

DISPENSER, OWNER AND A COMMUNITY CHAMPION



DISPENSER DETAILS

Name: Bobby Bugden
Position: Owner
Location: Be Seen Eyewear
Lismore and Ballina
Years in industry: 3

What initially attracted you to a career in optical dispensing?

Through my father-in-law Greg Hickey. He has 40 years' experience as an optical dispenser and has built his two practices – Be Seen Eyewear – from the ground up. Through various conversations, Greg provided insights into the profession and what opportunities it presented individually, as well as for my broader family – continuing the legacy of an independent, family-run practice.

What are your main career highlights?

Although my optical career is relatively short, becoming a qualified optical dispenser through ACOD, which then led to shared partnership of Be Seen Eyewear in Lismore and Ballina are the two stand outs. The relationships with colleagues of the optical community as well as the patients is also a significant highlight.

What are your strengths as an optical dispenser, and what excites you?

I find it difficult giving myself praise, but my biggest strength is build trusting relationships with patients. What excites me is being able to aid patients in improving their quality-of-life by meeting their optical needs.

What advice would you give yourself at the beginning of your optical career?

To be a good dispenser it takes time, despite your best efforts you can't learn everything at once and, in fact, you'll never stop learning.

What do you believe are the opportunities and challenges facing Australian optical dispensing?

I see opportunity in enhanced lens technology that can better meet an individual's needs. There's also opportunity for independents to provide a point-of-difference due to the large number of buy outs in recent years. The biggest challenge is a gap in experience. I have learnt from some great dispensers in the latter part of their careers, some with 40-plus years' experience. While ACOD are doing an amazing job, you can't replace that kind of experience overnight.

How do you ensure your skills and knowledge stay up to date and current in such a fast moving industry?

I stay up to date through conferences such as O=MEGA, our lab HOYA who organise training days, organisations such as ODA and ACOD through their resources such as webinars and training, as well as networking with people in the industry that are highly skilled and experienced.

Earlier this year, you won the Community Champion Award at the ODA National Excellence Awards. What actions led to this?

This related to the devastating floods in Lismore and the Northern Rivers in February 2022. I was flooded out myself for the initial day, but managed get through and eventually help out on the second day. I organised a garage full of donations for those that literally lost everything. Once I could get through to my hometown of Lismore, I dropped them to evacuation centres.

Then, like so many others, I spent the next weeks organising help and working street-by-street cleaning out houses, stripping houses back to bare bones, clearing out businesses, including my own, and providing support wherever possible.

Our practice in Lismore was completely inundated over the roof and we lost almost everything, while Ballina was shut due to flooding as well. Although devastating, we still had our homes and loved ones where many people weren't as fortunate.

How your practice is faring since the Lismore floods?

My business partner Greg needs a lot of the credit for being proactive; he didn't hesitate going all-in on the rebuild. Having a trade background, and with some help from friends and family, Greg and I rebuilt our shop and we managed to re-open eight weeks post-flood through hard work from the team and optical community. Whether it be from EyeBenefit, suppliers, other practices, or optical industry friends, we were overwhelmed and humbled. The practice has bounced back remarkably. We are family-owned, local and independent and have always prioritised serving the community – and I believe that has helped us with the local community ultimately wanting to see us triumph.

Why did you become a member of ODA, and what value do you see in the organisation?

I was introduced to ODA through ACOD when I was doing my Cert IV. ODA provides support for dispensers as well as an abundance of knowledge to help give you the best chance at reaching your potential.

What would you say to others thinking of joining ODA?

My advice to anyone on the fence about becoming a member would be that ODA will contribute to you doing your job well and progress your career in a positive way. ■



Bobby Bugden being awarded the Community Champion Award at the 2023 ODA National Excellence Awards.