

HERBERT SMITH FREEHILLS CELEBRATES AND ACKNOWLEDGES INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

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News

To celebrate the International Day of People with Disability on 3 December, we spoke with Daryl Glenn from our Sydney office and Calvin Shaw from Dubai about their experiences within the firm and the Ability Network.

Hi, I'm Daryl Glenn and I have worked with the firm for 18 years in the Sydney print room. Outside of work I really enjoy chess, reading, watching movies & television with subtitles.

I have had severe hearing loss since I was 18 months of age because of German Measles. Over time technology has changed and I now wear modern digital hearing aids from Switzerland. It has also become easier to communicate because of computers.

There are some difficulties I face day to day because of my hearing loss, including not hearing public media/announcements, such as in shopping centres, or fire drill evacuations in the building. However, at home I can hear the tiny sounds of the smoke alarm every 5 minutes, which needs a new battery!

People make all sorts of assumptions about hearing loss, including that we use sign language like Auslan all the time, whereas not everyone does. At school I was taught one-on-one with a lip-reading teacher, but I can also sign in Auslan with some people. However my family don't sign so I communicate with them by speaking clearly and lip reading.

"If I had to give some tips to people about how best to communicate with me, I would say to please speak clearly, not too quickly, and don't cover your mouth or look to the ground. If I don't understand everything the first time, it helps for people to write it down or type. Sometimes people mistakenly repeat what they're saying in a louder voice - but that doesn't help!"

I'm pleased the firm is celebrating and acknowledging the International Day of People with a Disability. My message for the day would be - you are not your disability. We are all individuals and it is wonderful to be recognised and supported in my working life.

Hi, my name is Calvin Shaw. I have been with the firm for 7 years, initially at the firm's Sydney office and now at the firm's Dubai office.

I have profound hearing loss since I was very young and wear a cochlear implant. As an aside, I should mention that the cochlear implant is a (great) Australian invention!

The cochlear implant helps a lot but, at least for me in relation to speech, needs to be used in conjunction with visual cues (such as lip reading). There are still some practical difficulties that I encounter - for example, when a person is not facing me it is difficult to understand them. It is almost impossible for me to do telephone calls (other than with someone I know very very well, like my wife) as there are no visual cues. However, over the years, and with the development of new technology, I have been able to access human speech more and more. To be a little bit cheeky, the great thing about technology is that where other people's hearing might naturally decline due to age, mine might improve! ;)

It's important that people are aware of disabilities. I've been able to request adjustments (for example, secretarial assistance during teleconferences and live captioning of internal training). However, for various reasons it may not always be possible, or easy, to speak up to request these adjustments. This is why sometimes an organisation like the Australian Ability Network or a day like the International Day of People with Disability is important to raise awareness on a platform, rather than individual, level where benefits might be able to be shared broadly.

"To give you an example of how this has occurred within our firm, recently the Australian Ability Network has helped to ensure that our CEO Mark Rigotti's monthly video updates now come with transcripts which are accessible on the same webpage as the video content - to the credit of all who were involved in making this possible."

To give yet another example of how and why awareness and networks are important, the firm recently delivered some e-learning about unconscious biases. The e-learning was produced jointly by our firm and another service provider. The video content produced by the other service provider did not have transcripts available, so another individual within the firm wrote to our Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Danielle Kelly, asking for subtitles or a transcript to be available. Danielle then worked with our Document Production team to prepare transcripts of the videos and shared through the network (including to me) which I thought was a great way to embody not only the themes of the e-learning course but also demonstrate the importance of awareness and networks!