

## THE INSPIRING JOURNEY OF PETER DHU – FROM ELECTIVE MUTE TO NATIONAL SPOKESPERSON FOR PEOPLE WHO STUTTER

Story: Dion Bromilow



A chronic stutterer from an early age, the unassuming Peter Dhu tells his remarkably inspiring story with a matter-of-factness that belies his years of torment and pain.

At one period in his early adult life, from the ages of 17 to 20, he felt so ashamed of his inability to speak that he became an elective mute, communicating only with pen and paper.

Today, Peter has overcome his stutter and moved on to enjoy a full and rewarding professional and community life as Manager of DonateWest, a division of the Health Department of Western Australia, and National President of the Australian Speak Easy Association.

And next February Peter will welcome some 400 delegates from around the world to the Seventh World Congress for People Who Stutter.

Recalling his boyhood and teenage years, Peter says: "I have stuttered all my life and still do. As a school age kid I was teased regularly.

"In my first job I was put in the back room with no client contact and regularly denied promotion because of my stutter. This was the last straw and at the age of 23 I decided to work on my stutter and undertook intensive speech therapy.

"Since then it has been 20 years of hard work, lots of practice and plenty of ups and downs. Even now, I have to work hard trying not to stutter, trying not to slip up, trying not to make a mistake for to stutter would bring shame, humiliation and embarrassment."

So it might come as a surprise that Peter would put himself in an environment where he needs to make speeches and be the public face of the national body that represents people with his disability.

But not only did Peter take on the challenging role of National President of the Australian Speak Easy Association, he sought to make an impact on the international stage.

And he found a receptive ear at the Perth Convention Bureau when in 1999 he first proposed that the WA Speak Easy Association bid to host the 2004 National Stuttering Conference.

Then, having won the right to host the national conference, the opportunity to bid for world congress presented itself.

At the same time Peter applied for and won a Perth Convention Bureau scholarship to enable him to travel overseas in August 2000 to attend an International Fluency Conference in Denmark.

There he observed what was necessary to run a successful world conference and returned even more determined to secure the 2004 World Congress for People Who Stutter.

He says: "Armed with all the strategic information and with a renewed confidence, we set about putting the bid together. Once again, we could not have done this without the guidance and resources of the Perth Convention Bureau."

The following year, in 2001, he and three other local committee members of the WA Speak Easy association headed off to Belgium with their bid documents, posters, videos and a PowerPoint presentation.

Peter says proudly: "We won. The bid was highly acclaimed and is now considered the benchmark for all future bids."

He says hosting the world congress in Perth will help to showcase the excellent work which is being undertaken here to assist people who stutter. "We have a very strong and vibrant self-help movement here which provides great support for people who stutter and their families," says Peter.

"Australia has one of the best speech pathology programs in the world and we felt it was time to bring the congress Down Under.

"I have to say that organising the congress is proving to be very hard work – it's like having a second job. But it's also a very exciting and rewarding experience."

While Peter gives a lot of credit to the Bureau for the successful bid, the Bureau in turn considers him to be a champion ambassador for Western Australia.

It's a relationship built on mutual admiration. Says the Bureau's Director of Sales and Marketing, Jill Henry: "Working with Peter and his team has been a great inspiration to all of us in the Bureau.

"He is a most deserving winner of our scholarship program which aims to assist local executives with non-profit organisation to bid to bring their international conferences to Western Australia.

"Peter was determined to win the World Congress for People Who Stutter and all the research, preparation and persistence paid off."

The Bureau is constantly on the look-out for other 'local host champions' like Peter. It offers a wide range of resources, from cash and in-kind assistance to the production of professionally produced bid documents, promotional literature, venue and accommodation assistance and site inspections for visiting national and international colleagues.

Adds Jill: "We provide professional marketing intelligence, industry expertise and effective support to make your event memorable."

For more information about how the Bureau can assist your organisation in bidding to host your national or international association colleagues in Perth, please contact:

Perth Convention Bureau

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