ATQ conference report

By Trina Phuah, in collaboration with Natasha Layton and Rachael Schmidt.

The Assistive Technology Queensland Conference and Exhibition was held in Brisbane from November 8-10th. ARATA was well represented, with a number of general members in attendance alongside ARATA President, Natasha Layton, and Board members Sue Lord, Rachael Schmidt and Secretary, Trina Phuah.

The conference theme of *Using Assistive Technology to Participate*, was reinforced by all of the keynote speakers. Christopher Hills and his father, Garry, spoke of the opportunities accessible computing has provided. If you’re not familiar with Christopher’s work, find out more over on his YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/icdhills. Karni Liddell is a successful Paralympian who shared her experiences and perspectives on inclusion and the importance of language. Watch a recent interview with Karni here: https://youtu.be/TUrdh0Y4MOM. Emma Weatherley questioned why there is often a negative view of mobility aids. Although she initially held this view, Emma’s own experience has shown that mobility aids are not defeating or limiting or confining. For Emma, using a mobility aid is not failing - it can provide endless opportunities, which has included the ability to travel to Disneyland with her family. See a presentation by Emma here: https://youtu.be/MUTBXoPFLzQ. Matthew Ames was the final keynote presenter. As a quadruple amputee, Matthew explained that he requires technology to participate in all aspects of his life. Key principles of assistive technology provision were reflected in Matthew’s take-home messages which were: Find the fastest, easiest way to do things; have a backup; and focus on aspirations, not the technology. See more about Matthew on his website.

Lloyd Walker, the NDIA Director of Assistive Technology, discussed the process of assistive technology for NDIS participants and service providers. He also launched a new Provider Toolkit - important information if you're working with the NDIS: https://provider-toolkit.ndis.gov.au. ARATA Board members Rachael Schmidt and Trina Phuah presented an overview of ARATA national and international activities, resources and membership benefits. Rachael also presented an update on the ARATA credentialing project, as well as her work on three clinical tools to support wheelchair provision, which is an expansion of her PhD and post-doctoral research.

ARATA President Natasha Layton took to the 'See it Live' stage and introduced resources from the WHO GATE Summit. These are linked on our website: http://www.arata.org.au/education-resources/at-training-development/. Natasha also represented ARATA on a panel discussion about ‘Choice, control and growth in the AT sector’, alongside John Vasey (MASS), David Sinclair (ATSA) and a private provider from Townsville. The panel discussed issues of practice governance and sector strengthening activities such as standards and guidelines, questioning whose task is this when block funding is withdrawn.

The conference was a great opportunity to share ARATA’s work, connect with peers and find out more about developments in the assistive technology sector. Keep an eye on the ATQ conference website as there were plans to make the presentations available soon. You can also see some highlights from the @ARATA_Inc conference tweets here: https://storify.com/ARATA_Inc/atq-brisbane-2017. Congratulations to all involved in the conference, particularly co-convenors Bridget Manning and Stephen Hales.