

Low Vision Disability Accessibility champion: Maureen Davenport

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Dear Reader: The body of this exhibit was written before Maureen died and is therefore in the present tense, further the Nundah Low Vision group she helped found is continuing.

Maureen Davenport was a champion for disability accessibility for those of us with low vision. She was born vision impaired and is legally blind. She learnt to read and write Braille by correspondence, learned touch typing, and then Braille shorthand. Maureen was employed by a large firm of solicitors for 25 years travelling to and from work by bus on her own, utilizing a white cane. When this position terminated Maureen elected to devote all her time and energy to voluntary activities as she felt there was a perceived need for people with disabilities to be visible in the community, and she now works harder than ever.

In 1988 Maureen did an intensive course with Lifeline, which equipped her to become a volunteer counsellor, and she is still volunteering there after 23 years. The training provided her with skills which enabled her to deal with people who felt that they couldn't cope with life. Maureen's own disability has enabled her to empathize with such people, as for many years Maureen caught two buses each way to the Lifeline Centre, relying on her white cane to aid mobility.

Maureen also became a member of, and a registered Volunteer with, the Royal Blind Foundation (RBFQ) [now Vision Australia (VA)]. Many people who become vision impaired initially find it difficult to adapt to the changed circumstances and tend to withdraw from society as the loss of mobility and the perceived inability to manage one's own affairs, both domestic and financial, can be daunting. Maureen proactively supports such people to remain as independent as possible. She provides a wonderful role model as she lives in her own home and, with the aid of suitably modified appliances, cooks and does her own housework. She still travels extensively and is able to describe the atmosphere so vividly that it encourages others to undertake challenging activities.

In 1990 Maureen became the first President of the Nundah Low Vision Support Group, a position she still holds, although she has less sight than many of the members, and all her notes, agenda's etc. are prepared in Braille. The twice monthly meetings provide an opportunity for people with similar issues to socialize and to discuss their concerns, difficulties and achievements in a friendly and non-threatening atmosphere. Many of the original members still attend. Possibility the greatest benefits come from Maureen's availability between meetings and the innumerable phone conversations she subsequently has from her own home, offering everything from encouragement to the provision of information and advice. She also visits members in their own homes, in nursing homes or in hospital. This Group, with Maureen as its President, won the Ted Tremayne Memorial Trophy for service to the community at the 2011 Australia Day Awards for the Electorate of Lilley.

Because of her work with vision impaired people at Nundah, at RBFQ headquarters and at Braille House Maureen saw the need for an additional support group and started the successful City Low Vision Support Group in 2000.

Meetings at both Nundah and the City include guest speakers, such as John MacPherson from Disability Services who provides information about activities/facilities provided by the Brisbane City Council (BCC) to benefit the vision impaired, while social activities range from lunches, day bus trips and visits to the theatre to attendance at functions such as the BCC lunch time concerts, BCC Library book readings and the Lord Mayor's Christmas Concerts. In 2007 and 2008 Maureen organised a week's holiday at Yeppoon for twenty-nine vision impaired people while members visited Grafton for a week in 2009 and 2010. As many vision impaired people are unable to travel alone this was a wonderful opportunity for them.

Both the Nundah and the City Support Groups are registered as Vision Australia Local Client Groups, as part of Vision Australia's Client Consultation Program. In addition to leading both Local Client Groups, Maureen has been elected as the Groups' Regional Representative which involves travelling to Sydney for a three day Conference which is an achievement for a vision impaired person.

Maureen has also been an active member of other Boards and Committees. From 1995-2005 Maureen was an RBFQ Board member and was awarded Life Membership in recognition of her outstanding contribution. Maureen also attends regular meetings of Support Group Leaders at Guide Dogs Queensland, Bald Hills where they share ideas and obtain relevant information.

Maureen has also organised many social functions for the RBFQ including six successful Musical Morning Teas which each raised over \$1000. In March this year she organized a St Patrick's concert which not only provided entertainment for vision impaired folk but raised \$500 which the pottery and woodworking groups at Vision Australia used to provide much needed equipment. Although the Groups are non-profit they regularly make donations to Guide Dogs and Braille House. In 1994 Maureen organized a Testimonial Luncheon in honour of Dr Mercy Dickinson which was attended by the Governor of Queensland and 240 people who had travelled from as far away as Mackay and Sydney. This was a big achievement for her.

For sighted people it is hard to imagine living in a world of darkness. Maureen has managed to not only create a meaningful life for herself as a volunteer, but she also provides support and inspiration to others. Her endeavours have not gone unnoticed. In 1997 Maureen received a Lilley Australia Day Award for services to the community in the Federal Electorate of Lilley while in 2007 she was very proud to receive the prestigious Making a Difference Award from Vision Australia. In the same year she received the Vision Australia Client Service Award at the Vision Australia Annual General Meeting in recognition of the positive steps this inspirational woman has taken to ensure that people who are blind or have

low vision are able to enjoy life to the fullest.

The above is based on the submission nominating Maureen for a Lord Mayor's 2012 Australia Day Achievement Award which she subsequently received.

In 2013 Maureen received the Order of Australia for her work with the Vision Impaired. In this instance she was nominated by The Honourable Wayne Swan MP while the following members of the Nundah Low Vision Support Group **Pat** Denaro, **Daphne** Francis, **Lynn** Adamson and **Jean** Weaver were the referees.

The Low Vision Support Group is continuing under the presidency of Maureen's husband John. The group aids Disability Accessibility in many ways, in conjunction with Vision Australia, the Queensland Braille Writing Association and Guide Dogs for the Blind. Everyone just works together to achieve this aim. **John** organizes the bus trips and the pick-ups for the meetings, in conjunction with Paul Wildman who is the voluntary bus driver, another volunteer **Lyn** organises the morning teas and buys all the raffle prizes, while **Shirley** organizes the theatre outings and sends the birthday cards, and **Des** sells the raffle tickets. **Merle** was a volunteer with the Queensland Braille Writing Association for 25 years while also supporting our low vision group and continues to help quietly and effectively with the organisational functions of treasurer and secretary. **Beryl** is legally blind and provides input from Vision Australia and ensures that all documents such as Travel Concession Cards and Companion Cards are up to date while **Jean** provides news of local activities and accompanies whoever wants to come to concerts at the Nundah Activity Centre and the free weekly concerts at the City Hall. Overall the supporters of the group, including the volunteer bus driver **Paul**, simply have a combined objective of assisting the vision impaired have a better quality of life.

Jean Weaver: Nundah Low Vision Group Jean is the assembler of this exhibit
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Paul Wildman: Bus Driver NLVG paul@kalgrove.com (2010-present) I have been the volunteer Bus Driver for this group for the past 5 years and have driven them thousands of kilometers on their weekly bus trips and tours. For the first several years Maureen accompanied us in the bus's co-pilot's seat and I developed a deep respect and high regard for this wonderful blind lady who gave so much for so many and took so little. She would tell me on the trips about her struggles for disability accessibility for the vision impaired and blind and this helped me learn much about their predicament and see first-hand so much of what she accomplished on their and thus our behalf.

Title: is Maureen receiving her Australia Day Award from Wayne Swan Member for Lilley.

