carers.

BrainLink's message is simple:

Caring is a critical job but it is often difficult and lonely.

For those individuals with an ABI or neurological disorder it is devastating and often complex for the carer.

Therefore we should acknowledge carers and support carers.

We are so encouraged by the response that we continue to receive from carers and families about BrainLink's commitment to improving their well being and health.

One carer stated at the end of a BrainLink education support session:

"When I look around me I am in awe of what all these carers do. I cannot believe I am part of this group of people who do such wonderful work in such a difficult climate; I now understand the value of what I do."

We thank you again sincerely for helping us support BrainLink families and ask you to stand with us to continue to get the message out and to ensure those caring for someone with an acquired brain disorder access the assistance they need.

**Philip Thomas,
Chair**

**Sharon Strugnell,
Chief Executive Officer**

Welcome to New Staff Members



Abraham moved to Australia, from South Africa, in 2010 when he started working for local government as a youth and family support officer. Before coming to Australia, he was appointed as the manager of the Ready for Life program. This program was created

for severely traumatized youth that were exposed to physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Abraham started working for BrainLink in late February as the Information & Administration officer.



Karen is the new Client Services Manager at BrainLink Services. Before commencing her role at BrainLink, Karen has worked in the human services, child protection, mental health, refugees & asylum seekers, aged care and over the past 5 years with carers who are caring for a person with disabilities.

Brain Injury Awareness week 2010 – Falls Related Brain Injury

Brain Injury Awareness Week 2010 was celebrated at the Melbourne Town Hall on the 20th of August.

Over 50 guests had the opportunity to listen to speakers such as Brent Alford & Ross Cottee who told their touching stories on how they acquired their brain injury. A powerful part of the morning was listening to the stories of people in the audience who openly shared their experiences and challenges since acquiring their injury.

Dr Bronwyn Morkham of YPINH facilitated this impromptu session. Towards the end, OMABI performed a relaxation session, of which the audience participated in, and enjoyed.

The date of **Brain Injury Awareness Week 2011** is from the 15th to the 21st of August. The theme is Criminal Justice and plans for this years celebration are underway!

For further information, contact Vanessa on 1800-677-579 or visit www.brainlink.org.au/whats-on.htm

BrainLink Women of Achievement Award Luncheon 2010



2010 Finalists (from left): Melina Schamroth, Jenny Newman, Sharon Tonkin & Leeanne Carey

It's a common saying that women multitask well – often juggling family, career and other commitments. BrainLink celebrates this by holding the yearly Women of Achievement Award Luncheon for Victorian women: entrants are assessed against six criteria: Multidimensional, Commitment & Achievement, Contribution to Community, Creativity & Innovation, Mentorship, and having achieved something new in Victoria.

Our 2010 Award Luncheon got off to a great start with BrainLink's CEO Sharon Strugnell welcoming everyone and introducing MC Dr Sally Cockburn, who entertained us all with her humorous insights into being a woman, and a carer.

Lunch was specially prepared by the Park Hyatt's chef, Josef Brownlee, and enjoyed during a wonderful talk by guest speaker Ita Buttrose, AO, OBE. Ita is a lady who has broken more glass ceilings than most, becoming Australia's first female editor of a major metro Australian newspaper, and working for two of the world's most interesting bosses: Kerry Packer and Rupert Murdoch. Her powerful and very entertaining speech encompassed some of her achievements, such as becoming the youngest-ever Australian Women's Weekly magazine editor, and first woman on the News Ltd Australia board.

Our four finalists, drawn from a strong list of nominees, had their stories presented during lunch, before BrainLink's chair Philip Thomas introduced them all to the stage for the big presentation.

The winner of the 2010 award was Sharon Tonkin, a woman who has worked tirelessly towards providing care to others, including her husband Phillip. Congratulations to Sharon and the three finalists - Melina, Jenny and Leeanne.

SAVE THE DATE: The date for the 2011 BrainLink Women of Achievement Luncheon is Monday the 17th of October 2011.

For more information, contact BrainLink on 1800-677-579 or visit www.brainlink.org.au/voa.htm

BrainLink Health & Wellness Events



Who's Who in Hospital (30 March 2010)

When you end up in hospital after an accident, it's not always clear what's happening and who the many staff are treating you. BrainLink and Royal Melbourne Hospital's Neurosciences Department presented a forum to explain some of the roles, as well as some latest treatments.

The speakers included: Simon Sung, Neurologist, who spoke about stroke, MS and Parkinson's;

Marcia Fleet, Neuro-oncology Care Coordinator outlined the roles of each professional who may be involved in treating someone with a brain tumour and finally Dr Kate Drummond, Neurosurgeon, eloquently described brain tumour operations; why some types (gliomas) are so hard to remove; and the latest exciting technology that is helping.

All in all, a fascinating insight into the very busy Neurosciences Department, and thank you to our guest speakers who somehow made time to present to our carers!



Relationships and Intimacy, Dr Sally Cockburn at The Nerve Centre

On the 10th of June, Dr Sally Cockburn presented to carers about Relationships & Intimacy. It was a great session with many people asking the sensitive questions they wouldn't usually ask. BrainLink look forward to having more sessions in the near future with guest speakers presenting on topics such as health & well being, grief & loss, current research, etc.

If you have any ideas of guest speakers or topics, please let the Manager of Client Services know by calling 1800-677-579.



Male Carers Retreat at The Country Place, Kalorama

In September BrainLink had the pleasure of taking a group of 10 male carers to Kalorama for a weekend filled with football, activities and food! The guys enjoyed a massage, three course dinners, wineries, breweries and of course football on a huge plasma TV. Not to mention lunch at the Kalorama teahouse amongst the beautiful surrounds of Kalorama. It was a well deserved time out from caring, for a short while.



Jells Park Walk & Lunch

For the first time, BrainLink hosted a walk and lunch at Jells Park in Wheelers Hill. Approximately 20 carers took part in an escorted walk with Vanessa from Park's Victoria who explained all of the flora and fauna of the park. After the walk, Sandy & Melanie from The Journey presented a session on "Caring for Others, Caring for Self" which looked at exploring the strengths and changes that come with the caring role and understanding the importance of looking after yourself. During the session, everyone enjoyed a delicious two course lunch with special guests from St Kilda Football Club.



MyTime Relaxation & Meditation Sessions

In September and November, BrainLink successfully hosted two **MyTime** Sessions at The Nerve Centre. Facilitated by Jarek Czechowicz, each session involved meditation, chanting and relaxation for all those who attended followed by a chance to catch up with old friends over some delicious food.

For information about upcoming MyTime Sessions, please contact BrainLink on 1800-677-579.

Sponsorships and Donations – thank you!

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LifeMoves

BrainLink is proud to welcome back Life Moves to The Nerve Centre. Delivered by Peers Inspiring Peers, Life Moves is an 8 week peer support program provided for people with an ABI, by people with an ABI. Sessions are delivered without carers or professionals and are a wonderful way to share your story, discuss issues and strategies while building confidence, self esteem and community participation.

When: Wednesday, 22 June 2011 to Wednesday 10 August 2011

Time: 12.30pm to 3.00pm

Where: Betty Cuthbert Room, The Nerve Centre

54 Railway Road, Blackburn, 3130

Cost: FREE (tea, coffee & biscuits provided)

Bookings or more information: Call 9376-6669 or visit

www.peersinspiringpeers.org.au

Brain Tumour Support Group

BrainLink is dedicated to providing continuous support to those diagnosed with a primary malignant brain tumour, and their carers.

In partnership with Southern Health, the brain tumour support group is every third Tuesday of each month, from February to November.

Facilitated by a palliative nurse, these sessions allow people to share their experiences and information with others in a similar situation.

When: Third Tuesday of each month from February to November, 1:30-3:30pm

Where: Betty Cuthbert Room, The Nerve Centre

54 Railway Road, Blackburn, 3130

Cost: FREE (tea, coffee & biscuits provided)

Bookings or more information: Contact BrainLink on 1800-677-579

Lotus Performance Group (previously known as OMABI)

BrainLink provides financial support to Lotus, the ABI performance group, which welcomes new performers and singers of all abilities.

You do not need to be a great singer or have a loud voice but sing in tune and enjoy singing as part of a group.

Lotus invites you to a **"come and try"** workshop on Friday April 29th in

Ross House 247 Flinders Lane Melbourne at 11.30am

The session will be led by Briony Swan who is a professional singer and music teacher.

Cost: Free, Light refreshments provided so please RSVP

Contact: If you are interested or would like more information about Lotus, contact Lyn MacDonald on 0457-038-834 or email_lynkiss@hotmail.com

BrainLink Writers Group

The BrainLink writers group is a creative writing workshop for people with or without an ABI, and with a keen interest in writing. Guest speakers cover topics from exploring your creativity to writing poetry. The workshops are free for all those who attend and lunch is provided.

For more information about the BrainLink Writers Group, contact BrainLink on

1800-677-579 or email admin@brainlink.org.au

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