

# CREATING A VISION



Julie Woods is a motivated, passionate, fiercely independent woman with an emerging life coaching business and a book about her life in production. What makes Julie unique is that this mother of two has overcome the adversity of losing her sight. Relentless in her passion to pass on her knowledge and help others, Julie refuses to let her blindness become a burden.

Julie says from the first moment she heard about life coaching she connected with it. When her childhood friend died of cancer, at the age of 39, she realised that we all are given a deadline and none of us know when that will be. She enrolled in a life coaching course and now offers life coaching clinics, which she describes as "a place where people can come if they are feeling unfocused or they are just thinking 'there must be more to life than this'".

Julie's blindness has given her first-hand experience in overcoming adversity and achieving goals, knowledge which she would like to pass on to others. "When I went blind I was thrown onto a pathway of rehabilitation. I had to learn to prioritise my time and set goals matching my time frame. Life coaching is all about achieving your own potential through goal setting."

Julie was fully sighted for most of her life. When she lost her sight it was a gradual process that began in one eye. "The vinyl we had laid in our bathroom was shimmering and I asked my husband if it was shimmering to him. When he said no, I decided it was time to go and get my eyes checked. Within three months the shimmering that started in my left eye turned into a blob and a haze. This happened in my right eye too. And within three months, I had lost my remaining vision. The scariest moment was when I realised what had happened in my left eye was going to happen in my right."

Julie's condition has left her only being able to see hand movements at four metres. Julie signed up as a member of the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind (RNZFB) and reluctantly began the extensive rehabilitation. She went on to become the Braille Literacy Coordinator at the RNZFB before becoming the Community Development Coordinator at CCS Disability Action in Dunedin.

The biggest adversity Julie faced in her new life with vision impairment was overcoming the attitudes of others. "I found that really difficult. When you are coming to terms with what you can do yourself and people think you are capable of doing little, then it's easy to submit to their low expectations. But I have always been the one who has set my own limits. I am the one who will decide what I am capable of - and the more skills I learned the more capable I became."

Life now as a woman with vision impairment is challenging. Julie faces the same issues everybody else does, like raising a family, running a household and working full time. She also studies part time and works out regularly. She refuses to let blindness put her life on hold.

Julie's experience with blindness and the lessons she has learned as a result of this are the source of a book she is currently in the process of writing. Julie has been writing her book with the help of speech software, which reads text back to her. In the book entitled *8 gr\* habits* Julie explains habits and lessons she has learned from blindness, and hopes her readers will adapt these lessons to their own circumstances in order to form great habits.

"I've had so many people tell me I am extraordinary, but I'm just an ordinary person who has found myself in extraordinary circumstances. This book attempts to uncover the ordinary nature of my approach to blindness by identifying habits people can apply to their own lives."

Julie's creativity is contagious, inspiring partner and Dunedin artist, Ron, to create art they could both enjoy despite Julie's lack of sight. On Christmas 2005, Julie says she received an amazing Christmas present from Ron. It was a mixed media artwork containing Braille and tactile letters. It was all white and displayed the words 'vision' in Braille and print. Ron was inspired to create this piece by observing Julie's love of Braille and his belief that even though she couldn't see, she still had vision. Since then, Ron has created more Braille art and donated profits from some of these works to the RNZFB.

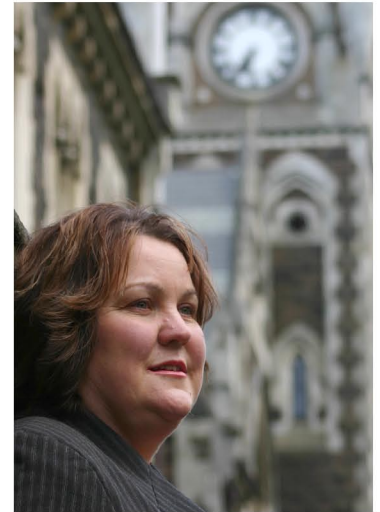
Julie says she learned a lot about herself from losing her sight. "Vision loss is more about attitude rather than being unable to see. If your attitude is right then the impact of blindness can be minimised."

Julie's message to those overcoming adversity is to set your own limits. "Don't let someone else set limits for you. If you do, they are likely to be a lot lower than the limits you set for yourself. Always remember, your brain and your sense of humour are the greatest weapons you have. Use them plentifully."

Julie hopes to complete her book in 2008. For more information about Julie's life, check out her website: [www.thatblindwoman.com](http://www.thatblindwoman.com)



By Monique Esplin



## JULIE'S LIFE COACHING TIPS:

- 1** Success is the launch pad for success. Pick one thing you've succeeded at and see if you can trace it back to prior success.
- 2** Big changes come through smaller continuous changes. Try removing one unhealthy eating habit each year and notice the difference over time.
- 3** You can't plough a field by turning it over in your mind. Add up the amount of time you think about something that is annoying you. Ask yourself if it was a good use of your time.
- 4** Always aim at something. If you do, you are bound to hit it.
- 5** Shoot for the moon - even if you miss you'll land among the stars. Aiming high is much more likely to energise you into action.