**Personal reflections from Amanda Stevens, Executive Officer Deaflind Association**

These are some of the magic moments that lifted my heart and reminded me, if I needed reminding, why I get up in the morning and do this mahi.

* Phil with one hand on the piano and one on the cello while Kathryn and Ellen played ‘Wing Beneath My Wings’ for Don.
* Being freely, wisely, honourably, and lovingly gifted cultural understanding around Te Ao Māori which helped me feel more connected to our Iwi delegates.
* Sali taking a photo of the roses in the dawn light to send to my man while we drank coffee and listened to the dawn chorus.
* Relaxing in the spacious and welcoming common room with a peg loom on my lap and introducing people to crafts and chatting and just hanging out.
* Gifting the crafts so many of us had contributed to, to Board Members at the end to thank them.
* Over months, sewing flowers in our logo colours out of all different materials and Sarah’s sister, Caro, arranging them with fresh greenery for table decorations and then afterwards distributing them to people who asked to take them home and to a day care facility for Intellectually Disabled people who reported back much appreciation at the tactile nature of the flowers.
* Being asked if I wanted my fresh fruit soft-whipped icecream in a tub or a cone and saying both so I got the icecream in the tub with the cone upside down on top like a witch’s hat.
* Eating vegetarian food like I had never had it so good!
* Tracing my fingers over the tactile 3D model of the site and buildings the architects, Warren & Mahoney, made for us only the week before to show their Grade One Listed Building we were privileged to be in. A plaque in the foyer announces “New Zealand Institute of Architects 25 Year Award”.
* Sarah and I consciously taking time to check in on each other’s wellbeing everyday.
* Being present in the grace and authenticity of Blanche as she presented and Fatima as she thanked her.
* The Guide Dog Teams being photographed in the award-winning, flowered courtyard.
* The awesome and inspiring screening of performance by multi-cultural disabled performers from Touch Compass, video-supported by Audio Described Aotearoa.
* Being in the presence of children as our whānau and knowing they were playing tennis and making friends.
* Being surrounded every day by a volunteer team who exuded warmth, practicality, enthusiasm, empathy, and an unquenchable desire to learn.
* Beautiful music floating through the venue from the player at the baby grand piano in the foyer.
* Brian on the electronic accordian and being able to touch it so I knew what it was.
* The ukulele jam! (Did you know they only have four strings and I had them mixed up with a banjo?)
* Living with braille in action – gift tags, programmes, thank you cards, and food cabinet.
* Having my fingers nibbled by Jagger.
* Sali and I drinking Sublime coffee made in my cafetière at 6am every morning and planning the day unfolding for best outcomes while listening to people out in the beautiful grounds with their dogs.
* Catching up with old friends.
* Making new friends.
* Listening to people’s aspirations beyond the challenges.
* Hearing some inspiring presenters from whom I learned so very much and some authentic and graceful thank you speeches based in lived experience in response.
* My heart touched by a twang once again of yearning to learn more tactile communication including social haptics.
* Being able to thank publicly four very special women who stepped forward during the planning of this seminar and offered me their knowledge, skills, wisdom, in some cases their families, and especially their individual passion which drives their work and they asked me to use it wisely – Sarah for her love of people and her logistics, Chandra for her photography and social media skills delivered with such verve, Charlotte for her support in everything sound including equipment, knowledge, connecting every individual in, and generosity of time to fly down from Auckland, and Sali, beloved friend who crafted with me for months in advance, held me upright for four days and nights, and agreed to lead the volunteers.
* The warmth, generosity, and engagement with our community’s needs Shirolee and Raylene from College House showed from the first visit to the last hurrah. They put tape across the sneeze guard at the food counter so we wouldn’t bump our heads, put braille on the food cabinets, made sure house keeping left everything exactly where they found it even when it appeared counterintuitive to them, supplied a doggy-do bin, supported our needs around a few very heavy fire doors, and goodness knows what else we didn’t know about behind the scenes. In my utopia inclusion would start at College House and radiate right across the motu!
* We printed off bright yellow dog bones with the name of the dog in print on one side and Braille on the other so people could hold their bone up if they needed support with their guide dog. Then, one of the dogs ate their bone, much to everyone’s amusement!