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Special Edition April 2014

Fundraising Event Celebrating Our New Patrons!

Touching Base welcomed 66 honoured and special guests, friends and colleagues alike to our most ambitious event so far, at a fundraising launch at the Sebel Surry Hills. We were a little surprised to arrive on the day to find the hotel had changed its name without telling us but fortunately everyone avoided being confused by their new name, Rydges Central Sydney, and found their way.

First we would like to acknowledge the very generous sponsorship of this event by the Cerebral Palsy Alliance NSW.



Cerebral Palsy
ALLIANCE

Formerly known as The Spastic Centre

This is an organisation that is clearly placing person centered care at the centre of its philosophies and in the way it supports the needs of its clients, including now having a very progressive policy around supporting their clients to access sex workers.



Photo by Belinda Mason

We are very thankful of the long relationship we have had with the Cerebral Palsy Alliance NSW and guests gave a great round of applause to Liz Foy and Natalie Morton, who were representing the Cerebral Palsy Alliance.

Here's a photo of Eva Cox about to sit at her table next to Liz Foy and Murray Loudon - along with Iris Loudon, and Elaine Manitta.

We were very lucky to have the renowned photographer **Belinda Mason** as our Official Photographer, along with other guests who were using their mobile phones to send live pictures via [FaceBook](https://www.facebook.com) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com). Do check them out

After the formal welcomes, our President Saul Isbister introduced our new Patrons as we presented them with special plaques and bunches of beautiful native Australian flowers (kindly donated by **The Flower Room**, Newtown).



Photo by Rachel Wotton

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG, even though supposedly retired, is still a hectically busy man, especially due to his recent work as the chair of the UN Human Rights Committee reporting into human rights violations in North Korea.

This work sadly dragged him away from us on the day. Touching Base can't trump a summons from the UN Security Council, but Michael Kirby kindly found time to pre-record his Keynote Address at his chambers, so he could share his thoughts with us on this special occasion.



Photo by Matthew Bowden

In his speech, Michael Kirby draws upon his experiences as Australia's longest serving High Court Judge and as a gay man, to talk about the similarities he can see in the way discrimination and stigma impact on people at a deeply personal level. Michael is also optimistic when he describes the path of sex worker rights as reflecting the progressive nature of law reform for gays and lesbians around the world. Here is a link to his speech on our Vimeo video channel:

<https://vimeo.com/91731379>

Our next Patron to welcome on board was Eva Cox AO. Eva is well known as an unabashed feminist and passionately promotes inclusive, diverse and equitable ways of living together. Eva supervised one of her students to conduct our first research project in 2002. This was a ground breaking look into the attitudes of disability service providers around supporting access to sex workers. Ever since then Eva has been a solid supporter of Touching Base and we look forward to working closely together into the future.



Photo by Belinda Mason



Photo by Belinda Mason

We had such a tight schedule that we could only have one Keynote Speaker; however each of our Patrons who were present were inspired to seize an opportunity to say a few words. We will be uploading short film clips of spontaneous speeches by Eva Cox, Helen Meekosha and Peter Woods to our Vimeo channel soon.

The next Patron to be introduced was Helen Meekosha - an Associate Professor in the School of Social Science at the University of New South Wales. We first met Helen at our fundraising screening of Scarlet Road in 2011 at the Art Gallery of NSW. When Eva suggested Helen may also be tempted to become a Patron of Touching Base we jumped on the idea. Helen has long been an advocate for the rights of women with disability and was impressed to discover that Touching Base has more male sex workers on our Referral List who cater for women clients, than the number of male sex workers we have catering for male clients. We look forward to working with Helen in the future so that we can offer University of New South Wales students opportunities to conduct projects for Touching Base.



Photo of Helen Meekosha by Belinda Mason



Photo by Fleur de Lys

Rachel Wotton and Saul first met our next Patron, Peter Woods, in 2002 when he was President of the Local Councils and Shires Association of NSW. They sat together on the NSW Sex Services Premises Planning Advisory Panel working together to produce planning guidelines for local councils in NSW, who were struggling to understand their role in regulating the sex industry under decriminalisation.

Peter understands there is also much work yet to do with local councils in NSW to create more equitable access to commercial establishments for people with disability. He also disapproves of Local Councils banning home based sex workers.

To the left is a picture of our wonderful Master of Ceremonies, Gary Fulcher, watching new Patron Peter Woods passionately encouraging others to join him in his enthusiastic support for the work we do at Touching Base.

Sadly Professor Basil Donovan had been dragged away to a conference in the USA. An internationally renowned venereologist, Basil often presents on his various research projects, such as his investigation into the sexual health of sex workers in various states in Australia. That research found decriminalisation like we have here in NSW is a superior model to any other form of regulating sex work. We certainly look forward to having Basil as a speaker at one of our future events.

Screening of The Gift



Lloyd and Spencer Harvey receiving guests' applause after a screening of 'The Gift' - photo by Belinda Mason

We were lucky to have the producers of [The Gift](#), Spencer and Lloyd Harvey, as guests and it was wonderful to see how warmly everyone felt towards this award-winning short film.

The Gift brings attention to the fact that having 3rd party involvement in arranging sessions can be greatly complicated when the attitudes of families (or personal carers / delegated decision makers) can challenge the rights of people with disability seeking to achieve sexual expression.

The Gift contradicts common media stereotypes by presenting a sex worker in a guiding role where they demonstrate high levels of compassionate emotional intelligence. Not all sex workers would act the same in the circumstances depicted in film, but it is refreshing to see sex workers portrayed as asserting their own agency as opposed to being victims.

Certificates of Appreciation for student projects



Helen Meekosha handing Certificates to (from Left to Right): Zhan Tang (MBA), Margie Payne (Law), and Ashley Burrell, Christopher Waters and Corinne Freeman (OT)

Several of the students who did project work for us in 2013 were able to attend. They all seemed very happy to receive their Certificates of Appreciation from Associate Professor Helen Meekosha.

Scarlet Road

Rachel Wotton then spoke about how **Scarlet Road** has been used as a lobbying tool by sex worker organisations to strengthen calls for decriminalisation of sex industry around the world. Rachel used global maps to identify countries where **Scarlet Rd** has been broadcast on TV in various countries and screened at film festivals. This map shown here identifies all the countries where we have received positive feedback about **Scarlet Road** and the work of Touching Base. It was amazing to see how far our influence has been felt across the world.

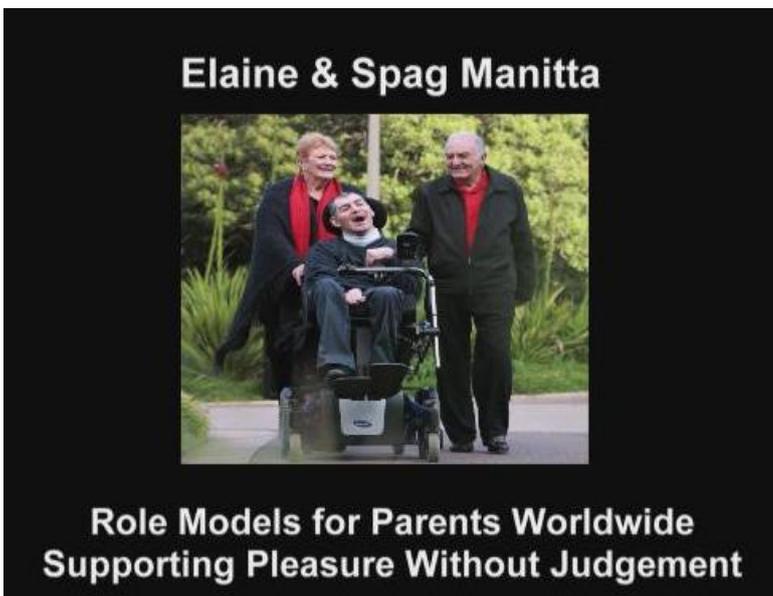


Posthumous Awards and Life Memberships



There was barely a dry eye in the room as we watched an excerpt of **Scarlet Road** - edited as a moving tribute to John Blades and Mark Manitta.

It was important for us to acknowledge Mark and John's significant contributions to raising the international profile of sex workers' clients with disability. Our MC Gary Fulcher (a long-time friend) accepted John's award and Elaine Manitta accepted Mark's award.



We then awarded our first Life Memberships to Elaine & Tony (Spag) Manitta. Touching Base wanted to highlight the loving support they provided their son Mark by assisting him to visit sex workers over many decades, as seen in **Scarlet Road**.

Guests on the day could clearly see the contrast between their open-minded dealing with Mark's sexual urges compared to the attitudinal barriers other parents can exhibit in similar circumstances – as shown in **The Gift**. Elaine and Spag are extraordinary role models leading the way for others.

Fundraising Auction and Raffle

MC Gary Fulcher & Saul Isbister had a great time auctioning off generously donated gifts - including two Starshot photo gift vouchers, a deluxe room for 2 nights at the Rydges Central Sydney and two bottles of rare premium wines, very kindly donated by Gary himself.

The raffle prizes were drawn by Elaine and Spag Manitta, including a \$200 gift voucher for a major retailer. We would also like to thank the other businesses and individuals who donated auction items, raffle prizes and other gifts... including:

- Our several anonymous donors who gave cash to buy raffle prizes and bottles of wine
- The Zen Day Spa for topping up our gift voucher from \$100 to \$150
- The Sydney Theatre Company for two tickets to **Perplex** by **Marius Von Mayenburg**
- Masseur extraordinaire Chris O'Brien for a 1 hour Myofascial Release Massage, and
- The Flower Room, Newtown, for the five lovely bunches of Australian Native flowers

We would like to thank all the people who chose to come along and share the afternoon with us. By all reports everyone had a thoroughly good time and took full advantage of the opportunity to network with lots of other good-hearted and open-minded people.

We are delighted to report that over \$6,500 was raised!

This fundraising luncheon was the first time Touching Base has attempted to put on such an ambitious event that included the luxury of a two-course meal. Thanks to the fantastic sponsorship of the Cerebral Palsy Alliance, other generous donors mentioned above, and all the people who bought tickets and took part in the auction and/or bought raffle tickets - at the end of the day we are delighted to report that over \$6,500 was raised to support our ongoing activities. The money raised will be used to extend our referral database; develop new workshops, training and information resources; and raise awareness of our work.

Lastly we would like to acknowledge and give thanks to members of our Committee of Management and the event organising sub-committee, Saul Isbister, Jill Maginnity, Rob Hardy – with help from Deborah Clarkson; also Catherine Scott (director of Scarlet Road) for her late-night efforts editing film clips for us: official photographer Belinda Mason; Steen Rees, -man and technical advisor; Kylie Pratt pro bono graphic designer and last but not least our Master of Ceremonies Gary Fulcher – for once again shining in the role!

We hope to see you all at our next event!!

Making a donation

Thank you to members who have been making monthly donations. What a great way to show your ongoing support for our work and you don't have to be a member to donate :)



Make a donation [now](#)

Remember all donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible and because we are unfunded every gift makes a difference. You can donate via our website <http://www.touchingbase.org/support-us> or click on the Make a Donation button to directly make a credit card donation right now.