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Blind Citizens NZ

Focus

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Change is happening – Editorial by Allan Jones

Well the first three months of 2018 seem to be disappearing very quickly.

Annette and I sat down with 13 other adults and three children for a Christmas day feast - a roast of lamb, lamb and hogget being a feature from my Oamaru childhood farm holidays, which encourages this abhorrent behaviour. Four of our dinner companions were from England and had come to New Zealand to see their new granddaughter. The lunch was a memorable occasion.

As I complete my editorial, I have come across two pieces of news that I believe are quite important to us. Apparently, before the election, Labour promised that if elected they would appoint a National Technology Officer. This would be seen as a similar appointment to the National Science Advisor. There may be one or two of our members who would put their hand up for the National Technology Officer's position. Apparently, government are taking their time over this appointment. I understand the idea is that this person would be a collaborator rather than a dictator and would work across government departments. They are going to make sure they get the right person for the job.

The second bit of news I came across is about a trial, which I understand is already underway in a supermarket in Auckland which is pairing an app to your cell phone, which would add up your purchases and take the money out of your bank account. Although the commentator who mentioned this did not spell it out, this may have huge ramifications for supermarket checkout staff.

I intend keeping across both these stories and would hope Blind Citizens NZ will also become involved. We certainly need to liaise with the Technology Officer, and to make sure that the supermarket app is accessible to us.

A Couple of Follow-Up Issues from the December Focus. Early February I spent a week in Australia. While I was there, I used three conventional taxis and nine Ubers. All Ubers cost between \$8 and \$9. My cab fare from Sydney airport to my hotel in eastern suburbs was \$34. My return Uber fare was \$8.50.

There was one hassle I had which I have asked Uber to investigate. In Brisbane where I visited last year I found I could phone the drivers as we can in New Zealand. But, I was unable to phone the Sydney and Melbourne drivers. In all three cities, the drivers could phone me without any hassle. I visited the Melbourne office of Uber and got reimbursement for cancelled trips. I did bring the fact of the usefulness of phone contact for a blind person to their notice and I will follow up to make sure they investigate this.

As we finalise our content for the March issue, there is an update about the Disability Support System Transformation work. There is a focus on the workforce that has led to a working group with union representatives, government officials, disabled people and service providers. Once completed the paper will be considered by Cabinet in March – this looks at the Mid Central System Transformation prototype. Initially this paper was set down for submission in December, however with the change of government it was delayed until March.

I am pleased about the work that is going on with the unions as their support and cooperation will be important in the success of this scheme. What I believe we haven't heard yet, is the new government's support for this transformation. I am optimistic and hopeful that they will support this.

Over the holidays, I reflected on the 2017 Annual General Meeting and Conference, which I experienced as an extremely good one.

It was good to see some young new faces and I am sure there are some future leaders amongst them. Amongst the presenters, my favourites were Paula Tesoriero Disability Rights Commission, and Sue Plowman from Auckland Disability Law. Their energy and vitality was good to experience. There was a very thought provoking presentation on some suggested changes to the governance and administration of Blind Citizens NZ, and I am sure the Board will address these. The AGM and Conference was well chaired by National President Jonathan Godfrey. He kept the business side short, and he kept it moving.

For me, perhaps the talks and lectures could be split over two half days, with business on the Friday night and Saturday afternoon. However, this is a minor detail.

I am glad the Blind Foundation's Constitution has been put to "bed". I am very pleased that there is a statement about "inclusiveness" in the Constitution. I would have liked to have seen a statement about the acceptance of "diversity" as I believe both Blind Citizens NZ and the Blind Foundation are more accepting of diversity amongst its members than they were ten years ago. Maybe the next update of the Constitution will include this.

In viewing inclusiveness, I would caution that in my opinion this applies to governance of the Blind Foundation and should not be exercised over management decisions. I have seen too many disasters when the two have been misunderstood and muddled. Twice in the last 20 years, I have taken a polarised position regarding governance of an organisation. Firstly with the Blind Foundation, and secondly with an Access radio station. At my tender age of 76, I now want a peaceful existence. It also gives me great satisfaction personally, that the Blind Foundation's Associate Member (elected board director position) has been done away with.

Geraldine Glanville's article which appears later in this issue has some excellent comments regarding the Blind Foundation's Constitution. I commend this article to readers.

I also draw your attention to the excellent essay reprinted in this issue. William Wu, age 15, won the Onkyo Excellence Prize in 2017, for his age group. It is tremendous to see a young person being so positive about being blind and who is able to celebrate this. I hope to be able to publish more articles of this ilk.

Now, I have three films, which I strongly recommend to readers. These are:

- The Post: Starring Meryl Streep as the owner of the Washington Post, Streep deserves an Oscar for her performance, and in my view is way out in front. The film centres on whether to publish the Pentagon Papers, which were leaked to "the Post". The tension in the film is amazing, and there is good dialogue.
- Darkest Hour: This film concentrates on a very short period of Winston Churchill's Prime Ministership.
- Goodbye Christopher Robin: A film which demonstrates how the stories of Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh made the English feel good after the depression and torment of World War One. The film certainly gave me a different opinion regarding the author AA Milne. Christopher Robin certainly suffered over the portrayal that he was given by his parents.

Finally, I want to encourage members to write guest editorials. I look forward to getting such contributions. Submitters are encouraged to take into consideration that we have limited resources, coupled with space constraints. This imposes an approximate word-limit of 400 words which equates to approximately one page. Articles can be sent to our mailing address PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242, or emailed to the editorial group at: focus@abcnz.org.nz

Sorry, You Can't

From Jonathan Godfrey, National President

Perhaps the most frustrating two words I hear in life are "you can't" and the addition of the apologetic "sorry" seldom softens the irritation, hurt, and occasional anger that I feel duty-bound to suppress as often as I can manage.

It started back as early as I can remember. I don't blame my parents for their attempt to make sure I didn't continue to want something they thought was going to be beyond me in life. I don't blame the teachers and the school system for saying I couldn't do some things, but those times were in the past, and that is where that attitude should be consigned.

"You can't drive a car, Jonathan". (Ha! Just you try telling my kids that.) OK, backing the car out of the garage is a little different to the open road, and rest assured I have no intention of taking my wheels for a spin around the block. When I was a teenager, the prospect of not learning to drive at the same time as my friends was a minor irritation compared to the irritations of not being able to read when and where I wanted, or not being able to bat at cricket practice. I recall the surprise expressed by the captain of the local women's cricket team when I asked if I could come to practice with my girlfriend who wanted to play in the team. I still didn't get to bat, but bowling in the nets is a great way to avoid fielding. OK, the captain didn't say "you can't" but the surprise she expressed was a sure sign of her under-estimation of my ability or aspirations.

So how do we address this sort of under-estimation? Perhaps we need to ask how the attitude is formed; perhaps we need to ask ourselves if we are helping others form opinions by our own outlook on life; perhaps there are some within our community going over the top to prove ourselves as competent and capable as any sighted person around us.

Maybe we'll need to talk about this at our conference in October.

I know there are plenty of blind people who have put the hard yards in to excel in their chosen sport; I'm sure almost everyone can tell me about a blind person who has succeeded as a musician, but I wonder how many people out there really believe blind people can get a great job, raise a family, run a business, and so many other facets of life that are common for sighted people. At a personal level, it still surprises me that I was the first blind person to gain employment as a lecturer of statistics, and I mean in the world. I didn't set out to be the first, and I didn't work it out for years afterwards until the second person to do so said he hadn't found anyone other than me before him.

On reflection, my journey to becoming a statistician shows a history of the "sorry, you can't..." speeches happening for other possible careers and perhaps a little surprisingly, none of these speeches coming from the mathematics and statistics academics I was taught by at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Did I strike it lucky? Well yes, but I also think my success owes so much to people who dared not to say "you can't..." with or without the "sorry". This isn't to say there weren't people who doubted me, but they expressed their ignorance, concerns, and fears in terms of questions that offered me a chance to show how I had met my challenges or what I could try to do if given an opportunity.

Over the last few years, my professional expertise have been called upon in working with Statistics NZ and the Office for Disability Issues in particular, as well as several other Government agencies, to discuss data and evidence to support decision-making to help make New Zealand a better country for disabled people. I've loved my chance to be both a statistician and an individual with personal experiences of blindness to call on, and I'm convinced the work done on the census questions about disability are an improvement on the past.

I know there are great people working in Government that understand there is a need to do much more work to improve the lives of disabled people in New Zealand. The best of these people have worked with disabled people to understand what it is that we as disabled people need or want.

It's the week of the census as I complete this column. I'm gutted that the people that worked to plan the census this year have let disabled New Zealanders down by not adequately providing for all of our varying needs with respect to filling out the census. I'm well aware that many blind people will have had family or friends help them, either online or in print; others among us will have exercised independence by completing the census online, but anyone who does not have the confidence to use the online service or does not wish to answer the questions with friends or family for some reason could so easily have felt left out.

There is a cost of not engaging in the census, and I'm not just referring to the fines that can be imposed on people who did not engage. Our best chance to be counted as disabled people and have the impact of our disability measured has been placed at risk because the service offered by Statistics NZ was lower than was offered in previous years. I'm proud of the work put in by Blind Citizens NZ to work with Government officials to get a resolution and I hope that everyone reading this column did complete the census one way or another. We are assured that a review of the census will take place and that we as well as the other Disabled People's Organisations we work with, will get to share the experiences of our members with the officials.

A saying I've heard a lot over the last few years goes something like, "we only count what is counted, and if we aren't counted then we don't count". This message feels a bit more real this week than it did last year, but I will get those census forms filled in soon enough.

I am absolutely confident that if we as Blind Citizens NZ had been asked how Statistics NZ could work with blind and low vision citizens, we would have given officials better advice than has been acted on in planning the 2018 Census. It is very difficult to go past the work done with the Electoral Commission five years ago to gain telephone dictation voting and make a comparison to the recent census planning. The Electoral Commission engaged with disabled people, including blind people, and our representative organisations. The Electoral Commission made sure the process of casting a vote was dignified, and that the options for doing so were an improvement on previous elections. Following the first implementation of telephone dictation voting in 2014 there was a review, with real disabled people involved, and minor improvements for the second use in 2017 were developed. In my view, the Electoral Commission set a standard for the right way to work with disabled people. Blind Citizens NZ will be part of the review of the 2018 Census, and I am confident that we will have a better outcome in 2023 as a consequence.

So, who will it be next that says "sorry Jonathan, you can't..." It won't be one of my kids; it won't be one of my friends, and I'm pretty sure my mum decided that these words were more often an invitation to try rather than a deterrent. There are still so many "you can't..." issues out there and so many of these are imposed on me and people like me by well-intentioned people who haven't actually taken the time to ask me if I can or whether I want to do something before making up their own minds. Our work at Blind Citizens NZ looks like being necessary for some time to come.

Board Appoints Governance Review Panel

At its 18 February 2018 meeting, the Board of Blind Citizens NZ appointed four members to its Governance Review Panel. Congratulations to Carolyn Weston, Aine Kelly-Costello, Donald Hunt, and Don McKenzie. On the Board's behalf, Geraldine Glanville, Convenor / Board Member will lead this work during coming months.

First Release from the Governance Review Panel

From Geraldine Glanville, Convenor

The Governance Review Panel has reviewed a new set of objects to appear in Blind Citizens NZ's constitution when this is next revised. We are not necessarily recommending these as our final choice, but are interested in receiving your comments on them, both favourable and unfavourable.

Please note that the term "blind" will have received a broader definition earlier in the revised constitution, and will probably be similar to that in the Blind Foundation's constitution that ran:

"blind" is the term used in this Constitution to describe those who regard themselves as either blind, vision-impaired, partially sighted, partially blind, deafblind, having low vision or in some other manner consistent with sight loss, but whose degree of sight loss qualifies them as a Member of the Foundation in terms of this Constitution;

For comparison, the current **Objects** are:

[Begins] In the exercise of its charitable nature and purposes, the objects shall be to promote in every way the interests and well-being of blind and vision impaired people within New Zealand, and in particular the Association shall have the right to:

- (a) advance and safeguard their interests;
- (b) advocate for their economic, cultural and social advancement by such means as better education and training facilities, wider employment opportunities and improved welfare services;
- (c) promote co-operation, consultation and peer support among them;
- (d) take such action in any emergency as may be necessary in their interests;
- (e) co-operate and affiliate with other charitable organisations in New Zealand and international organisations of and for the blind;

- (f) encourage and promote full participation and equal opportunity in the life of the community;
- (g) advocate for the right to self-determination, dignity and full participation in society;
- (h) design, formulate and implement policies, programmes and services for their benefit;
- (i) monitor, evaluate, and review all policies, programmes and services developed by others for their benefit;
- (j) monitor pertinent legislation and rulings, and make submissions;
- (k) develop an informed public opinion about, and stimulate community interest in, blind and vision impaired people;
- (l) provide links with blind and vision impaired people throughout New Zealand. [ends]Ends.

The proposed new **Objects** are as follows:

[Begins] Blind Citizens NZ is a charitable organisation of blind people in New Zealand who choose to speak out on our own behalf. We uphold the aims of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the purpose of which is to “promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity”. Consistent with social justice, and in aspiring to achieve an Accessible, equitable and inclusive society for all members of the blind community in New Zealand, we advocate for and actively pursue the following objects:

- Full participation in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the community;
- Equal opportunities to engage in education, training, employment, and cultural and leisure activities;
- Blind-friendly streets, public transport services and facilities designed for public use;

- The right to access publicly available information in a form that compensates for our lack of sight;
- Our right to independently cast a secret vote in elections;
- Blindness-related services that enable us to approach everyday life with independence, confidence and dignity;
- Technology and telecommunications that accommodate our blindness-related needs;
- Self-determination, including the right to be consulted on and involved with those decisions that affect us;
- Improved community education and awareness of both our needs and capabilities;
- Training, support and experience in leadership and advocacy for our members;
- A positive and inclusive culture that encourages and values member participation, social interaction, peer support and the sharing of information and advice;
- Tangible and practical outcomes from collaborative efforts with our disability and social service sector partners to secure a non-disabling society for all;
- Active support for the causes of blind people throughout the world;
- Acknowledgement of the Treaty of Waitangi and its application in the work of Blind Citizens NZ;
- All other things as are incidental to, or which may assist with the attainment of, any of the above objects. [Ends]

If you have online access, please send your comments directly to:
Grp-blindcitizensnz@yahoogroups.com

Otherwise, please contact Rose Wilkinson Executive Officer at National Office via phone or post at:

Phone: 0800 222 6940 selecting option 2 from voice-interface;

Email: rwilkinson@abcnz.org.nz

2018 Annual General Meeting and Conference

Raising Expectations: is blindness defining who we are?

From Rose Wilkinson, Executive Officer

We publicised in the December 2017 Focus issue, the Board's decision to hold this year's AGM and Conference at the Brentwood Hotel, Wellington. If you haven't thought about coming along, perhaps now is the time to start planning to be in Wellington for this year's three-day event (Friday 5 to Sunday 7 October). Registration forms will be available by the time this Focus issue reaches you. You can get these from our National Office, website, branches or network coordinators.

To support members avoid making a large payment all at once, and who want to come, we once again offer a payment plan to suit your budget. This means you can make regular payments so that your time at the Brentwood hotel is paid for before the AGM and Conference starts on 5 October.

The Board will decide when it meets in April, whether this year, it can once again offer a financial subsidy to first-time attendees. The outcome will be publicised as soon as practicable once the Board has reached a decision.

Last but not least, there is still a little time to offer suggestions for speakers and topics. Do send your ideas through to National Office.

**Is Braille or Employment one of your Passions?
Consider putting your expertise and knowledge to use
Support Blind Citizens NZ make a Blind Bit of Difference**

Blind Citizens NZ has representative positions on several national organisations. When the terms of office for these positions fall due, or there are resignations, the Board determines what its approach will be. When a term of office is coming to an end, the Board will decide whether to reappoint the incumbent, or publicise the position.

When publicised, unless otherwise notified by the incumbent and/or they have served the maximum term set by the respective organisation, they may submit a further expression of interest. The Board resolved at its 2017 Annual Planning Meeting, that positions that fall due this year would be advertised.

Representative positions on the Workbridge Council and The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust, are now publicised.

Expressions of interest from financial Ordinary (voting) Members of Blind Citizens NZ are called for. These must be received no later than 4pm, Thursday 31 May 2018. Members interested in either of these representative positions should request the position description for the role they intend to express interest in i.e. these outline all requirements, attributes etc., whereas an overview only is provided in this Focus issue. Fundamentals requirements for each of the two positions follow.

- 1. Workbridge Council:** Paula Waby has represented Blind Citizens NZ on the Workbridge Council since 2015. It was with regret that the Board received at its February meeting, her resignation for personal reasons. The Board is keen to hear from members interested in this role which involves attending approximately three one-day meetings per year in Wellington (all actual costs paid). The term of office is determined by the Board on a case-by-case basis.

You may be suited to this role if your extensive skills and expertise include knowledge and understanding of the following:

- the disability community in general;
- barriers to employment and the challenges experienced by blind and vision impaired job-seekers, and those in employment;
- vocational services and funding opportunities available for disabled job seekers and those in employment; and
- the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2. The Braille Authority of Aotearoa New Zealand Trust

(BANZAT): The three-year term of office for this position falls due this year. Paula Waby has represented Blind Citizens NZ since 2012 and is not seeking reappointment.

Blind Citizens NZ will give preference to prospective appointees who can demonstrate competence and/or are suitably qualified in a minimum of three of the following:

- Is a touch reader of contracted braille and relies on braille as their primary means of literacy;
- Is the holder of either a Trans-Tasman Braille Proficiency Certificate, a Braille Writer's Certificate, a Braille Proficiency Certificate, or an equivalent qualification as determined by the Board of Trustees from time to time;
- Has a sound knowledge of technical aspects of codes, e.g. mathematics, music, foreign language;
- Has an understanding of international attitudes and standards;
- Has had three years' experience in either braille transcription or braille teaching.

Whichever position you might be considering, your expression of interest should identify the strengths, expertise, knowledge and attributes you bring.

Requirements etc., are set out in the respective position description. Anyone interested in finding out more about either of these positions, please contact the Executive Officer Rose Wilkinson at National Office (contact details at the end of this Focus issue). Expressions of interest / applications should be received no later than 4pm, 31 May 2018, for the attention of the Executive Officer via: **Email:** admin@abcnz.org.nz; or **Post** to PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

Member-at-Large Vacancy - Extra Ordinary Election From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

Blind Citizens NZ is conducting an extra-ordinary election to fill a Member-at-Large vacancy. The vacancy happened when Paula Waby was elected as World Blind Union Representative. Her Member-at-Large position then became vacant. The term of office for the vacancy concludes at the end of the 2019 Annual General Meeting and Conference. The Board has the delegated authority to set its own timelines for an extra-ordinary election. This means timelines can vary to those of scheduled elections and may be less generous.

Notification of timeframes to fill the Member-at-Large vacancy follow:

- Nominations close: 4pm, Thursday 19 April 2018.
- Distribute ballot material: Thursday 10 May 2018.
- Voting closes: 4pm Thursday 7 June 2018.
- Vote-counting: Friday 8 June 2018 (time to be confirmed).

In addition to the dates provided, there are key factors for members interested in standing for election to fill this Member-at-Large vacancy, to be aware of.

Eligibility requirements: You are eligible to be nominated provided you have been a financial Ordinary Member of Blind Citizens NZ for no less than 24 full months measured cumulatively during the period of five consecutive years ending on the closing date for nominations.

Nominations: the person being nominated will need two financial Ordinary Members to support their nomination. One will “move/propose” and the other will “second” the nomination. Each of the three people involved is required to sign the paper nomination form. Email procedures similarly require each of the three financial Ordinary Members to confirm their role in the nomination process. When the email procedure is chosen, candidates are required to contact the Returning Officer prior to commencing this process. This is important for there are instructions unique to the email procedure that must be followed i.e. the email process mirrors as closely as possible, requirements for the paper-based option.

Candidates are required to submit their CV (supporting information and a position statement) to the Returning Officer, with their nomination. Familiarity with CV requirements, and the role and responsibility of Board Members can be achieved by obtaining pertinent information. This is available on Blind Citizens NZ’s website, and/or upon request from National Office (contact details located at the end of this Focus issue).

Nominations close and must be received and in the hands of the Returning Officer by **4pm Thursday 19 April 2018**. These can be sent to the Returning Officer via any of these options:

- **Post:** Blind Citizens NZ, PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242;
- **Fax:** 04-389-0030;
- **Email:** election@abcnz.org.nz

Will there be an election: If there is more than one nomination to fill the vacancy, an election will be held. If only one nomination is received, no election will be required. The successful candidate will be elected unopposed and commence in the position immediately.

Election Information: If an election to fill the vacancy is required, ballot material will be distributed to financial Ordinary Members by Thursday 10 May 2018.

Blind Citizens NZ has several options available for members to participate in our election processes. You choose how you receive your election material, and how to cast your vote. Election (ballot) material informs you about candidates standing for election. This is available in the following options: large print, audio (CD), braille, by email, and via our National Feedback Line on the Blind Foundation's Telephone Information Service (TIS).

If you are in any doubt about what your preferred communication option for elections is, please contact our national office to check soonest. You can then make changes if you need to.

Casting your vote: the way you vote can be different from the way you receive your election (ballot) material. When casting your vote, you have three options from which to choose. You can vote using the large print ballot form, the braille ballot option (braille voting cards), or TIS. If you currently receive a large print voting paper and you are unable to cast your vote independently, you are encouraged to give TIS a go. TIS offers you an independent and empowering voting experience. You independently access information about all of the candidates, and you cast your vote. As there can be unexplainable delays with mail, TIS is a more reliable option that ensures your vote is received by the due date. Voting closes **4pm, Thursday 7 June 2018.**

Blind Citizens NZ Prestigious Awards

Call for Nominations

Annually, the Board calls for nominations for its most prestigious. These being: Beamish Memorial Award, Extra Touch Award, and the Johnston Cup for Leadership. Criteria for each award are provided and should guide your thinking towards making a nomination. For each of these three awards, only financial Ordinary (voting) Members of Blind Citizens NZ, branches, may make nominations.

Nominations should be sent to the National Office for the attention of the Executive Officer (details are located at the end of this Focus issue). The close of nominations is advised in conjunction with each of the awards. Consistent with the Board's approach to these awards, the element of surprise is paramount. This means the Board's decision for all awards remains confidential irrespective of whether or not an award is to be presented. The Board encourages members and branches to pop on your respective thinking caps...

Beamish Memorial Award: The Beamish Memorial Award is the single most prestigious award that Blind Citizens NZ has the honour and privilege of bestowing on anyone within the organisation. It can only be awarded to an Ordinary Member of Blind Citizens NZ who has made an outstanding contribution to society in their particular field of service to the community. If you know of someone who meets this criteria, and whose outstanding efforts you believe should be recognised, then please do take advantage of this opportunity. The name of the person being nominated, their contact details, along with information and reasons in support of the nomination are needed.

Nominations close and must be received at Blind Citizens NZ's National Office by 4pm, Thursday 30 August 2018.

Extra Touch Award: This esteemed award is aimed at recognising an individual or organisation where, as part of the process of catering to the general public, an outstanding contribution is made towards improving access or services to blind and vision impaired people. Opportunities to recognise contributions in this way are diverse and include access to information, society, technology, transport and pedestrian safety, everyday equipment, educational, vocational or recreational opportunities, shops and customer service, and services in general.

Nominations must include the nominee's name, their contact details and information that mirrors with and responds to criteria for granting the Extra Touch Award. These must be received at the National Office of Blind Citizens NZ by **4pm, Monday 2 July 2018**.

Johnston Cup for Leadership: First presented in 2007 by Doug (past National President of Blind Citizens NZ) and Jeanette Johnston, this award encourages and recognises leadership potential from amongst members of Blind Citizens NZ; the intent is to encourage them to accept leadership responsibilities inside and outside the blindness community; and to develop an environment where they can be recognised for leadership in their field of endeavour.

There may be members of Blind Citizens NZ who you believe meet this criteria and who have contributed in some noticeable way – the community may have benefitted through their leadership. Provided the person you are thinking about is an Ordinary (voting) Member of Blind Citizens NZ, and you believe they are worthy of being nominated for this award, all you need to do is tell us. Information in support of the nomination is required. Nominations must be received at National Office by **4pm, Wednesday 22 August 2018**. Contact details for national office are located at the end of this publication.

Blind Citizens NZ 2018 Scheduled Election

Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

Constitutional Ruling 10 (Elections) directs Blind Citizens NZ in its election procedures. Positions for election this year include World Blind Union Representative (held by Paula Waby), and three Member-at-Large positions (held by Andrea Courtney, Murray Peat, and Daniel Phillips).

This Focus issue is the first of two opportunities Blind Citizens NZ publicises the election and calls for nominations. Please note:

- people currently in each of these positions are eligible for re-election;
- the term of office for all positions is two years;
- successful candidates will commence their term immediately following the conclusion of this year's Annual General Meeting and Conference;
- the election for all four positions happens at the same time, by a ballot of all eligible Ordinary (voting) Members;
- nomination forms and / or email nomination procedures are available upon request from National Office.

Here now, are the details about timelines and the procedure for the election of all positions. Additional information about positions is available upon request from the National Office. You will also locate information on Blind Citizens NZ's website. If you are standing for election, then please take the time to ask for, and become familiar with the duties and responsibilities of Board Members. Additionally, the skills, experience and knowledge needed for these positions.

You will find contact details for Blind Citizens NZ's National Office and our website at the end of this Focus issue. Now to the timelines and procedures...

To be nominated for one of these positions, your answer should be "yes", to the next two questions:

- a) Do you live in New Zealand?
- b) Have you been a financial Ordinary Member of Blind Citizens NZ for at least 24 months of the past five years, up to August 2018? If you are not sure whether you meet this element of criteria, please contact our National Office to find out.

What you need for your nomination: Once you have decided to stand for election, you need two people to support you – one will move and the other will second your nomination.

There are two ways you can complete and submit your nomination – by paper, or email. If using the paper form, signatures of each of the three members involved in the nomination are required. Email procedures similarly require the same people to actively confirm their respective role in the nomination process. If you choose the email procedure, you are required to contact the Returning Officer prior to commencing this process. This is important as there are instructions unique to the email procedure that must be followed i.e. the email process mirrors as closely as possible, requirements for the paper-based option.

Nominations close at 4pm Thursday 16 August 2018, and must be received and in the hands of the Returning Officer by this date/time. Candidates need to provide their CV when their nomination is sent to the Returning Officer. Nominations should be sent to the Returning Officer at one of the following:

- **Post:** Blind Citizens NZ, PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242;
- **Fax:** 04-389-0030;
- **Email:** election@abcnz.org.nz

What happens once nominations close? If the maximum number of nominations for the four positions is received, no election will be needed. Candidates for those positions will be declared elected unopposed. However, if nominations exceed the number of positions being elected, an election will then be held.

Financial Ordinary Members have a say: Ballot material (names of people standing for election, information they have provided about themselves, and voting information), will be sent to all Ordinary Members recorded as financial on the member database at National Office as at **4pm, Thursday 16 August 2018**. No later than **Thursday 6 September 2018**, ballot material will be distributed in the voting member's preferred format.

When does voting close: Completed ballots (votes cast by voting members) must be received at National Office no later than **4.00 pm, Tuesday 25 September 2018**. Vote counting will take place Thursday 27 September 2018.

Candidate information: Blind Citizens NZ has several options available for member to participate in our election process. Election (ballot) material about candidates standing for election is available in large print, audio (CD), braille, by email, and via our National Feedback Line on the Telephone Information Service (TIS). If you are in any doubt about whether your preferred communication option for Blind Citizens NZ elections is correctly identified on our records, please contact our national office to check.

Choose your preferred option to vote: When casting your vote, there are three options to choose from. Please note that the way you vote, can be different from the way you choose to receive your election (ballot) material. You can cast your vote using the large print form, the braille-card option, or TIS. We encourage you to try TIS as this offers a truly independent and empowering voting experience. By using TIS you can independently do all the things you need to do in an election – you hear all about the candidates standing for election, and you cast your vote. You can also be certain your vote will be received on time, something that cannot be assured when using the postal option. If you would like to know more about using TIS, and/or to cast your vote using this option, and you are unsure if you are registered with us to do so, please contact our national office.

Work and Income - remaining abreast of change

Blind Citizens NZ is actively working with government officials to influence change, and to make a blind bit of difference. Our work is varied and on this occasion, we take time out to highlight some of the areas we have influenced over time, within the Ministry of Social Development.

We encourage readers to take the time to provide us with feedback about your experiences. This informs our work, and for Government, enables monitoring of implementation of change and what is working, and where attention may be needed.

Same case manager: a number of people say “I have established a good relationship with my case manager, can I have the same case manager.” The answer is **yes**. Remember to mention this when you call to make an appointment. Sometimes you may need to wait a little longer when you make a specific request such as this, than if you agreed to see just any one.

Signalling your communication needs: Work and Income is aware that a number of people have particular communication needs such as email. If you are talking with your case manager (or when you speak with someone at the Call Centre), check with them if they have recorded on the computer why and what you need. Work and Income is unable to record this information unless it asks you or you ask them.

Overseas Travel – Disability Forum (programme or event): In some situations you may be able to continue to receive payment of your benefit for up to 12 weeks when you are overseas to attend a disability-related forum (programme or event). This is over and above any other discretionary four week absence from New Zealand that you may be allowed in a 52 week period. The criteria for continuing payment on the basis of attending a disability forum are:

- the person must have a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment; and
- the absence from New Zealand must be for the purpose of attending a disability forum approved by the Chief Executive Ministry of Social Development (note all applications must be referred to the Principal Disability Advisor, Anne Hawker); and

- the approved disability forum must be:
 - ✓ a disability programme or event associated with the United Nations or an international disability organisation; or
 - ✓ another type of programme or event that the beneficiary is attending to contribute a disability perspective.

This criteria does not extend to your partner if they're getting a benefit and are expected to look or prepare for work.

Beneficiaries will need to provide proof of their intended attendance at an overseas disability forum i.e. registration documentation and travel itinerary is required.

Accessibility Statement and work across government agencies:

The Chief Executives group on Disability Issues have signed off the following Accessibility statement:

[Begins] “Public Sector Chief Executives are committed to working progressively over the next five years towards ensuring that all information intended for the public is accessible to everyone and that everyone can interact with our services in a way that meets their individual needs and promotes their independence and dignity.

Accessibility is a high priority for all our work. This means:

- meeting the New Zealand Government Web Accessibility Standard and the Web Usability Standard, as already agreed, by 1 July 2017;
- ensuring that our forms, correspondence, pamphlets, brochures and other means of interacting with the public are available in a range of accessible formats including electronic, New Zealand Sign Language, Easy Read, Braille, Large Print, Audio, captioned and audio described videos, transcripts, and tools such as the Telephone Information Service;
- compliance with accessibility standards and requirements as a high priority deliverable from vendors we deal with;

- responding positively when our customers draw our attention to instances of inaccessibility in our information and processes and working to resolve the situation;
- adopting a flexible approach to interacting with the public where an individual may not otherwise be able to carry out their business with full independence and dignity.

We will continue to actively champion accessibility within our leadership teams so that providing accessible information to the public is considered business as usual.”

Blind Citizens NZ (a member organisation of the Disabled People’s Organisations Coalition), has been actively involved in the development of the Accessibility statement that was adopted during 2017. Meetings to look at the programme of work to progress achievement of the aspirations included in this statement are ongoing.

MyMSD Website: Blind Citizens NZ has been active in raising with MSD, issues around the accessibility of its MyMSD Website. Those concerns have been heard by MSD, and work is underway with the vendor to ensure MyMSD meets the public sector web standards. Blind Citizens NZ remains actively involved as this work progresses.

Obituaries – We recognise Blind Citizens NZ Members

By Allan Jones

Over the past several months, we have fare-welled members known to many of us for their long-standing involvement with, and contributions to Blind Citizens NZ and the blind community generally. This article recognises some members whose passing we know about. It is fitting that we recognise in particular Moya Badham, John Tunnicliff, John Douglas, and Marlene Lazarus.

Moya Badham is remembered for the wisdom she demonstrated at Conferences. She spoke in a commanding but gentle manner and was not afraid to give her opinion.

I first met Moya about 50 years ago where she was a stalwart of the then Hamilton Branch of Blind Citizens NZ.

John Tunnicliff was a resident of Pearson house when I lived there in the early 1960's. He was always willing to sit down and talk and he fought for what he believed in. Mary Schnackenberg paid John a great complement when she spoke of him making sure he got minutes of meetings in braille; he was well prepared for meetings by reading and digesting them.

John Douglas was well known to Wellington members of Blind Citizens NZ. He was a great conversationalist and shared with me a great love of cricket. John passed away at the end of October last year aged 79. He was given a rousing farewell where much was said about his “trail blazing” in broadcasting. A comment on his HR file was also mentioned – this being that “John would be hindered in his career by his lack of sight”. We know this certainly wasn’t the case.

Marlene Lazerus was a Member-for-Life from Upper Hutt. She passed away early this year. Marlene was one of the first frequent callers to the National Feedback Line. She was a fervent supporter of Blind Citizens NZ. Marlene was a lady who spoke her mind and did not take prisoners.

The Blind Foundation’s Revised Constitution What’s in it for us? From Geraldine Glanville

I have heard it suggested that at least some members of Blind Citizens NZ are unsure how the recent revision of the Blind Foundation’s rules could benefit them either individually or collectively.

Having been part of the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC for admittedly only the last six months of its existence), I would like to try to shed some light on the most significant items members may have missed in the mass of information that came out both during and at the end of the review.

Some of you may recall that The Foundation's Board sought to update the constitution in 2014 with no prior consultation and with inadequate explanations of the effect of or reasons for the proposed alterations included with the voting forms. This was followed by the obligatory Meeting of Members during which proxy votes were used to thwart the meeting's desire to call a halt to the inevitable outcome of the vote because of these obvious shortcomings. As many of you will be aware, it was due to the efforts of Clive Lansink, our then National President, who sought to mount a legal challenge on constitutional grounds, and no doubt also to the Board's growing realisation that it had over-stepped the mark in the way it had handled the process, that provided the catalyst for the establishment of the Review Committee. For those of the Committee who were aware of this background, there was always the feeling that the 2014 experience represented the elephant in the room.

Postal Ballots: So, what now is different from 2014 and could the same situation happen again? Well, this is unlikely, but the ball is now in our court. First of all, the Board must now circulate to members in advance of any postal ballot, any changes it is proposing to make to the rules, or on any other proposal for that matter. This will not mean that all members will necessarily receive individual notification but will be advised through mass-media outlets such as email or perhaps even Outlook. It is expected that this will reach most of those in the blind community likely to have a view on what is being proposed. After a period of discussion and debate, the strength of any objections raised may persuade the Board to withdraw or modify its position.

If not, a group of 20 members may submit a rebuttal or counter-proposal which the Board is bound to include in the voting pack alongside its original proposal. The vote will still be on the Board's own proposal, but at least the counter argument will be there to help voters make their choice as to whether to support the Board's proposal or not. This is an entirely new and untried ruling at this stage, so it will be interesting to see if and how it works out in practice.

If Members themselves wish to change the rules or have the Board conduct a postal ballot on any issue on their behalf, , they will need to present evidence of support from not less than 100 Members (a reduction from the previous requirement of 5% of the membership) . The Board will be allowed the same opportunity to present its own rebuttal or counter-proposal, although it will be the Members" resolution that will be voted on in the postal ballot. The outcome of any resolution voted on in a postal ballot is binding on the Board.

The Board can still make changes to the rules without reference to Members in the case of a manifest error or one caused through legislative change. However, any proposal to make such changes must be signalled in board meeting minutes before being adopted at a subsequent meeting. The intervening period would thus provide an opportunity for any concerns to be aired.

Meetings of Members: The Board may call a Meeting of Members at any time, but Members will need evidence of support from at least 100 Members (a reduction from the old mark of 5%) before such a meeting will be called. In order to satisfy the apparent requirements under Incorporated Societies legislation, a special Meeting of Members will also need to be convened even though a postal ballot may have previously been held. This of course also enables those who have not yet voted to seek further information or assurance before casting their vote.

No resolution adopted at a Meeting of Members, including the Annual General Meeting, is binding on the Board. There has always been a provision in the rules for 30 Members to include in the Notice of Meeting a 600-word explanation in support of a resolution to be included in the business of the Annual General Meeting. This provision has never been used and, although not binding on the Board, such a resolution and its supporting arguments could be considered a useful means of drawing attention to and garnering support for an issue that will definitely be circulated to all Members.

One particular change in this area is that the Board is now required to formally notify its intentions within 40 days regarding any resolution adopted at a Meeting of Members and, if no action is to be taken, then the reasons for this must also be provided. Once again, this is likely to be via mass media outlets. It may be time to start using resolutions, whether notified in advance or arising from the floor, to elicit a response that will receive a wider circulation to Members than often occurs with the mere submitting of questions for oral answer and later inclusion in the minutes.

Proxy votes have now been eliminated entirely, not only for influencing a vote count but also for boosting the numbers of those attending a meeting. This has meant that a quorum for a meeting has been reduced from 50 to 30.

Interacting with the Board: Members have always had the right to observe at Board meetings and to speak with the permission of the Chair. However, this right has now been extended to all clients of the Foundation as well as staff and volunteers. The implication thus created that the Board really does want to hear from stakeholders should be an incentive for Blind Citizens NZ to use this facility more frequently than it has in the past.

A new rule on complaints and grievances has been introduced to comply with proposed Incorporated Societies legislation.

Complaints may be raised about the actions of a Member, or a complaint or grievance may be raised about the actions of the Board. In either case, the essential element in this ruling is that Members have the right to be heard

One possible complaint I could raise at the moment is that Board meetings often lack good sound quality. Being an observer at Board meetings, either in person or on the phone, only makes sense if one can hear what is being spoken around the table, so hopefully this problem will be rectified in due course.

Self-determination: Most will be aware that the Associate's seat has been disestablished and the seat reconstituted as a further member-elected one, meaning that the entire Board is now elected by Members.

There are more references in the constitution about the right to be consulted and have active involvement in decisions that affect us. We are even supposed to be consulted when certain policies are changed. Consultation is one of those words however whose interpretation and application appears to be somewhat flexible, so I would probably take this with a grain of salt.

The definition of self-determination as a preamble to the rules was a late inclusion by the CRC. It is a reminder to the Blind Foundation of the inalienable rights of blind people on which the rules are founded and which must be respected throughout the organisation.

I hope this short summary goes some way towards identifying those areas in the rules that we should be more aware of. A copy of the Blind Foundation's constitution and the final report from the CRC covering its work, is available from the Board Secretary at the Blind Foundation.

Congratulations William Wu – Excellence Prize Winner 2017 World Blind Union Onkyo Braille Essay Contest

Blind Citizens NZ is pleased to publish William Wu's winning essay announced October 2017. We are guided by the contest sponsors (Onkyo Company Limited and The Braille Mainichi Newspapers of Japan) when publishing winning entries. William Wu's essay and details provided by the sponsors follow.

The Excellence Prize 2017 for Group A was awarded to **William Wu**, 15-year-old male from New Zealand, a BLENNZ student, with a score of 72 points. He was awarded the prize for the following reasons:

1. William Wu shows how, despite his blindness, he was able to gain positive experiences, opportunities and even privileges.
2. He further shows how he has been a source of inspiration to others and how other people have inspired him.

This is William Wu's Essay - The Positive Experiences and Opportunities that can come from being Blind

Blindness is a terrible and insuperable condition for anyone to live with. Imagine, living in a world without light – in total darkness. Surely, this is a heart-breaking and devastating curse!

I lost my sight at the tender age of two when I developed Retinoblastoma, a rare type of eye cancer, in both my eyes. In spite of having undergone a number of medical procedures (including chemo and laser treatment), the cancer cells could not be exterminated. Finally an operation had to be performed to remove the infected parts from both eyes.

Indeed, many people consider sight as being "the most precious" of the five God-given senses, and losing it is one of the greatest calamity in life. However, the truth is that blindness is only a curse if you see it as such.

As for me, I believe it can be a kind of key to the many blessings of life if only one would look past the veil and shadows of sightlessness.

Truly, my visual impairment has given me many marvellous opportunities that my sighted peers have never imagined possible. For example, I was able to take part in an overseas camp to learn about Braille music, and to participate in the Onkyo Braille Essay Contest where I have the chance to write about my experiences. Through Braille, I am able to gain new knowledge and pursue my studies.

I can also enjoy the small blessings of every day like disability parking, priority for boarding a plane, and even booking a private lane at the pool for free. All these experiences, and much more, would never have come my way had I been fully sighted.

There are many blind communities all over the world and they are connected to one another through messaging or by their call groups. Though they are blind and experiencing similar problems on account of blindness, they are amazing and knowledgeable people who share their ideas and experiences with each other. Through contact with them, I have been able to learn so much such as new technological skills, sharing ideas on music, arts and craft, gaming tips, and infinitely more.

Being part of this great inspirational and educational network is a definite positive. I have made many friends, and through the sharing of ideas and experiences, we get encouragement and solutions to our problems. In this way, I feel positive and can focus on my goals in life. I know of no other community which is like our blind community.

When we are cheerful and motivated, we are a source of inspiration and encouragement to our friends, both sighted and blind, but especially to those who feel down-hearted and disappointed with life.

Sometimes people are amazed when they see a blind person doing something which they perceive to be exceedingly difficult. For example, they think that rock climbing is an impossibility for the blind. In reality, however, I think rock climbing is more about technique than about seeing.

Also, some things that blind people do on a daily basis and which we would consider them to be "normal" things, can actually amaze and surprise some sighted people. They have come up to me and say that I am "inspirational". I feel embarrassed but, at the same time, I get a sense of happiness and thankfulness that I can touch people's lives in this way. On the other hand, sighted friends help me to know about the "sighted world", thereby preparing me for entry into that world after leaving school.

Being visually impaired has introduced me to extraordinary opportunities and events which would not have been possible if I was not blind. And being blind has connected me to a worldwide community through which we are able to share knowledge, ideas and tips; thereby making the world an easier, safer and better place. It has helped me to develop self-confidence, and made me articulate in expressing my thoughts and feelings.

Indeed, living as a disabled person among the sighted in my school community has been mutually uplifting. All these experiences and events are positive things in my life. All these positive things show that living with blindness is not a curse - if we would only make full use of the gifts that God has given to us and the opportunities that come our way.

Personnel - Blind Citizens NZ

Board

- **National President:** Jonathan Godfrey (Management Committee) jonathan@tactileimpressionz.co.nz
- **Vice President:** Martine Abel-Williamson (Member-at-Large / Management Committee): martine.the1@xtra.co.nz
- Andrea Courtney (Member-at-Large): andycoute@xtra.co.nz
- Geraldine Glanville (Member-at-Large / Management Committee): gbglanville@xtra.co.nz
- Shaun Johnson (Member-at-Large): shaun.zdots@xtra.co.nz
- Murray Peat (Member-at-Large): phone 021 081 66126; murraytp@xtra.co.nz
- Daniel Phillips (Member-at-Large); 027 468 3669
- Paula Waby (World Blind Union Representative / Management Committee): paula.waby4@gmail.com

Focus Editor

Email articles to: focus@abcnz.org.nz

Post: PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

National Office

Physical: Ground Floor, 113 Adelaide Road, Newtown, Wellington

Postal: PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

Phone: 04-389-0033; 0800 222 694

Fax: 04-389-0030; **Internet:** <http://www.abcnz.org.nz>

Email: admin@abcnz.org.nz

Executive Officer, Rose Wilkinson: rwilkinson@abcnz.org.nz

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