



**DEAFBLIND INTERNATIONAL
SECRETARIAT
ANNUAL REPORT**

1ST JULY 2008– 30TH JUNE 2009

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DEAFBLIND INTERNATIONAL was formerly known as THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF DEAFBLIND PEOPLE

DbI - THE WORLD ASSOCIATION PROMOTING SERVICES FOR DEAFBLIND PEOPLE

STOP THE PRESS!

Senses Foundation to host the Deafblind International Secretariat in Perth, WA!

Senses Foundation has been successful in its bid to host the Deafblind International (DbI) Secretariat for the next four years, commencing August 2008.

Deafblind International is the world association promoting services for deafblind people through international collaboration.

The attainment of the DbI Secretariat for Senses Foundation (Senses) is a remarkable achievement. It will place Senses at the centre of the international community involved in the service development and advocacy of people who are deafblind throughout the globe.

Being the “hub” around which the international deafblind community revolves allows Senses to be at the forefront of receiving the latest information of what is going on in the world, participating where appropriate and communicating key findings to the deafblind community throughout the globe.

Having the DbI Secretariat under its care and management will increase Senses Foundation’s profile across Western Australia and raise its profile on the world stage. Elvira Edwards, Senses Foundation’s Senior Manager Client Services (and now DbI Secretary) and newly appointed Secretariat Manager Bronte Pyett, recently traveled to New Delhi to ensure a smooth handover of the Secretariat from India to its new home at Senses in Perth, Western Australia.



Article and photo courtesy of Senses Foundation Newsletter. September 2008 (Issue 6) - In Touch.

INTRODUCTION

Officially taking over the DbI Secretariat Manager's role on 1st August was both daunting and exciting. The opportunity to do a face to face handover with the previous Secretariat team in New Delhi (9th & 10th July 2008) proved to be very valuable and provided a solid platform to take over the responsibilities. The following Agenda was set for the meetings:

***Deafblind International
Secretariat Handover Discussions
9 – 10 July 2008,
Hotel Claridges, New Delhi***

Points for discussions

This meeting is proposed as a face to face meeting between the old and new DbI Secretariat in order to facilitate an efficient handover of the various functions and responsibilities. DbI officials working alongside the Secretariat on a regular basis are also a part of the discussions in order to enable a smooth and continuous move into the new Secretariat to be located at Senses Foundation Inc. Australia. Elvira Edwards as the new DbI Secretary and Bronte Pyett as DbI Secretariat representative will be a part of this meeting to understand DbI – its nature, scope, reach and consequences more closely. Importantly, these discussions will help clarify the Secretary and Secretariat functions better and provide a platform to address questions and doubts.

The discussion will take place over a period of two days at Hotel Claridges, New Delhi between 9 am and 5 pm.

The focus of discussions will remain on the various functions of DbI and its implications for the Secretariat. Some of the possible areas for discussion are as below:

- ***Core values, philosophy and brief history of DbI***
- ***Organisational Structure - General Assembly, Council and ManCom, Membership, DbI Officers – roles and responsibilities***
- ***DbI Secretariat - Overall roles and responsibilities of Secretary and Secretariat, Reporting mechanisms, Communications with ManCom, Council and DbI members, IT support – Secretariat email id***
- ***DbI Partnerships - World Federation of the Deafblind (WfDB); International Council for the Education of the Visually Impaired ICEVI); European Blind Union (EBU); European Deafblind Union (EDbU)***
- ***DbI meetings - ManCom and Council meetings, Schedule, tasks, reporting, General Assembly, Other meetings – Strategy groups, nominations committee, awards***

An overview, critical issues, ongoing / pending actions and implications for the Secretariat for the following areas:

- ***Membership Functions***
- ***Database***
- ***Finance Functions***
- ***CPA Guidelines***
- ***Information Functions***
- ***DbI ManCom and Council***
- ***DbI Conferences - European Conference; World Conference; Future Conferences; Conference Guidelines***
- ***DbI Networks***

- *DbI Strategy paper*
- *DbI Awards*
- *Nominations Committee*
- *DbI Constitution*

The meeting is aimed at helping colleagues from Senses Foundation Inc. Australia feel confident that they can meet the responsibilities adequately. It will help all to familiarise with the processes, expectations, immediate priorities and ongoing challenges. However, the discussion does not in anyway indicate an end in itself. Regular and frequent contact with the ManCom members and increasingly with the wider council and DbI membership will make this process stronger over time.



DbI Handover meeting, New Delhi July 2008

Sumitra Mishra (outgoing DbI Secretary), Ton Visser (DbI Treasurer), Parag Namdeo (outgoing DbI Secretariat Manager), Elvira Edwards (incoming DbI Secretary), Bronte Pyett (incoming DbI Secretariat Manager).

At the conclusion of the Handover meetings, we met with the hosts of the DbI 15th World Conference 2011 and had a tour of the proposed conference venue and facilities. (In recent months the hosts advised of their inability to host the conference due to the global economic crisis and concern for civilian safety in New Delhi).

Following the successful handover meetings, we had the opportunity to enjoy some of the sights, smells, tastes and sounds of New Delhi.



A traditional meal with colleagues



The colourful markets



The odd traffic jam!

SECRETARIAT DUTIES COMMENCE IN AUSTRALIA

Upon returning from India, initially much time was dedicated to familiarizing with information and implementing new systems. Past documents were read and filed to sort through what would be relevant going forward and what could be archived.

By fine tuning the systems and re-writing membership letters we put our stamp on the DbI Secretariat. It was identified that it would be useful to write procedures for several of the functions of the DbI Secretariat along with flow charts for easy reference of all the corresponding steps in the processes.

The members, ManCom & Council were contacted in the early days as we introduced the DbI Secretariat in Australia and encouraged regular communication to keep information accurate and the news of members and Networks circulated. The response from members and colleagues was overwhelmingly positive and instilled confidence in us to hit the ground running and make some positive changes for DbI whilst the Secretariat was under our care and management.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership database was inaccurate at the time of handover and it was evident much work was needed to bring the data into line with the figures held by the Finance Office in the Netherlands. After discussions with the Treasurer it was agreed the best way to check the data was through the renewal process at the beginning of 2009.

Initially members with outstanding fees were contacted to request payment for 2008. Those who did not respond to the several requests or who notified DbI they were cancelling their membership were marked as Non-Active on the database.

All other active members, Corporate, Individual and Libraries were contacted in February 2009 inviting them to renew their membership and pay the relevant membership fee. Members were also asked to complete a membership renewal form to assist in checking the contact details and membership requirements against the database.

When we took over the Secretariat the membership statistics were as follows:

Member Category	Live (Paid)	Live (Unpaid)	Live (free)	Live (no payment status)	Non-Active
Individual	70	3	11	38	446 (of which 37 were free)
Large Corporate	11	0	0	1	1
Small Corporates	36	14	0	2	7
Mini Corporates	0	0	0	0	0
Libraries	1	1	0	3	20 (of which 2 were free)
TOTAL	118	18	11	44	474

Following discussions with the DbI Management Committee in September 2008 it was identified that this data did not reflect the actual payments received for 2008. It was agreed that there were no members eligible for free membership and that those who were still unpaid as at 31st December 2008 would be marked as non-active.

Currently, the membership statistics are as follows:

Member Category	Active & Paid	Awaiting Renewal
Individual	78	50
Mini Corporate	1	0
Small Corporate	25	19
Large Corporate	10	4
Libraries	3	5
TOTAL	117	78

It has been agreed that members will receive three renewal reminder letters before their membership will be marked as non-active and their membership benefits will cease. This method allows for an unpaid member to receive membership benefits for up to a year past their membership expiry date but it has been decided to continue this way out of good will and in the hope they may choose to renew in the future.

DBI REVIEW

The DbI Review magazine is produced bi-annually and posted to members. The Secretariat is responsible for collating the mailing spreadsheets for the distributor and tallying quantities for printing. With the successful resurrection of the membership database, the data provided for the magazine distribution is now accurate and in turn saves money for DbI by providing correct addresses for delivery, therefore avoiding non-delivery and return to sender items. As well as only printing the required quantity for active members. Some members prefer to receive the magazine in text format on disc which is produced by the Secretariat and posted worldwide where required.

An article by the Secretariat was required for both issues produced since July 2008. The aim of the article is to report on the work undertaken in recent times and to use it as an opportunity to reach out to members and encourage regular communication.

IMPROVEMENTS

Early on, the DbI website was identified as a problem area. Much of the information was out of date and details of Members, Networks and the Organizational Structure were inaccurate. Through the process of receiving renewals and sourcing information for the back page of the DbI Review, the information was meticulously corrected and uploaded to the website.

When organizing the first round of ManCom & Council meetings, the process of emailing multiple reports to members was arduous and inefficient as many of the recipients' email servers rejected the files as spam or oversized. I suggested a secure login facility on the website where static documents would be uploaded and made accessible to selected members for viewing. This suggestion was approved and facilitated by the Network Administrator. The first occasion this facility was used was in circulating the reports to ManCom for the February 2009 meetings in Osimo, Italy. All ManCom members gave a resounding thumbs-up and appreciated the new and simple method that was created.

The website was reviewed from a user's perspective and some recommendations were made to improve the functionality of the site, including the layout, font and tool bars for easier viewing and navigation.

As previously touched on in the Membership section of this report, the membership database was in disarray at the time of handover. To satisfy financial auditors in the Netherlands and to ensure the database truly reflected the current members, I recommended that all the data be imported into a database management system (the data was previously provided in an Excel spreadsheet). The database software was chosen following a successful track record using it for the DbI World Conference hosted by Senses Foundation in 2007. The software enables the user to enter specific data (user-defined fields); accurate contact details and attach relevant notes to each record to create a history with each member. It has an excellent search mechanism to narrow information down to an exact group of members. The possibilities are endless on the proviso that the information entered in is accurate and detailed, which is certainly now the case.

To keep members interested in DbI's activities and to maintain the value of membership, one on one email communication with members has been further developed to add a personal touch to the organization and ensure members feel they are valued and important within DbI. Through this communication, the Secretariat has had the opportunity to come to know many of the members (in an online capacity) and develop strong and positive relationships.

ISSUES

For different reasons, but often due to financial restrictions, DbI loses members each year. DbI also enjoys welcoming new members each year however it is important to maintain current members wherever possible. Some members have expressed their concern over the value of their membership and felt the member benefits did not justify the annual fees. Plans for the immediate future include a more advance e-communication facility and updated website as well as an updated Welcome Pack containing a Membership Certificate for Corporate members and a Membership Card for Individual members. A member survey could be an interesting method to receive honest feedback and suggestions from members about what they would like to gain from their membership.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE & COUNCIL

An important role of the DbI Secretariat is to provide regular support to the members of the DbI ManCom & Council. According to the Constitution there are occasions where we are required to notify these members of upcoming events and potential changes to the organization. A good relationship has been developed with these members and communication flows both ways to effectively link members, networks and key people in the organization together.

Over the past year, plans have been implemented for two ManCom meetings and one Council meeting. The first meetings were held in September 2008 in Würzburg, Germany for ManCom & Council. The second meeting was held in February 2009 in Osimo, Italy for ManCom. Some of the tasks undertaken to coordinate these meetings included:

- Notifying members of meeting arrangements;
- Confirming travel arrangements with each member and communicating this with meeting hosts;
- Supporting DbI Secretary in setting the Agenda;
- Making travel arrangements for Secretary;
- Drafting Secretariat report;
- Issuing the reports to members prior to the meetings via email and later the secure log-in facility;
- Checking past “Matters Arising” documents to follow up outstanding business;
- Regular contact with meeting host to arrange accommodation for participants and meals;
- At the conclusion of the meetings letters of thanks were written and sent on behalf of the DbI President to the meeting hosts;
- Minutes reviewed then circulated and Matters Arising documents created for future reference.

CONFERENCES

With the 7th DbI European Conference 2009 coming up in September coinciding with the next round of DbI Council and ManCom meetings and the added challenge of an Extraordinary General Assembly, the months ahead will be busy. In the immediate future the Agenda will be drafted and circulated to ManCom & Council for comment. A call for reports will be issued and reports will be posted on the secure log-in facility prior to the meetings. Additional emails will be circulated to members regarding the Extraordinary General Assembly. Liaison with the Conference Organizers in Italy will intensify to fine tune the arrangements for the ManCom & Council meetings requirements, as well as the DbI booth which will be manned by the Secretariat throughout the week of the conference.

The responsibility of taking care of arrangements for sponsorship recipients lies with the Secretariat. Regular communication between the Secretariat & the sponsorship recipients, Treasurer and Conference Organizers will be required to put travel, accommodation, meal and special access requests into place.

The Secretariat supports the hosts of pre-conference activities by encouraging participation in these events and circulating announcements as they are released.

The Secretariat has put the call out for *Expressions of Interest* to host the DbI World Conference 2011 and the DbI European Conference 2013. Several emails have been sent to potential candidates and EOI's have been received, circulated to ManCom & filed for future reference. A host for each of these conferences will be chosen and announced in Senigallia, September 2009.

PLANS FOR 2009/10

In the first half of 2010 a ManCom meeting will be held. The date and location of this meeting will be decided in Senigallia, September 2009. The Secretariat will support the chosen host to organize this meeting and communicate the details to ManCom members to assist with their travel arrangements and meeting requirements.

A membership drive would be welcomed if the ManCom sees this as a good use of Secretariat time. DbI relies on the financial support of its members and other than promoting DbI's services at conferences, there is not a lot of current activity in this area and there is potentially scope for significant growth.

Now well at home in the role of DbI Secretariat Manager the year ahead will be less daunting and more exciting as now a solid understanding of the role has been identified, the potential for improvements and growth is apparent and a welcome challenge lies ahead.