

ADAM JAMES RECEIVES THE 'PENTLAND AND BANFIELD' AWARD FOR SELF ADVOCACY

HAVING A SAY CONFERENCE 2019

Having a Say conference is held every year hosted by VALiD (Victorian Advocacy League for individuals with Disability). The Having a Say conference is the largest conference for people with disabilities within Australia where people can use their voice, to speak up, to be heard and to be respected. The first conference was held in 2000 with 190 attendees. This year the Having a Say conference celebrated its 20th conference with a 1000 attendees in Geelong, Victoria.

Each year at the Having a Say Conference, Deakin University presents the 'Pentland & Banfield' award to a self advocate who is recognised as a leader in self advocacy. The award is named after the late Doug Pentland and David Benfield, two founding members of Reinforce self advocacy group who were tireless advocates for the rights of people with an intellectual disability. It is always with great pleasure that I present this award as I knew Doug well and had many opportunities to see his advocacy in action. I also knew David well and had the opportunity to work alongside him when studying the history of self advocacy. Their strengths and skills as self advocates were many and included the courage to speak out, a commitment to the rights of people with disabilities and a sense of camaraderie with their peers. We use these qualities to guide us when making this award.

In 2019, the award went to Adam James. In the photo you can see the moment when Adam receives this award. Adam has been a self advocate associated with VALiD for around 10 years, he is a member of the Eastern network and is invited often to work on advisory groups, research groups and to attend other forums where he represents issues impacting on the lives of people with an intellectual disability. I first met him at one of these forums almost ten years ago when I was researching individualised funding. Adam's enthusiasm for having a say was strong then and is perhaps even stronger now.



A feature at the 2019 Having a Say conference was the Trace podcast 'Who killed Maria James?' www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/trace/, where Adam, his brother Mark and journalist Rachael Brown talked about the story of Adam's mother's murder and Adam's experiences of abuse that are at the centre of this story. This is a 'must listen' for all people who are committed to justice for victims of violence and abuse, for the fight that needs to continue for people with an intellectual disability to be given their right to justice, and to be supported to be a part of the justice process. It is also an incredible personal story of two brothers supporting each other through this ordeal, to get justice for their mother, for Adam and for their family. You can watch Adam and his brother talking about this on the VALID you tube 'Standing by my brother' www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8ZytHfOeN4.

Adam dedicated his award to the memory of his mother and his father who he said he wished were there to see him receive it, knowing they would be very proud. He also acknowledged the support of his brother and the people who work beside Adam so he can have a full and meaningful life continuing to be a strong self advocate and 'a happy man'. Adam has an infectious personality, he never forgets anyone who he has met. Adam is a person who remembers people and experiences that matter to him and we at Deakin University hope he sees this award as an important recognition of who he is and what he contributes to our society, and remembers it as one of his good experiences.

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