Submission
No 153

INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS

Organisation: Access Innovation Media

Name: Mr Tony Abrahams

Position: Chief Executive

Date received: 17/02/2010

Submission to:

NSW Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

The Provision of Education to Students with a Disability or Special Needs

Submitted by:

Tony Abrahams

FOR

Access Innovation Media Pty Limited

Access Innovation Media 5 Thomas Holt Drive North Ryde NSW 2113 t 61 2 9813 6780 f 61 2 9813 6799 info@ai-media.tv www.ai-media.tv

Table of Contents

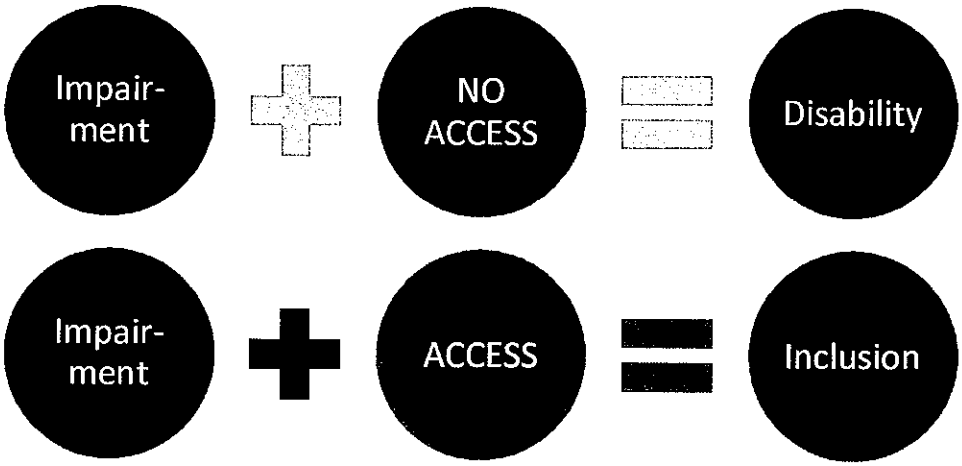
1. ABOUT ACCESS INNOVATION MEDIA 3
2. BACKGROUND 3
3. EXISTING FAILINGS 4
4. NEW TECHNOLOGY DELIVERS NEW SOLUTIONS FOR DEAF KIDS 5
5. ABOUT AI-LIVE™ 6
6. FUNDING PRINCIPLES 6

1. About Access Innovation Media

Access Innovation Media (Ai-Media) is a social enterprise founded in 2003 dedicated to realising a big vision: The End of Disability.

Figure 1 illustrates.

Figure 1: Our Vision - The End of Disability



© Access Innovation Media 2009-10

Impairment is a fact of life. Disability is not. Our mission is to be world leaders at developing and delivering **innovative economic access solutions** that transform the experience of life for people with impairment, their families and carers; and the community at large.

Our expertise is in alleviating the exclusion that children and adults with hearing impairment experience. This submission focuses particularly on deafness but has implications beyond.

In 2004 we pioneered the large-scale introduction of captioning to Pay TV in Australia, with a cost-effective and common-sense approach that has seen the captioned library grow to deliver over 120,000 hours of programming across more than 45 channels annually. This total is set to grow further over coming years.

In 2007 we introduced live captioning to the classroom and have refined this solution over the last 3 years.

2. Background

It has been widely acknowledged that Australia's disability system is failing – and requires overhauling at the national level. A National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is the way forward. We encourage NSW to adopt policies consistent with the national approach.

A number of significant national and international developments over the last few years have signalled that a step-change in Australia's approach to disability policy and access is now overdue.

In particular we note that:

- Australia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 and the Optional Protocol in 2009[1];
- The Federal Government, following the release of "*Shut Out*"[2], and the findings of the Disability Investment Group[3] (DIG) are composing a whole-of-life National Disability Strategy to fill a key gap in Australia's health and social security systems and provide access and inclusion for millions of Australians with impairment;
- The National Arts and Disability Strategy[4] focuses on ensuring persons with disabilities can access television programs, films, theatre and other cultural activities in accessible formats (which includes access to classroom materials); and
- The Federal Government is prosecuting a Social Inclusion Agenda with education as a critical priority;[5]
- The Education Revolution program has accessibility as a central tenet;[6]
- The Productivity Commission[7] has commenced an 18-month inquiry into the feasibility of an NDIS on the back of strong recommendations from community[8], business[9] and government[10].

Many submissions to the *Shut Out* report[11] noted that society disables far more than physical impairments do. It is community understanding of the nexus between impairment, disability, access and inclusion that is the key to transforming the impact of disability; and unlocking the productive capability of this lost sector of the economy.

Change can and must begin in schools.

3. Existing failings

Shut Out notes that while there is no way to measure the exact social and economic cost of failing to ensure young people with disabilities have every opportunity to learn, it is certain that failing to provide them with education limits their potential to lead productive, independent adult lives.[12]

Deaf children are 2.4 times less likely to complete high school than their hearing counterparts and 160,000 people are out of work and many of these are on the Disability Support Pension because we don't have a system that facilitates their inclusion in education or the workplace.[13]

According to Access Economics the costs of excluding people from the productive economy because of deafness alone exceed $12 billion per annum.[14]

New solutions are required.

4. New technology delivers new solutions for deaf kids

Deaf kids can do anything, except hear.

If we can translate audio-based information in a visual medium in realtime, deaf exclusion can be eliminated.

Ai-Media have been focused on delivering this solution.

There are 2 ways to provide access:

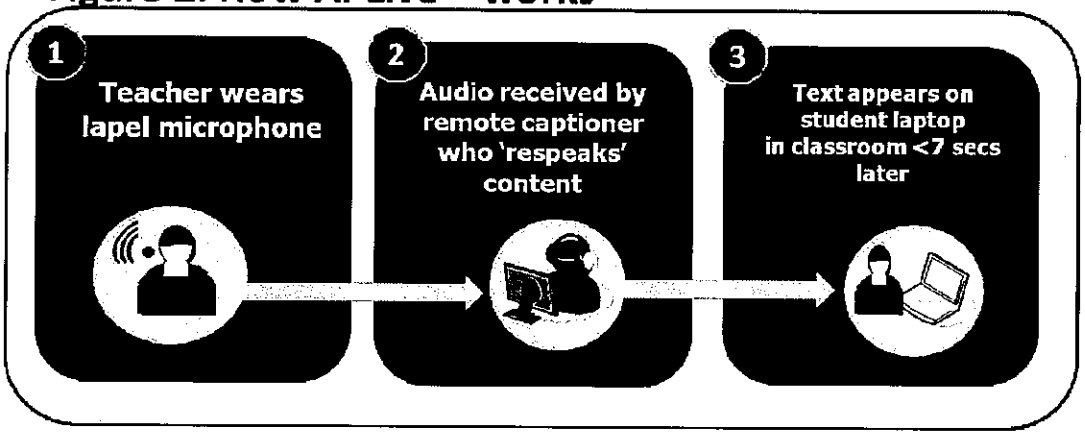
1. **Sign language**: For the 7,000 Deaf Australians who know and use Auslan[15], sign language interpreters are effective in many situations. Auslan is a language distinct from English with its own vocabulary, syntax, grammar and sentence structure. Auslan interpreting does not give direct access to the spoken words and nor does it build literacy. The effectiveness of Auslan interpreting depends on the availabilty and skill of the interpreters, their Auslan capabilities, and (importantly) their subject matter knowledge. Remote interpreting can improve efficiency (by making interpreters available for more appointments throughout the day) but this solution depends on high bandwidth connectivity at both ends. Auslan interpreting is to be preferred over captioning where the client has poor literacy.

2. **Realtime Captioning**: Captioning delivers realtime textual representation of the spoken word to the hearing impaired client. Recent advances in technology have allowed realtime captions to be displayed to more devices in more places with greater convenience. This trend is set to continue. Captions are useful for the 3.5 million hearing impaired people in Australia (providing they are literate and have access to a display device). The required internet connectivity to stream text is relatively small. Methods of generating text include stenography machines, keyboard and speech recognition. The availability and financial viability of these services continues to improve. With political will and funding, every deaf child in Australia – right now – could have access to live remote captioning solutions in every classroom using technology such as Ai-Live™.

5. About Ai-Live™

A world-first, Ai-Live™ provides realtime text of classroom discussion delivered to a student's laptop in under 7 seconds using skilled remote respeakers as the following Figure 2 illustrates.

Figure 2: How Ai-Live™ works



Ai-Skills™ provides training, accreditation and quality assurance supporting the respeaking and subject matter knowledge central to the delivery of effective access. Further discussion of the Ai-Live™ solution can be found in the Hansard records of testimony given to the Senate Standing Committee on Hearing Health in December 2009.[16]

6. Funding principles

New solutions require funding.

Ai-Live™ is a solution designed for the NDIS; giving individuals the choice of where, when and how captioning should best be deployed to deliver most effective access to education.

Solutions and funding structures that are portable to the workplace are essential to provide a whole-of-life solution that has, for so long, been lacking.

Proposals to fund this at a federal level mean that NSW would do well to mimic the funding structure of this design.

ENDNOTES

[1] http://www.un.org/disabilities/
[2] Commonwealth of Australia (2009) *Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia.*
[3] Disability Investment Group (2009) *The Way Forward - A New Disability Policy Framework for Australia* - http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/disability/pubs/policy/way_forward/Pages/default.aspx
[4] http://www.cmc.gov.au/working_groups/national_arts_and_disability_strategy
[5] http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Pages/Resources.aspx
[6] http://www.deewr.gov.au/SCHOOLING/DIGITALEDUCATIONREVOLUTION/Pages/default.aspx
[7] http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/disability-support
[8] See www.NDIS.org.au for a list of supporting organisations – including National Disability Services.
[9] Disability Investment Group (2009) *The Way Forward - A New Disability Policy Framework for Australia* - http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/disability/pubs/policy/way_forward/Pages/default.aspx
[10] See K. Rudd, Address to the National Disability Awards Ceremony, 23 Nov 2009, http://www.pm.gov.au/node/6349
[11] Commonwealth of Australia (2009) *Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia.*
[12] Commonwealth of Australia (2009) *Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia.*
[13] Access Economics (2006) *Listen Hear – The Economic Impact and Cost of hearing loss in Australia.*
[14] Access Economics (2006) *Listen Hear – The Economic Impact and Cost of hearing loss in Australia.*
[15] 2006 Census as reported in Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auslan
[16] T. Abrahams, Testimony to Senate Standing Committee on Hearing Health, 7 December 2009. Hansard http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commttee/S12648.pdf