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Blind Citizens NZ

Focus

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Christmas Editorial, by Allan Jones

I really enjoyed Blind Citizens NZ's Annual General Meeting and Conference, held in Wellington from 5 October to 7 October. Saturday's program was particularly challenging with five speakers including two knowledgeable, high-calibre senior public servants, the launch of the "framework strategy for the delivery of braille services", and three presentations by Blind Citizens NZ members. By afternoon teatime my brain was on overload, and it called for a nana (or is that grandpa) nap.

I particularly enjoyed the presentation from Leilu Harrison-Talbot. Leilu demonstrated a great deal of wisdom and courage - her presentation was "Do I let blindness define who I am?" Her answer was a definite and resounding "no". A member suggested that "here we have a future leader of the Association". Leilu said we need to set up our young people to achieve and succeed. She also quoted her dad who told her "you can do anything you put your mind to".

Kylee Maloney, a member of Blind Citizens NZ, who I have known for many years, gave a riveting address where she talked about her journey through darkness and her reemergence back in to society. Áine Kelly-Costello talked about the Access Alliance and this demonstrated the grouping of Blind Citizens NZ, the Blind Foundation and many other disability organisations. On this topic, your editor was at Parliament a couple of months ago and witnessed the power of organisations presenting together and being "heard" Parliamentarians from all sides of the House. A book of stories was presented to the Minister for Disability Issues Hon Carmel Sepuloni. Other Members of Parliament, senior public servants such as the Disability Rights Commissioner Paula Tesoriero, and Brian Coffey, Director Office for Disability Issues were present.

The three speakers showed me that Blind Citizens NZ demonstrates diversity and inclusiveness. This will ensure Blind Citizens NZ has a future and I believe it will be a very different "beast" in years to come.

Another aspect of Conference, which appealed to me, was the part our National President's children played in assisting with the after-dinner raffles. This reminded me of a yearly Lions dinner where we took our children along and proudly stood up and introduced them. On Sunday morning, it was a privilege to have Jonathan and his daughter Annabelle join me at the breakfast table.

Sacha O'Dea, Programme Lead System Transformation gave a good account of where the programme has got to, now the pilot for the Mid Central region is underway. I believe the Blind Foundation should take cognisance of the profound effect this program may have on their funding, but more importantly to me is the way that future service users will ask for, and demand service. I am very excited about the System Transformation pilot and will keep tabs on developments.

We were privileged to hear a presentation from Neil Annenberg Chief Operating Officer from the Social Investment Agency. It is my understanding that investment in wellbeing will feature prominently in next year's Government budget and that enhancement of Mental Health will feature high on the list of input and expenditure. This department has until now operated under the radar.

I started attending Conferences in 1960. Now, after each Conference I ponder if this will be the last one I will attend. Lately, I am very aware of the National President's comments about the "family of the blind". My experience is very different from Jonathan's, as at an early age, I was thrust into the "family of the "blind". It was a family I wasn't comfortable with, and after finishing high school, I was able to escape. Escaping in the early days wasn't easy. I am told that about this time the then Board of Trustees spent most of one meeting discussing the "outlandish" clothing I was wearing. I think I was wearing corduroy trousers. I also got a letter from the then Director who told me that I had bitten the hand that fed me.

I hasten to add that I am now happy being a member of the "family of the blind" especially as I can be "my own person" a position which wasn't easy to achieve in the early 1960's.

Discussion on Friday, and resolutions passed by Conference will ensure that the structure of Blind Citizens NZ will change to meet the needs and aspirations of younger members, and the climate of 2018. We will hear more about this in the coming months.

Early in November, I ventured out to 121 Adelaide Road to listen to the Blind Foundation's audio link to their Annual General Meeting in Nelson. In Wellington, we started with an audience of five members, two staff, and two volunteers. The volunteers were asked to leave before the meeting started, having provided us with refreshments. Auckland surpassed us with the number of staff members. There were four centres linked by an audio link i.e. Nelson, Wellington, Kapiti and Auckland. There were also some phone links with members in Auckland and Dunedin. Áine Kelly-Costello is the deserving recipient of the Chairman's Award for her contributions and work to make accessibility a key issue across disability organisations. The Blind Foundation Chair also reflected on the long contribution to both the Blind Foundation and Blind Citizens NZ that both Áine and Nola Burges have made. In my view, as both Nola and Áine are Blind Citizens NZ members, it was a pity to learn that Blind Citizens NZ's Chief Executive Rose Wilkinson, was not permitted by the Blind Foundation, to attend its Annual General Meeting. This is more the pity when it is your editor's opinion that the Blind Foundation's Annual General Meeting is a public meeting.

Two other comments to make in this editorial. Westpac Bank have recently introduced some measures, which will reduce charges for persons over 65. These include no fee being charged when using a teller for assistance. It will be interesting to see if other banks follow suit - remember it was Westpac who led the charge in the provision of audio ATMs.

Besides the reviews, I have mentioned in other issues of Focus, I have come across an expert panel to look at benefits, and most importantly to us, an educational review that is looking at the direction of education in the next 30 years. I am glad to observe that high-powered delegations from both Blind Citizens NZ and the Blind Foundation have been involved in this process. This topic also provoked some of the best discussion I have come across on Blind Citizens NZ's "blind discuss" email list.

Next year will be a busy one, cobbling together all these multiple reviews. I trust we can make sense of it all.

My thanks to Rose and the team at Blind Citizens NZ for their support and assistance. I wish all readers a Merry Christmas, a great New Year, and a relaxing and enjoyable holiday.

Keeping Busy

From Jonathan Godfrey, National President

The last three months have been extremely busy for Blind Citizens NZ, the Board, for me as National President, as a dad, a partner, and a friend. Somehow, I've also managed to keep everything going at work so that my students get the best out of me as well. I'm completing this column after the Board meeting and the Annual Planning Meeting and just before the conference I am organising starts tomorrow. My first day of absolute rest since August will be on Sunday, although perhaps the kids will have other ideas! I've worked hard and I've played hard, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Undoubtedly, the highlight of the year for Blind Citizens NZ is Conference. Three days of comradeship, work, play, excessive food and perhaps a shortage of sleep. Our business sessions last around sixteen hours in total and in between there is seldom much downtime as people catch up with old friends or make new ones.

We have our dinner with an award presentation and a bit of fun with the raffles at the end. Our speakers were awesome; they were definitely thought provoking and often entertaining too.

At our dinner, we recognised the crucial role Brendan Boyle (Chief Executive Ministry of Social Development) played in ensuring the Accessibility Charter has been signed by (now) 37 Chief Executives across central government agencies by way of our Extra Touch Award. We presented this to Anne Hawker (Principal Advisor Disability, also from MSD) in place of Brendan, which gave us a perfect chance to surprise her with an award of her own for the role she has played in helping us get the Accessibility Charter progressed. We need champions like Brendan and Anne to help make our hopes become realities. Giving them a moment in the spotlight and a large framed certificate is a lovely way to say “thank you”.

I really do like giving people surprises (the pleasant kind, not the scary kind). An opportunity to give conference attendees a surprise that was full of wow at the time, but once understanding of what had transpired came along, the scary consequences were quickly realised. Josiah, the technician helping provide the excellent audio-visual experience for attendees in two venues helped us out. As Chair, I asked everyone to remain seated and quiet while we gave a demonstration. When all was calm, Josiah undertook his assigned task. After a minute or so, I quietly asked Rose where Josiah was; the answer was “right in front of you!”, so I asked Josiah to do it again, and tell me when he had finished. I then informed attendees that Josiah had just ridden his electric scooter around the room, up and down the aisles several times. I’m guessing very few people had any idea what had happened at all; thankfully, reality hit them, not the dead silent scooter.

The use of electric scooters has been in the news a lot since conference.

I think everyone (blind or sighted) should be concerned about the safety of all pedestrians who cannot hear or see these machines coming. They are, or can be, much faster than pedestrians, even faster than joggers and runners. Your board is deeply concerned about the dangers these and other silent vehicles pose when they must cross paths with pedestrians. We'll be looking for opportunities to promote pedestrian safety and the concerns we have about electric scooters on footpaths.

Opportunities to raise issues of concern to our members have included two appearances in front of the Justice Select Committee. Rose Wilkinson and I talked about the right blind people have to cast an independent vote with dignity and confidence in both general and local body elections. Questions from MPs showed engagement with our written submissions and knowledge of the issues we face.

Getting out to the branches and networks is something I find extremely valuable. I visited Nelson in October and met quite a few members, some old friends, and the new branch committee. The Nelson branch committee is making a lot happen for their members. They have regular activities for peer-to-peer contact, and several committee members are making sure that local issues for blind people are being heard by local Councils.

On returning from Nelson, I went to a donkey show. My partner Amy has four donkeys, two of which went to the show. Aside from doing most of the lifting and carrying, I had to hold and brush donkeys a lot. I did also get to participate in the show-ring a few times because one woman + two donkeys = opportunity. Amy let me show the less cooperative one; Winter is his name, and he is smart (selective, moody, antisocial, resourceful and talented). I was told Winter does not do jumps and that he does not walk backwards, well not for Amy anyway. I can now only reflect that showing donkeys is a lot like our advocacy work.

The donkeys wonder why we ask them to jump jumps that can be walked around, and asking them to back up a bit at our request just seems silly. Contrary to common belief, donkeys are not stubborn and they do not lack intelligence. They require patience and understanding; you must be committed and believe that what other people say is impossible, just might actually be possible, and you must follow your convictions with the right action. Okay, Winter did only jump one of the two jumps, but he did go backwards both times I asked him. I'm now convinced more than ever, that we need to find the right way to ask for what we want. We won't always win first prize (two thirds and a fourth for Winter) but perhaps the results will get better each time we try. FYI: The ribbons now hang in my office at work, and by the time you read this, I will have had my next donkey show experience.

Another parallel between donkey showing and our advocacy work is that we need teamwork, so that the best person available for a task is doing that task, but we also need to share the workload because no one can be in two places at once. That means working out which of the mountain of tasks should be given to each person who wants to contribute. Sure, Amy is better at brushing donkeys than I am, but when I start the brushing of a donkey, she is free to do the jobs I absolutely cannot do.

Delegation is something I find easy to do. It doesn't matter if it is a volunteer or one of my kids doing a chore at home. As long as I trust the job will get done how I want it done, I can pass it to someone else. There are many tasks that I could do as National President but the total time needed to do everything that anyone thinks I should be doing exceeds the time I or any one person has available. I'm pleased to have Board Members who are willing to make themselves available when I can't be. I'd love to have been able to join the South Canterbury Branch at its recent 40th anniversary end of year dinner.

My thanks go to Andrea Courtney for putting her hand up this time, as well as to Martine Abel-Williamson for the times she has attended DPO Coalition meetings that clash with my work commitments.

The Annual Planning Meeting that has just finished is when the Board works out who will do what. We've put a lot of effort into really working out which activities warrant the most energy and attention. We're trying to find ways to make it easier to do the work we do, and to make sure that it isn't just the board being engaged in the work. Even talking to someone in our community, or perhaps someone else who is blind, sharing ideas and our experience does lead to greater understanding of how we can get on with life as blind people. Some of our best chances to talk to one another come by way of our branch or network meetings, attendance at conference, or by following our email lists or Facebook page. One thing I hope you get to do more than I do is to pick up the phone and talk to family members or friends, especially now that the festive season is upon us. I do hope you get to relax as much as you want over the summer break, and are sufficiently revived for a busy 2019.

Implementing Governance Review Outcomes

From Rose Wilkinson, Executive Officer

Outcomes of the Governance Review Panel's work were, circulated several months out from the Annual General Meeting and Conference. Members were therefore prepared to discuss resolutions relating to the future governance structure of Blind Citizens NZ that would occur during the AGM. Resolution 6 in the set of resolutions proposed: "That a revised constitution be made available to all financial ordinary members in their preferred format in the first half of 2019 prior to a ballot being conducted."

In anticipation of the AGM, adopting resolutions on the future governance structure of Blind Citizens NZ, the Board in September, scheduled a meeting of National Council to happen on 12 December.

The purpose of the meeting being to change clause 17(a) in the current constitution which allows for amendment to the constitution by a resolution from the AGM or a resolution from a meeting of National Council. The 2018 AGM endorsed the development of a revised Constitution that would embrace changes proposed by the Governance Review Panel. For this reason, clause 17(a) must now include a postal ballot of members as well. At its meeting on 12 December 2018, National Council unanimously supported the proposed amendment to the Constitution.

The Board is now preparing next steps. This includes giving financial members advanced notice of the opportunity they will have to review the draft constitution early in 2019, and provide feedback. The Board will make decisions based on all feedback received. It will then circulate the final version of the constitution to all financial members to vote on.

For voting members, having certainty about your financial status and knowing you can influence the future direction of Blind Citizens NZ will be especially important. Members uncertain of your financial status should contact National Office for clarification. Contact details are available at the end of this Focus issue.

I Rode a Camel, and Got Bitten by a Cane!

From Paula Waby, World Blind Union Representative

I wanted to share some of my highlights from attending the World Blind Union Midterm General Assembly held in Mongolia from 9-12 September 2018.

The theme was “Leaving no blind person behind – ten years of the UNCRPD, what we have achieved so far and the next decade of advocacy”.

I thoroughly enjoyed and benefitted from attending this meeting and networking with people from the Asia Pacific region and want to thank Blind Citizens NZ for funding my attendance. There were about 180 people there including a large group of observers from Mongolia. New Zealand was well represented with Martine Abel-Williamson, Judy Small, Sandra Budd, Thomas Bryan and myself, plus my guide. Other countries represented included Thailand, the Philippines, China-mainland, Australia, Korea, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Mongolia, Vietnam and China-Hong Kong. We also had representatives from Uganda and Canada and a delegation from North Korea.

The first day commenced with the policy meeting. Following this, we had the Women's Forum, which I found very interesting. The theme for this session was “Women: education, employment, participation and inclusion”. After hearing from various speakers covering plans for hearing the voice of women, education, employment and the Mongolian experience we broke into smaller groups to discuss issues for blind women in our various countries.

The opening ceremony and keynote address for the mid-term Assembly was given by Mr S Chinzorig, Minister of Labour and Social Security in Mongolia. This was followed by speeches from people including:

- Dr Fred Schroeder, President of the WBU;
- Ms Michiko Tabata, President, WBU Asia Pacific region; and
- Ms Gerel Dondovdorj, President, Mongolian National Federation of the Blind, Chair of the Organising Committee.

Some of the issues covered were discussion about the Marrakesh Treaty. Five countries in attendance had already ratified the Treaty including Mongolia. Other topics included a Treasurer's report, UN Advocacy, employment, technological issues, rehabilitation services, accessibility of environment and tourism, web accessibility, sustainability of the region and work done by the Mongolian Government.

Each day there was a craft stall selling goods made by local blind people. There was also an exhibit of The Braille Box, which is made by Index. I was interviewed twice for Mongolian television and co-presented New Zealand's country report along with Thomas Bryan from the Blind Foundation. We received some good questions following our presentation.

One evening New Zealand and Australia had an ANZAC's dinner and it was very good being able to network with our closest ally. Our two countries also met under the Pacific Oceania region to discuss the World Blind Union, and how we could support the other countries in our region.

The welcome dinner commenced with entertainment using Mongolian instruments and throat singing. The gala dinner on the last evening commenced with entertainment from a string quartet, followed by performances from the students at the Mongolian Opera School. It was interesting to experience some of the local music and instruments.

I was fortunate to have an extra day for sightseeing. My highlight was riding a camel. I did not realise how tall they are, even lying down. When they stand up you have to hold tight to the front hump (camels in Mongolia have two humps) because they get up on their back legs first and it throws you forward. It was also nice to get away from the pollution in the city of Ulaanbaatar.

I found the Mongolian people very friendly and willing to assist. The roads were amazing with six lanes of traffic but usually eight cars across swerving unpredictably. If the roads were too busy, cars also seemed to use the footpaths as another lane or as a car park making navigation quite challenging. Pedestrian crossings appeared to be simply a suggestion and in fact the cars toot whilst people are crossing in order to make them hurry up. Police were on most intersections blowing whistles and directing with a light stick. The footpaths were full of manholes raised or inverted a few centimetres, broken or loose cobbles, random lampposts or slabs of concrete placed anywhere and steps of all depths. I was told there are no guide dogs at all in Mongolia and most blind people do not travel alone. Traffic and pedestrians did appear to understand the meaning of the white cane though and slowed or stopped for us.

In closing, if you read my title and are curious my experience in being bitten by my cane was one time when I went to fold it up. Have you ever caught your fingertip between two of the lengths of cane? If not, don't try it. The pain was pretty amazing and I was just pleased it was not my braille-reading finger!

Martine Abel-Williamson – Supreme Recognition

On 28 November 2018, Martine Abel-Williamson, Vice President Blind Citizens NZ was recognised for her contributions towards making a blind bit of difference for disabled people in New Zealand, and internationally. Attitude Awards, run by a charitable trust, that seeks to increase awareness of the benefits of the integration of people with disabilities into every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life, presented Martine with two awards. She received the **Attitude Making a Difference Award** - this award recognises someone with or without a disability who has made a significant contribution to improving the lives of people with disabilities. It aims to celebrate work that improves the lives of people with disabilities within a community.

This may be paid employment, or may work voluntarily but this person will make outstanding personal efforts beyond their job description or effectively be an unsung hero in their community. The entrant may have given up their time and energy to help other people. They may have influenced policy making at local government level, participated in local action, or otherwise made a difference, which has benefited others in their community. The award recognises Martine's aim to assist others, and her selfless giving of time.

Martine also received the **Attitude Supreme Award**, awarded to the category winner who has had the most significant impact on both the disability sector and the wider community. This award recognises that Martine has achieved outstanding results, that she embodies the spirit of the Attitude Awards, and is a role model for others to follow.

In addition to her roles with Blind Citizens NZ, Martine has positions on boards and panels for agencies including ACC, she is Global Treasurer of World Blind Union, Chair of Auckland Disability Law, and lead of the Asia Pacific Regional UN Advocacy Network.

Congratulations Martine – these awards and acknowledgements are recognition of your contributions and the influence you have brought through your work.

Blind Citizens NZ's 75th Anniversary, 2020

In October 2020, Blind Citizens NZ will celebrate 75 years of its existence. The Board is already beginning to think about what this celebration might involve. Greg Newbold will be writing about events since 1995 i.e. the 25 years through to 2020. Aside from this, the Board has made no other decisions, because it wants to hear from members, branches and networks.

Although there are several months before the Board will consider ideas and feedback, starting the process early, means you have more time to start your own thinking. The Board is especially keen to hear from you about:

- Ideas about where to hold the 75-year anniversary celebration.
- Should the celebration coincide with the usual dates i.e. in 2020 this would be Friday 9 to Sunday 11 October?
- Are there international guests we should invite?
- What about speakers, presenters and their topic(s): are there people you believe should be included in the programme?
- What topics should there be for speakers and presenters?
- Is there a theme the 75-year celebration should take - so, what is this?

Feedback closes at 9am, Monday 10 June 2019. The Board will consider all ideas and feedback at its meeting on 22 and 23 June.

Celebrating Success – Identification and Accessibility

Earlier in this Focus issue, we celebrated people recognised in different ways, for their work and/or championing of blindness and disability issues. We carry that theme through here to celebrate organisational and collaborative disability-related successes.

Identification is an issue Blind Citizens NZ has advocated on for a very long time. We know as a result of Conference resolutions, hearing from members across the community, and working with the Blind Foundation also, just how much blind, deafblind and vision impaired people need a nationally accepted form of identification that is just about the person - not linked to age, ethnicity, travel, disability, financial status, or any other aspect of one's life.

We also know through our collaborative work with the DPO Coalition (comprises seven disabled people's organisations in total), and Government that many people across society will benefit from a generic form of identification such as Blind Citizens NZ has been advocating.

Led by Blind Citizens NZ and working collaboratively with the DPO Coalition, Government, Hospitality New Zealand, and other stakeholders, we celebrate the success of the Kiwi Access Card. As stated by Hospitality New Zealand, "The new Kiwi Access Card has been designed with everyone in the New Zealand community in mind. We have changed the name and the look of the card so that it can better address the needs of everyone, across our society that needs a form of secure identification to give them access to goods and services."

The Kiwi Access Card has enhanced security features, to ensure it is a secure and reliable form of identification. Here is an overview of security and other features included on the Kiwi Access Card:

- use of UV ink means that under UV light the 'Koru' will appear in the background;
- micro text in the background of the card makes the card harder to scan, and therefore harder to forge;
- braille letters "ID" in lower case are towards the front, bottom right;
- a small transparent photo of you is to the right of your main photo i.e. at the bottom, approximately centre, and visible from the back;
- a transparent map of New Zealand towards the right hand side on the front of the card, is visible from the back also;
- the bottom right hand corner of the card is transparent, which makes the card exceptionally hard to replicate;
- the front of the card is overlaid in an holographic layer featuring a security design/emblem.

We include a front facing sample of the Kiwi Access Card below – the words “Kiwi Access” appear at the top left of the card. A Koru design separates the two words. Your photo is on the left of the card under the title Kiwi Access. Embossed, at the bottom of the main photo is your date of birth. To the right of the photo details include full name and date of birth (required to verify identification), respective issue and expiry dates, small transparent photo of you, map of New Zealand, embossed individual card-number bottom right, and braille letters “id” just above.



Applications for the Kiwi Access Card open from 14 January 2019, via NZ Post. The cost is \$55 including GST, and is valid for ten years.

Now to our next success celebration. During 2016, led by the Blind Foundation, a collective of disability-related organisations began working collaboratively to consider the potential for accessibility legislation in New Zealand. By 2017 there were 12 organisations signed up and working towards accessibility legislation: Blind Foundation, Auckland Disability Law, CCS Disability Action, Deaf Aotearoa, Disabled Person’s Assembly, Parents of Vision Impaired (NZ), Inclusive New Zealand, Kāpō Māori Aotearoa, Blind Citizens NZ, National Foundation of the Deaf, People First Aotearoa, and Cerebral Palsy Society.

When talking about successes, these are the collective of everyone’s work and contributions. There are however, individuals who have been champions, such as Áine Kelly-Costello who coordinated the grass-roots campaign.

Additionally, initiatives and collaborative approaches, led on behalf of the Blind Foundation by Dianne Rogers - Access Alliance Coordinator and Blind Foundation General Manager, Policy and Advocacy. David Lepofsky, Ontarian champion for accessibility legislation has worked closely with Dianne Rogers and the Access Alliance as our work has progressed.

Over the past 12 months the Access Alliance has created accessibility-related awareness opportunities, and strengthened its relationship with Government, primarily through the Minister for Disability Issues Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Members of Parliament (Parliamentary Champions for Access Legislation), led by Poto Williams, Labour MP for Christchurch East, and the Office for Disability Issues.

The extent of information from research, data and reports produced by the Blind Foundation during 2015 and 2016, provided the basis for the Access Alliance to promote the need for accessibility legislation. Then, earlier this year, the Access Alliance presented the Minister with a petition to put accessibility into a legislative form. Then in October, the Access Alliance presented the Minister with a collection of personal stories, each of which demonstrates access challenges.

Through the Office for Disability Issues, due diligence was carried out about accessibility legislation across various jurisdictions internationally. All these pieces of work informed Minister Sepuloni in her approach, including with her Cabinet colleagues. The outcome of Cabinet's decision is the cause for celebration...

On Thursday 6 December, the Minister for Disability Issues announced that, "Cabinet has approved a work programme to thoroughly explore how we can achieve full accessibility for disabled people and all New Zealanders, Minister for Disability Issues Carmel Sepuloni says.

The work programme will focus on accessibility for disabled people but will also look at how we can improve accessibility for other groups such as seniors, carers of young children, people with English as a second language, and those with temporary injuries. The work programme will involve collaboration with a wide variety of stakeholders, including the Access Alliance, other disability groups and small business. It will look at:

- how to define “full accessibility”
- the challenges and opportunities of different approaches
- whether legislation is needed for mandatory codes and standards for accessibility and what domains any might cover.”

There is no doubt that organisational advocacy towards removing barriers faced by blind, deafblind and vision impaired people will continue. Blind Citizens NZ does however take this opportunity to recognise Minister Sepuloni’s endeavours on behalf of disabled people, and to applaud Government on its decision to explore thoroughly, how to achieve full accessibility for disabled people and all New Zealanders.

Titbits from 2018 Annual General Meeting and Conference From Rose Wilkinson, Executive Officer

This article highlights information about the three days, while avoiding duplication of activities and outcomes mentioned previously.

Friday’s AGM business sessions were full, and varied. There was only one remit this year with a focus on Statistics NZ. The key message, supported by everyone is to ensure challenges faced in this year’s Census are resolved, and not present in 2023 when the next Census happens. Áine Kelly-Costello spoke to her paper and facilitated discussion around how Blind Citizens NZ’s AGM and Conference can be a more engaging, informative and empowering weekend for everyone, regardless of age.

Saturday morning, Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Disability Issues carried out the official opening. Her address set the scene for guest speakers and their respective presentations, each of which aligned to the theme “Raising Expectations: is blindness defining who we are?”

Just prior to lunch, Martine Abel-Williamson on behalf of the Board, presented the animated social media video, which raises awareness with the general public, of some of the key issues faced by the blind community, and what the general public can do about it. There is more about the Board’s work on this animation video, further on in this Focus issue.

In the afternoon, following guest speaker presentations, attendees participated in a workshop and facilitated discussion about “Making Disability Rights Real”. Facilitated by Daniel Phillips Board Member Blind Citizens NZ, and Paul Brown Senior Advisor Disability Rights, Office of the Ombudsman, attendees chose one of six issues (education, housing, employment, accessible information, seclusion and restraint, disability data). Each group discussed their specific issue, and brought forward one thing they wanted to achieve, whether through Government or other means. A second step in the workshop was opening up discussion to enable people to raise any item/issue important to them, within their group. Each group then agreed on one item/issue it wanted to have pursued. Workshop topics and outcomes will inform the Independent Monitoring Mechanism’s 2019 country report. The IMM comprises the DPO Coalition, Human Rights Commission, and Office of the Ombudsman.

Now to Saturday evening’s Conference Dinner, where award presentations are made. In addition to those you have already read about, there are two more to celebrate.

Southland Branch received the John McDonald Trophy, recognising that as at 30 June 2018, it had the highest number of members in proportion to the total number of Blind Foundation members in the branch’s geographical area.

Carolyn Peat is this year's recipient of the Johnston Trophy for leadership. The National President when presenting the award recognised Carolyn's contributions to Blind Citizens NZ, her leadership through Auckland Branch, and areas external to the blind community.

This was an enjoyable occasion. Held at the Brentwood Hotel, Wellington, a live link throughout the three days between the main venue in Wellington, and Auckland Branch members in the Blind Foundation's recreation centre, Awhina House was a first. Feedback from the majority of attendees and participants rated the audio and video link, and hearing loop, as one of the best experiences, with all aspects of the highest quality. Streamliner Productions worked tirelessly with Blind Citizens NZ to achieve the quality and standard experienced.

Now to share a few words from Leyna Coleman (Auckland), which describe her experience as a first-time Conference attendee... Leyna says, "I was very excited to be attending Conference for the first time. I hadn't travelled by plane for ages and I couldn't remember the last time I had stayed in an hotel. It interested me to see what is happening at a national level with Blind Citizens NZ and I felt I could participate in this. Some of the speakers were quite interesting and I enjoyed the reciprocation, helping and being helped by others. The dinner on the Saturday night was also a highlight. I look forward to next year's Conference, even though I won't have to travel far to get there!" Thank you Leyna for sharing...

It is never too early to start planning for next year's Annual General Meeting and Conference, where we will be in Auckland at the Naumi Hotel, Mangere. Consideration to a live link between Auckland and Wellington is happening, and possibly one other location. Dates for 2019 are Friday 4 to Sunday 6 October, and the theme is "Getting on with it – a new horizon". Further information will be publicised as it becomes available.

Blind Citizens NZ Accessibility Social Campaign

To support our work and striving towards New Zealand becoming a fully inclusive society, where blind, deafblind and vision impaired people can lead rich, full and independent lives with confidence and dignity, the Board has launched a social awareness campaign. The Board has received expert advice and guidance from Creature, the agency that worked with Blind Citizens NZ to develop our visual signature. The aim of the campaign is to educate the general public about some of the key issues faced by the blind community, and what the general public can do.

From the Great Barrier Brief, guided by the Board, the five areas thought to be most relevant were selected:

- The Built Environment.
- Political Life and Independent Voting.
- Employment.
- Culture and Entertainment.
- Transport.

Of these, ‘The Built Environment’ was thought to be the most relatable to everyday Kiwis. This is the focus of the main video, which lasts around 30 seconds.

Next came the idea – a really simple idea based on the notion that...

It shouldn't be hard for our blind citizens to beat everyday obstacles.

To bring this idea to life, we have exaggerated in the video, what it is like for a blind person to negotiate everyday obstacles.

The video is the creation of a fun, animated character who stumbles across somebody’s rubbish on the sidewalk, and then has to perform a series of ridiculous over-the-top actions to simply get past.

Blind Citizens NZ has done everything possible to ensure the main video is an exemplar of accessibility – it is both audio described and has captions. Then there are five shorter versions, one each of the five areas. Each of the cut-down versions is approximately eight seconds long, and includes a description of what is happening.

Although the campaign is aimed at the general public using social media, Branch Committees and Network Coordinators will have the information for use locally, as an advocacy tool. In the meantime, anyone with internet access can check out the social awareness campaign messages by taking this link:

<https://abcnz.org.nz/issues-of-concern-to-blind-citizens-nz/blind-citizens-nz-accessibility-campaign/>

Blind Citizens NZ Representatives Appointed / Needed

The Board at its November meeting made appointments and/or reappointments, to national representative positions.

Individuals appointed or reappointed to national representative positions report to the Board at regular intervals. Congratulations to:

- **Workbridge Representative:** Paula Waby, two-year appointment.
- **Focus Editor:** Allan Jones reappointed for two years.
- **World Blind Union Committee:** Martine Abel-Williamson and Carl Halliburton, each have a two-year appointment.
- **Ministry of Health Disability Services Consumer Consortium:** Mary Schnackenberg reappointed for a further two-year term.

Expressions of Interest: The Board is calling for expressions of interest from financial (voting) members interested in international blindness topics, who have an interest also in the WBU Committee. The purpose of this Committee is to support the role of the WBU Representative, Paula Waby. It comprises up to four financial Ordinary (voting) Members of Blind Citizens NZ, plus the WBU Representative.

The term of office for each of the appointed committee positions is two years. These run concurrently with the WBU Representative's term of office.

There is room on this Committee for up to two more people. Interested financial (voting) members should submit an expression of interest, with supporting information. This should include your interest in international blindness topics/issues, knowledge of World Blind Union, and your involvement in Blind Citizens NZ. There is a 1,000 word-limit. Expressions of interest close at 4pm, Monday 16 April 2019. Please send via one of these options:

- Post: PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242;
- Email: admin@abcnz.org.nz
- Fax: 04-389-0030

Cyril White Memorial Fund

Closing Date for Applications – 1 February 2019

The Cyril White Memorial Fund is a funding opportunity that encourages and cultivates leadership skills and qualities among blind, deafblind and vision impaired people. Blind Citizens NZ, together with the Blind Foundation, is responsible for publicising these opportunities. There are two funding application rounds each year i.e. 1 February and 1 October. The February round of funding applications closes 4pm, Friday 1 February 2019.

Established in honour of Cyril White a pioneer in the blindness advocacy movement, this Fund pays tribute to his work and achievements on behalf of blind people. Eligibility of applicants is primarily for members who are eligible for full registration with the Blind Foundation. However, projects that are likely to be of direct benefit or interest to blind and vision-impaired people are eligible for consideration.

If you have a project or activity and want to find out if this meets the fund criteria, then please be in touch for full details. Then, when you submit your application, you will be confident to have ticked all required boxes. Most of all, you will be assured your application meets eligibility criteria.

Applications to the February Cyril White Memorial Fund round need to be received by 4pm, Friday 1 February 2019. These should be for the attention of: Cyril White Fund, C/ Blind Citizens NZ, PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242. Alternatively, by email to admin@abcnz.org.nz including in the subject line, Cyril White Fund application.

Membership Renewal Reminder

Membership renewals fall due on 1 July annually. Mindful of the opportunity for financial Ordinary Members to provide feedback on the draft Constitution in the first quarter of 2019, having your say, is important.

If you are uncertain whether you are financial, please check by contacting our national office, or your local branch treasurer. Being financial by the end of February 2019 is particularly important, as this is when the mail-out of the draft Constitution to Ordinary Financial Members, will be finalised.

With Christmas and New Year just around the corner, it is important to know that our National Office closes noon, Friday 21 December. We re-open Monday 14 January 2019. Membership queries that arrive during the close of National Office will receive a response following National Office re-opening in January 2019. If emailing, please send your query to admin@abcnz.org.nz and include “membership query” in the subject line.

Geographical and Special Interest Networks

Blind Citizens NZ has several geographical networks, and a special interest network. Each of these options are relatively new for Blind Citizens NZ. Geographical Networks are slowly gaining support amongst members where there is no Branch. As each network is established, members who belong to that network, link with their Coordinator. Together you will get a sense of how you will stay in touch, receive information the Coordinator receives from National Office, socialise, etc. Currently we have geographical networks for Otago, Taranaki, Christchurch CBD, and Gisborne.

Regarding special interest networks, for guide dog handlers and supporters, if you aspire to be a guide dog handler or perhaps you have been one and want to retain contact with others, becoming a member of our Guide Dog Handler Special Interest Network may be of interest to you. Email is the primary mechanism for members to communicate, but it is not the only option. If you would like to join the email list, pop an email through to admin@abcnz.org.nz including GDH Special Interest Network in the subject link.

If you want to find out more about our geographical and special interest networks, you can contact our National Office for information.

Ways to be informed about Blind Citizens NZ's Work

There are several ways members can receive information about what Blind Citizens NZ is doing. Receiving minutes of Board meetings, memos, submissions, etc., are ways you can remain in the loop. We have an email distribution list, National Feedback Line on the Blind Foundation's Telephone Information Service (TIS), and website.

Joining the email list is straightforward. Just sent an email through to admin@abcnz.org.nz with a reference to receiving information, in the subject line. Other contact details are at the end of this Focus issue.

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 / Management Committee): andycoute@gmail.com
- Vaughan Dodd (Member-at-Large): vdodd001@gmail.com
- Geraldine Glanville (Member-at-Large): 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
- 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.blindcitizensnz.org.nz>

Email: admin@abcnz.org.nz

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

**Blind Citizens NZ is appreciative of donations
received from our members and supporters, and for
funding from the Blind Foundation, and the Lotteries
Grants Board**

If undelivered within 14 days please return to
Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand inc.
PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242.

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