



CONFERENCE REPORT

Deafblind International World Conference
Gold Coast, Australia. August 13th-16th, 2019.
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The 17th Deafblind International World Conference occurred on the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia from August 13th to 16th, 2019. More than 420 attendees participated in the conference hosted by Able Australia to “Share the knowledge to ACT: Accessibility. Communication. Technology”. Over 30 countries were represented, and there was also diversity in the attendees and presenters, which included individuals with acquired and congenital deafblindness, families, professionals, educators, service providers, and academics.

With broad themes tackled each day, presenters and panels offered their voices and perspectives in sharing research, practices, and lived experiences. Isabel Amaral’s keynote on accessibility looked at the broad scope of accessibility and how barriers are not always equally evident and yet are equally important. She noted a connection between accessibility and a sense of belonging, which in turn is impacted by access to open-minded attitudes in society. On the second day, Jacqui Martin’s keynote focused on emotional intelligence related to communication and how we can increase awareness of our own emotional states and respond with more awareness to others. The panel shared their own experiences of touch and movement in emotional regulation, and how deafblind people can perceive emotions tactilely. The third day brought a dialogue led by Christopher Woodfill about innovative uses of technology in daily life, and the role of legislation and policies in creating inclusive tech which matches the needs of deafblind people. This discussion highlighted the importance of including legislation related to technology in our dialogues about systemic change. The final day featured a Family Forum which emphasized the need for ongoing peer and professional support for both individuals with deafblindness and the families in order to thrive in every life stage. Additionally, a grand total of 127 abstracts from 26 countries were accepted for concurrent sessions and poster presentations related to each day’s theme.

A notable conclusion to the conference was the presentation of the first WFDB Global Report by Geir Jensen and Alison Marshal. It is an important publication which connects statistics, literature reviews, and surveys of the global deafblind population to international disability rights. It estimates that individuals with deafblindness represent between 0.2% to 2% of the global population, a number that is not insignificant in supporting advocacy and awareness efforts. The report highlights the complex interplay of commonalities and diversity of people who are deafblind. At the world conference, this dynamic was on full display in the conversations and presentations on accessibility, communication, and technology. This trifecta offered an opportunity for each participant to reflect on how the knowledge shared could translate into action in their own life and the lives of others.

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