

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## What is deafblindness?

There are nearly **300,000** Australians currently living with deafblindness - a number that is expected to grow to one million by 2050.

Deafblindness (also called dual sensory loss) is the combination of both hearing and vision impairments. People with deafblindness have varying degrees of combined hearing and vision impairment.

For example, a person may be hard of hearing and totally blind, or profoundly deaf and partially sighted, or have nearly complete loss of both senses.

## What challenges does a person with dual sensory loss face?

Everyone deserves the opportunity to be connected and to participate in the wider community. At Able Australia, our programs and services are aimed at breaking down barriers to create a society that is inclusive of all abilities.

Approximately 90% of the information we receive about the world comes through our vision and hearing. The support required for each deafblind person is highly individualised, depending on the degree of hearing and sight loss and their communication requirements.

A person with deafblindness experiences the world by using residual vision and hearing and/or by using touch (i.e. tactile signing), smell and taste.

A person with deafblindness may experience difficulty connecting with their local community due to mobility challenges, access to information and perhaps most importantly, communicating with others. Professional staff from Able Australia provide specialised support to people with deafblindness in the areas of case management, interpreting, community access, learning, leisure and counselling.

Volunteers, family members and friends of people with deafblindness play a vital role in facilitating participation and access to the wider community.



## Who is Helen Keller?

Helen Keller was a renowned author, political activist and lecturer who was both deaf and blind. Helen was the first deafblind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.

She was born on 27 June in 1880 with full sight and hearing, but an illness at 19 months of age left her without either of those senses.

Despite this, she went on to make tremendous progress with her ability to communicate. Helen is remembered as an advocate for people with disabilities and remains a good example of what people with a disability can achieve when we focus on their ability and enhance their opportunities.

## Who are Able Australia?

Able Australia is one of Australia's leading not-for-profit organisations, delivering high quality, person centred services to people living with multiple disabilities, including deafblindness.

We provide a diverse range of community services, to assist some of the state's most disadvantaged people, such as supported accommodation, respite care, community transport and community support.

From its humble beginnings in 1967 as the Victorian Deaf Blind and Rubella Children's Association, Able Australia has grown into a diverse and dynamic organisation that today, employ more than 500 staff, and are supported by over 300 volunteers. We are passionate about ensuring every person we support is seen, heard, respected, valued and connected.

## How does Able Australia support people with deafblindness?

For nearly 50 years, Able Australia has specialised in the provision of comprehensive support services for people with multiple disabilities, including deafblindness. Our Deafblind Services include:

- Case management - supporting individuals and their families to access advice, information, resources, advocacy, referrals and establish links with the wider community
- Communication skills development - developing communication systems that best suit a person's needs, including basic Auslan signs, deafblind finger spelling, tactile signing, print on palm and Braille
- Community education - raising awareness of the issues surrounding deafblindness within the community and seeking additional funding for improved equipment and services
- Behaviour management - helping people with behaviours of concern to achieve increased independence and greater participation/connection with the wider community
- Counselling - a psychology and support service that enables individuals and those who assist them to work together
- Individual support - support with everyday needs such as shopping, banking, recreational leisure activities or attending appointments, to encourage independence and community inclusion
- Recreation programs - group recreational activities such as BBQs, ten pin bowling, holiday camps, social clubs and more
- Ablelink - digital literacy training which supports people with deafblindness to communicate with the world around them through the use of adaptive technology
- Respite - opportunities for both people with a disability and those who support them to enjoy a break away from each other

If you would like to know more, please call us on **1300 225 369**.

## What is adaptive technology?

Adaptive technology is equipment that is used to modify conventional computers and enable people with deafblindness and dual-sensory impairment to operate them. These include:

- Voice synthesizers that “talk” to people
- Zoom text functionality which enlarges text on screen
- A Braille terminal that translates what is shown on the computer screen through a ‘Braille-output’ display
- Braille symbols are formed on a constantly changing strip (dots) that sits at the base of the keyboard

Ablelink provides people with expert tuition by highly skilled technicians in the use of adaptive technology.

## Why Host an Able Morning Tea?

It’s a fun and easy way to help a great cause and an excellent excuse to get together with your school community.

By hosting an Able Morning Tea during Deafblind Awareness Week, you will help raise awareness and provide vital support services to people living with deafblindness.

It can help others consider what they can do to support people with deafblindness and how to make people with a disability feel more included in the local community.

## What do I do to get involved?

Simply register at [ablemorningtea.com.au](http://ablemorningtea.com.au) or call us on **1300 220 602** and we will send you everything you need to host an Able Morning Tea with your school community. Your morning tea is limited to your imagination whether it be a simple cake stall or a themed morning tea.

## What if I can’t hold my event during Deafblind Awareness Week?

Deafblind Awareness Week runs from 24 to 30 June 2016.

As the last day of term is 24th June, you may prefer to hold your event prior to this, or even when you return from holidays in July.

You will still be able to hold a great event, raise awareness of Deafblindness and make a worthy contribution to Able Australia.

## How can I help spread awareness of deafblindness at my event?

Promote your Able Morning Tea by downloading and displaying the editable poster available from the Able Australia website [www.ableaustralia.com.au](http://www.ableaustralia.com.au).

While you are there, print out or photocopy any other resources you need for your Deafblind Morning Tea, including Deafblind Bingo, the Auslan alphabet and this fact sheet.

An Able Morning Tea is a fun way to consider some of the daily challenges that people with deafblindness face.

You could also start your Able Morning Tea by explaining what deafblindness is and why you have organised this event

Most importantly have fun! You are making a very real difference to people in our community who would otherwise be isolated!

## How can I help spread awareness on social media?

- Follow Able Australia on Facebook or Twitter (@AbleAus)
- Share some photos of your Able Morning Tea using #ablemorningtea

