

Conference Reviews: Orange conference...

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“Celebrating Diversity, Moving Forward Together”, was the theme for this year’s Special Education Conference held in Orange on 29th April 2013, and proved to be very popular with approximately 280 staff attending from the Western Education Region of NSW. The conference proved so popular again, that places filled quickly. The conference appealed to a range of Special Educators, School Counsellors, Support Learning Officers and Teachers across the Western region.

We started the day with the Key note speaker, Brian Smyth King the Executive Director, Learning and Engagement, NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC). He provided an interesting keynote, “Personalising learning and support to respond to student diversity”, consistent with the conference theme.

Participants enjoyed 3 different workshops with a choice of 15 different sessions. Some workshops were ‘sold out’ before the conference began. Workshops included a broad range of topics including some very

interesting and practical sessions such as;

- Behaviour and Mental Health
- Headstrong; The Creative Way of thinking, talking and teaching about mood disorders, mental health and resilience.
- Sometimes the classroom hurts- Investigating the sensory environment.
- Risk Management; Re-thinking escalation and crisis in a school context.
- Positive Psychology in the Classroom.
- Community Engagement and Kinship Systems in Aboriginal Communities.
- Grief and Loss for Children
- KidsMatter
- The Australian Curriculum Life Skills and Builder program.
- Adjustments for students.
- Personalising your 21st century.
- Disability Legislation.

We were very fortunate to have fantastic local guest speakers attend the conference, as well as speakers from the Black Dog Institute, Redbank School, ADHC State wide Behaviour Intervention Service,

KidsMatter, Rural & remote Distance Education Unit. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to catch up and network with colleagues during the breaks and browse the range of trade displays available. Displays were available from services and programs such as the National Disability Services, Friends, Headspace, Kidsmatter, Child & Adolescent Mental Health, School-Link (local and CHW), and so on.

The highlight for many at the conference was the final, very insightful keynote address from a young student, and his father. TJ has high functioning autism and has experienced a range of educational settings. TJ’s dad advocates effectively for so many children with autism, their parents and carers in the area. TJ provided a very insightful and articulate presentation about his experiences at school, and strategies he has found helpful. He so confidently and honestly spoke about his experiences and responded to many comments and questions from the audience.

Access to a number of the presentations is available at: <http://rde.nsw.edu.au/celebrating-diversity>

