

Born in 1954 Paul was diagnosed legally blind at the age of three. He began life's journey with an element of uncertainty as there seemed no reason for his sight disability at the time. It was not until he reached the age of 65 that he learned his loss of sight was due to medication provided to him as a baby.



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 an early age learned that he needed support from teachers and fellow students to reach average educational standards.

In class teachers would speak as they wrote words on the blackboard to make it easier for Paul to take notes. Fellow students would also provide Paul with notes and form study groups with him to get through assignments, homework, and projects. Paul very quickly learned that if he was to be successful at school, he needed good friends around him and willing teachers who did not mind going the extra steps to help him.

Paul liked to play rugby league but faced challenges catching the ball and judging distances. Team mates soon learned that when playing football with Paul they needed to be on his left side for a chance to receive a pass. Paul's strengths in football revolved around fearless determination in defence and lightning speed off the mark in attack.



At age 9 Paul began learning Music and chose the Violin as his instrument. In the beginning he played by ear, mainly because he could not see the manuscript however, after a period of about 6 months he received large-formatted hand printed music manuscript from the Royal Blind Society in Sydney. At age 18, Paul received his diploma of music for both practical violin studies and music theory.

On leaving school, and after temporary employment as a storeman, Paul joined the Department of Defence as a clerical assistant 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 hand-written addresses placed on envelopes and parcels, however they surely knew he had poor sight when watching him hold envelopes close to his face when reading the mail address. Duties involved sorting mail addressed to Army Units located in NSW.



For reasons unknown to Paul at the time, Paul received promotion 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 forbidden him to ride a friend's bike, Paul was 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 about Paul's suitability became an issue when a couple of black limousines displayed orange scratch marks on the side of the vehicles and so, Paul gained promotion within the Army Audit Branch.

With a growing family of 3 girls, Paul discovered the game of Blind Cricket and although up until this time in his life he avoided blind things, he became very keen with the game and after a year or so playing, he saw a need for changes to the way things were done.

So, he and a few friends established their own club named Nepean Blind Sports Club. At the Club's first meeting, Paul was elected President and so, with a particularly good committee, and with the support of Penrith Council's Mayor at the time, the Club was given the use of an old house and home ground on the banks of the Nepean River.

Paul Presided over Nepean Blind Sports Club for the next 4 years. In that time the Club built a good relationship with key community groups in the Nepean District and formed a good working relationship with the Royal Blind Society in Sydney.



Over a two-year period, Nepean had developed into a Blind Sports Club with over 200 members, (a mix of legally blind and sighted members). The Club introduced 24 different sporting activities, with all members (sighted and blind) eligible to participate. With a growing family now with 3 girls, Paul and his wife fostered a blind boy (Michael) aged sixteen and introduced this boy to the game of Blind Cricket. By this time in his life, Paul was coaching players in the game of Blind Cricket 3 days per week. Paul took a special interest in Michael and after only 6 months playing the game of Blind Cricket, Michael was selected to represent NSW for the national Carnival.

During his 7-year career in the game of Blind Cricket, Paul achieved selection for NSW and Queensland. During this same period, Nepean Blind Sports Club entered the NSW Blind Cricket Competition and won this competition at its first attempt.

Back at work, during this same period, Paul gained promotions to an internal auditor, registry clerk and then cadet section clerk positions, This Cadet Section Clerk position, headed by a Brigadier General and staffed by about eight regular army

personnel managed the Australian Army Cadet Corps. At the time, Paul was the only civilian in Cadet Section.

Worried about his future, Paul realised that reading, especially speed reading, was not something he could 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.

After Goff Whitlam became 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 the School Cadet Scheme is comprised of wealthy private schools and so, these schools could fund their own activities.



After vigorously lobbying the Federal Government, private schools and the RSL, secured an agreement to transfer management responsibility of the Army Cadet Scheme to the Army Reserve and local Community Groups. Eventually, only

the Brigadier, a driver/assistant and Paul remained in Cadet Section.

As army officers moved out, Paul found himself appointed to these vacant positions. First as a Lieutenant ACC, then Captain ACC and finally Major ACC - a position responsible for the general management of the Australian Cadet Corp. In this position Paul reported directly to the Brigadier General; Paul's duties included visiting cadet units throughout Australia and officiating at annual cadet camps held in each state of Australia. Paul also managed the approval and administration of Promotion and transfer of Officers of Cadets. Paul held this position for approximately 10 years until when, under a Liberal Government, the Cadet Section moved location to Canberra and staffing reverted to Regular Army positions.

A short stint with the RAAF saw Paul looking after the human resource administration of civilian personnel then retired after completing 21 years with the Defence Department.



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



After six long months in retirement (at 39 years of age), Paul pursued business interests in the Sign Industry. At the time, Wide Format Digital Printing was an innovative technology and was remarkably interesting to Paul. After being employed in various 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 opportunities available 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/marketing program along with regular email and phone campaigns. Paul regularly travelled the world meeting with suppliers and inspecting innovative 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 then 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 was also a volunteer for Vision Australia.

Paul's lived life experience has proved to be a great asset in his efforts to setup Blind Bats Inc, a Charity designed to offer twenty-four bespoke designed sporting activities to blind and vision impaired people of the Moreton Bay Region. Community inclusion through inclusive activities is the central aim of the Charity. Each event on the activities calendar includes both blind/vision impaired members and sighted members in all activities. In addition, as a way of further including members in their local community, all events are run by local community clubs and associations with Blind Bats Inc being a point of contact for recruitment, and advice





on things unique to vision impaired people. At Blind Bats, each event endeavours to use the latest adaptive technology and rules that provide a safe and enjoyable activity for members and their family/friends. Over the years, Paul has helped vision impaired people improve their quality of life.

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 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 years to come. The program, designed and supported by Blind Bats Inc, over a four-year period, has been a matter of setup from scratch.



In 2019, the Blind Bats Inc Management Committee, volunteers and friends finished their 4 years of setup and began to prepare to progressively introduce their unique inclusive activities program. Each activity/service makes use of the latest research and adaptive technology. A focus on the inclusion of sighted and vision impaired people of all ages is a feature of these activities. Blind Bats Inc is a family-friendly organisation.

In 2021 Blind Bats Inc received approval of a Federal Government grant which enabled the commencement of its inclusive activities program. The highlight of the program was an inclusive 'Beep Cricket' match between the BATS and the Moreton Bay Mayor's XI. A prototype of the new Kookaburra/Blind Bats Beeping ball introduced for the first time, proved to be a notable example of adaptive technology producing a level playing field. This



activity, enjoyed by a large representation of the Moreton Bay Community, is a fine example of the utilisation of the latest adaptive technology when pursuing community inclusion for people with a disability. The production version of the Beeping Cricket Ball now scheduled for completion in February 2022.

Blind Bats Inc has already begun planning to use this innovative technology in various ball sports including Football, Baseball, Hockey and Tag. He believes that most ball sports could be more accessible to the vision impaired by using a beeping ball. Other ball sports such as Netball, Volleyball, Tennis and Golf are on the list to receive this new Beep Ball Technology.

Paul also arranged the purchase of the BAT Bus. This bus, dedicated to provision of safe transport for vision impaired participants to and from events/activities. Blind Bats Inc also designed a version of activities that enabled vision impaired participants to perform at a level more closely to their sighted teammates.



The school of thinking is to lift the capacity of vision impaired participants rather than restricting the capacity of sighted participants (wearing blindfolds). This change to orthodox thinking in Blind Sport alone, created a desire to play with the beeping ball. The desire was so high that it attracted blind people from everywhere, people who were previously concerned that they could not compete with those with better sight. During periods when the prototype beeping ball was unavailable to use, participation of those with no or limited sight dropped off until the beeping ball became available again.



We welcome everyone to join us each Sunday at our 'Come and Try Days.' Join with us in a fun day of Beep Ball Activities or if you prefer, socialise with others in a family friendly atmosphere. Each Sunday we have a free BBQ lunch for all who attend.

For more information about Blind Bats Inc, go to our website at: <https://blindbats.org/>