

Born in 1954 and after contracting Pinks Disease at 6 months old, Paul was diagnosed legally blind at the age of 3. Throughout his school years, Paul Szep had a burning ambition to be the same as all his fellow students. Vision impaired with sight of 15% in his left eye and the ability to see a shadow of hand movement in his right eye, Paul at a very early age learned that he needed support from teachers and fellow students in order to reach average educational standards.

In class teachers would speak as they wrote on the blackboard to make it easier for Paul to take notes. Fellow students would provide him with notes and form study groups with him in order to get through assignments, homework and projects. Paul very quickly learned that if he was to be successful at school, he needed good friends and willing teachers. When playing football with Paul in the team, teammates soon learned to be on Paul's left side to have a chance of receiving a pass.

On leaving school, and after temporary employment as a storeman, Paul joined the Department of Defence as a clerical worker and was assigned to the mail room where all new employees began their careers. Paul always rightly or wrongly instinctively resisted telling anyone about his sight problems and so, no one understood the difficulties he faced when required to rapidly read a hand-written address placed on envelopes and parcels. Paul was required to sort these items into Army Unit labelled pigeon-holes.



For reasons unknown to Paul at the time, he was promoted to the mail delivery section and given an orange coloured electric golf buggy designed to carry bags of mail. Given that Paul's mother never allowed him to own a bike and had strictly forbidden to ride a friend's bike, Paul was very excited to drive this vehicle. The job entailed the delivery and pickup of mail bags throughout the barracks. Even though Paul managed to keep time schedules, questions began to be asked about his suitability for this position when a couple of black limousines displayed orange scratch marks on the side of the vehicles and so, Paul was promoted to the Army Audit Branch.



After about 6 months Paul was promoted again to an internal audit position and seemed to perform the job well. The only problem he had was reading the serial numbers on weapons however, he managed to gain assistance from local staff who read them to him. All went well until the staff member assisting him was posted out and the replacement refused to help. Instead of helping Paul, the new staff member reported the problem to the Commanding Officer.

Paul was transferred to Cadet Section as a clerk. This section was headed by a Brigadier General and staffed by about 8 regular army personnel. Paul was the only civilian in Cadet Section.

Worried about his future, Paul realised that reading, especially speed reading, was not something he could not do well. So, each evening and whenever time allowed, he would read and memorise policy documents related to the Australian Cadet Corp. This move worked very well for Paul as he

soon became the 'go to man' for Cadet Section staff and various Cadet Unit staff throughout Australia. Paul became so proficient that the Brigadier General used to refer to him as encyclopedia cadets.

When Goff Whitlam was elected as our Prime Minister, one of his early policy decisions was to drastically reduce the resources provided to the Australian Cadet Corp Scheme. The thinking at the time was that this scheme was largely comprised of wealthy private schools and so, these schools could fund their own activities. After some lobbying from these private schools and the RSL, a decision was made to post our all regular army personnel over a one-year period, except for the Brigadier who also had other responsibilities. Cadet units could make use of local army reserve unit staff.

As army officers were posted out, Paul found himself being appointed to these vacant positions. First as a Lieutenant ACC, then Captain ACC and finally Major ACC - a position responsible for the day to day management of the Australian Cadet Corp. In this position Paul reported directly to the Brigadier General. Duties included visiting cadet units



throughout Australia and annual cadet camps held in each state. Paul also handled the approval and administration of Promotion and transfer of Officers. Paul held this position for approximately 10 years until when, under a Liberal Government, the Cadet Section was moved to Canberra and staffing reverted to Regular Army positions.

A short stint with the RAAF looking after the administration of civilian personnel, saw Paul then retire and pursue business interests in the Sign Industry. Wide Format Digital Printing was a new technology and was very interesting to Paul. After being involved in a few businesses occupying CEO and Sales Manager positions, Paul saw an opportunity consulting to the Screen-Printing Industry – introducing Wide Format Digital Printing Systems.

Later, Paul realised there was better money to be made in the supply of equipment, services, ink, consumables and spare parts, so he set up his own supply business. The nature of this business was importing Wide Format Printers from England, Israel, China, Taiwan, Russia and Japan. Paul secured exclusive sales licences within Australia and the South Pacific along with a keen buy price. He built up a customer data base to which he sold the equipment, services and consumable sales.

Industry magazine advertising and exhibitions / trade shows were a feature of his sales program along with regular email and phone campaigns. Paul regularly travelled the world meeting with suppliers and inspecting new technology. Even though legally blind with about 5% total vision by now, Paul travelled alone without incident. He put this down to his years of experience and not being afraid to ask for directional help at airports and when travelling from one



supplier to another by taxi.

Paul retired at the age of 60 years of age mainly because his total eyesight was reduced to 3% and because of this, felt he could no longer run the business effectively.

Always ready and willing to assist the blind, Paul is a member of Guide Dogs Australia, his favourite charity. He is also a volunteer for Vision Australia. With 5 children and 5 grandchildren Paul and his wife once fostered a blind boy aged 16. Paul introduced this boy to the game of Blind Cricket and coached him to achieve State representative honours. During his short blind cricket career Paul achieved selection for NSW and Queensland sides in his mid-30s. During this period, he co-founder and preside over a very successful blind sports club – Nepean Blind Sports Club in Sydney. This Club won the NSW Blind Cricket Competition at its first attempt. Paul's lived life experience has proved to be a great asset in his efforts to setup Blind Bats Inc. Over the years, Paul has helped many vision impaired people improve their quality of life.



In 1988, Paul was very honoured to receive an Australia Day Medal for his service to the blind.

Since 2015, Paul has been working on the charity now named Blind Bats Inc. The aims of this charity are to promote an active lifestyle through organised sporting and active rest using the latest methods and technology. The program also facilitates the inclusion of vision impaired and sighted member participants in order to enhance an inclusive experience for all. Paul has a desire to take community inclusion to the next level by co-opting regular sports clubs and associations to include vision impaired people in their program. Blind Bats Inc. provides the necessary support to ensure this happens in an enjoyable and safe manner.



Blind Bats Inc. activities are unique and will set the standard within the blind community for many years to come. The program is designed and supported by Blind Bats Inc. For the past 3 years it has been a matter of setup from scratch.

Now in 2019, the Blind Bats Inc. Management Committee, volunteers and friends are ready to progressively introduce our unique program. Each activity/service makes use of the latest research and adaptive technology. Further information on Blind Bats Inc. can be found at www.blindbats.org

