

Abstract No. 1.3

Tuesday 5th September 2017 at 12:00-12:45

Title: My Journey to Independence : From Isolation to participation

Presenter: Linda Fistonich, Australia (recorded presentation)

Co-presenters: Karen Wickham

Main focus: Mainly practice/Both congenital and acquired deafblindness

Abstract: My name is Linda Fistonich and I was born in Auckland NZ. My parents along with my two sisters and brother migrated to New Zealand a year or so before I was born. They came to make a new life for themselves from what was then known as Yugoslavia but is now known as Croatia.

I was born with the congenital condition known as Optic Atrophy and started to lose my sight at aged eight and my hearing at 11 years old.

The aim of my presentation will be to demonstrate my journey to independence, from being a negative, dependant and isolated person to one who is positive, happy and connected with others. It is my hope that you will gain a greater understanding of how to best support Deafblind people to achieve their goals through the development of close interpersonal, meaningful and positive relationships. I have strived to overcome obstacles in my life and build the life that I wanted for a very long time. My parents did what they thought was best for me especially as far as my educational aspirations were concerned, but failed to communicate how to cope with the many situations one comes across in the real world.

There have been many transitions in my life; the biggest transition that I will talk about in detail in my presentation is my journey from complete dependence, to moving into my own apartment in Parkland Villas and living an independent, fulfilling life. I had been happy to remain dependant as I saw no need to do otherwise and it was only when my mum went to a nursing home and I fully realised I could no longer rely on her that I took up the challenge and did a crash course in independence. I am relishing my new found independence and proving to others that for a deaf blind person anything is possible given the right support and attitude. Senses have been of marvellous assistance to me, both in my personal growth, building my social connectedness and closeness in all my relationships and encouraging me to become part of the Deafblind and local community. I have gained more confidence and am not so anxious of being left on my own, I have learnt I can be independent. Building a connectedness and closeness with all the communities I interact with and being met with respect and understanding has supported me to make these significant life changes. Touch is also been a part of my everyday life – and is integral to the Deafblind experience and to building closeness and connectedness in my relationships and my life. My experiences, family and supports have enabled me to embrace relationships, build communities, be a part of the wider world and enjoy all the benefits it has to offer. I look forward to sharing my experiences with the wider Deafblind community as an example of what a person can achieve given the right tools and as reassurance and guidance for Deafblind people, their parents, families and supports facing similar challenges.