



# The Torch



Edition #25

## Professional Speakers Association Recognises Speakers with Disabilities

Two professional speakers with disabilities were recognised at last month's annual conference of the Professional Speakers Association of Southern Africa.

Motivational speaker Nicky Abdinor, who has spoken at events globally, was recognised with the prestigious Speaker Hall of Fame award for 2022. This award is presented to professional members of the association who have delivered excellence over a period of years speaking to diverse audiences as a keynote presenter. And Nicky certainly has done that in her many local, national and global speaking appearances.

As an aside, Nicky was the first person I knew of who presented internationally online, way back in the 2010's.



Disability advocate Nick Smit was awarded first place in the annual Speaker Factor contest, where he competed against the top associate level speakers from the PSASA chapters across South Africa. Nick's speech, called D.A.N.C.E Your Destiny was well received by both judges and audience.

Nick, also known as the Rebel Ninja, is a passionate disability advocate and teacher and his company Smergos is active in promoting disability awareness and inclusion.

Another link between Nicky and Nick is that they have both been guests on my A Different Way of Seeing podcast, back when I was focusing primarily on accessible travel.



I featured Nicky Abdinor back in January 2019, on episode 05 of the podcast, and Nick and his wife were my guests on episode 50.

You can find those episodes, as well as my full library of past shows, [here](#)

If you're looking for a fantastic speaker for your next event, you can't go wrong with either Nicky Abdinor or Nick Smit. Here's where you can find out more.

Nicky Abdinor: [here](#)

Nick Smit: [here](#)

Source: [Professional Speakers Association Recognises Speakers with Disabilities | Lois Strachan](#)

## Inaccessibility of railway system for disabled persons highlighted in user test



Members and supporters of the Western Cape Network on Disability assist a wheelchair user to disembark Prasa's blue train.

Cape Town - Western Cape Network on Disability (WCND) members gathered to commute by train to highlight just how inaccessible the service – and public transport in general – is for persons living with a disability.

On Friday, wheelchair users and visually impaired persons with guide dogs, took Prasa's blue Electrical Multiple Unit (EMU) train from Cape Town station to Retreat and back.

Wheelchair users were able to embark through the use of their own portable ramp, highlighting an access stumbling block.

Disembarking proved more challenging, though, and several adjustments needed to be made to the ramp.

Jeremy Opperman first took a train at the age of 11 in 1974 and has been using it as a primary mode of transport ever since.

“As a blind person, we can’t easily identify what station we’re at. Even if you have been catching a train for as long as I have, you’re going to make a mistake every now and then.”

The on-board driver-commuter communication system was welcomed and had been requested for many years, Opperman said. However, it did not help those with a physical disability. In terms of enhancing accessibility, so few changes have been made that it's negligible, Opperman said.

“The work that needs to be done is not on the trains, as much as on the platforms. There’s work needed on the existing stations and Metrorail and Prasa need to make the effort, track each station, see what needs to be done, see what can be done, budget for it, plan it and do it. But there has been no strategic approach to addressing the access issues at all.”

WCND vice-chairperson Michelle Botha has been visually impaired since birth and was a regular train commuter.

“I stopped taking trains about five or six years ago because I started experiencing that the anxiety of actually commuting by train as a disabled person with overcrowding, lack of access, the unreliability of the train service – the anxiety of doing that – just outweighed the benefits, so I started paying a lot more to use e-hailing services.”

WCND chairperson and wheelchair user Anthony Ghillino hasn't been able to use a train for 30 years following his motor vehicle accident.

“We can fight and advocate for employment, education – all sorts of very important things – but if you can't get there, then our hands are tied. We acknowledge that it's not an overnight fix, just that all infrastructure improvement/upgrades need to be done on the basis of universal design.”

Prasa could not be reached for a comment before going to print.

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Source: [IOL News](#)

South African Library For The Blind Communique



The South African Library for the Blind (SALB) is committed to

creating access for the blind and visually impaired members and wishes to stand in solidarity with Blind SA and Section 27 as they work to End the Book famine for those living with blindness and visual impairment. In this landmark case, it is our hope that the Constitutional Court will confirm that the copyright law as it stands is unconstitutional and in so doing allow reforms that will end the book famine for those living with blindness and print disabilities. [#EndTheBookFamine].

After 9 years of negotiations with The Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC) and the National Public Works Department (NDPW) the plans for the upgrade of the existing SALB building and the addition of a new double story building began when the site was handed over on the 30th of April 2021 to Siviwe Jayiya Construction (SVJ). Good progress has been made thus far and the anticipation is to have work completed by April 2023.

The SALB website is still up and running and boasts the following features namely, Online member registration, user friendly functionality for the blind people, SALB OPAC and VIOPAC (with features of streaming and book downloading), and Overdrive. All audio books can be downloaded or streamed from the SALB website ([www.salb.org.za](http://www.salb.org.za)) and the application promptly updates the Aurora Library Management System to make changes on the member profile.

As of February 2022, SALB members have access to PressReader, which is now available on the SALB website! PressReader is a digital newspaper boasting digital versions of over 7 000 newspapers and magazines in more than 60 languages. This is done through its applications for iOS, Android, Windows, Mac and various e-readers as well as its website, and operates digital editions of newspapers and magazines for publishers. All of this at no cost to the member.

New audio and braille titles have been added to the catalogue recently, new members joined the library, and roll out of new mini libraries is continuing across South Africa.

SALB would also like to announce the rollout of the Megavoice Envoy Connect device, which is currently being distributed to all new members joining the library. After extensive testing was done over the past years with pilot member feedback and modification to the playback device. This is in attempt at combating the negative impact of the South African Post Office (SAPO) challenges on our book distribution/circulation to our members.

The SALB is embarking on a rollout of mobile/developed recording studio/booths with key strategic partners to gain access to indigenous language narration. So far two recording studios are up and running; Eastern Cape and Northern Cape with Mpumalanga being launched soon. More of these recording studios will be implemented in other provinces.

Library Management remains committed to doing everything within its control to limit the impacts on service delivery. More than ever, the challenge before us is for all librarians to be in the forefront of information dissemination to ensure that the damage done by the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges are overcome, one community at a time until we cover the entire continent.

Source: [SA Library For The Blind](#)



## Beneficiary News

### Happy Birthday



Zuko celebrated his 50th birthday in May. The staff and directors of St Dunstan's wishes you everything bright and beautiful for the future.

### WP rugby for Francois

Francois Wessels has recently been selected for the Western Province u/13 Craven week rugby squad and is set to play in the 2022 Craven week in Krugersdorp.



This followed after Francois played in six trial matches, each match more intense than its predecessor. Francois's dad, blind veteran Don Wessels, says that, immediately after his computer's JAWS voice read out the WhatsApp text announcing the splendid news of Francois's selection, he shouted out loud 'Thank you Lord'!

Given that there were more than 2500 players to choose from, as well as unknowns and challenges such as injuries, Don says some of the Bible texts he held fast to during the month of trials were: 'He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.' (Ps 18:33), 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness' (2 Cor 12:9), and 'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies' (Ps23:5B).

Francois (12), playing loosehead prop, weighs a hefty 71kg and stands 1.8m in his socks. He is a grade 7 learner at Beaumont primary in Somerset West, where he earlier in 2022, received gold medals for javelin and discus, as well as bronze for shotput. Francois also received the Beaumont Academic Achievement Award in 2021.

The Wessels family was further blessed in that elder brother, Mateo, received Winelands u/15 tennis colours earlier in 2022. Not to be outdone, youngest brother, Gido, received 100% in two of his 2021 end of year school exams, as well as receiving a medal for baseball. After years of late-night- and early morning study, mum Maatje received a Master's degree in Health Innovation Cum Laude from UCT at the end of 2021, equalling hubby's Master's degree in International Politics which he received years ago.

The Wessels family thanks St Dunstan's for their valued monetary- and other support over the years, without which these achievements would have been hard come by. Above all, they praise and thank God Almighty.

## Award received from Blind SA



St Dunstan's was honoured with an award from Blind SA. We would like to extend a thank you and word of appreciation to Blind SA for the award: In recognition of meritorious and distinguished services to persons who are blind and partially sighted.

## John and Esther Ellerman and Ian Fraser Memorial Trusts



Below is a short introduction to our 2 trusts:

### The John and Esther Ellerman Trust

**Vision:**

To have mobility training available to all blind people in South Africa enabling the trainees to be integrated into their community and the sighted world at large, and open doors to job opportunities.

**Mission:**

To assist organisations of and for the blind, which are based throughout the country, in both city and rural areas to provide training which is adapted to suit the needs and locality of trainees. The assistance is in the form of a – subsidy enabling organisations to employ Orientation and Mobility Practitioners.

## The Ian Fraser Memorial Bursary Fund

### **Vision:**

To provide bursaries to blind and visually impaired persons enabling them to attend a FET or tertiary institutions of education.

### **Mission:**

Assisting blind and visually impaired people financially enables them to further their studies.

Please visit our website, [www.stdunstans.org.za](http://www.stdunstans.org.za) to learn more.

To reach our goal, we will need a database of those who support this cause. We would greatly appreciate it if you could sign up for our Trusts Newsletter to keep you updated on all new developments and exciting news. You may use this link to sign up: [here](#)

Please also follow us on social media here: [here](#)

If it is not too much to ask, please share with friends and family, thank you.