

## Vale Professor Mark Ylvisaker

It is with great sadness that I write the obituary for Professor Mark Ylvisaker. After a long illness, Mark passed away at the end of May 2009, surrounded by his family. Mark was a Professor at the College of St Rose, Albany, New York, in the discipline of Speech–Language Pathology. While initially training in philosophy, a background that influenced his later work, Mark decided to change professions and became a speech–language pathologist, graduating with his PhD from The University of Pittsburgh, under the supervision of Professor Audrey Holland. Mark soon became interested in the field of traumatic brain injury and focused his extraordinary intellect and clinical aptitude on finding innovative approaches to the assessment and treatment of people, especially children and adolescents, in real-life contexts. His ground-breaking work revolutionised treatment approaches internationally. The novel aspect of his work was the appealing combination of theoretically grounded approaches with common-sense practical strategies to deal with the complex sequelae, such as the cognitive–communication disorders and behavioural issues that may arise following traumatic brain injury (TBI). While Mark’s approaches were grounded in educational theories and philosophy, with strong influences from writers such as Vygotsky, his ideas were accessible and practical, offering clinicians and families down-to-earth advice about how to tackle the real life problems facing people with TBI.

Mark is well known to clinicians and researchers working in the field of TBI in Australia and also internationally. He visited Australia and New Zealand many times and became known and respected here due his erudite, insightful and clinically relevant writing and his inspirational presentations. Mark had a lifelong passion and devotion to improving the lives of people with TBI and their families. He combined his love of clinical work with academic teaching and research and he was extraordinarily prolific with the publication of over 100 professional works including six textbooks. Mark was a great supporter of *Brain Impairment*. Indeed, the first issue of *Brain Impairment* includes Mark’s keynote address from the 1999 ASSBI Conference which was held in Sydney, in addition to a seminal article about the construction of iden-

tity after TBI that Mark wrote with Tim Feeney, his long-time collaborator. Among his many legacies is a website entitled Learnet (<http://projectlearnet.org/index.html>), which he was instrumental in developing with the Brain Injury Association of New York. This website provides practical common-sense strategies to all those who work with children or adolescents with TBI in managing the common behavioural sequelae which can interfere with everyday functioning in education and social environments. His advice was widely sought after, with requests for workshops and consultations in 50 states across the United States, and from 15 countries around the world, including extensive consultation in Australia and New Zealand. He was the recipient of many awards for his life’s work, including most recently a Distinguished Achievement Award from the Brain Injury Association of America and the prestigious Frank R. Keffner National Lifetime Clinical Career Award from the American Speech Language and Hearing Foundation. He also served on the editorial boards of six international journals including our own journal, *Brain Impairment*.

Mark was a gifted, inspirational and generous person who had a significant influence on all those he met. Mark’s warm and optimistic personality was infectious and he was a person who lived each day to the full. He was completely committed to improving the future of people with TBI and set about making this happen any way he could. His energy and passion were unrelenting, and even when he became ill, he continued to work clinically, write prolifically and travel internationally to communicate his message. His influence can be seen in many ongoing research projects. At our recent ASSBI Conference, which was held in Sydney, his work was quoted in many presentations including, for example, papers on goal-setting, identity reconstruction after TBI, and improving communication after TBI among many others. There is no doubt that the impact of Mark’s lifetime commitment to TBI will be far-reaching and long-lasting, and the main beneficiaries will continue to be people with TBI and their families, as Mark would have wanted.

**Leanne Togher**