



Blind Citizens NZ

Focus

**Publication of the
Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc
Volume 55 No 4 – December 2019**

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Strawberry Fields Forever

Editorial, by Allan Jones

In this editorial, I will cover three main topics:

- System Transformation // Enabling Good Lives.
- Blind and Low Vision NZ's Annual General Meeting.
- Blind Citizens NZ's Annual General Meeting and Conference.

I share with you all that I have recently achieved the reading of Greg Newbold's excellent book "Quest for Equity". Greg spanned the first 50 years of Blind Citizens NZ from its inception in 1945 to 1995. He was able to get a good handle on the "Institute / Foundation", and what was happening in the broader community. I look forward to his next summation with great interest.

Well, at the time of writing, we have only got 15 sleeps to Christmas. This year, I have achieved half my Christmas shopping including an Amazon Dot for my daughter. The price dropped from \$89 to \$49. My thanks to various Blind Citizens NZ members, who encourage me to carry on with the musical quotes. The first one for this issue is a song that came out in 1954 by the Aims Brothers with "Naughty Lady of Shady Lane". The quote is "when offered some liquid refreshment the lady never, never, says no". The idea for this song came from an item in some Auckland Minutes that told me one Emily Peat (age 12 months), had attended a Blind Citizens NZ meeting. I won't spoil the magic of the last line - I just googled the song and it is on You-Tube.

The most immediate breaking news is the Enabling Good Lives / System Transformation process. What I am picking up is that it will go ahead, however a big injection of funding will be necessary to make it work effectively. From the Manawatu pilot there has been a 15% increase of disabled people seeking assistance. I am very much a fan for this approach it will be challenging to the major service providers. But to me that's not such a bad thing. I go into a bit more detail in my article "the first 100 days".

I'll reserve my second musical quote for Blind and Low Vision NZ's Annual General Meeting. This quote is from the Beatles, Strawberry Fields - "living is easy with eyes closed misunderstanding all you see". This line has always amused me. You can interpret it how you like. The audio link for Blind and Low Vision NZ's Annual General Meeting worked fairly well. I joined the crew from the Wellington office. There was the occasional "crossed line", whether people didn't use their mute buttons or whether it was something else. I was heartened, and pleased to hear the Board Chair use the words "inclusive" and "diverse" when talking about Blind and Low Vision NZ. for me having both these words written in to the foundations constitution. I felt the "special meeting" was a complete waste of time and believe it was unnecessary. Its "saving grace" was that it only took half an hour. I for the life of me couldn't see where the Constitution banned the public from coming to the Annual General Meeting. In the past, there were some characters, who were never seen, except at an Annual General Meeting. One character during the 1980's managed to rile the then Chief Executive Officer with questions about the then Foundation's expenditure.

The third quote I aim at myself, and I know some colleagues would agree. Elton John has a song called "Talking Old Soldiers:" In that song there is a line, "I could drink three times the beer than I can drink today". This does segway into this year's Annual General Meeting and Conference. I came away in a reflective mood. My first reflection is on how Conference has changed and how that change for me ensures the future of Blind Citizens NZ. National President Jonathan confronted an "elephant" in the room when he spoke about the recent suicide of Hana Bainbridge. Not condemning or glorifying it, but acknowledging that our members, along with the general community we need to be aware and not hide away from this tragedy. We have lost a number of blind folk over the years by suicide.

My first Blind Citizens NZ Conferences were taken up with "scraps" between the then Foundation and Association. In the last several Conferences I have attended, the emphasis has been on "going forward" and enrichment". Paula Tesoriero' presentation on the Friday night got us firmly in to a "going forward mood". In the past, Friday nights, after the Presidents hour/not half hour, and dinner, tended send one off to sleep. Paula was inspiring!

Saturday's programme was kicked off by Robert Martin, and "if we think we had it tough", with abusive staff from the Foundation, and we did, this is nothing on what Robert and his colleagues suffered from being incarcerated during their time at Kimberley. I would like to hear from Robert as to how much J.B Munro played a part in his life. The other presentation I was taken with, was blind para-athlete (cyclist) Hannah Pascoe's delightful presentation. Her drive, determination and encouragement was a joy to hear.

Conference to me is a time to meet up with old friends and get to know new people. I enjoyed a Saturday breakfast with Clive Lansink and Mary Schnackenberg, and others. I got in to a worthwhile and pleasant conversation about braille, even though I was forced to eat "humble pie". It didn't go down too badly with the breakfast cuisine. We didn't solve the question about the sign for "th". It will be interesting if in this issue, 75th will be spelt out or have dots "1-4-5-6". The 2020 Annual General Meeting and Conference will be a celebration of our organisation having survived 75 years. I hope it will be a mixture of going "forward and looking back": I also hope we can have a musical night. Having such events in the past has shown us what a lot of wonderful musicians we have lurking in the blind community.

In the last three months, I have seen two films, and been to a "tiny ruins" concert. Both films had a disability theme and each featured young men with Down Syndrome.

The film “Ride like a Girl”, was about the woman jockey Michelle Payne who rode a Melbourne Cup winner several years ago. Her brother was born with Down Syndrome and played himself in the film. The second film “Peanut Butter Falcon” was about a young man who escaped from an institution. After several adventures, he ended up as a wrestler. :

While both films would have benefitted from “audio description”, they each had some very good parts and very believable characters. I understand Peanut Butter Falcon is due for release in January 2020.

Last but not least, I highlight a publication edited by Robin Hunt and Patricia Harris entitled “Hear we are, read us – Women, Disability and Writing”. As publicised when launched, “...it's a little book with big ideas, featuring diverse, well-known and emerging women writers. The important thing they have in common is that they all share the lived experience of disability. Eight novelists, poets, essayists, playwrights, memoirists and bloggers have contributed to the book, including Charlotte Simmonds, Tusiata Avia, Michele Leggott and the late Robin Hyde...” I understand this book is in Blind and Low Vision NZ’s library.

I want to wish all a merry Christmas and a restful and invigorating holiday.

The Year of the Pig

From Jonathan Godfrey, National President

You might wonder how the title of this column comes about, but for anyone with Asian connections or interests, it’s obvious. This has been the year of the pig. I’ve celebrated a birthday that is a multiple of twelve, and so have a few others, meaning it’s been our year too. (Strictly speaking our year hasn’t finished yet as the Chinese New Year will be celebrated on January 25 2020.)

I think it's been a great year; for me, my family, many of my friends and colleagues, and for Blind Citizens NZ. Some highlights for me include: being invited to speak on behalf of disabled people at the Social Wellbeing Committee of Cabinet, purchasing a little farm with Amy, working on said farm, making progress on the new Disability Action Plan 2019-2023, acquiring goats, chickens, ducks, and yet more donkeys. By the time you read this, the sheep will have arrived, and maybe I'll have found some cattle too. I've lost weight through activity and healthy living. Amy and I have built fences, hung gates, trained, walked and showed donkeys, cut and burned gorse, chased wayward goats, loud ducks, and surprisingly cooperative chickens, planted numerous trees (fruit and native), and spent hours outside having fun.

At our Blind Citizens NZ end-of-year Xmas celebration, one Wellington member asked me how I was getting on at work given how much time I seemed to spend on the farm and doing work for Blind Citizens NZ. I'm pleased to say that work is going very nicely too actually, and the promotion's committee thought so too, although the promotion doesn't change my title at all.

It's been a great year for our organisation, and the Board in particular. The impact we've had at the DPO Coalition was crucial for the progress on the new Disability Action Plan. Our view was that this new plan needed to be a whole of government plan that didn't focus on a short list of targets that affect a small portion of our community. All government agencies are now expected to collect data and evidence on the experiences of disabled people who should be using their services and then to engage with disabled people to find ways to improve those services. This is all about "nothing about us without us" and your representatives very definitely make sure that "blind people are speaking for ourselves".

The work on the new Constitution led to its acceptance with every member being able to vote on it instead of leaving the democratic power in the hands of those members fortunate enough to attend our AGM. I've asked that the report supplied to the AGM summarising our year be included in this Focus issue, so I don't have to go over everything here, except for some updates.

We've recently seen the greatest influx of new blood to the Board table since 2004 with three completely new faces (Wendy Chiang, Chrissy Fern, and Carl Halliburton), and Dave Allan returning after a six year absence. We held an induction for these new board members immediately prior to our three-day board meeting and annual planning meeting, and I have to say that it started my weekend of meetings off very nicely to see their enthusiasm and readiness to contribute.

I'm really pleased to lose the tag of youngest board member, although perhaps that has always been a little unfair on Martine Abel-Williamson whose birthday is not all that far ahead of mine. So to give you a small problem to solve, there are now three pigs on your Board.

I'm sure Martine and I are on the same page when it comes time to support people stepping forward to take on new roles. Over the years, we've both taken on new challenges with each other's support. In recent months, Martine has been asked to consider standing for the World Blind Union Presidency by people at the highest level of the WBU. She has of course been working with these people in her current role as WBU Treasurer, and from what we can ascertain, she is the person who is highest in the current WBU hierarchy to be in a position to take on the top job. The WBU rules state that Martine must be nominated by her country of residence, or a majority of its delegates. New Zealand has two delegate positions and the Board of Blind Citizens NZ is totally supportive of nominating Martine to be the next WBU President, but it takes two.

The other delegate decided not to use the WBU Forum (a group of three people from each of the two organisations established to ensure cooperation as a country) without consulting the Blind Citizens NZ members of the Forum to discuss the idea and to form any recommendations for the two boards to consider. If this had happened, we may have avoided the situation we are now in. To put it bluntly, one delegate organisation fully supports Martine's nomination, but the decision of the RNZFB Board was not to support the nomination, but rather to nominate her for the Treasurer role again. Your Blind Citizens NZ Board wrote to tell the RNZFB directors of our stance and asked them to reconsider their position. I am pleased to tell readers that they did reconsider, but I'm disappointed that they decided to stick with their original decision. Nomination is not a guarantee of election and ultimately it is up to the numerous delegates from around the world to vote, but Martine has established a superb reputation for her work at the World Blind Union.

No justification has been given for the RNZFB view that Martine is good enough to be a top player at the WBU as long as she is Treasurer, but not as President. Personally, I am appalled by this decision. The RNZFB is in effect able to veto the nomination of arguably the most successful blind New Zealander at the World Blind Union level because we have just two delegates and one out of two is not a majority. They are able to decide to stay silent because they held the discussion in committee, but as part of that discussion, they could have decided what to make public. Even if they weren't going to make their view totally public, they should be working with Blind Citizens NZ as the other delegate to ensure our cooperation in all World Blind Union matters, and they most certainly could explain their lack of support to Martine herself. I ask everyone reading this column to now consider how NZ looks as a country if we say to the rest of the world "Sorry we won't nominate Martine to give you the chance to vote for her as your President, but you can vote on her being your Treasurer because that's all we think of her."

Well, I now state for the public record, Blind Citizens NZ does support you Martine. You have demonstrated to us and your colleagues at the World Blind Union that you can contribute at the very highest level. The demands on your time from organisations all over the world in the last few years are testament to you personally, and the support you have received from the blind community of New Zealand. Blind Citizens NZ members gave you the start at the World Blind Union, and you have repaid us many times over. New Zealand is held in high regard as a direct consequence of your work. Blind Citizens NZ awarded you the Beamish Memorial Medal to recognise this work; unfortunately, we don't have anything more to give you without the active support of other organisations.

I don't often look outside our membership for anyone's actions or successes, but a deaf woman we work with at the DPO Coalition has just joined the board of the World Federation of the Deaf.

Victoria Manning is known well beyond the Deaf community as someone who speaks up for all disabled people. Deaf Aotearoa is fully supporting Victoria to take on leadership in the WFD because she will speak up for Deaf people and Deaf women in particular. She has already represented the WFD at the United Nations in Geneva; I'm sure that every time Victoria does anything on the world stage, her audiences know she is from New Zealand. What a pity New Zealand might miss a similarly awesome opportunity in the blind world.

Let's get back to some positive stuff: Our Annual General Meeting and Conference went really well with some very good presenters and awesome service at the Naumi Hotel in Mangere. I actually really enjoyed Conference this year, especially handing out awards to some very unsuspecting recipients. My congratulations to both Thomas Bryan and Vaughan Dodd who were each awarded the Beamish Memorial Medal for the work they have done on behalf of Blind Citizens NZ over many years.

I reckon that our year has been so good really that we've set the bar very high for the 75th year we're now moving into, but my view is that we're in a really good position to make that a winner too. You'll see more on the plans for the 75th Annual General Meeting and Conference in this issue of Focus. I think one of the most anticipated activities next year will be the compilation of the second instalment to the history of blindness advocacy being written by Greg Newbold. (If you haven't read the first instalment, then request a copy of Quest for Equity from the Blind and Low Vision NZ library or from our own National Office.

As we head towards Christmas, I'm looking forward to some time with family and friends. There will be absences of course, but no one lives forever, and I'm sure the most notable absence from my family would be proud of what has happened this year for me. There have been ups and downs, but the ups very definitely outweigh the downs. I hope you can say that about this year too, and that we can all take the positive energy I keep seeing among the blind community into next year. Even if it will be the Year of the Rat, I'll still be a pig! I'll still be speaking up on behalf of blind people, and I have every intention of enjoying life.

Report to Blind Citizens NZ Members

Getting on with it – A New Horizon

From the National President and Chief Executive

Note: this article is taken from the 2019 Annual Report to this year's AGM and Conference

Each of the Board's meetings during 2019 started with a review of activity pertaining to our Strategic Plan. There are several recurring themes, that have a major impact on the organisation's performance, some positive, but also some that continue to hinder progress towards meeting our collective aspirations. In short, these are:

- progress with central government through our work with the Disabled Peoples' Organisation (DPO) Coalition;
- a need to improve our communications; and
- a strong desire to do more for our membership.

Our actions demonstrate our agreed statement of purpose, namely that Blind Citizens NZ exists to give voice to the aspirations and lived experiences of blind, deafblind and vision-impaired New Zealanders.

Our Strategic Plan list seven goals:

1. Blind people live in an accessible, equitable and inclusive society.
2. The community's response to blindness is reflected in affirmative actions and attitudes.
3. Blind people are confident and successful advocates on both a personal and systemic level.
4. Blind people receive the services they need to approach everyday life with independence, confidence and dignity.
5. Blind Citizens NZ is recognised for its leadership in the blind community, and as a leading Disabled People's Organisation in the disability sector.
6. Blind Citizens NZ is a listening, receptive and responsive organisation that encourages people to want to belong.
7. The value of what Blind Citizens NZ adds to the blind community and society in general is evidenced both in growing membership and funder support.

There is no question of commitment to our organisation, whether it is the board, our staff, or members working on issues at a local level. However, we know there is always more we could be doing if only we had more time, more energy, and more resources. In considering progress against the stated goals, board discussions reflect what our membership would probably be saying - more needs to be done.

While it is all too easy to be critical about what is not being done, the reality is that to have undertaken any other activity would mean we would need to have given up something we did do. Having said that, there is an expectation that we report to the membership by way of our agreed Strategic Plan.

On this occasion, there is a sense we are delivering for our members on Goals 1, 2, 5, and 6. If we are to be critical, then we must increase our effort on Goals 3, 4, and 7 and pay greater attention to them in the coming year.

As a Disabled Peoples Organisation, Blind Citizens NZ listens to what our members have to say. The views we express on behalf of our members are those formed by way of discussion, debate, and consideration of different perspectives. In recent years, we have admitted that we cannot deliver on every issue our members want to see progressed. The board has needed to decide which issues must be progressed and which we will work on if or when opportunities arise. We are making progress, perhaps though, not quickly enough...

The progress we have made on behalf of our members by working within the DPO Coalition have been immense over the last twelve months. Perhaps it is fair to say this has led to a reduction in our efforts to create opportunities outside the DPO Coalition. While this may be so, we hasten to add that we have grasped opportunities that have come our way through our work within the DPO Coalition. The new Disability Action Plan, our leadership in the Independent Monitoring Mechanism and Disabled People Led Monitoring of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have all contributed to an increased workload for the board and staff.

As an organisation, we believe you can be proud that Blind Citizens NZ is a heavy contributor to all facets of this work, and that our influence is noticeable, and often noted for example, by government officials.

Blind Citizens NZ continues to work with central government officials to progress issues including access to information, access to physical spaces, and our safety on footpaths and other public places in particular. We have played a major contributor in bringing to fruition the Kiwi Access Card, a new form of identification that is for everyone. After many years of plugging away, Blind Citizens NZ took this issue to the DPO Coalition who supported taking a collective approach with Government. Progressed over a couple of years, the creation of a new form of identification became a significant piece of work with a great outcome. There is still work to do on this issue, but let us remember that it was Blind Citizens NZ's democratic processes and the voice of our members, along with continued advocacy, and the support of others too, that New Zealand now has the Kiwi Access Card.

An issue we had on our organisational “to do list”, and to which Citizens NZ has been a contributor, is the development of guidelines to use the Optional Protocol for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Called “Making complaints to the United Nations Disability Committee: A Guide for New Zealanders”, this document explains all about what is an optional protocol, and how you go about making a complaint to the international committee, if everything else you have tried, has not worked. Launched in April this year, these guidelines are available in the full range of alternate formats.

Blind Citizens NZ is a member of the Access Alliance Steering Group, where we have worked collaboratively to progress accessibility legislation. Our involvement includes leading some of the policy work with government officials.

We have also been involved in delegation-meetings with Ministers, to profile the importance of accessibility legislation and the potential difference this can make for us all.

The Minister for Disability Issues Hon Carmel Sepuloni is a champion of this work – she achieved on our collective behalf in December last year, a commitment from across Government to continue exploring options to progress accessibility legislation. This extends beyond disability and recognises for example, the needs of older people, people with temporary impairments, and those for whom English is a second language. We remain optimistic that by the June 2020, we will achieve a first reading in the House, for accessibility legislation.

Blind Citizens NZ has been fortunate to experience an increased share of publicity these past 12 months. The National President was interviewed on the first ever World Braille Day this year (4 January), applauding the merits of braille and raising awareness of its importance for our community. Involving members for news-items such as George Taggart when he expertly navigated his way around Wellington airport using Ira for the first time ever.

There have been several interviews about the nuisance value and danger e-scooters create for us all. Media interest in e-scooters on footpaths continues to attract attention, and those who attended last year's AGM and Conference will remember we had our own personal demonstration and experience, when our sound technician rode around the conference room on his e-scooter. Blind Citizens NZ has collaborated with Living Streets Aotearoa and a wide range of other organisations to take this issue to Ministers.

Access to information has always been a challenge for our community of people. During the past 12 months, we have been able to build on the work done in 2018 on Government's Accessibility Charter, with implementation across all central government agencies being everyone's aim.

This is one area where our work is extremely important, but may well end up being un-noticed by our members, or at least may not result in direct acknowledgement.

Imagine for a moment the day you receive all public information in a form you can read, and independently access, all government-funded services you receive are easily accessed because the people who provide them acknowledge your specific needs and attend to them.

The board recognises that the way we communicate with our current members, our potential members, and the wider public needs to be modernised so that we reach the greatest number of people using the mechanisms that best suit them. Hana Bainbridge carried out our Member Engagement Project and she contacted many of you.

Through Hana, we asked our members, one by one, how we should be reaching out to you. By reaching out to you, we have heard what you have said, and we are making changes. We are preparing the next stage in this work, and Hana was to be a mainstay once again. Sadly, Hana passed away suddenly in August, and we must now rethink how we will repeat this work without her. Member feedback through Hana's work both last year and early this year, has informed our Communication's Plan which takes a more modern approach than we have been using. We will shortly be implementing this plan, with regular reviews of how we are doing

We continue to use Facebook and Focus well, and our email lists are well used. We have a lot of support out there, but we must find a way to translate this into increased membership. Telling our stories is a powerful tool that we make use of quite sparingly. Our Focus magazine is going out to many people who are not members of our organisation through the Blind Foundation's Library Service, as well as to a host of key contacts who have an interest in the work we are doing.

Readers of Focus and the National President's articles will know that he believes life is for living. It is time more of our community stood up and told the world we are proud of what we have achieved, what made it possible, what made it challenging, and make it blatantly obvious to anyone who will listen that we do want a life that is for living.

If Blind Citizens NZ has had a role in making a blind bit of difference, then we should be proud to promote that too. We encourage you all to seek the opportunities to tell your stories, to tell decision-makers about your aspirations and about your lived experience.

Our Annual Report is a fitting opportunity to acknowledge publicly, two individuals who had to resign their board positions this year. Obtaining and retaining meaningful employment is a challenge for many people in our community. The energy and commitment required to uproot yourself to move to a different city for a new job is not to be underestimated. We congratulate Vaughan Dodd for doing so even if his new job meant he could no longer serve on your board. Becoming a parent is a massive commitment too. Murray Peat's decision to put family first has our respect and support. We also recognise the years Geraldine Glanville has given to the board of Blind Citizens NZ. We point out though, that the board has made sure to line some work up for her over the next twelve months as we work with Greg Newbold to write up the history of our organisation over the last 25 years leading up to our 75th birthday in 2020.

The departure of three board members opens up opportunities for some new faces on the board, and as we head towards this year's AGM and Conference, we already know we will have three new board members. Shortly after they join the board, we will learn the outcome of the months of work that have gone into drafting a proposed new Constitution, engaging with our members seeking your input, and then issuing the final for voting.

Many of you took considerable time to read that first draft, to ask questions and to provide suggested amendments, many of which were implemented. It is now up to you, our members to ensure the hard yards we have all put in over the past two years, including the work of the Governance Review Panel, to get us to this point, becomes reality. Please do remember to vote in support of the proposed new Constitution.

The year ahead promises more opportunities for Blind Citizens NZ to cement itself as the lead player in shaping how the New Zealand Government works with and for disabled people. How the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind works with and for blind people, and how each member of this great organisation works with and for each other in our 75th year.

2020 – 75th Annual General Meeting and Conference

Working Together

As preparations move along for next year's celebratory 75th AGM and Conference, the theme for which is "Working Together", it is hoped many of you will set aside the dates of Friday 9 to Sunday 11 October 2020, and join everyone. There has been extensive consideration given to several venues in the top half of the South Island i.e. in Nelson and Christchurch. Factors the Board takes into consideration when making its decision include, suitability of venue(s) to meet Blind Citizens NZ's needs, availability of the venue on preferred dates (closest to 8 October, the anniversary of Blind Citizens NZ's establishment), and cost implications for attendees, and the organisation.

Having taken into consideration all factors, the Board has resolved the Sudima Hotel Christchurch Airport will be the venue for the 2020 AGM and Conference.

In reaching this decision, and remaining true to holding the event in the upper South Island, the Board wants members to know that it considers the increase for attendees (and the organisation), to be higher than desired. Registration costs will be finalised early next year (2020). In the meantime, meeting and accommodation requirements are secure, and registration forms will be available by early February, which will include advice of payment options.

Blind Citizens NZ – Preparing for a New Strategic Plan

The Board has begun preparing for a new strategic plan that will take effect on 1 January 2021. Members have an opportunity to share thoughts, and to offer suggestions that will guide the Board as it sets Blind Citizens NZ's direction for the next several years. You may even think amendments that refresh the current plan will suffice. To guide thinking, the current strategic plan is included in this Focus Issue.

Whatever your thoughts, the Board is mindful its request comes when the festive season is happening. Notwithstanding this, the Board's aim is to consider suggestions when it meets the first weekend of February. Drafting will commence, with a draft strategic plan published in the March 2020 Focus Issue and a further feedback opportunity will be available at this time. The Board's intention is to finalise the new organisational strategic plan in time to take this to the 2020 Annual General Meeting and Conference.

Members are encouraged to send thoughts and suggestions through to National Office by 9am, Wednesday 22 January 2020. These should be sent for the Chief Executive's attention to PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242, or emailed to: admin@abcnz.org.nz.

Here now is the Strategic Plan 2018-2020...

Purpose: Blind Citizens NZ exists to give voice to the aspirations and lived experiences of blind, deafblind and vision-impaired New Zealanders.

Vision: Blind, deafblind and vision-impaired people live the life they choose. In the context of this document, the word “blind” encompasses all those who are blind, deafblind or vision-impaired who can identify with our goals.

Values: We value:

- respect for the different ways each of us responds to the challenges of blindness;
- the shared learning and support received from the lived experiences of others;
- adherence to democratic principles that ensure our representations are broadly based;
- commitment to sustained effort in our advocacy;
- constructive, cooperative and mutually supportive relationships with other disability organisations;
- the principles and opportunities afforded by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the New Zealand Disability Strategy;
- our history and the role we have played in the lives of blind people since 1945.

Goal 1: Blind people live in an accessible, equitable and inclusive society

- We will advocate on the grounds of human rights and equity to those whose laws, regulations, operations, activities, attitudes or products create barriers to our full participation in society.

Goal 2: The community’s response to blindness is reflected in affirmative actions and attitudes

- We will create greater community awareness and education around the abilities and capabilities of blind people to participate fully in society given the means and opportunities to do so, and will ensure blindness is always portrayed in a positive light.

Goal 3: Blind people are confident and successful advocates on both a personal and systemic level

- We will provide and support advocacy training for our members and demonstrate through collective action, how blind people can bring about change for the better in their own life and in the lives of others in the blind community.

Goal 4: Blind people receive the services they need to approach everyday life with independence, confidence and dignity.

- We will assess the services of providers specifically funded to provide blindness services to ensure that the needs and expectations of those receiving them are being met; and will advocate for improvement in both quantity and quality where there is evidence of unmet need.
- We will advocate for a better service experience for blind people using public services, and support training for non-blindness-specific service providers in how to cater for our needs.

Goal 5: Blind Citizens NZ is recognised for its leadership in the blind community, and as a leading Disabled People's Organisation in the disability sector

- We will work with Government and our disability sector partners to translate the rights conferred under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Disability Strategy and the Disability Action Plan into tangible and practical outcomes that will create a non-disabling society for all those with a disability.
- We will actively support like-minded international organisations that advance the cause of blind people throughout the world.

Goal 6: Blind Citizens NZ is a listening, receptive and responsive organisation that encourages people to want to belong

- We will maintain a consistent flow of information through a variety of media to the blind community and seek every opportunity to engage with blind people of all ages about the impact of blindness on their lives.
- We will promote and provide a safe and welcoming environment within our branches and networks for activities that encourage social interaction, peer support and the sharing of information and advice.

Goal 7: The value of what Blind Citizens NZ adds to the blind community and society in general is evidenced both in growing membership and funder support

- We will actively promote the benefits of joining our organisation to the blind community, with special attention to youth engagement.
- We will demonstrate to supporters and funders that we are a dynamic and constructive disabled people's organisation worthy of their financial support and backing.

John Mulka's First 100 Days

by Allan Jones, Focus Editor

At the time of writing, John Mulka the new Chief Executive Officer of Blind and Low Vision NZ has been in office for just over three months. He has said that before he “gets on the plane” to go home to Canada for Christmas, he will have a document with a clear vision re the changes he wants to make re Blind and Low Vision NZ going forward.

Before writing about the interview with John Mulka, I want to go back 40 years, when I was a social worker at the Wellington branch of the Rehabilitation league.

At this time, Geoff Gibbs and I were part of an international conference, which looked at the transition of school leaver's from school to the workforce. Geoff and I had a fortnight in each other's company. We talked a lot about philosophy's of blindness and where and how the Foundation might change. Again today, it is pleasing to have a similar type of conversation. About 11 years later, I joined the staff of the Foundation at the beginning of the "focus on rehabilitation" programme". I believe that Geoff had a good supportive staff around him. However, there were many factors, which mitigated against these changes succeeding: the wider society wasn't ready for such a gigantic shift, there was reticence and sabotage in the staff group, and the blind were not as supportive as they could have been about the change. Maybe in hindsight, it was too bigger shift for the new Chief Executive Officer. John Mulka I believe has more in his favour. The community perhaps is more ready to accept a shift in emphasis. There has been a big shift from paternalism. The client group are more determined and sure of the life they want, and there is a political encouragement in terms of the "enabling good lives and system transformation" process. Also "a form of individualised funding" is now a reality. It isn't "IF", but "WHEN".

I have now heard John speak three times - at Blind and Low Vision NZ's Annual General Meeting, Blind Citizens NZ's Annual General Meeting and Conference, and he also spoke at the Retina Annual General Meeting.

John has impressed in that he has travelled around the country without a "band" of minders. "He is perceptive", and he "listens to people". He told me very clearly "he likes meeting people". He has also heard the ground swell of dissatisfaction re delays in getting service from Blind and Low Vision NZ: he is absolutely determined that will change, as part of this change. John is reverting back to a regional model of service delivery. He has appointed a general manager for the southern north and south island.

John describes the changes as a “service refresh”. He talks about seeing things “through a different lens”. He talked about a “person directed service”.

Finally we broached two issues which will need further discussion from several parts of the community. Firstly how do we accommodate members of our client groups who have no understanding of “individualised funding” and have no knowledge of what services they require!!!

Secondly is “rehabilitation” an appropriate word for what Blind and Low Vision NZ offers. I experienced rehabilitation when I broke my hip. I was assisted and encouraged to get back to my former “being”. This isn’t what happens with loss of eyesight. With respect I suggest, that the service I receive from Blind and Low Vision NZ is “habilitation”. The service enriches my life. I don’t need the pernicious and demeaning “assessment” for these services. I guess that I and others have subverted the system by going straight to the provider of the service we want. Occasionally, I have received a “slap over the wrist with a wet bus ticket”. However I am glad to say that the service I have received has been of a very high quality. Recently, I was harshly reminded of a bit of advice I received which I didn’t want to hear, and that was not to attempt the partially constructed Johnsonville bus station without sighted help. The day in question was extremely windy and I had no sense of “where traffic was”.

Before concluding my interview with John, I discovered he is trying to get to grips with the wonderful game of cricket. He also has a love of music. I look forward to talking to him about Neil Young, Leonard Cowen, and the “granddaddy” of them all, Gordon Lightfoot, who incidentally, turned 80 on 17 November. I will watch John’s progress with great interest.

The Journey, by Pamela Marsh

I have been on a journey that altered my life in many ways. My story starts at the age of 20, just after my first child was born. I had trouble reading the newspaper, so got glasses and that helped. Then, I had my second child, and my sight was worse. Eventually, I saw an eye specialist. He informed I had an eye condition called Keratoconus, which means my cornea, instead of being cone shaped was square. He asked if anyone in the family had eye problems and after talking with my parents, I learned my grandfather on my father's side had the same condition.

On my second visit to the specialist, he explained I would need an operation called a corneal transplant, which is where the cornea is removed, and a donor cornea replaces it. I was amazed by all this and felt very scared. I had a husband and two small children. How was I going to cope? I'm pleased to say I did cope. We all did. On Wednesday 11 June 1969, I entered Dunedin Hospital's Lindo Fergusson Ward for my operation. This would take place within a couple of days provided a donor eye became available. I was scared stiff. It was explained to me that both my eyes would be covered for 4 days and I would have to obey certain rules. No bending over or lifting anything heavy. The Ward Sister was Sister Lobb. I remembered her from my nursing days. She ran the ward with military precision.

On Friday 13 June I woke at 6am feeling something was a bit different. My glass had been removed from my locker and a big sign NIL BY MOUTH was on the back of the bed. The nurse told me someone had died at 3am. I laid down in the bed feeling very humble and gave a few prayers for the family who had lost a loved one. Minutes later the nurse came to prepare me for the operation.

When I woke after the operation, I had no pain. I just felt a bit nauseated so I did some deep breathing and fell back asleep.

Because both my eyes were covered, I had to learn a few new tricks like learning to feed myself. Not very elegant but I got there.

Next day the doctor came to take the dressings off and look at my eye. I was very nervous but sat quietly while he removed the two stitches holding my eyelid closed. I gently opened my eye as he asked how many fingers he was holding up. "Two" I said. I looked across the ward and said I could see right across to the window and to the blue sky outside. It was amazing, as I had not seen that clear for many years. The doctors were very pleased. My eye was covered again. I had 22 stitches.

Eventually they took the patch off my left eye and I was allowed to get up but had to obey certain rules. No lifting or bending over to pick something up off the floor. I had drops four times a day, ointment at night and a patch over my eye. How I loved having that patch on.

After two weeks I was allowed home but had to come back a fortnight later to get my stitches out. Major surgery again. Eighteen months later I again was admitted to Dunedin Hospital's Lindo Fergusson Ward for the operation on my left eye. The ward was the same with Sister Lobb at the helm. I felt as though I knew the procedure and it would be easier this time but that was not so. Two days after the operation I woke very early with a lot of pain in my eye and knew something was wrong. When the doctor arrived he said the new cornea was showing signs of rejection. So the battle began with anti-rejection drops on the hour every hour for three months. I had ointment and a patch at night. After a whole year and many trips to the eye clinic, the doctor said he could do another graft but I declined that as I could see very well with my right eye.

Many years later while having a regular check-up, a cataract was discovered in my right eye. This could cause all sorts of problems.

After much soul searching I saw a doctor at Marinoto Clinic in Dunedin. He sent me to a lady doctor at Dunedin Hospital. She suggested having another graft again on my left eye. As she pointed out, many years had passed since the last graft was done and the technology was more updated.

So in 2009 I again entered Dunedin Hospital for my third corneal graft. This time in the main hospital. There was no Sister Lobb. The procedure would be much the same except they had an eye bank in Auckland. On the morning of the operation, with me on the operating table, I asked the nurse why we were all waiting and she explained that the cornea coming from the eye bank had landed at Dunedin Airport and we were waiting for it to come by courier. Again, I felt very overwhelmed and humble. Procedures at Dunedin Hospital had changed over the years since my first operation. I was discharged the next day with 16 stitches this time. But as before, this graft also rejected and I was back to square one again. At this point we shifted to Timaru and I tried to put it all behind me and move on with my life.

In 2014 with almost no sight, at all, I decided to have the cataract removed knowing it could compromise the graft that had been so faithful all those years. Three months later trouble again as my graft started showing signs of rejection. The Blind Foundation came to see me to offer help and through them, I became a member of Blind Citizens NZ. My optician referred me to Dr John Rawstrom in Christchurch. He suggested replacing the inner part of the cornea, a much smaller operation. So on 19 October I once again entered hospital, this time in Christchurch for my fourth cornea operation. I was to be first on the operating list. But on arrival I was told the cornea coming from the eye bank in Auckland had got lost but the doctors were looking for it. Eventually it was found in Wellington so I ended up last. The doctor had told me I would have a little bubble inserted in my eye. I didn't quite understand what he meant but he was the surgeon so he must know what he was doing.

After the operation, I had the familiar patch over my eye and had to lie flat on my back until morning. When I saw the doctor next morning he seemed pleased with my eye and how the operation went. While I would not see much for a while, but he was happy for me to be discharged. A nurse escorted my husband and I to the main door. Pointing to the green band on my wrist, she explained I would not be able to fly. I had no intention, of flying anywhere, and thought nothing more about it. Upon arriving home, my husband cut off the green band plus the hospital band and threw them in the bin. Two days later, I received an urgent letter which explained I had an Alcon gas bubble in my eye. This was to adhere the inner cornea to the outer cornea and what the nurse was saying was I could not fly because of it. Six days later as we were preparing to return to Christchurch for my check-up I looked out the window and could see clear across the street. It was amazing. At my appointment my sight was tested by the nurse and I could read the chart right to the second last line. Very small print. The Doctor was so pleased. We went to Christchurch every month for over a year (400kms return) and in August this year I had my last appointment with Dr John Rawstrom, and will now be under the eye specialist in Timaru. It was very hard saying goodbye to John, as he had become a big part of my life along with the great doctors at Dunedin Hospital all those years ago.

I am nearly at the end of this amazing journey and I have met some wonderful people on the way. I learned a few new tricks but most of all I've learned patience and humility. Seven years after my first cornea graft I woke in the night as I thought I heard someone calling my name. It was 3am. Words were going round in my head and I went to the kitchen and started writing them down. Later that day on looking at the date, I saw it was 13 June. Seven years ago I had my first graft. I have included the poem with this story. Over the years I have written so many poems but this first one has always been special.

Poem: The Gift

From where I stand I see a view
I would like to share with you,
In the distance is the Canterbury Plain,
Which looks so beautiful even in the rain.
I'm sure each one could tell a story.
A Blue Cedar so beautiful but why,
Because its branches reach nearly to the sky.
A Japanese maple so very small,
It's a vivid red but will never be tall.
A cheeky fantail has just passed my way,
His story he may finish another day.
The bellbirds are calling very near,
Their notes ringing out loud and clear.
The sun is setting on my view,
With hues that are pink instead of blue,
This is the time I have been waiting for,
As this the time I have been waiting for,
As this view tomorrow I may see no more.
In their majestic glory the Southern Alps before me,
As though guiding sailors home from the sea.
Mt Cook I see and feel I could reach,
Out and touch its highest peak.
This view how lucky I am to have seen,
Because it may have never been.
For years ago I was blind,
And thought my sight would be left behind.
But with the gift of someone's eyes,
I now look up and see clouds upon the skies.
The sun has gone and evening draws near,
But whatever tomorrow brings my view will be clear.
Because God and nature has been so dear,
As today I have taken time to see,
With the wonderful gift that was given to me.

Ministry of Social Development – Self Service Kiosks

Blind Citizens NZ has been working with the Ministry of Social Development, providing assistance regarding the introduction of kiosks in some Work and Income service centres. Our assistance will go some way towards ensuring clients who are blind, deafblind, vision-impaired or have low-vision, and use the kiosks can do so.

The Ministry of Social Development are testing its new self-service kiosks for clients to use in their Work and Income service centres. These kiosks are Chromebook computers that have a ChromeVox screen reader for vision-impaired users. You can also plug a braille display into the USB port on the kiosks as well. Only the seated kiosks will be able to be used with the screen reader. Only seven offices in the country have this capability so far. These sites are Wellington City, Upper Hutt, Avondale, Mangere, Thames, Te Awamutu and Gisborne. Further service centres will be getting the new computers in January and an update will come once these are live.

Membership Renewal Reminder – National Office Closure

Membership renewals fall due on 1 July annually and with 2020 shaping up to be another busy year, this reminder may prove useful. If you are uncertain whether you are financial, please check by contacting our national office, or your local branch treasurer.

With Christmas and New Year just around the corner, it is important to know that our National Office closes noon, Monday 23 December. We re-open Tuesday 14 January 2020. Membership queries that arrive during this time will receive a response when our National Office re-opens in January 2020. If emailing, please send your query to admin@abcnz.org.nz and include “membership query” in the subject line.

Cyril White Memorial Fund

Closing Date for Applications – 1 February 2020

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. On this occasion, 1 February falls on a Saturday therefore applications received by **4pm Monday 3 February 2020** will be eligible for consideration.

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, Monday 3 February 2020. 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.

On behalf of the Board and staff, all the very best for Christmas and New Year everyone – thank you for your support and feedback. We look forward to another busy and exciting time in 2020.

Blind Citizens NZ – Board and National Office

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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

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Focus, Volume 55 No 4 – December 2019