

## Closing Session

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Hello everyone. My name is Paul Pagliano. I'm the Vice-President of SPEVI and it's my great honour to be part of the closing session for the Melbourne 2015 SPEVI Biennial Conference. For those of you with vision impairment I'll include an audio description of the visuals I include in my PowerPoint presentation.

The photos on the opening and second slide are stunning night time views of Melbourne looking at the city across the Yarra River. The lights reflecting on the river present Melbourne as a vibrant and exciting city – which it is.

And the free trams in the CBD make getting around the city such a cinch (see Frances Mary I'm learning from you choosing tier 2 and tier 3 words). Also it was a great idea to give myki cards in our conference satchel.

The Melbourne Conference & Training Centre has been a terrific venue. I must admit I wasn't sure during the opening ceremony when it was a 'bit squeezey' but after that initial session and with some creative problem solving those issues of being over crowded seemed to fade into the background.

Overall it's been an absolutely super conference. The presentations have been of such high quality and so relevant that it was difficult for me to choose which ones to attend. The illustration for this slide consists of five stars and the word excellent.

I've even added a virtual sticker with a golden crown and the words excellent work. This virtual sticker is to you Rachel and for each member of your team, everyone that was involved in putting this conference together, and that includes All Occasions Management and the conference organizers, you've all done a fabulous job. Excellent work.

Another person I want to specially mention is Dr. Frances Gentle our SPEVI President. She's been absolutely fantastic. We're so lucky to have her as our president – and how she found time to edit the latest edition of the SPEVI journal I just can't fathom.

Please join me in thanking them all for the work they've done. Putting on a conference like this is such a lot of work and responsibility. I imagine you're all absolutely exhausted, but hopefully also very satisfied with what you've been able to achieve. The visual for this slide is of yellow smiley face mug vase with yellow and white flowers. I think it's really beautiful. I hope you do too.

And the really good news is we're going to at least break even, maybe even have a little profit – so well done! That's brilliant news.

The visual for this slide is of the white rabbit from Alice in Wonderland with a large pocket watch set at two minutes past 9 o'clock. In the recent Tim Burton film the white rabbit is able to manipulate time – so that's what I'm going to do – take you back to the beginning and walk you through the conference.

For some the conference started last Friday with the SPEVI-ICEVI Pacific EFA-VI Forum. This two-day forum was held at The University of Melbourne. EFA-VI stands for "Education for all children with visual impairment" and it's a global campaign ICEVI and WBU launched in 2006. The forum was opened with a keynote presentation by Lord Colin Low (ICEVI President)

This was followed by presentations by Dr. Frances Gentle 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President ICEVI & SPEVI President; and Dr. James Aiwa Chair ICEVI Pacific Region (PNG identified as a Pacific focus country). The focus of the forum was setting our direction for 2015-2017 and this information will be available on the ICEVI website in the near future.

Despite not having AUSAid funding this time six countries were represented by 27 delegates and these delegates then stayed on for the SPEVI conference. Having 27 delegates for this forum is in my opinion a really great achievement and once again Frances Gentle provided the leadership.

Sunday was free for people to roam around Melbourne. The visual for this slide is a sign, which says: "Clean. Single. Looking for mate" and has five wooden pegs glued to the base with three odd socks attached. I rather fancy one of these signs for our laundry back home. I seem to have a lot of odd socks.

SPEVI conference proper started on Monday. The whole conference was structured around the theme of: "Together towards tomorrow: Families and professionals – a vision for success". This theme emphasizes the importance of children, families and professionals working together to achieve new goals.

The visual for this slide is of a baby who's just reached the crawling stage dressed in sky blue overalls with yellow mops sewn to the base. This baby is already productive because he cleans the floor as he crawls.

Here are some conference statistics: 4 keynotes; 100 papers / workshops (9 peer reviewed); 1 school visit; strong parent representation – 34 parents, sponsors & displays, 3 meetings and a conference proceedings. The visual for this slide is of chemical cat - a white cat with black glasses and a bow tie in a lab looking very scientific with the caption: "There are two types of people in this world: Those who can extrapolate from incomplete data".

The conference began with a welcome from Rachel Morgan the conference convenor and a welcome to country by Dean Stewart. The visual for this slide is of an Aboriginal dot painting of two goannas by Clifford Possum. I love

Aboriginal arts and this painting for me is particularly aesthetic – it has an elegance that taps in to our human sensibility.

The official opening was by Gene Reardon, Director at the Victorian Department of Education & Early Childhood Development where she said “Inclusion means having specialists to ensure students with special needs receive the highest quality education possible”. This statement received a spontaneous round of applause.

Lord Colin Low President of ICEVI then formally invited SPEVI to establish closer ties with the world organisation. Frances Gentle who is also 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of ICEVI has promised to look into what alignment can be achieved – so it’s a matter of watch this space.

Our first keynote was by Dr. Karen Wolffe entitled “Polishing the crystal ball: Preparing children and youth with visual impairments for life beyond the classroom”. The point that really struck a chord with me was her entreating us to:

Ask children with vision impairment often: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” For me Karen was saying we polish the crystal ball for children with vision impairment by working to ensure they develop a strong internal locus of control. The secret is they need to own their own futures.

The visual is a cartoon entitled “The IKEA job interview”. A man is entering an office where there’s a second man seated at a desk. He says: “Take a seat” and points to a chair set that needs to be assembled.

Keynote 2 was by Dr Lauren Ayton on the hopes and challenges of a bionic eye: Implications for education and learning. It was very exciting to hear about how the world is likely to change for people with vision impairment. Lauren explained that early experiments with the bionic eye sent information to the visual cortex that consists of different combinations of black dots. I’m now going to give you a chance to simulate the experience. Are you ready?

Shake your head from side to side to see if you can see an image. For those who can’t see it’s a black frame enclosing a white sheet filled with lots of tiny black dots. When you shake your head from side to side while looking at the black dots an image appears. Can anyone tell what it is?

Did anyone see a Pokemon? Who saw Pikachu? Wanna try again?

The third keynote was by Shearlee Poed. Her paper was entitled “Reasonable adjustments – a vision for equity”.

Sheralee quoted the late Stella Young when she said - “You get proud by practicing” – which is such a powerful message.

Another quote I wrote down from this keynote was when Sheralee said: Get this ridiculousness changed. Clearly there are a lot of very silly policies being

forced on educators and students with vision impairment and we need to challenge these.

SPEVI Professional Standards for Vision Teachers. Trudy Smith RIDBC Renwick Centre has been leading this update and linking it with the AATD. Revised standards aligned with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Trudy & Fran are meeting with AITSL for 2 hours tomorrow so we wish them all the best for their meeting.

Our final keynote was by Susan LaVenture and her paper was entitled “Empowering parent involvement”. Once again this was the perfect keynote for the conference. Thank you so much Susan for sharing your personal journey. It made what you had to say very powerful.

The take home message for me was the importance of giving back – here you are modeling giving back and now your son is doing the same.

The visual for this slide is of two parents and two children in super hero fancy dress costumes. Mum is wonder woman, Dad Captain America and the children still establishing their super hero identity – I think the girl is becoming a female version of batman.

In a moving tribute Susan dedicated her keynote to the late Paul Manning a leading NZ parent advocate and Pacific region chair of ICEVI. It was wonderful to see all the NZ delegates come to the front for the Maori song at the end – the karpoupoiya.

A particular highlight for me at this conference was the premier of a short 19 minute film by Shane Doepel entitled Professionals who are blind share education experience and advice. I found this a really powerful film and for those of you who missed it I strongly encourage you to download it from You Tube.

One thing Shane said that strongly resonated with me was her comment about the New Zealanders having such high self esteem as vision teachers – which is wonderful. It’s also confronting because the system in Australia has become so harsh with many staff not even knowing if they still have jobs when they go back to their schools after the holidays. The visual for this slide is of a coffee mug, which says “Some days the best thing about my job is that the chair spins”.

Hopefully this conference has helped those who feel vulnerable and given new hope. The visual for this slide is of sea lion or is it a seal. Any way there are two photographs. The first has the caption, which says: “I try to put on a happy face” The second has the caption “I fail”.

The next visual is a cartoon entitled “Two stupid chickens: whith one chicken on one side of the road yelling out to another chicken on the other side of the road “How do I get to the other side” to which the second chicken replies “You

are on the other side”. This brings me back to Shane’s film where one person said: “I can now see the benefits of inclusion and of having opportunities to congregate with peers who are the same as me”.

Another speaker in Shane’s film said from a blind person’s perspective most regular class teachers including students who are blind are functionally illiterate in braille. The visual for this slide is a black board with “Chalkbored: What’s wrong with school and how to fix it” written on it.

One strategy has been to establish a school for students who are blind in Melbourne called “Insight”. There was a visit to the school on Wednesday afternoon hence this visual. It’s a photo of a bus with a gigantic carpet snake wrapped around it. In Townsville carpet snakes can grow to enormous sizes. My wife Fiona One day Fiona my wife rang me to say one was in the process of leaving our property and it was so long it was still leaving our yard when its head had completely crossed the road in front of our house.

On Tuesday night we had our conference dinner at the Victorian Arts Centre. Everyone looked wonderful in their masquerades. At the dinner we celebrated SPEVI’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Finally I’d like to make mention of the catering. I’ve been to conferences in the USA where the delegates had to rush off to local restaurants for their food. I think that’s very disruptive. It’s so nice to come to a conference where the food is provided. Being able to eat together provides many opportunities for spontaneous conversations and bonding. The visual for this slide is of a semi-trailer truck painted as a giant Mars Bar that has one end bitten off. It’s truck size.

So in this closing session I’ve taken on the role of the white rabbit and manipulated time in order to take us back through the highlights of the conference. All that’s left for me to do is to now is to take you into the future

To the SPEVI Biennial Conference in Brisbane January 2017. It would be wonderful to see you there.

Thank you. It’s now time to go out into the city and enjoy yourselves. The conference is over.