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Blind Citizens NZ

FOCUS

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Second Time Around Editorial, Allan Jones

This is my second attempt at being editor of focus, my first attempt ended rather ignominiously 55 years ago. Cyril White and Terry Small approached me to be focus editor however at that stage of my young life I had too much on my plate coping with university and dealing with having just left Pearson House. One of the reasons I was chosen was that I had in my possession two Ferograph real-to-real tape recorders which for copying purposes was a great advantage. My first major blue was when copying a tape I put both recorders in the record mode hence wiping the copy that Terry had given me to copy and send out to branches.

The second major blunder was to have a friend reading an article on to tape while there was a soccer match being played at Blanford Park which was located at the back of my flat. My friend's voice was drowned out by cheers and whistles from the very exuberant crowd of soccer enthusiasts. I was relieved of my editorship fairly promptly.

It is my hope that 55 years later I will be much more organised.

I want to pay respect to previous editors Carolyn Weston and Judy Small. Between them they covered 16 years of editing focus. Three other editors I would like to mention are Anne Clarke, Terry Small and Mary Schnackenberg.

My first experience of a then Dominion Association of the Blind (DAB) meeting was as a 14 year old school boy crouching under the stage of the old Foundation's gymnasium. Archie McLaren an old Blind Citizens NZ stalwart was being chastised for busking in the local George Hotel. Archie claimed in no uncertain terms that it was his right to busk and that no matter what the meeting decided he would continue to busk.

Another memorable meeting about five years later was a series of meetings where the topic for discussion was whether the DAB should accept money given by the Foundation's Board to run the Association or whether to go on collecting money from the public. The first meeting ended in a tied vote. Stan Cooper Auckland branch chairman who chaired the meeting had a casting vote and I am quite convinced cast his vote against accepting money from the Foundation. However the result was disputed and about three weeks later another meeting was held. A number of elderly members were "bussed in" and the decision was reversed.

I went on to serve on the Auckland Branch committee for a number of years. Stan Cooper was Chair for most of this time. He was a great leader and a great visitor of blind members around Auckland. Stan was very interested and advocated for their welfare. Other members of this committee were Bruce Gourlay, Cissie Bryan and Terry Free. The Auckland Branch had its committee meetings in a room in the Civic Chambers. Harold Laurent was another very active member having a local and national roll in the DAB.

From my memory there weren't too many women involved in the Association. Cissie Bryan, Nan Aiken, and Ethel Curry were active members in the Auckland area. At a national level there were the Wharton sisters from Wellington, Hilda Osborne and Margaret Seabrook from Whanganui, and Moya Badham from Hamilton.

During my time of editorship I want to highlight some of the characters of Blind Citizens NZ, and talk about their legacies. I also want to get contributions from younger members especially as to what sort of Blind Citizens NZ they envisage in the future. Áine Kelly-Costello has contributed an excellent article to start this ball rolling.

It is interesting to note that I have witnessed three name changes of Blind Citizens NZ. When I joined, it was called the Dominion Association of the Blind. I am uncertain when the next name change occurred but I do remember the debate when it became the New Zealand Association of the Blind and Partially Blind. Then in 1998 Blind Citizens NZ adopted its present name Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand.

That's enough reminiscing for this issue as from the last few months there is a lot to write about.

The 2017 Annual General Meeting and Conference was held at the Ascot Park Hotel Invercargill. Blind Citizens NZ's Board, staff, and volunteers did a tremendous job in venue selection, and the devising of a Program. I was greatly impressed in being given a braille copy of a pamphlet about the hotel. My only regret is that I wasn't able to spend more time in Invercargill. Carolyn Weston and Tony did take me and several others to a very good fish restaurant on the Thursday night. I would have liked to have visited the Burt Munroe Museum and the other new transport museum.

I will publish highlights from the AGM and Conference in this issue and the March issue.

The second item I will highlight is the Transformation of Disability Support Services which builds on the principles of Enabling Good Lives. This is rather a complicated and complex issue but I am fairly certain that over the next 10 years there will be major changes to how disability services are dispensed and these changes will be for the better. I will come back to this topic later.

The third issue I highlight is about some fairly major changes in the taxi industry. Again I feel this will have a profound effect on the blind community.

Finally, the last issue I want to highlight are two films which were shown in the international film festival. The film “Dealt” and the film “No ordinary Sheila”. No ordinary Sheila, which might still be appearing in cinema’s over Christmas is about an amazing Kiwi woman Sheila Ngatouche. Much of the film is taken up with interviews with Kim Hill and Dianna Priestly. There is also narration by Phil Darkins a well-known singer and broadcaster. The DVD of this film will be out late February.

The second film is Dealt, directed by Luke Korem. This film was billed as being about a blind card magician Richard Turner. For me and George Taggart who went to the film with me, the highlight of the film was the journey of both a brother and sister through loss of sight. I am pleased to report this film is audio described and I hope to be able to print the URL for accessing the audio described film. I have a feeling it will appear on Netflix.

I want to encourage members to submit contributions to Focus. I would prefer to have them signed however, unsigned contributions as long as they are not transgressing decency, blaspheming, or libellous, space permitting, will be published.

I look forward to being the focus editor and I hope I will receive many contributions to this magazine. I wish you all a happy Christmas and a prosperous new year

From Jonathan Godfrey, National President

Greetings everyone. I write this column hard on the heels of a full weekend with the Board at our Annual Planning Meeting. So much has been happening since my last column that I've found it a little difficult to work out how or where to start. During our discussions at this meeting we placed a great deal of emphasis on aligning our work with the new Strategic Plan.

Right at the top of that document, we see why we work for Blind Citizens NZ where it says "Blind Citizens NZ exists to give voice to the aspirations and lived experiences of blind, deafblind and vision-impaired New Zealanders." While it is true for the work I do as a Board member, it is also true for so much of what I do away from the board table as well; I'm confident that there are many others among you who are showing that you don't need to be National President to demonstrate that blind people do have aspirations, and that we do have a view of the world that is based on our lived experience as blind people.

Perhaps the most obvious demonstration of the voices of blind people comes out at our meetings. During September, I visited two centres to talk with local members about how they want to play a role in the ongoing work of Blind Citizens NZ. The members I met in Christchurch and in New Plymouth decided that they would prefer to continue as "networks" rather than using the formal branch structure used in the past. The most important meeting of blind people is (of course) our national event held in October each year.

Our AGM and Conference were held in Invercargill, and it was well worth the long trip down there. Concerns that having to travel so far for the event were quickly laid to rest as we can now boast (just a little) about getting the largest number of members together in one room for a very long time. The successful Guide Dog Handlers' Forum was held immediately prior to the main event, and it looks like we will soon have our first special interest network being formally established. Special guests included the new Disability Rights Commissioner, Paula Tesoriero; Brian Coffey (Office for Disability Issues Director); Dianne Rodgers (Blind Foundation); Sue Plowman (Auckland Disability Law) and Clive Lansink (past National President) to hear their views on how we might progress the rights of disabled New Zealanders.

Later in the day we managed to gather all but one of the living National Presidents for a discussion filled with anecdotes, a few laughs, and only a modicum of advice for the incumbent.

One of the more controversial speakers we heard from on the Saturday was Graeme Nahkies who is an expert in governance. He has worked with the Board this year and following our discussions, he accepted the invitation to tell us what he thought was in need of fixing with our organisational structures. He did, and some of his ideas were challenging. While some of his suggestions received general support, others very definitely did not. Having gathered an indication of support for some issues raised in a discussion paper and the address from Graeme, the Board needed to work out a "where to from here" plan. A suggested way forward was presented to the Board by Geraldine Glanville and has now led to the establishment of a Governance Review Panel (GRP) that will need input from our members. Expressions of interest are called for elsewhere in this issue, but even if you don't want to join the panel, your opinion on various topics is important to us and you will be asked for it during 2018.

Over the years, members propose remits for discussion at conference. These often lead to statements of policy being developed or propose a call to action. We have a very long list of resolutions passed at our conferences though, and acting on all of them is proving to be an unreasonable burden on our limited resources. Your Board has therefore had to prioritise among the numerous advocacy issues we could follow up on, along with the activities that are necessary to make sure Blind Citizens NZ adapts to the rapidly changing world we operate within. We can do only so much, and to add a new challenge to our "must do" list means we actually need to take something off that list. Prioritising is not a fun exercise because it does mean that something we want has to be dropped down the list to a low priority level.

That does not mean it is to be forgotten; we will act if opportunities to push any issue of interest to our members arises, but trying to create opportunities is far from easy. The Board's first attempt at creating a priority rating for each issue might end up being a fairly blunt instrument, but we must find a way to set ourselves up to succeed. We can only get better at doing this exercise, and the second time we do it will be easier than was the first.

Another key outcome of the Annual Planning Meeting is the decision to hold our AGM and Conference in Wellington next year. When it comes down to it, the cost of an event in Auckland is beyond our means. In part, the Board hopes that making a decision this early gives the members in the upper North Island enough time to prepare for a journey south. More importantly though, the Board determined a theme for Conference. We reflected on the need to continue work in "raising expectations", mostly of those people outside our community that do not understand the realities of life we face, but also of organisations that provide us with services, and perhaps even those of us who put our own glass ceilings on what we can achieve in life. The full theme will be "Raising Expectations: is blindness defining who we are?" I hope you join us to help push the boundaries and smash the glass ceilings.

The festive season is soon to be upon us all. I ask you to take care of yourselves, your loved ones, and those around you. I hope you get to enjoy the finer weather, the company of good people and all the goodies that the festive season delivers. May your gardens grow beautiful fruit and vegetables and your kind words bring joy to the people around you. Merry Christmas.

Listening, Connecting, Engaging - The perspective of one young, active Blind Citizens NZ Member

From Áine Kelly-Costello

I'm a University student, campaigner and Blind Citizens NZ member. I had the privilege of addressing the Blind Citizens Conference this year. As a young person active in the organisation, and in light of the conference theme of "listening, connecting, engaging", I took the opportunity to share some learnings and suggestions based on my experiences of campaigning both for climate action at my university and as a community organiser for the Access Matters campaign for accessibility legislation. Below, I outline what I hoped to convey.

Blind Citizens NZ has a 72-year-long proud history of blindness advocacy in New Zealand. As we heard at Conference, an impressive number of attendees have actively contributed to that history for half, or close to it, of the organisation's life thus far. Something keeps bringing them back. I suspect that "something" is connected to the fact that they not only feel empowered for their voice to be heard within the organisation, but also because there's a certain sense of camaraderie in learning from, advocating with, and sharing both moans and laughs with fellow blind and partially sighted humans. They enjoy the opportunity to do just that by being part of Blind Citizens NZ.

However, there is a problem... The memo about all that the good humans of Blind Citizens NZ have in common with other blind humans who have yet to join Blind Citizens NZ isn't always getting out. Members like me could work on improving that by telling stories about why we got involved in the organisation, or what keeps us coming back. Real stories, genuine stories that connect a human to the advocacy.

I could tell you, for instance that I got involved in advocating on my Blind Citizens NZ branch committee because I connected with its mission to reflect the lived experiences and aspirations of blind New Zealanders, and that I wanted to contribute in my own way.

That's not incorrect. But, I could alternatively tell you that one day a Blind Citizens NZ Branch committee member was telling us about the Auckland Library EBook service we should be entitled to. Excited at the prospect of free EBooks, I was most unimpressed to discover that the app was so poorly designed as to make moving between chapters in a book all but impossible with the screen-reader Voiceover. Those free novels and poetry anthologies and goodness knows, waiting tantalisingly just beyond my fingertips, provided the motivation I needed to speak up, among the other friendly but rather more experienced advocates on the Branch committee, to initiate our efforts to convince the app provider to take accessibility seriously.

Now, what about the people who have joined Blind Citizens NZ, or maybe shown a faint trace of interest in the organisation, but aren't more actively involved? Fortunately, various campaigning groups in Australia have developed a useful method for understanding this problem and making progress. I refer to the terminology a group called the Wilderness Society go with here. They talk about circles of engagement. Imagine five concentric circles. Starting from the outside and moving inwards, those five circles are named as follows: Community, Connected, Contributors, Collaborators, Core. Your Community is the set of people that you want to hear about the campaign or organisation. Connected people know about the organisation (e.g. by reading *Focus*) but aren't actively contributing at the moment. Contributors, well, contribute when directly asked, with their time, money or expertise. Then, it's the Collaborators who set about organising the Contributors to make it easy for them to help. Finally, the Core are the glue without whom the organisation would fall apart.

The trick is to find means of encouraging people to move one circle in. This idea is also called "ladders of engagement". We could focus, in particular, on encouraging those branch committee members who would fit into the "contributors" category, to consider how they might coordinate a small group of other contributors working on a particular issue.

How can we encourage our members to have the confidence to step up like this, though? I suggest the Board could consider whether we might put more resources into upskilling our members in areas that would be of particular use to the organisation (e.g. managing accounts, chairing committee meetings, growing our social media presence, blogging, minute-taking, writing advocacy emails ...). These skills are transferable, which should make acquiring them all the more attractive. The Leadership Seminar often held before Conference, and this year's Guide Dog Forum appear to be excellent steps in the right direction. Blind Citizens NZ could build on these with more specific and regional-level efforts.

In short, I believe Blind Citizens NZ has much to offer potential members already. We could communicate that in more relatable and memorable ways, encourage people to move one ring in on the circles of engagement, and entice them to do so with relevant upskilling.

**Governance Review Panel (GRP) - Blind Citizens NZ
From Geraldine Glanville, Convenor / Board Member
Blind Citizens NZ**

We are seeking expressions of interest from financial ordinary (voting) members to look at the structure of our organisation at both a national and local level. If successful, you will be part of a small panel that will do this work.

Those of you who attended our Annual General Meeting and Conference will be aware that we have already opened up discussion on a number of possible areas for change. In addition, the presentation we received from a governance expert outlining what he saw as our outmoded form of governance only served to reinforce the need to move on this with some urgency.

The purpose of this panel will not be seeking to review the constitution at this time. Constitutional amendment can occur once we have agreement on the changes we wish to see. However, some familiarisation with the current constitution will be useful, and in some cases necessary, since this sets out the rules under which we now operate.

The Board reluctantly accepts that the work of Blind Citizens NZ can no longer be centred on the remits process as determined by the Annual General Meeting. As the commitment to the work of being a leading Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) continues to grow, we no longer have the resources to commit to some of the work that used to be generated through our AGM and Conference. This has meant that we have had to prioritise what we believe we can accomplish given our staff and Board capacity and that some remit items may not receive the same attention afforded to them in earlier times.

We are fast approaching our 75th anniversary. In the past, we have prided ourselves on being ahead of our times, and perhaps we still represent what an ideal DPO should aspire to. There is little doubt that our governance processes however have not kept pace with accepted ideas of good governance in the modern era and this is why this panel is being established. If you agree that change is needed and that you have a desire to contribute your thoughts to the melting pot, we urge you to apply to join this panel.

The date for the close of expressions of interest is 31 January 2018. A budget has been provided for this work and there is likely to be some face-to-face meetings as well as email communications. However, the work must be completed by 31 July in order to have plenty of time for the points we raise to be studied before approval is sought at the Annual General Meeting and Conference in October 2018. Please submit your expression of interest to National Office ensuring it is received by 4pm, Wednesday 31 January to any of the following:

- Email to: admin@abcnz.org.nz; or
- Post to: PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington.

**Notice of Extra Ordinary Election to fill the
Member-at-Large Vacancy
From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer**

The election of Paula Waby to the position of World Blind Union Representative, leaves a vacancy for the Member-at-Large position she previously held. The term of office she was serving, concludes at the end of the 2019 Annual General Meeting and Conference. To fill the Member-at-Large vacancy, an extra-ordinary election will be held. Voting members are reminded the Board has the delegated authority to set its own timelines for an extra-ordinary election, and that these can vary to those of scheduled elections. Timeframes to fill the Member-at-Large vacancy are now notified.

- 1. Am I eligible for nomination to stand for election to this position?** Eligibility requirements are set out in Constitutional Ruling 10.1. You are eligible for nomination 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.

2. **How do I go about being nominated?** Nominations must be agreed to by the nominee (person standing for election), and the two individuals moving and seconding the nomination. Nomination forms require the signature of all three individuals. Email procedures similarly require each of the three individuals to confirm their role in the nomination process. Candidates who choose the email procedure 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 supporting information and position statement to the Returning Officer with their completed nomination. Requirements for the nomination process must be concluded (including completed nominations being received by the Returning Officer), by **the close of nominations, 4pm, Wednesday 31 January 2018**. Contact details for the Returning Officer are:

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

3. **What happens after nominations close?** In the event only one nomination is received no election will be held. The candidate standing for this position will be declared duly elected unopposed. However, if more than one valid nomination is received, an election will be held.
4. **Financial Ordinary Members have their say:** Ballot material will be sent to all Ordinary Members recorded as financial on the member database at National Office as at 4pm, Wednesday 31 January 2018.

Distribution of ballot material in the voting member's preferred format will happen no later than **Tuesday 20 February 2018**.

5. **When does voting close:** Completed ballots must be received at National Office no later than **4.00 pm, Tuesday 27 March 2018**. Vote counting will take place the next day (time to be confirmed), Wednesday 28 March 2018.
6. **Receiving election information and casting your vote:** Blind Citizens NZ has several options available for members to participate in our election process. Yes, you choose how you receive your election material, and how to cast your vote. Election (ballot) material informs you about candidates standing for election and 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.

Then, when casting your vote, you have three options from which to choose. Of note is that the way you vote can differ from the way you receive your election (ballot) material. 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 ballot form and you are unable to cast your vote independently, perhaps you might give TIS a go. TIS offers you an independent and empowering voting experience - you independently access information about all of the candidates standing for election and cast your vote. It is also a more reliable option for ensuring your vote is received by the due date. Reliance on mail knowing delays that fall outside the control of Blind Citizens NZ can occur, is something to think about.

Do you want to know more about using TIS and using this to cast your vote?

Do you need to check whether you are registered with Blind Citizens NZ for this option? If your answer is yes to one or both these questions, please contact our National Office.

Last but by no means least, anyone standing for election should obtain information about Blind Citizens NZ's Board, and the Member-at-Large position. You can get this from our National Office - contact details are at the end of this Focus publication.

We're establishing a Network for Guide Dog Handlers

Made possible through an allocation of funds by the Board from a bequest received early in 2017, a two-day forum for current and aspiring Guide Dog Handlers, as well as those who have been a handler, family and friends, was held just prior to Blind Citizens NZ's AGM and Conference.

Such was the enthusiasm of handlers present who both appreciated and benefitted from the many peer-to-peer support opportunities, the suggestion for the Board of Blind Citizens NZ to support the establishment of a Guide Dog Handler Network became clear. Handlers expressed the view this will provide them with a safe and supportive environment to share ideas, experiences and information beneficial to one another.

Our December Focus issue is both timely and ideal for Blind Citizens NZ to promote this opportunity to Guide Dog Handlers so those of you yet to learn about this initiative, can add your expression of interest for the establishment of the proposed Guide Dog Handler Network. You can convey your support for the establishment of the Guide Dog Handler Network via any of the following mechanisms:

- send an email to the email-list established for the Network
guidedoghandlers-blindcitizensnz-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
- leave a private message on Blind Citizens NZ's National Feedback Line;

- by mail to: PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242;
- by fax to: 04 389 0030

We have some background to Blind Citizens NZ's very recently created category for Special Interest Networks and the basis for which the Guide Dog Handler Network will be established. Special Interest Networks may exist where blind, deafblind and vision impaired people wish to join together to pursue a common interest or characteristic i.e. such as for Guide Dog Handlers.

Membership criteria is minimal - members must live in New Zealand. There must be a minimum of five, three of whom will be financial ordinary members of Blind Citizens NZ. Once established, the Network will be required to appoint a Coordinator who must be a financial ordinary member of Blind Citizens NZ. The Network once established, will determine how it will link with and keep its membership informed. As this will be the very first Special Interest Network, the Board will be guided as to the parameters within which the Network will operate.

**Jonathan Godfrey, National President's Report to 2017
Annual General Meeting and National Conference
From Blind Citizens NZ 2017 Annual Report**

The last twelve months have been busy, interesting, challenging, and rewarding as a consequence. I gained the office of National President in an acting capacity following the resignation of Clive Lansink in November 2016, and was elected to hold the position in my own right in March 2017. I wish to record a huge vote of thanks to Clive for his hours of dedication to Blind Citizens NZ during his time as National President and for years before that as he served on our governing body.

I am confident that Clive's dedication remains strong, and that now he uses his energy in different ways to help improve the world for blind, deafblind and vision impaired people.

Clive's departure created my first major challenge to pull a group of people together so that we could work as a team, without one of our superstars. It hasn't always been easy and occasionally we've had to feel our way a little.

I'm pleased that a number of Board members have taken their chances to propose and then lead work in new areas because I am confident that we will all be better off if everyone gets to do their bit, in the way they want to do it. The way we work with our members (current and future) was a key discussion point at our Annual Planning Meeting, and motivated the selection of the theme for this year's conference. With this in mind, I believe we need to find ways of working that suit everyone who wants to help promote and contribute to the work of Blind Citizens NZ, and that includes you, the blind citizens that are our members.

My first challenge away from the board table was the negotiation with the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind over our funding and associated service agreement. I consider this to have been successful, with a significant increase in our funding, but also the recognition that we at Blind Citizens NZ were the lead organisation on a range of issues facing our members and other blind citizens. Of particular note is the recognition that the work we do with government as a Disabled Persons' Organisation (DPO) is making headway on a range of issues because of our importance in the success of the DPO Coalition. The DPO Coalition co-governs the progress on the Disability Action Plan. Our regular meetings with government officials check on the progress of plans set down back in 2014, some of which are advocacy matters that affect blind people every day while others are less relevant to our members.

Action 9A is a key one for blind people; it reads, "Increase accessibility of information across government agencies". At our most recent DPO Coalition meeting this action is considered "on track", but the notes show we had some delays along the way. In contrast, Action 9B, "Understand the journey through the justice sector for disabled adults, disabled children and their families" has been completely "off track" until very recently. We can link these two actions to resolutions passed at our conferences; we know that we can contribute to the debate on these actions because our members have given us a mandate and stated our collective aspiration.

On a topic much closer to my own heart, Action 9E, is to "Implement the work programme of the Disability Data and Evidence Working Group, including a focus on Maori and Pasifika." I am a member of this working group, having been appointed by the DPO Coalition as the "DPO Lead". The working group hasn't done much this year, but the impact of the work done in 2016 is now being implemented.

My recent column in our Focus magazine mentioned some statistical information that we now have, because a set of questions that establish an indicator of disability status is included in several major surveys conducted by Statistics NZ. These questions will also feature in the 2018 Census, and in surveys conducted by other government agencies. We will soon find ourselves in possession of a deluge of quantitative data that supports the things we've known for years at the anecdotal level.

Our close working relationship with other DPOs and Government via the DPO Coalition means we have also been able to promote a few of our own advocacy issues. We know we have the support of our DPO Coalition partners on banking issues, identification, and the companion card initiative to increase access to a range of cultural activities.

Back at the Board level, we've been changing the effort being made in the social media space and working hard to create a Strategic Plan that works for all of us. I'm particularly keen on the statement of purpose we've proposed and I've been testing it a lot this year; I think it has been well-received.

My friends and family might be seeing a lot more of our organisation's work than they've been used to seeing thanks to exposure via Facebook. I believe we have more work to do in the social media space than just liking and sharing things on Facebook though. This is one area of work that will only succeed if members outside the Board actively engage with our work. We need to celebrate the progress being made in all facets of our work, including the work done by our representatives serving on boards, panels, and focus groups. I leave it to others to report on their representative activities elsewhere, but we need to thank these people who commit time and energy to promote our vision. At an organisational level we continue to support Martine Abel-Williamson in her global role as Treasurer of the World Blind Union. We've also had a great deal of governance training, and we've done the things a board has to do to keep an organisation like ours running.

Our staff play a key role in our success. Our Executive Officer, Rose Wilkinson, has been ably supported by Puti Rutene in the Office and contractors to help with fundraising, financial management, and minute-taking. Our National Office has been working slightly differently over recent years as the Board strives for efficiency and effectiveness. In summary, we are concerned that the time spent on administrative matters is time not spent on advocacy. We are keen to make sure the administrative matters are robust, diligent, and meet all legislative requirements, but we cannot afford to miss opportunities in the advocacy arena because we were so tied up doing the housework. This problem is not just one for the National Office. In recent years a number of branches have really struggled to meet the requirements of our constitution and policies.

Over the last twelve months, National Council approved constitutional changes and the Board has established policies for geographic networks, and by the time of our AGM, the number of networks will have risen to three, perhaps four, from one a year ago. I do see a need and opportunities for us to help establish even more networks in future, hopefully going into areas where Blind Citizens NZ hasn't had a formal branch presence to date.

The Board has decided that there is sufficient interest in legislation from our membership to support the work of the Access Alliance which is calling for enforceable minimum standards for meeting the needs of all disabled New Zealanders.

We've also spent time reviewing the work of the Constitutional Review Committee and have determined that the proposed new constitution for the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind Inc. is an improvement on the current constitution and can now encourage our members to support it too.

As National President, I've chaired numerous meetings, attended even more meetings, spoken in public forums and at Select Committees, and visited a number of our regions. I can't do everything, and actually, I don't want to either; I don't have to do everything though because I do have confidence in other Board members and can pass work on to them, especially when my family and work commitments clash with those activities.

My own mother has needed to help me with my children from time to time over the last twelve months, and I wish to thank her publicly for that support. She is just one of the many people that contribute to our organisation even though they are not our members; I ask you to pass on my thanks to anyone who helps you or your branch as a volunteer. We really do need to value these people for their support.

Perhaps it is only through being forced to look back over the last twelve months as part of writing a report for the membership that I can truly appreciate the quantum of work that has been done by me, the Board, our staff, our Branches and Networks, and our Volunteers. In the end, I think it fair to ask why we all do all the work we do for Blind Citizens NZ. For me it is pretty simple. We exist to give voice to the aspirations and lived experience of blind New Zealanders. That is, our members and the numerous other blind people living in New Zealand today and those people who will find themselves part of the blind community in the years

Titbits from the Annual General Meeting and Conference From Rose Wilkinson, Executive Officer

This article highlights bits and pieces from the three days, and celebrates this year's award-recipients. Some aspects may be a little repetitive having been mentioned earlier in this publication...

Friday's AGM business sessions were full on. These involved, working through remits, endorsing the Constitutional amendment about establishing Special Interest Networks, adopting the Strategic Plan 2018-2020 with an amendment that recognises Blind Citizens NZ's international affiliations, and generally getting the work done. While three branches were disestablished, news of three Networks being established i.e. Christchurch, Taranaki and Gisborne, was celebrated.

Saturday's open day started with Invercargill City Council's Deputy Mayor Rebecca Amundsen, carrying out the official opening. Her presentation was followed by a series of guest speakers, whose respective topics painted a picture around advocacy, legislation, human rights, accessible legislation, and pathways responding to any and all of these topics. Speakers were Sue Plowman from Auckland Disability Law; Clive Lansink Immediate Past President Blind Citizens NZ; Paula Tesoriero Disability Rights Commissioner;

Dianne Rogers General Manager Policy and Advocacy and Project Manager to the Access Alliance; and Brian Coffey, Director Office for Disability Issues.

Graeme Nahkies Director BoardWorks International gave a thought-provoking presentation that considered many elements of Blind Citizens NZ including its Constitution and organisational structure. Áine Kelly-Costello's perspectives as a young blind campaigner also focussed on various modes of communication and social media to both inform and engage with members.

Presentations during Saturday's Open Day concluded with a walk down memory lane by all but one of the past National Presidents of Blind Citizens NZ. Forming a panel, Mary Schnackenberg, Doug Johnson, Vaughan Dodd, Carolyn Weston and Clive Lansink each talked about and reflected on their respective time as National President. They also gave feedback in relation to this year's theme.

During Saturday evening's Conference Dinner, award presentations were made. Donald Hunt of Waimate and Joseph Twomey of Whanganui were each awarded the Beamish Memorial Medal for their respective and numerous contributions to Blind Citizens NZ over many, many years.

Wellington City Council and Auckland Council were recipients of the prestigious Extra Touch Award. Auckland Council's outstanding support to blind and vision-impaired Aucklanders during the 2016 local authority elections meant that as voters, they were well-informed about candidates standing for election, and able to exercise their vote in the closest approach to a secret vote Auckland Council could provide. Achieving a world-first, Wellington City Council's installation of 200 iBeacons from one end of the Wellington CBD to the other means blind and vision impaired Wellingtonians and visitors are informed about names of shops and businesses, and what is beyond the entrance.

IBeacons, in conjunction with the BlindSquare App, describe the layout of shops including where the counter is, about obstacles and barriers within, and on exiting, direction and where the nearest bus stop or pedestrian crossing will be.

The John McDonald Trophy was awarded to Nelson Branch recognising that as at 30 June 2017, it had the highest number of members in proportion to the total number of Blind Foundation members in their geographical area.

Doug Johnston was delighted to present on behalf of the Board, the Johnston Trophy for leadership to Áine Kelly-Costello, recognising her contributions to Blind Citizens NZ, blind youth and the blind community in general.

There were two additional, and special presentations this year. The first of these going to Carolyn Weston for her unstinting contributions as Focus Editor over ten years. And to Clive Lansink for his tireless energy and contributions during his successive terms and clocking up 10 years as National President, making him the longest-serving National President in the history of Blind Citizens NZ.

An enjoyable time was had by those who came together for this year's AGM and Conference which was held at the Ascot Park Hotel Invercargill. The facilities were superb, and overall, the support and assistance provided by hotel personnel and staff was exemplar and contributed to everyone's experience and a hugely successful event. The Minutes of the AGM and Conference will shortly be released so you will be able to read more about outcomes etc.

If you are thinking about coming along to next year's Annual General Meeting and Conference, you can start planning now. The Brentwood Hotel Wellington is the venue for 2018, where everyone comes together on Friday 5 October for three days through to Sunday 7 October inclusive.

Electronic Health Records: a direction for health care

From Stephanie Fletcher, Ministry of Health

In 2016 a new Health Strategy was released which provides for a future direction for health care that includes a culture and values that will underpin this direction. One of the action points of the Strategy was to establish an electronic health record. Work has commenced within the Ministry of Health to prepare a business case for Cabinet for approval. It is anticipated that the business case will go before Cabinet before the end of the year.

It is clear that an electronic health record needs to be for all New Zealanders; consumers, health care providers, health planners and innovators. It should enable consumer and their whanau to become more active in managing their health and wellness through accessible information provided in a way that they wish to engage with it.

The Ministry of Health has been actively engaging with a wide range of people to understand why an electronic health record is needed and what it might be. Consumers are involved in this process, from being part of a Sector Advisory Group and Governance Group that supports this project, to participating in workshops and contributing by interview.

A series of co-design workshops were recently held across the country to identify where there are information gaps in current health and social systems and how an electronic health record may enable a better supported health care system that supports the vision. The workshops have been clear in identifying that the benefits for consumers and their whanau are that they are better informed, there is less risk of error, there is less time wasted and there is improved confidence in the health system.

Patient portals have been offered to consumers as a way to interact with their personal health information via general practice for several years now. The portal allows an individual to book appointments online, request repeat prescriptions, view lab and test results and in some cases, email your GP.

An electronic health record could build on that interaction by including hospital, allied health and non-government health records. You can see if your general practice offers a patient portal by going to <https://www.patientportals.co.nz/>

The Ministry continues to engage with consumers. If you would like to be involved in this activity please email Stephanie Fletcher in the first instance at Stephanie_fletcher@moh.govt.nz

Social Media, Not all Bad From Carolyn Peat

The way people communicate and socialise has changed dramatically within the last twenty years. The rise of social media platforms, apps like Facebook, Twitter, Messenger and What's app just to name a few, has given us the ability to connect with family and friends along with the ability to connect with people who share the same interests or causes that we do.

Sadly we do hear about the bad side of social media with bullying and stalking just to name a couple but it is not all bad. I want to share a story where a small group of blind people supported each other using social media for good.

None of us will forget the Kaikoura earthquake on 14 November 2016. For one low vision lady it was very scary. She was Australian and living in Palmerston North. This was her first experience of an earthquake. She was a member of a blind chat group on an app called Roger.

So when the quake happened she recorded a message sharing exactly how she felt and you could hear the quake in the background. There was also a second message from a man in Wellington who had experienced quakes before but even he admitted this one really scared him. For the next few hours those of us awake talked with these two people, keeping them calm and asking if there was any way we could help them. Once things settled down we all went off to sleep not realising we had just been a part of something very special. The next morning the two members of our group we helped left heartfelt messages thanking us for our support and that it made them feel loved and supported even though we were not physically there.

This demonstrates the good side of social media and even though Roger no longer exists there are other apps to take its place.

Social media is a useful way for our community to support, advise and share information and I believe in this day where we are less likely to meet other blind people because there are not the same institutions some of us grew up with, this is the new way to make those contacts. There are public forums you can join and you can create closed groups with friends where it can be a safe place to talk.

We need to accept the challenge of social media and use it for the benefit of our community and by doing so we will meet a whole new group of blind and low vision people who could potentially make a huge contribution to Blind citizens NZ in the future.

The Blind Citizens NZ Board has taken up the challenge of participating in social media with a Facebook page so why not help them by liking the page and sharing the stories they post there with your networks.

Disability Services about to Undergo Profound Changes from Allan Jones

I preface this article by saying that the views and opinions stated in this article are those of the Editor and aren't necessarily the views and opinions of the Association. I hope this article will stir other association members to give an opinion I will do my best to print all opinions expressed.

For the last 10 years I have heard new "buzz" words around Disability Services. In 2006 we were visited by Australian Eddie Bartnich. His visit was sponsored by CCS Disability Action and Paul Gibson hosted Eddie to several meetings and visits around the country. Eddie had three major concepts, individualised funding, local area coordination, and listening to the dreams of disabled.

In 2007 along with many others I presented a submission to a parliamentary inquiry. In my submission I applauded training of workers but I also made a plea to not ignore the maverick caregiver. I also challenged the model of "staffed houses" suggesting that to me in many instances was the worst form of "client capture".

Soon after this inquiry Minister Turia tasked the Ministry of Health to come up with a better way of dispensing disability services. For the last two years I have heard the then Minister for Disability Issues Hon Nicky Wagner talk about "enabling good lives". The Minister also highlighted better employment for the disabled.

There were pilots in Christchurch and Hamilton. Christchurch did well in promoting employment and Hamilton did well in promoting "enabling good lives". There is a good video which I have called the Kylee video, which demonstrates that the enabling good lives approach can work for people. While waiting for a meeting at Ministry of Health I met Kylee in the foyer of the Ministry's building. She appeared even more effervescent then she is in the video and refers to her support people as "her crew".

Rather than having things done to her, the crew do things with her. There is a similarity in our terminology “of, and for the blind”.

Hon Nicky Wagner’s approach went into top gear earlier this year hence more jargon co-design, transformation and of course enabling good lives. Individualised funding is still talked about but I believe in a slightly different but important approach.

A concept where there has been considerable discussion is to have “one bucket of money” from which all disability services are paid for. Again another idea is that if your cost of disability service is under \$5,000, you would not need an assessment.

My main two disability services are transport and technology. The cost of these I should estimate being around \$3,000 per year.

I was a member of a committee to look at the provision of equipment transformation, and there were some really interesting views expressed and highlighted.

One of the services we talked about were Cochlea Implants, a very big one-off cost. Although the cost is not so high I would also put training for a guide dog in this category i.e. in the case of a guide dog a new dog would need to be trained and supplied every eight years. As the system is now, there are various levels of pricing some of which need assessment, while the lower band of equipment do not need assessment.

What has been expressed loud and clear and extremely fervently over the years is the need for assessment, and the waiting time for assessments, hence the waiting time for the delivery of equipment to be reduced dramatically.

Another idea which I like a lot is what has been termed as a “blended approach” i.e. people having the option of an assessment or not, and having an assessment and going straight to purchase the service and equipment they need.

Again for me I know several Foundation and ex-Foundation staff whom I could go to with dollars in hand and get a fairly immediate service. I should add there are several ex-Foundation staff I can now go to and pay for advice.

I would hope that the “large bucket of money” or “pot of gold” would iron out many of the inequities of disability services. One which it should iron out is that when people need services or equipment they would get them and not be disadvantaged by a spouse working as they are under our present system. There is a long way to go in the development of this approach, however, there is a desire and will to get it right.

An aspect of the co-design committee which greatly appealed to me was that members were from the next generation.

I was at University with one committee member’s mother, who is my current boss John Taylor. He is also a member of the co-design group.

There are 24 committees already working on the transformation process, and there is a cabinet paper due to go to Government in December, however this may be delayed until 2018. The transformation pilot in Mid Central is due to kick off from 1 July 2018. The roll-out over the whole of New Zealand could take from seven to 10 years.

Your editor will be watching and reporting on this process with great interest, so do watch this space.

Cyril White Memorial Fund

Next round of applications close 1 February 2018

Knowing a little about Cyril White, may enthuse you to consider making an application to this esteemed memorial fund. Cyril White was a pioneer in the blindness advocacy movement. Following his passing in 1984, the Cyril White Memorial Fund was established to honour his memory. The objective of the fund is to encourage and cultivate leadership skills and qualities among people who are blind, vision impaired or have low vision. Eligibility is primarily aimed towards assisting those who are eligible for full registration with the Blind Foundation. However individuals or projects that are likely to be of direct benefit or interest to those who are blind, vision impaired or have low vision are also eligible for consideration. If you have a project or activity and want to find out whether this meets the fund criteria, then don't be shy. Contact Blind Citizens NZ or the Blind Foundation us for full details. Then when you submit your application, you'll be confident you've ticked all the required boxes, and most importantly, that you meet the eligibility criteria.

Applications to the Cyril White Memorial Fund must be received by 4pm, Thursday 1 February 2018. They should be sent for the attention of: Cyril White Fund, C/ Blind Citizens NZ, PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242. They may also be emailed to: admin@abcnz.org.nz including in the subject line – Cyril White Memorial Application. If you require information regarding eligibility criteria, you can obtain this via either of the above mechanisms, or by phoning Blind Citizens NZ's national office on 0800 222 694.

Prospective applicants should note there are two rounds annually. The first round closes 4pm, 1 February 2018, and the second at 4pm, 1 October 2018.

Taxis

From Allan Jones

For the last six months or so I have followed with great interest the machinations of the taxi industry. My interest has centred on Wellington although I would be interested in hearing what is happening in other cities.

About six months ago I took part along with other disabled people in a trial offered by Uber. Uber offered participants' half price fares to get to know the Uber experience as yet they don't take total mobility cards. Uber and Zoomy can be described as "taxi companies" which are ordered via apps on your iPhone. Before you place the order you're told how long the car will be and how much the trip will cost you. One aspect you need to be aware of is that Uber has "surge pricing" i.e. if demand is great the price of your trip could be more than usual.

In the initial stages of using Uber I had a bit of trouble with the GPS system "drifting" and the car could come to a parallel street some distance away. A very good aspect of the Uber system is that you can call the driver. I often do this and let them know I am a blind person and that they will see me with my white cane. Some drivers will phone me and enquire as to where I am.

As mentioned, Uber don't have total mobility. Perhaps we will have to wait until the "enabling good lives" system comes in to play which would put Uber on a "level playing field".

There are some trips I make where Uber is on par with traditional cabs. Using Total Mobility from my house to the Blind Foundation I pay just over \$10 using Total Mobility. I would pay \$9.50 plus an EFTPOS card fee of \$2.50 if I don't have cash.

The other great advantage with Uber and Zoomy is that there is no cash handling. The fare is debited from my credit card I also get an email giving me details of my trip and the fare I paid.

A recent update to Uber's app is that I can now order an Uber in advance. This was very helpful when I wanted to pay for my nephew getting from my house to the airport. We placed the order at 8.30am for him to be picked up at midday. An email came to my computer confirming the order stating the time for pick up and the cost. This was the lowest I have had from home to the airport for quite some considerable time being \$20.

A recent development in Wellington is that now a considerable number of drivers are driving for several companies. The most common are Uber, Zoomy and Kiwi Cabs. Some drivers I have spoken to don't like "serge charging" so when Uber prices are over the top, will revert to taking fares from Zoomy which doesn't have serge charging. Or they revert to their traditional cab companies. Blue Bubble taxis don't allow their drivers to drive for other companies

Uber now have cars in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

It is my understanding they will soon be in Tauranga, Hamilton, Queenstown, Rotorua and Taupo. Zoomy have cars in Auckland and Wellington - I am not sure about other centres.

One challenge to us will be if braille labels are made again mandatory in taxis, which company will the driver show they are representing? If they drive for three different companies - three different labels might be something they aren't able to do.

In the Parliamentary debate on the Transport Amendment Bill just before the elections, both NZ First and Labour said they would reinstate braille signage in taxis. A lot of cabs I use still have their labels in place and intend keeping them there.

I would like to hear readers' comments about Uber and other taxis, their good experiences and any negative experiences they have had. I guess my final comment has got to be "watch this space".

Self-determination and the Blind Foundation's AGM

By Allan Jones

Perhaps there is still such a thing as a free lunch. On Saturday 11 November about a dozen of us braved the early hour and turned up to 121 Adelaide Road at 10am to join in the Special Meeting to confirm the Blind Foundation's new constitution. Three venues were linked and a roll call got underway fairly quickly. I breathed a sigh of relief when the Constitution was passed with about 90 percent of voters in favour. I will publish more about the Constitution in the March Focus issue.

At 11am the Blind Foundation got underway with another roll call by which time a few more folk had joined the meeting for the AGM. I was extremely pleased to see Maria Stevens (a member of Blind Citizens NZ) get a commendation from the Board Chairman Rick Hoskin for her work with braille. Over the years we have had a number of strong advocates for braille - Elsie Laurent my teacher, Terry Small, and Mary Schnackenberg to name a few. Maria has carried on a good tradition and I am glad the Chair of the Board recognised this.

I was also pleased to be told that the board had put \$1m in to the Oppenheim Trust. Secondary and tertiary education needs to be fostered and encouraged, and adaptive technology needs to be on hand when needed.

The audio linking the venues was much better than it has been in previous years although there were issues which I am certain will be ironed out. In my view the meeting went on half an hour too long but thankfully it did end at 1pm. Wellington Blind Foundation staff were good hosts and provided us with an enjoyable lunch.

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