

**ADDE**

Australians for Disability and Diversity Employment



**NEWSLETTER**

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**Spring 2008**

***ADDE Celebrates the launch of:***

**Leading from the front?**

**Research on Disability Employment in the Victorian Disability Sector**

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In July 2007, ADDE commissioned Equity Research Centre to investigate the issue of the employment of people with disabilities in the Victorian Disability Sector; after all if Disability Organisations will not employ those whose cause they espouse, then who will?

Funding for this research was provided by the Reichstein Foundation, ANZ Trustees and the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust. It was conducted throughout February and March 2008 and the results were tallied in April. Although no one was surprised by the findings it was still disappointing to learn how little rhetoric and action plans translate into real benefits for the people these organizations are supposed to serve.



The Final Report, *Leading From the Front? Research on Disability Employment in the Victorian Disability Sector* was



launched on Monday 18th August 2008 at the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission in Melbourne. The event was well attended by representatives from all major disability organisations. The keynote speakers, Suzanne Colbert, CEO of the Australian Employers Network on Disability (who gave her address via video link), and Cath Smith, CEO of VCOSS, were very well received. Coffee, chai and a delicious selection of

nibbles were provided by our very own Kathy Leitch of the *Kokoda Kafe @ 1000 steps* fame and a lively discussion of the report's ramifications followed the official presentations.



The report proved very timely, appearing at around the same time as the Australian Government was ratifying the *International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Now, by underlining current failings in disability employment procurement, and various submissions to *The Future of Employment Services in Australia: A Discussion Paper* relating to DENS, ADDE expects this research to be

leveraged into more proactive Government policy.

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## **Credo**

There for the Grace of God go I,  
I have a purpose,  
I have developed distinctly,  
Uniquely,  
Like everyone else,  
Sometimes,  
I wish my life was easier,  
However,  
My life has shaped my character,  
Stubbornly gathering my resources,  
Like flame hardening and purifying.

My life has influenced my outlook,  
Every day presents new challenges,  
To make life more interesting,  
I adapt,  
Differently to you,  
Through my presence,  
I enrich society,  
Making you feel better about yourself,  
Encouraging you,  
Inspiring you,  
Sometimes,  
Humbling you,  
Forcing you to change,  
Making my life meaningful.

Difference inspires creation's metamorphosis.  
There is no such thing as perfection, unless it is in the act of the creation of  
existence itself.  
As human beings, we all have a legitimate contribution to make within the  
community.  
It just needs to be recognised and validated as such by society.

May we all be considered valued members of society,

**Ania Zamecznik**, ADDE Newsletter Editor

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## ***Australia signs the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities***

The last few months have been a bit of a roller coaster ride for disability organisations and now that the dust is settling and we can begin to distinguish the thrust of Australian Government policy in relation to people with disabilities, we can begin to take advantage of the opportunities offered and create some of our own.

According to The Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, Bill Shorten: "Impairment is a fact of life. We have different data sets to describe this. According to the ABS, 20 percent of Australians will record some form of impairment ... the challenge is that whilst impairment is a fact of life, it's the attitudes of the community which disable people." (source: [www.billshorten.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.billshorten.fahcsia.gov.au)) As most of us probably already know Australia signed the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the 30 March 2007, but did not ratify its agreement until the 18 July 2008. (Government tends to move slowly when it comes to decisions on important issues and this was actually considered a rush job.) The change in Australia's Federal Government from Liberal to Labor and resulting Departmental restructures delayed this process further, yet, even so Australia was one of the first United Nations member countries to fully commit to the Convention. The Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, Bill Shorten states that: "The Convention is part of the Government's long term commitment to improving the lives of people with disability and their families. The Convention is aimed at removing barriers faced by people with disability and enhancing opportunities to participate in social and political decision making processes, recognises rights to education, health work, adequate living conditions, freedom of movement and equal recognition before the law ... We are working on a national disability strategy and employment strategy around people with disability and mental illness ... What does concern me though in the field of disability is some of the issues which have traditionally been put in the too hard basket. The lack of data is appalling ... (this is where ADDE plays an important role). If I turned up for an interview these days with many employers and I was blind or had one leg or I was deaf or I was in a wheelchair and found it hard to communicate, chances are the recruitment agencies wouldn't consider me. Yet, somehow we have managed to rule out Leo Beethoven, Frank Roosevelt or Steve Hawking. I wonder for those who make it through the system how many others do we miss and deny the richness of their contributions, much less the lives that they should have fulfilled ... We are serious about a National Disability Strategy with employment focus, focus around quality standards of working with the States, engaging with the private sector, serious about all those things. But, I think that this quote, though, sums up where I think we need to be on disability and changing the politics of disability and Dr King said: all people are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny,

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whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be, until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be, until I am what I ought to be. That is the challenge of this convention.”

(source: [www.billshorten.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.billshorten.fahcsia.gov.au)) Australia’s Human Rights

Commissioner Graeme Innes noted that, “In Australia, we have made some great advances in disability law and policy, but there is much more to do ... We must strive to remove barriers to physical and information access, ensure equal opportunity – not just in theory, but in practice – in employment and education, as well as address the severe inadequacies in supports and services for many people with disability and their families.” (source: [hreoc.gov.au](http://hreoc.gov.au)) On the 20 August 2008, at a Seminar (held during the Beijing Olympics, so that it did not receive nearly as much press coverage as it deserved) presented in Brisbane by Queensland Advocacy Inc., Commissioner Graeme Innes went on to say that: “most of the issues coming to the Commission in the education area involved a combination of attitudes, access to information on what to do, and a lack of sufficient resources ... Even within the law and justice area, I suspect that better realisation of human rights for people with disability will be more about programs, policies, and resources than legislative change ... where what courts and others responsible appear to lack is not the power or the duty to make appropriate decisions but the lack of facilities in practice to give effect to what they know to be right ... Human rights is not only a job for human rights agencies, any more than disability rights are only a job for disability service providers.” In other words first we need a change in attitude within society regarding persons with disabilities, making everyone personally responsible for bringing about disability integration, so that an inclusive framework for the whole community can then be built. Commissioner Graeme Innes enumerated various innovative concepts in product development, emphasising that they should be not only green but also disability friendly. Commissioner Graeme Innes suggested the “adoption of an accessible procurement policy by the Commonwealth” and considers “Disability, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ... (to be) about all of us and everything”. This comprehensive responsibility should also include employment of persons with disabilities at the product design stage so that the knowledge embodied within someone - who as disabled potential user of the product, currently has to constantly road test finished goods or prototypes - can be utilised to prevent many problems while the design is still at the concept stage. This would save companies a lot of wasted money and effort expended on ineffective products. It should also provide jobs, for people with disabilities, which would more than pay for themselves. Participation by persons with disabilities in decision making processes affecting programs for, or of interest to, persons with disabilities is crucial and, without such involvement, these programs cannot succeed. The current government is to be commended for seeking submissions from disability organisations on current programs; it must now remember to consider employing disabled persons in any new projects it creates to replace those which have failed to provide the necessary benefits.

## **Wheel Work**

My name is Michael Merrett and I am a wheelchair user. I use a three wheel electric scooter that gives me independent mobility. I have had muscular dystrophy since birth and it has affected my ability to get an education and work in many ways.

I have been for many jobs but never been successful in the past because they were not appropriate positions or there was unfair competition. My first real job has been with the Australians for Disability and Diversity, ADDE business plan, where I learnt how to work as part of a team on something that I believed was worthwhile, where I could contribute something positive that may enable other people with disabilities and myself to gain part-time employment. This has led to me getting the research position with ADDE where I have been working on implementing the recently launched research report - "Leading from the front?"

I would like to live in a society where people with disabilities were not discriminated against in any way and the idea of social inclusion was a complete reality.

In my opinion, people with disabilities have unique and special strengths and if those collective strengths were encouraged and allowed to be more fully developed then the society would be much stronger and more productive.

I work part-time and I do what I can to make positive changes in every way possible to help create the society in which I would like to live and for those who will follow in the future.

I feel strongly about disability employment and social inclusion.

I would like to exercise leadership on the issue of disability employment and social inclusion by developing a job matching website that matches appropriate employment opportunities to people with disabilities and promotes key disability employment organisations.

I believe that the Federal Government needs to set up and fund, a socially inclusive national system that matches jobs to people with disabilities and to people from diverse backgrounds and to people of mature age.

I believe that there needs to be added employment incentives for people with a disabilities because it is very difficult to enter the workplace for the first time when on the Disability Support Pension (DSP). In my opinion there should be large financial incentives for people with disabilities to enter the workforce, for

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example, so that they can buy clothes, computers, a mobile phone, get the Internet and Broadband, extra travel and food expenses, stationery.

I hope that soon a *national system* will be created, that will match appropriate jobs to people with disabilities and to people from diverse backgrounds and to people of mature age.

I hope that a new *financial incentives employment program* will be integrated into the possible *national system* to ease the pressures of change, particularly for people with disabilities entering the workforce and towards creating a more socially inclusive workforce.

In my opinion, the President of ADDE has shown strong leadership at a Federal and State level by highlighting the important national need for people with disabilities to be matched with fair and appropriate employment opportunities as part of the Federal Workforce Strategy, which will result in a more socially inclusive society.

ADDE was formed in 2005 and has led the way forward in the disability sector in regard to advocating for systemic changes in disability employment. It recently launched the ADDE research report at the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, VHREOC.

The leadership role of ADDE is effective because many key people from the disability sector attended the ADDE research report launch, "Leading from the Front?" and they were all interested in the information contained in the report.

As part of the ADDE report 45 not for-profit organisations were investigated and it was discovered that there were not many people with disabilities employed in all levels of the disability sector and that new strategies need to be implemented to increase the employment of people with disabilities in both the public and private sector.

I was fully involved as part of a Project Team where I worked part-time employment as a consultant sole-trader for ADDE that involved working with the CEO of Diversity at Work, (D@W) and the other project team members in researching and writing the ADDE business plan.

I wrote down the minutes of each meeting and took photographs of the project team and added them to the project management website.

At each meeting with the CEO of D@W and the project team where we developed the ADDE business plan I would listen to the other team members and when appropriate I would voice my ideas and opinions.

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Mostly, I would agree with the CEO's ideas and directions in regard to the ADDE business plan, even though occasionally I would challenge him in regard to the ADDE business plan in an attempt to better understand his way of thinking.

After the official meeting at D@W I would invite a few of the team members for a coffee to discuss various aspects of the meeting in attempt to build a stronger team relationship.

Our ADDE project team was strong and remains strong. We are all working on a couple of projects together under the ADDE banner and we all look forward to working on projects together in the future.

Gaining my first employment required good judgment in problem solving and most importantly I had to show initiative as I had never been officially employed before and the idea of being employed was a new concept that I had to get used too, in order to be successful.

In September 2007 I joined Wise Employment and they helped me write my resume. When I joined the City of Yarra, Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) in November 2007, I said, "I am looking for some part-time employment, with the City of Yarra. Do you know anywhere where I might be able to get some part-time work?" I was interested in working part-time in the disability sector at the Richmond Town Hall in the City of Yarra. I was referred to go to an ADDE committee meeting at the Victorian Commission of Social Services, VCOSS.

I went to the ADDE committee meeting at VCOSS and was referred to D@W to arrange an interview for a position to work part-time as a consultant to help research and write the ADDE business plan. I was well planned for the interview and I was accepted for the position.

I regularly advocate on behalf of people with disabilities in regard to negotiating with Department of Transport for accessible public transport, particularly in Richmond.

I believe that everyone deserves to have equal and fair access to Public Transport. At the Yarra DAC I am focused on all issues relating to accessibility in the City of Yarra and I work as a volunteer to create a more inclusive and diverse community by highlighting the need for accessible Public Transport and the construction and commissioning of Tram Platform Stops throughout the City of Yarra starting on Bridge Road, Richmond and Tram Stop 19.

I have recently written a submission for the Sir Rod Eddington Report – "have your say" in regard to my request for the introduction of accessible Platform Stops throughout the City of Yarra.

I am working as a volunteer consultant with Yooralla as part of a representative group that is investigating physical access issues in regard to the Transport Ticketing Authority (TTA) and the new Myki fare payment ticketing system that will be introduced in 2009 and 2010 that is on display at the Myki Discovery Centre at Southern Cross Station. The existing TTA fare payment ticketing system and the new Myki ticketing system use standard fare payment equipment from the manufacturer that has not been satisfactorily modified and discriminates against people with disabilities particularly those who use wheelchairs and electric scooters.

Kind Regards,

**Michael Merrett**

Australians for Disability and Diversity Employment (ADDE)  
Research Implementation Worker

### ***A Disappointment***

Following my diagnosis in 1982 (with MS), I was able to continue working as an HR Manager for another 11 1/2 years with the same company. Eventually, after periods of 3 days work per week rather than 5, I was made redundant by the Company.

After carefully considering my options, and spending 6 months with WISE Employment working full-time for the Kidney Foundation, I became aware of an HR and Workers' Compensation Role being advertised by the MS Society. When I submitted an Application, it was immediately and flatly rejected. When I protested to the CEO, I received a very detailed explanation, which argued at some length that I was 'Clearly Over-qualified which would make it an unsuitable appointment.'

I was Disappointed, and saw it as a wasteful missed opportunity. As an HR Professional, I believe there should at least have been a personal discussion, preferably with an opportunity to spell out the aspects of the job which called for abilities I may not have had. Although I'm aware that some people with MS have been and are employed by the Society, I've always had the impression that the Society would, at that point, have preferred not to employ them.

It is vital that Employers can be shown how the Disabled can be employed successfully – especially by the Body that represents them.

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(I'm aware that this does not represent things as they are now – I'm aware of at least two Persons with MS who have been appointed to key roles in recent years.)

**David Sullivan**      President PwMS

### ***Once upon a Factory***

*(This is a true story as told to me by a friend of a friend who happened to live near an old mattress factory.)*

It was awards night and all the employees were gathered around the podium waiting with bated breath for the announcement of who would get the coveted award of the year. Everyone was speculating on who would be acknowledged as the most valuable employee. Finally, it came and the prize was awarded to someone who never allowed their self to be distracted while on the job and produced flawless products with unexcelled workmanship. But no one stepped up to claim it.

The most valuable employee of the year was not present at the function. In fact they did not even know about the function.

The other employees asked each other: "Who is this person?" "Why did they win the award?"

The questions flew thick and fast, right and left, as people tried to remember if they had ever met this most valued employee of the year. "Did this unassuming celebrity even exist?" No one remembered gossiping with them over coffee in the cafeteria or swapping baby photos with them before work. "Was this person who received the award a part of the furniture or maybe even invisible?"

No.

The best worker in the factory produced faultless work day after day and year after year, undiverted by chatter or what went on around them and took pride in each perfectly sprung mattress they touched. Knowing exactly how much to tighten each wire and when it was just right, they had no wastage and produced no rejects. They never slacked off or distracted others. Their quality control was superb and the manager wished he had twenty such workers: it would have done wonders for the company's bottom line. With twenty such workers production costs would go down, quality checking would become redundant and profits would rise exponentially. Unfortunately, the manager's fairy godmother was never welcomed in the human resources department and had no say in the hiring or firing of the staff, so could not grant him his wish. Instead, the manager was using a recruitment firm to hire workers and this firm would never even know how to, much less consider, interviewing deaf and blind persons such as the most valuable employee.

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*If you know which factory this story relates to please let us know.*

**ADDE Submission to the Review of Disability Employment Network Services (DENS) on improving the DEN system**  
**Current problems with the DEN system**

A major short coming of the present DEN system in being able to assist people with disability in gaining employment is the mis-match between how most employers source their employees, and how the DEN providers source job opportunities.

Many employers (especially large employers) use recruitment agencies to advertise and short list candidates for positions. These agencies have little understanding, knowledge or interest in short listing people with disability for these jobs, and the vast majority of these jobs do not ever filter down to the DEN system to be matched with job seekers with a disability. In fact the recruitment agencies and the DEN providers probably see themselves as competitors in the jobs market.

Even businesses, Local, State and Federal government Departments and larger organizations in the not- for- profit sector do not usually advertise their positions through the DEN system, even if that organization has a pro-active disability employment policy. The best they may do is advertise through “seek.com” and the daily newspapers.

This means that a DEN client is reliant on having a case manager who looks in the paper every day, or in other advertised networks, which rarely happens. Also there is usually no indication in the job advertisement that the employer has any disability pro-activity.

Some major employers sign memorandums of understanding with DWA (Disability Works Australia), which should in theory advertise these positions to all DEN clients wherever they live. At present only DEN providers in the local geographic area to that particular job’s proximity seem to be contacted. The basis on which decisions are made or not made to provide job information to local DENS is very unclear.

People without disability make choices about jobs to apply for with many considerations in mind. Geographic location is only one factor of many. Therefore why should people with disability be told they may only have access to jobs in a particular proximity to the DEN where they are registered?

DEN providers are trying to source employment opportunities in their local geographic area by networking and developing personal relationships with employers. Some DENS do this well and some do this very poorly. However most of these businesses tend to be small to medium size employers, and DEN clients are missing out on all those other potential employment opportunities from

other sectors of the economy or in other geographic areas to where their DEN happens to be located.

Suggested solutions to these problems.

- ❖ A national system of identifying jobs advertised by pro-active disability employers (similar to the two ticks system in the UK) should be established. This encourages people with disability to apply for these positions. In the UK this symbol appears on all these job advertisements.
- ❖ Alternatively the wording “People with disability are encouraged to apply” could be included in job advertisements from proactive employers
- ❖ DWA (Disability Works Australia), which is a Government funded agency throughout Australia needs to have the responsibility for selling this system to employers and signing them up to a commitment to pro-active disability employment recruitment policies and practices. This organization should not have any responsibility to source candidates for positions, but should be a referral service for information, training and technical support.
- ❖ There should be a tender process every few years for this national contract to ensure that best use is made of this “tax payers funding”
- ❖ Openness and accountability should be a top priority with measurable data such as how many organizations signed disability employment commitments, how many jobs were referred to DWA for advertising through the DEN network, and how many of these jobs DEN providers sourced applicants for
- ❖ All these jobs must then be advertised through all DEN networks via a centralized computer data base
- ❖ Each DEN case manager would then have a list of jobs sent to their computer from proactive employers, which they can match to their client profiles, and assist with applications, support etc.
- ❖ Perhaps recruitment agencies could be given some financial incentives to place and retain people with disability similar to the DEN providers
- ❖ Alternatively some shared incentive scheme to encourage recruitment agencies to work with DEN providers so people with disability can benefit from both employment sources.
- ❖ There should be some requirements as part of the DEN funding process to ensure that DEN providers are “leading from the front” in their own employment practices. How many DENS employ people with disabilities themselves? This question requires some research.\*
- ❖ How can this sector expect others to do what they may not be doing themselves: employing people with disability?

\*See ADDE research paper, "Leading from the Front?" which clearly shows that the Not for Profit sector is not leading from the front with employment of people with disability.

### Conclusion:

This submission highlights the disconnect between the current system, which is based around a competitive model where individual DENS and other employment agencies all compete for clients (employers) and candidates (job seekers) and providing the best employment service and outcomes to the employers and job seekers. By changing this model to a more cooperative one, we believe that the system will produce more successful outcomes for people with disability, than it currently does.

ADDE is pleased to be a part of this submission process and we look forward to seeing improved employment outcomes for people with disability, in the future.

### ***Contrary Reflections – Pandora's Box***

Recently, while visiting friends, I watched a Blu-ray copy of Gattaca. It is scary how much closer we have come to its reality than when it first screened at the cinemas. Its statement on eugenics is possibly even more relevant now, a decade later, when we really are starting to implement DNA sequencing in the testing of foeti for genetic diseases. When the coda (cut from the final cinematic release) begins it scrolls through a roll call of prominent persons we would term disabled: persons who, if they had been screened for genetic abnormalities in the womb, would likely have been aborted as defective. Among their ranks are named some of the greatest geniuses humanity has ever produced and others instrumental in changing the course of world events. Some we know for certain as affected by various conditions and others we can only speculate about. Speculation has abounded that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had Tourette's syndrome and so did Dr Samuel Johnson who produced a *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1747.

The Marfan's syndrome sufferers presumably include Abraham Lincoln, Niccolo Paganini and Sergei Rachmaninoff as well as several of Egypt's Pharaohs. Among those recently diagnosed there are many popular musicians like Joey Ramone (from the Ramones), Sir John Tavener (composer) and Jonathan Larson (creator of the musical Rent). Does Marfan's syndrome confer musical aptitude?

The supposition of ADHD, Bipolar or Asperger's spectrum often includes the same personalities: Beethoven, Mozart, Da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Edison,

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Einstein, Galileo, Newton, Andersen, Van Gogh; a veritable who's who of the painting, composing or writing fraternity. These represent only a small proportion of those listed in only a few of categories, if you dig deeper and explore further, it almost seems a prerequisite to be disabled to be a famous artist, writer, composer, musician and, interestingly, politician - with Julius Caesar and Napoleon I of France both being listed as epileptics and the Kennedys, Wilson and Churchill supposed victims of ADHD.

Recently there has been speculation that all with Asperger's spectrum disorders have overstimulated brains and try to deal with the constant bombardment of information by concentrating on minutiae and thus becoming savants those with a lesser degree of stimulation being more functional in society and those affected to a greater degree specialising so narrowly that the rest of us remain unaware of their specialty. Why does our society not utilise these skills? Are disabilities faults in genetic coding, or are they simply mutations which can help make our species more diverse and thus more adaptive and resilient to adverse conditions? What drives a young actor with a bright future and fantastic career prospects to self destruct and yet pushes a severely disabled person to cling to what most would consider to be a miserable existence.

Eugenics and Euthanasia are currently both actively promoted as rights issues. According to MedicineNet.com: *The practice of eugenics was first legally mandated in the United States in the State of Indiana, resulting in the forcible sterilisation, incarceration, and occasionally euthanasia of the mentally of physically handicapped, the mentally ill, and ethnic minorities (particularly people of mixed racial heritage), and the adopting out of their children to non-disabled, Caucasian parents. ... It is important to note that no experiment in eugenics has ever been shown to result in measurable improvements in human health. In fact, in the best known attempt at positive eugenics, the Nazi "Lebensborn" program, there was a higher-than-normal level of birth defects among the resulting offspring.* The Nazi regime also practiced negative eugenics through genocide which the international Charter of Human Rights condemns.

Most persons labelled as disabled do not consider themselves as such, and many do not want to be cured of their disability. Many Autistic people reject the notion that there is an ideal brain configuration and that any deviation from an arbitrary norm is pathological, instead they consider it to be simply a different cognitive style, like left/right handedness, which has contributed to our evolution as human beings. A totally blind person does not necessarily want to view the world through a functional pair of eyes, neither does a profoundly deaf person necessarily wish for the ability to hear. What they do want is recognition of their intrinsic value and capacity to contribute to the rest of society. Nor is it true that you don't miss what you have never known, you just deal with what life has endowed you with or you don't survive. When you sink into a morass of bitterness and jealousy you lose the special gifts you may have acquired uniquely through your particular disability.

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When Pandora set free the ills of the world, Hope remained. We, as individuals and as a society, desperately need that Hope in conjunction with determination and perseverance to help us overcome the obstacles life throws in our path. Which ever malady afflicts us can teach us coping mechanisms and present alternative viewpoints in situations and ultimately benefit everyone we share our existence with. What is needed most is the right approach.