

## **DbI Conference in Romania a Spectacular Success!**

On behalf of the DbI Management Committee, congratulations to the members of the local planning committee headed by James Thornberry (Sense International-UK) and Cristiana Salomie (Sense International (Romania) and the Scientific Committee, chaired by Tony Best (UK) for the exceptional staging of the 16<sup>th</sup> DbI World Conference, held in the spectacular of the JW Marriott Grand Hotel, in Bucharest, Romania, May 25-30, 2015.

The conference got off to a welcoming beginning the evening of May 25, with brief words from DbI President Gill Morbey, Scientific Committee Chair Tony Best and Sense International (Romania) hostess Christiana Salomie. Their brief words were followed by welcome cocktails and finger foods to enrich the evening's collaboration.

### **Day One (May 26)**

The Official Opening ceremony on Tuesday morning, featured welcoming addresses from Gill Morbey (President of DbI and CEO of Sense International), Cristiana Salomie (Sense International-Romania), Sunil Sheth (Chairman, Sense International), Liliana Preoteasa (Romanian Minister of Education) and Doru Vlad Popovic (Director of Special Education, Univesity of Bucharest).

This was followed by a theatrical performance from 'GOT 2 Act', a group of young performers, based in Cornwall, UK, who are deafblind . They were joined on stage by three young performers with deafblindness who attend a special school for children with hearing impairments in Bucharest. The performance was an account of the early years of Helen Keller, the famous deafblind activist.

The first plenary of the Opening Day featured an introduction to the conference theme (Local Solutions to Common Needs) from Tony Best. This was followed by an inspirational presentation from Vasile Adamescu, a deafblind educator, author and sculpter who outlined his many achievements along the way overcoming his challenges with deafblindness in Romania.

### **Day Two (May 27)**

The title of the Plenary Session on Day Two was Education and Learning. The session, moderated by Carolyn Monaco (Canadian Deafblind Association), featured a key note address from Dave Power, CEO and President of Perkins School for the Blind (USA). Dave's powerful presentation provided commentary on how organizations change over time and how they need to keep re-evaluating their activities to remain viable if they are to properly deliver services in the long term. Plenary respondents included Marianna Riggio (Perkins School for the Blind) who spoke about Perkins International activities; Dmitry Polikanov (Russia) describing the activities of their recently formed organization

(Deaf-Blind Support Fund), and Linda Eriksson (Sweden) who outlined the various educational options for individuals with sensory impairment in her country.

### **Day Three (May 28)**

The title of Day Three's Plenary Session was Identity and Belonging, an emotional session exploring the concept of personal identity and how people with deafblindness develop their self-concept and become part of their community.

This session, moderated by Sonja van de Molengraft (Netherlands), featured the dynamic key note speaker Dr. Suzanne Zeedyk from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. Suzanne's presentation explored the significance of human being's personal connections and their importance in human functioning. A few phrases from her message were: Humans are born in relationships; our brains are shaped by human connections; identity is not individual – it is relational; the way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice-their identity, etc.

Plenary respondents to Suzanne's message were Dr. Paul Hart (Sense Scotland), Chris Woodfill (Associate Executive Director from Helen Keller National Centre – USA and North American Representative on the World Federation of the Deafblind), Isabel Amaral (Portugal) and Akiko Fukuda (Japan and Secretary General of WFDB).

Following the morning plenary, Dbl made special award presentations for Life Time Achievement, Distinguished Service and Young Professional Achievement; while Perkins presented their prestigious Anne Sullivan awards

The last half of Day 3 was given over to the Dbl Networks, the special interest groups that bring colleagues together with similar interests and concerns. The first part of this session featured the nine Network leaders on stage outlining a brief description of their respective networks: Dr. Marleen Janssen & Dr. Paul Hart (Communications), Liz Duncan (Acquired Deafblindness Network or ADBN), Joff McGill (Rubella), Dr. Walter Wittich (Research), Dr. Joe Gibson (Outdoor), Dr. Nadja Hogner (Usher Syndrome), Ricard Lopez (European Deafblind Network or EDBU) and Dr. Andrea Wanka (CHARGE).

Following this brief introduction, conference delegates participated in their member Networks and/or chose to become new members of Networks.

In the evening following the sessions, conference participants streamed to the Crystal Palace Ballroom for the Gala Dinner which featured an incredible five course dinner, entertainment from students attending Sfanta Maria Special School for Children with Hearing Impairment and Ion Creanga National College, and dancing into the early hours.

## Day Four (May 29)

The last day of the conference included a Plenary Session, a Round Table Discussion, , several special announcements about upcoming conferences and the Official Closing Ceremony.

- The last plenary of the conference was titled Advocacy and Recognition. The session featured key note speaker Lars Bosselman (Belgium) describing advocacy and how it can be effective in campaigning for services. Respondents to Lars' presentation were Ricardo Zevallos (Sense International, Peru) and Cristiana Salomie (Sense International, Romania). Ricardo spoke about the effectiveness of their advocacy to put deafblindness into Peruvian law; while Cristiana spoke about their Romanian advocacy successes which included having deafblindness recognizing in Romanian law, achieving special consideration for deafblindness education in Romania, among other positive initiatives.
- Dennis Lolli (Perkins School for the Blind - USA) moderated a thought provoking round table discussion titled: What is our future? The round table featured Dmitry Parapanov (Russia), Siriporn Tantaopas (Thailand) and Andrea Hathazi (Romania).
- Lars Søybe, from The Danish Centre for Deafblindness and Hearing Loss<sup>1</sup> , gave out the latest information about the 9<sup>th</sup> Dbl European Conference will be held in Aalborg, Denmark, September 5-8, 2017. For more information check out the conference website [www.dbi2017denmark.com](http://www.dbi2017denmark.com)
- Gill Morbey, President of Dbl, announced that the 17<sup>th</sup> Dbl World Conference was awarded to Able Australia<sup>2</sup> and scheduled to be held on the Gold Coast of Australia in 2019.
- Gill officially closed the conference with a few closing remarks which included the following quotes:  
'I don't feel as isolated now'; 'we don't want our past into the future but rather our future into our present'; 'I thought I was an alien but then I realised there were other people on the planet with me'.

### General conference statistics:

According to conference organizers, just under 400 individuals registered for the conference, representing 51 countries. The majority of those registered came from Europe and North America, with the largest number (36) coming from the Netherlands. Dbl was pleased that 41 people came from Eastern Europe, the largest ever from that region. .Other participants travelled from as far afield as Japan and Argentina, with a significant number from Asia, Africa, Australia and South America.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.dbc.n.dk](http://www.dbc.n.dk). The Danish Centre is a small corporate member of Dbl.

<sup>2</sup> [www.ableaustralia.org.au](http://www.ableaustralia.org.au). Able Australia is a large corporate member of Dbl.

In addition to the plenary sessions mentioned previously in this report, there were 98 workshops presented and 30 poster presentations over the full four days of the conference.

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