

# Support Skills

A Program for Students with Vision Impairments

SPEVI Conference 2020: Creating a Clear Vision for the Future

Lea Nagel

Statewide Vision Resource Centre

# Acknowledgement of land

Our Support Skills Program is held on the land of the Wurundjeri people and I wish to acknowledge them as Traditional Owners.

I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting today on the traditional Country of the Kurna people of the Adelaide Plains.

I would like to pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

# Objective

To share the Support Skills Program with SPEVI encouraging cross-pollination of ideas with educators of the vision impaired.

This paper will give a snapshot of the Support Skills Program in 2020.



# Eligibility:

## Educational Vision Assessment Clinic

- Distance vision with glasses, if needed, worse than 6/18  
and/or
- Visual field no greater than 20 degrees in radius around a central fixation
- 550 students eligible for service in years Foundation to 12
- Years 4 to 10 = 7 year levels = approximately 296 students
- 80 = more than a quarter of eligible students attend

# Support Skills Program in brief

- Where: Statewide Vision Resource Centre.
- For: Students in years 4 to 10 who are partially sighted or blind.
- When: Once or twice per term.
- What: 6-part timetabled day, Expanded Core Curriculum.

# Background

- 1880s: Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB) provided education to students who were blind at 557 St Kilda Rd.
- 1961: Approximately 70 children resided at the RVIB Burwood school.
- 1970s: Local schooling of students with disabilities, fewer students attended the RVIB school full-time.
- Early 1980s, 4 students who were attending local schools began coming in to RVIB school on curriculum days to learn specialist skills.

# Background continued

- 1986: Garry Stinchcombe began coordinating.
- 1986: 30 students, mostly braille.
- By 2004: Students with vision impairments were mostly enrolled in their local schools and supported by RVIB and Department of Education Visiting Teacher Services.
- 2004: 80 students, braille and large print users.
- 2009: RVIB, now Vision Australia closed the Burwood School.

# Background continued

- 2010: Support Skills relocated to Statewide Vision Resource Centre, Department of Education Victoria.
- 2010: 60 students, most twice per term.
- 2018: Garry Stinchcombe retired.
- 2019: Lea Nagel coordinator.
- 2020: 80 students, 56 once per term, 34 twice per term.



# Support Skills aims:

- To support the inclusion of students with vision impairments in their local schools.
- To support learning in the Expanded Core Curriculum, supplied by the school and visiting (itinerant) teachers.
- To enable children to work alongside other children who share similar experiences, developing their support networks.
- To give families an understanding of educational and life possibilities and opportunities.
- To demonstrate to school staff how to present curriculum to children who have vision impairments.

# Grouping

Students are arranged into groups for the year taking into account:

- Year levels.
- Friendship groups and requests.
- Travel arrangements (families, friends).
- Mix of students – gender, braille/large print.
- Large print users generally once per term.
- Braille or high needs generally twice per term.

# Grouping

2020: 5 groups.

- 1 group comes once per term.
- 4 groups come twice per term.

Twice per term groups:

- Core group of approximately 9 who come twice.
- Alternating group of approximately 8 who each come once.

# Grouping example

- Session 1: 9 “core” + 4 “once”.
- Session 2: 9 “core” (same students) + 4 “once” (different students).
- Total students in group: 17.
- Total students in at a time: 13.

# Timetabling

Timetable is planned each week taking into account:

- Subjects in order of preference from enrolment forms.
- Emailed requests from student, family, VT, school.
- Follow-up suggested in previous SSP sessions.
- Staffing.
- Spaces.
- Technology for each student each session.

[illegible]

## **GROUP A**

### **Session 1**

### **Friday 1st March**

#### **ATTENDING:**

**Grade 4: Student 1, 2, 3, 4, 5**

**Grade 5: Student 6, 7**

**Grade 6: Student 8, 9, 10**

**Absent: Student 11**

**8:45am**      **ASSEMBLY** in SSCentral. All welcome.

**9:20am**

**PE** with Teacher & Volunteer. Meet in the Foyer.  
Students: 5

**O&M** with 2 O&Ms at the Garry Stinchcombe Gallery  
Students: 3

**Technology** with Teacher in SSCentral  
Student: 1

**Technology** with Tech trainer in Tech 1  
Student: 1

**Braille Music** with Music Teacher in the Music Room  
Student: 1

# Main Timetable

# Individual student timetables

**Student**  
**Locker: 22**  
**SUPPORT SKILLS PROGRAM 2019**

**GROUP A**  
**Session 1**

**Friday 1st March 2019**

**8:45am**

**ASSEMBLY** in SSCentral. All Families and staff welcome.

**9:20am**

**Technology** with Tech Teacher in Office 4

**10:10am**

**Art** with Art Teacher in the Art Room  
With Student 3, Student 4

**11:00am**      **RECESS**



Lockers

Locker list  
Independence



# Feedback sample, abbreviated

**9:20am Braille Music** with Braille Music Teacher

Today Student told me all about his music sessions where he is encouraged to create lyrics to existing songs, and practice rhythm to a guitar accompaniment with a shaker. Today Student and I explored some rhythm and melody in braille music. Student remembered ta, ti-ti and sh from previous Dot Power days, and we added lyrics to speak in rhythm... Student read the words of each line aloud, then the rhythm in rhythm names, and then the words in rhythm. Although we came across different pitches today, the ti-ti's only use the top four dots of the braille cell whereas the ta and sh incorporate the bottom dots...

Student took to braille music quite well and was very enthusiastic about each new task we undertook which was wonderful to see.

# Feedback sample, abbreviated

**10:10am Polaris** with Tech Teacher

Student's Polaris had recently been displaying brackets as a low G. This is a sign that we are in the wrong braille code. Student changed the braille code back to UEB, from the Options menu....

While exploring his Documents folder, we discovered several files named Noname. This led us to discuss how and why they are called Noname, then to rename the files. Student did this from the File Manager menu initially, learning that the File Manager is a program and has a menu...

Commands:

Rename: Enter + R ...

# Subject areas

- Art
- Technology
- Music & Braille Music
- PE
- Careers
- Research Skills
- Vision Issues
- Social Skills
- Braille
- Braille Maths
- Drama
- Daily Living Skills
- Orientation and Mobility

# Partner Organisations

- Vision Australia – Daily Living Skills
- Guide Dogs Victoria – Orientation and Mobility
- Technology sales and support – phone and in person
- Donvale Primary School – small gymnasium & kiln
- Heatherwood School – playgrounds, gymnasium, business
- Donvale Gymnastics – some PE sessions
- Genazzano College – swimming pool & staff, carnival
- Arts Access Victoria, National Gallery Victoria



# Art: Ceramics









PE

# Swish Blind table tennis





PE

Donvale  
Gymnastics





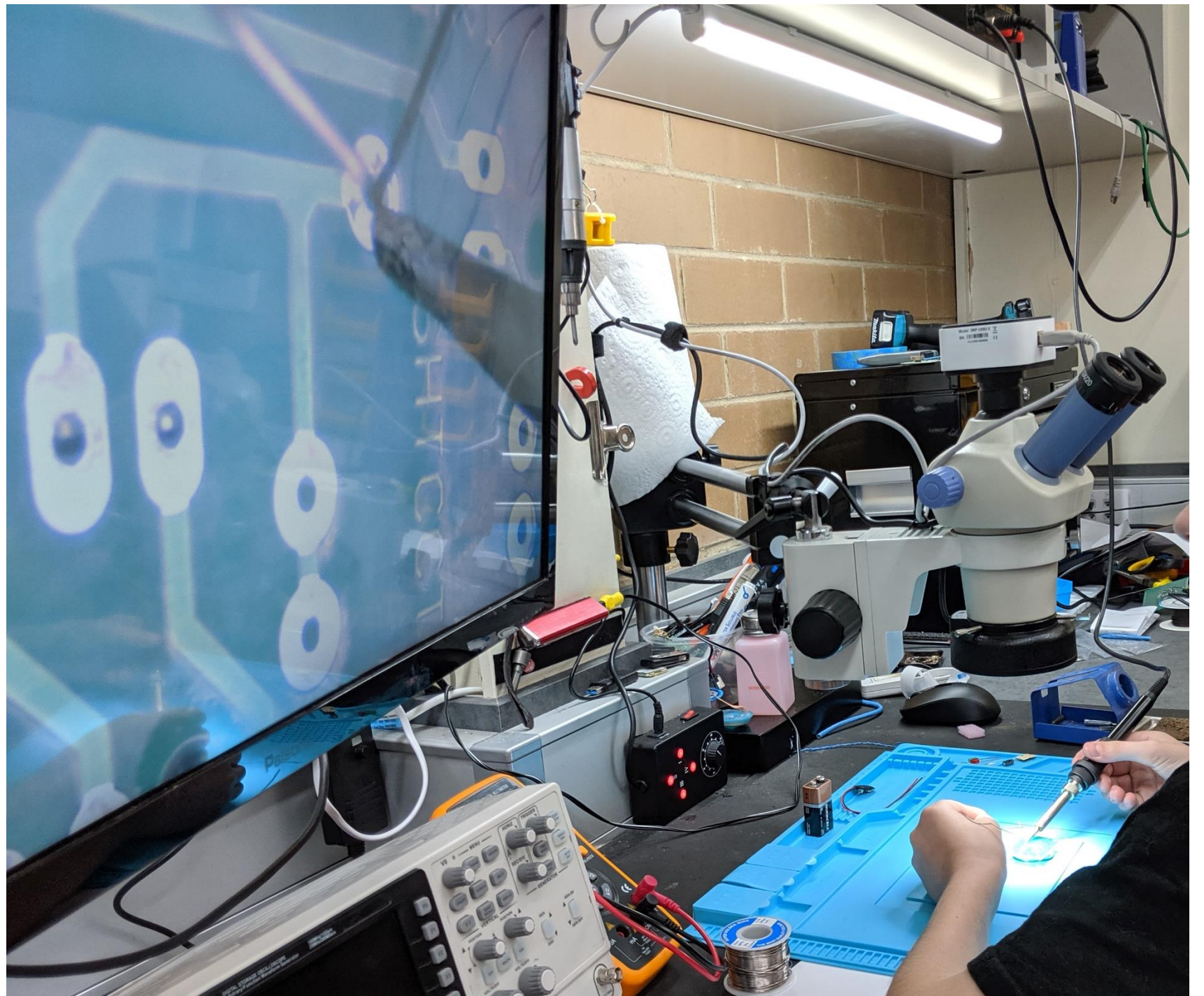
PE

# Beep Baseball





# Technology: Electronics





# Orientation and Mobility: Mapping apps





# Braille Music





# Careers

## Piano Tuner



# Staffing

- 8.5 Statewide Vision Resource Centre staff for the day
  - 3 sessions from Guide Dogs Victoria
  - 2 sessions from Vision Australia
  - Manager
  - Administration for the day
- 
- Teacher co-ordinator during the week
  - Administration support 0.6 during the week

# Spaces

- Support Skills Central: 14 at table, extra chairs
- Garry Stinchcombe Gallery: large open space
- Teaching rooms: 3 – 6 seats at tables × 6
- Art room
- Kitchen
- Storage: PE, Technology, Music
- Outdoor play areas
- Nearby PE indoor spaces



# Staff collaboration

- Mentoring
- Support
- New staff
- Volunteers, observers
- Events: Careers Day, Big Arts Day Out
- Administration support
- Professional learning

# Events

- Arts Big Day Out
- Careers Day
- Circus
- Try Day
- Athletics or Swimming Carnival (occasionally)
- PE Day
- Graduation
- End of year mini-concerts

Big Arts Day  
Out

Koorie Heritage Trust  
Touch Tour





Big Arts Day  
Out

Travel with  
Guide Dogs  
Victoria





PE

Goalball





PE

Goalball



PE

Goalball





Art  
Gallery

Touch  
Tour





Art  
Gallery

Touch  
Tour



# Swimming Carnival



# Feedback from students and families

## Best things:

- Student feels fully included.
- Learns skills that help with independence, future.
- Support, information about resources.

## Student summaries:

- Love reading, informative, positive.
- Always forward the feedback to school.
- Occasionally have changed our approach to learning in response.



# Feedback from students and families

Families find Support Skills extremely valuable. They demonstrate this by bringing their children from all over the state of Victoria. More than a quarter of eligible children attend regularly.

Support Skills Program has contributed to the development of skills and attitudes among school-aged students for many years. The students families develop a network of support through SVRC, and life-long friendships are made.

# Feedback from Staff

- ... to be somewhere where expertise is valued and important...
- Flexible, accommodating, skilled people in this program.  
Fantastic team.
- Space that allows for creativity, flexibility, knowledge...
- Support from everybody here, information that comes through is very helpful.
- Enjoyed relating to ... and creating a connection with [students].

# Comments on the Program

Garry Stinchcombe:

... the Support Skills Program is still as relevant today as it was nearly 40 years ago. It can still play an important role in the education of students who are blind or have low vision in Victoria.

An informal community of students, families and staff continues to help support and promote the program. This energy is vital to the success of the program.

# Thank you to:

Students and families for their enthusiastic participation and encouragement.

Families for transporting students, giving up a day of work, signing forms, replying to emails.

SVRC management for their support.

SVRC staff for bells, resources and help during the day.

EVAC staff for encouraging families' involvement.

School staff, Visiting Teachers.

Thank you

end