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Dr Stuart Down

Winner of 2009 Libby Harricks Achievement Award

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Stuart at school

Stuart started losing his hearing at six years old and is now classified as having profound sensori-neural deafness. He was a capable student, assisted by the visiting teacher scheme, and excellent at sports, representing his school in cricket, tennis and hockey (despite not hearing the referee's whistle!), and in having to endure teasing from fellow students. He was involved in Cubs and later was a Patrol Leader in Scouts.

Medical training

Stuart gained a high V.C.E. score after being awarded a school prize as the top student in French. He gained a place in the medical course at Monash University, which was challenged during his first year by the then Dean of the Medical Faculty, who informed Stuart that they did not accommodate students with disabilities! His place was secured after discussions with the University's Equal Opportunity Officer and he graduated with honours in 1998. Since then he worked initially at Box Hill Hospital and over the past five years he trained as a specialist in sports medicine in Melbourne and at the Australian Institute of Sport (A.I.S.) in Canberra. He was awarded the Gold Medal for top student in 2008, when he graduated as a Fellow in the Australasian College of Sports Physicians.

Sports Physician

In 2005, Stuart was Senior Doctor at Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre at the Deaflympics, overseeing sports as diverse as wrestling, water polo and badminton. In 2006, he was Senior Doctor for Weightlifting at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games, while later that year he was Senior Doctor in Canberra for the World Champions Hockey Championship for Women. Over recent years, as sole doctor, he was accompanied Junior Australian teams in hockey to Europe and S.E. Asia and the A.I.S. soccer team to South America.

Stuart inspires all who meet him with his competence, his warm gregarious nature and his refusal to allow his disability to interfere with his life goals. He has achieved much against the odds.

Stuart's response

I would like to start by thanking Richard Brading & SHHH Australia for inviting me to be here today. I am truly honoured to be receiving this year's Libby Harricks Achievement Award.

I suppose I had best thank my ever-thoughtful mother in nominating me. It was indeed a pleasant surprise to open a letter last month, inviting me to come here to receive an award I had not heard of, let alone been aware that my mother had in fact nominated me!

On that note, and perhaps on a more personal level, I would like to pass heart-felt thanks to both of my parents for their unwavering love and support to both my sister – who is also profoundly hearing impaired – and I. It would be very fair to say neither my sister nor I would be where we are in life today, without the patience & undying commitment shown by our parents, towards ensuring we could aspire to achieve our chosen paths in life.

The course I have taken, from secondary school through to where I now stand as a fully qualified Sports Physician, has been very much facilitated by the excellent support services in place at all levels. This has included visiting teachers at both primary and secondary school and the disability liaison staff at university. I am also eternally grateful for the

assistance from my audiologist in Melbourne – Moh Dadafarin – whose patience, explanation and attention to detail has been nothing short of magnificent.

I recall well, my Disability Liaison Officer at Monash University in Melbourne, thumping the table with a face that read “woman on a mission” upon learning of resistance I faced in trying to initiate special consideration as a hearing impaired undergraduate medical student. Indeed she conquered the then Dean of Medicine, and paved the way for me – the first hearing impaired graduate of Monash University Medical School – with the provision of note-taking services and special consideration in examinations, the latter being continued through to my post-graduate specialist medical examinations. I have since learned of two further hearing impaired undergraduate medical students since I graduated in 1998.

This just highlights the importance of such services and the good fortune we have in Australia, of being blessed with such assistance from the numerous specialists, organisations and support groups. My sister Elena has worked with the deaf & hearing impaired in India and China and currently works with AusAid, and says such services are unheard of in so many other countries.

On that note I would finally like to thank my sister Elena – not just for coming here from Canberra to see me receive this award, but for providing me with inspiration. She may not be aware, but in seeing her carve her way through all and sundry before her over the past 20 years, she has constantly provided me with inspiration and hope - to achieve greater things, and most of all, to not be overcome by the frustrations & social isolation that hampers so many of us with hearing impairment.



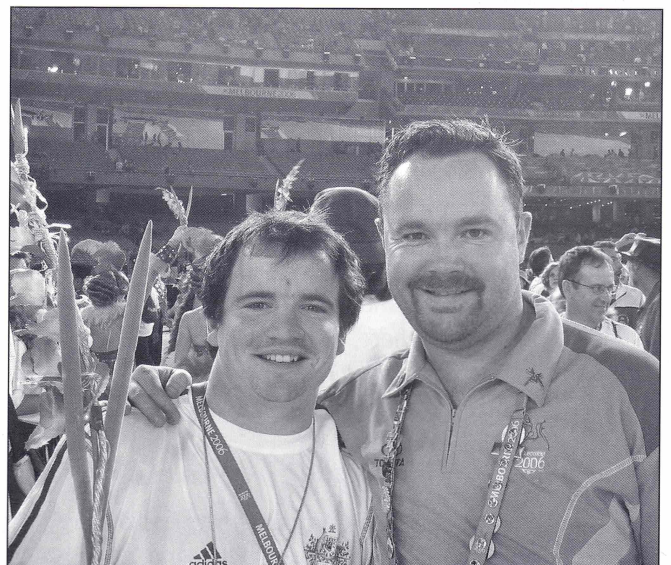
Stuart receiving 2009 Libby Harricks Award



Stuart with AIS Hockey Team in Brussels, Belgium, 2007



Stuart with AIS Hockey Team staff in Malaysia, 2006



Stuart at 2006 Commonwealth Games with Ben Turner, Gold Medal weightlifter