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Blind Citizens NZ

Focus

Publication of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc Volume 56 No 1 – March 2020

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COVID-19 – How we are working differently

Government announced its four-level COVID-19 Alert System early to mid-March. The reason we have the four-level Alert System is to slow the spread of COVID-19. The Alert System tells us what to do to protect ourselves, and others from COVID-19. We have been at Level 4 since 11:59pm Wednesday 25 March, and remain so, until further notice. This is the first time this has ever happened, and everyone is learning about what to do, and what not to do. This means we are doing so many things quite differently.

Blind Citizens NZ Board, Chief Executive, Branches and Networks continue to work and do as much as possible in this environment. For some, meeting by phone and zoom, and other virtual means is a new way of working and/or keeping in touch. For others, it is the norm, with the exception of course, that we are working and interacting this way because we must. It is for the time being, the way we keep in touch with each other, and / or do our work and carry out our roles. Phoning around members is happening, so do not be surprised to receive a call from someone from Blind Citizens NZ saying hi, and checking how things are for you.

The Board held its March meeting (Saturday 28 and Sunday 29) using Zoom. It was not the usual full two-days, but three hours each morning. A key focus of the meeting as you might imagine, was to consider the impact the pandemic is having on everyone. Additionally, potential implications for Blind Citizens NZ and the myriad of organisational and constitutional requirements there are. For the time being, plans remain in place for the Annual General Meeting and Conference, and the election of two Members-at-Large. Branches and Networks are encouraged to think about different ways of meeting – more so as a means of keeping some routine and these will of course present opportunities for people to stay in touch.

The Board has set an extra-ordinary meeting during April to review organisational implications arising from COVID-19.

As we adapt to working in this environment, Blind Citizens NZ has been actively involved lobbying Government, and successfully achieving for Blind Low Vision NZ, recognition that the production of information for blind, deafblind, low vision and vision-impaired people, is an essential service. Organisationally, we are working with Government to ensure our population / community of people also get COVID-19 related information in the range of hard-copy options. Until recently, only those who can access official websites, social media, emails etc., have been fortunate enough to receive this information first-hand. While it has taken until week two of this pandemic situation, there is progress! Information in the range of blindness formats should be available, but this will depend on how time-sensitive the information is.

Most importantly, the Board, staff, Focus Editor, Branches and Networks want you all to know you are in our thoughts. We are here to provide assistance if you are facing challenges or hardships of any kind during this Lockdown, and after. Please do make contact with the Chief Executive (or a Board Member), and we will do what we can to provide support. Contact details are at the back of this Focus issue. If you want to find out what your local Branch or Network is doing, you will find key contacts at the back of this Focus issue.

It's the Putting Right that Counts Editorial, by Allan Jones

I want to lead off this editorial with two iconic Pete Seeger lines – the first from “Where have all the flowers gone?” and the line “when will they ever learn”. I would twist this around a bit and ask, “Will they ever learn”. Then the second line is a biblical quote from the song “Turn, Turn, Turn”, and the line “peace will come I swear it's not too late”.

I attach both these lines to the RNZFB Board's initial decision not to support someone from the blind community, to stand for President of the World Blind Union. As someone who has been a member of the blind community for a long time, I am appalled at the level of secrecy and lack of information surrounding the initial decision reached by the RNZFB Board. I am pleased to report the RNZFB Board at its 29 February 2020 meeting, reviewed and subsequently reversed its initial decision. You will read more about this from our National President a little further on.

In the meantime, I want to be clear that I don't expect the RNZFB Board to always make decisions that I will agree with. I do however, expect their decisions to be minuted and explained. I understand there may be matters of sensitivity that requires the RNZFB Board to go in to 'Committee' on this matter. That is no excuse though, for the lack of information about why, at least initially, it decided not to support someone from New Zealand, standing for President of World Blind Union. One of the key lessons I learnt from being a member of a Lions Club for 30 years, was that your colleagues and friends might have a different political view from me. However, both sides were prepared to be open and honest about where they stood. I suggest the RNZFB Board adopt the same approach. I believe it can be assured of earning "brownie points" for doing this.

I want to now turn to discussion about what is now called "small passenger carriers". Several weeks ago, there were many emails on Blind Citizens NZ's "blind-discuss" email list, where this topic featured. With the permission of two of the contributors, I am quoting from each of their emails. The topic I am highlighting is mostly about Uber. The Uber technical platform is reasonably accessible when using "blindness related speech software".

Here now, from Clive Lansink, is the first email about which I refer.

"The comments on Uber are very interesting. The one point I would add is that the changes to small passenger transport legislation (by the way that means small vehicles, not small passengers) means that all such transport services are now treated the same way in law. I haven't looked at it in detail but I think even the word "taxi" may now have gone from the law so there is now no distinction between what we traditionally know as a taxi and the new-age services like Uber.

So what does this mean? Well first, I can see real problems on the horizon for traditional taxi services. We are already seeing increasing use of taxi apps and I suspect taxi services will switch more and more to being accessed this way. So some taxi services will start to question the economics of running call centres and drivers will question the cost of maintaining communications equipment in their cars. So over time it might get harder for people to phone for a taxi in the traditional way, and that will impact on those blind people who for whatever reason can't use a smartphone.

Secondly, as new taxi companies spring up, they won't inherit the traditions of the old established taxi companies. There is no longer a requirement for drivers to show area knowledge, and I suspect over time other traditional training requirements will also be lost. So we could see an increasing lack of knowledge about disability and the rights of guide dog users etc.

We're already seeing the evidence of declining service standards. Ten years ago, a driver would get out of the vehicle and knock on the door or something to attract your attention. Now they just wait. They may phone you, but sometimes they'll do nothing at all, and if you don't come out, they will often just drive away. Somehow this is now regarded as normal service, even though not long ago it would have been regarded as poor service. Also, we can see over time how the customer is expected more and more to find the vehicle when it turns up, rather than the driver being expected to find the customer.

Thirdly, drivers are more and more reluctant to provide even basic help to passengers. I haven't seen this yet with the traditional taxi companies I use, but I have heard from others that this is starting to happen, and more so with new age services like Uber. It's as if the new philosophy is I'm only here to drive the car - you the passenger do the rest, although some drivers probably will willingly offer a better standard of service than that.

A final point for now is that traditional taxi companies have usually done their best to get a vehicle to you at whatever time you ask for it, especially if they know who you are. But that is declining, and app-based services just don't bother at all because it's just driven by an algorithm with no human intervention.

I'm not sure about North America, but in New Zealand our Total Mobility taxi subsidy scheme might be part of the answer, in that for any transport service to come onto that scheme, they do need to meet contractual obligations including disability awareness and other service standards. So I think if Uber is to come onto that scheme, it will in fact be Uber Assist rather than Uber in general (Clive Lansink's contribution ends).

Now back to me (Allan Jones) – if Uber and other "rideshare companies" join the Total Mobility Scheme, I would expect an easier way to contact them. I am currently wrestling with being charged a cancellation fee. I am asking that this be refunded, as I couldn't phone the driver too let him know exactly where it was. I should add that if an Uber vehicle drives away, you will probably be charged \$10 for this "privilege".

Here now is the second email to which I referred – this is from Jonathan Godfrey, National President...

"Discussions about the use of taxis or small passenger vehicles as they are now known comes up on this list perhaps more often than anything else which shows how critical it is for our community.

I'm looking forward to the review of Total Mobility that is slated for the coming year. The massive inconsistency across NZ that exists is not limited to the amount of the subsidy although I believe it is now just the cap that differs since many regions have moved to a card system that no longer watches our number of trips.

I know that in Auckland, drivers are supposedly given disability awareness training. Well I've had good service from drivers without that training and poor service from some who have, so in my opinion, the training isn't all that important to me as a customer. It has affected which drivers have the capability to accept the TM cards, and that is a greater issue for me. There are several reasons, but it means that a driver who just doesn't want to deal with disabled people doesn't have to by not doing the training. I should point out that driver training is not a universal commitment by all regional councils as part of the scheme. Drivers in Palmerston North do not get disability training, except perhaps to be told they must accept all passengers except anyone who poses a threat to them or their property.

In Wellington, there are taxi companies who do not accept TM because they do not have any mobility vans in their fleet. I can see the logic of the regional council as it tries to get more mobility vans on the road, but it reduces the number of cars available to the rest of the disabled community consequently. I understand that the number of mobility vans is an issue practically everywhere, including Wellington so the council's thinking hasn't worked.

What I want to see is that the TM scheme is accepted by all small passenger vehicle services. I do not want to go along the rank at an airport and ask each driver if they accept TM; I do not want to have to wait for the non-TM cabs to clear out of a queue at an airport taking other passengers on their way until a TM cab comes along, and yes, I do think I should be able to find a cab at all hours of the day.

I do know of some driver for hire services that accept TM, but the woman I have the most contact with runs her business as a booking based service.

I do agree that the traditional telephone based taxi service we were used to in the 20th century is going or has gone. The presence of Uber and the like has made an impact on the taxi industry with many of the most lucrative jobs no longer being available to the bigger taxi companies like AKL Coop or Wellington Combined. Drivers in Wellington have told me they are down by anything up to \$400 per week on what they pulled in five years ago.

From what I can tell though, the taxi companies are part of the problem. They argue that Uber and the like should be forced to operate like they must; in the end, they got the consistency they asked for, but on terms that favor Uber. The idea that a taxi offers a premium service as against the cut price Uber suggests to me that greater market distinction is needed. All too often though, I see taxi drivers behaving like a no frills driving service at which point they make Uber look attractive.

One final point about Uber in an international context. When I was in South Africa four years ago, my host suggested using Uber because it offered security and guaranteed that the person driving me would be a person of (albeit Uber's) quality. The ability to give feedback ratings (they do matter) on drivers gives me more confidence than the ability I currently have to offer feedback on most NZ operations.

There are some countries that have illegal taxis operating, including South Africa (January 2016) and Vietnam (April 2011) as part of organized crime operations targeting tourists. Extensive warnings from my hosts in both countries were heeded (Jonathan Godfrey's contribution ends).

From my perspective, one of the criticisms I hear about Uber and other new "ride sharing options", is the fee that the company charges drivers per trip. This appears to be a practice adopted from how traditional taxi companies operate. What they don't tell us is what their drivers have paid to the companies for their licenses. These licenses now can't be sold to anyone else. Drivers may have depended on this money for their retirement.

A lot of Uber drivers are part time – they can be retirees, students, housewives, and people needing to supplement their income. My dealings with Uber drivers has been in the main good. They are enthusiastic about their work and wanting to give good service. The fact that they know you can rate them does have a desirable outcome.

Three interesting points I gained from having coffee with an Uber driver before we went into Lockdown:

- 1 After four hours driving, they need to take a half hour break.
- 2 I thought "surge pricing" at lunch-time and mid-afternoon was due to customer demand. The person I spoke to suggested it was more about drivers going for lunch or having an afternoon rest.
- 3 My informant believed that overseas rulings has impacted Uber taking Guide Dogs.

Finally, here is the email content from a senior advisor at the Ministry of Transport. This reinforces advice we have had from Blind Citizens NZ, about its work with government and colleagues in the DPO Coalition.

The following information leaves me feeling optimistic about a positive outcome.

"In 2008, New Zealand ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Officials from the Ministry (and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency) have been involved in recent workshops with members of the Disabled People's Organizations Coalition (DPO Coalition) to discuss transport-related actions for inclusion in the 2019-2023 Disability Action Plan. These actions aim to improve disabled people's access to, and experience of, the transport system and providing them with more choices and control of their journey.

One of the Ministry-led actions in the 2019-2023 Disability Action Plan is to undertake a strategic assessment of the provision of services for people with different transport needs. This assessment will include a review of the Total Mobility Scheme. This project is currently being scoped, with details to be determined in the first half of 2020."

Finally, in this editorial, I want to talk about two films. The first is the film "JoJo Rabbit", a film which I feel would work wonders with audio description. I have now been to the film twice - I went before Christmas and I was ill prepared and found it very difficult to get my head around. After hearing various reviews, and opinions, I got the gist of the story. I went again. I rate this as a tremendous movie even though there are some difficulties for many of us in the blind community. I don't want to spoil the story for readers who might want to attend this movie, but Adolf Hitler is the young boy's imaginary friend. One of the salient characters is a young Jewish girl who is being sheltered in the attic of the young boy's house. One other important bit of information is that about halfway through the movie the young boy discovers his mother's body after she was hung by the Nazis for assisting Jewish people. The first time around I was aware of how upset the young boy was, but had no idea why.

You will have no trouble understanding the breakup of the relationship with Hitler. What was helpful to me was a friend explaining the final scene in the movie. It is a very joyous one.

The second movie I want to mention is the film "Bellbird". William Dart gave an excellent review of this film, which features several excellent NZ musicians, Nigel Gavin, Annie Whittle and Emma Paki. I missed this film when it came out, and look forward to seeing it on DVD.

My final quote is from a Gordon Lightfoot song "Sundown" and the line "sometimes I think it's a sin when I think that I'm winning when I'm losing again." I won't try to interpret this for readers, and instead, leave you to ponder...

Note to readers: The delayed distribution of our March Focus issue is due to adapting to COVID-19 Alert Levels 3 and 4.

February 29 is a Special Day

From Jonathan Godfrey, National President

This must be the fifth or sixth time I've started this column. I've struggled to work out how much to say or not to say about events since my last column in December; my original plan will have to wait for another day.

The impasse between Blind Citizens NZ and the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind's (RNZFB) Board over the nomination of Martine Abel-Williamson for the role of World Blind Union President has consumed hours of my time, our Chief Executive's time, and that of the Blind Citizens NZ Board. On top of that time spent on behalf of Blind Citizens NZ, we need to add in the efforts undertaken by individuals in their own right, chief among them being Martine herself.

In my December column, I observed the efforts undertaken by Blind Citizens NZ to get the RNZFB Board to reconsider its position. They did, but the outcome was still not in support of nominating Martine. Members of Blind Citizens NZ then reacted to my column with questions, calls for action, and expressions of outrage, but nothing was forthcoming from the RNZFB Board.

There was no doubt in my mind back in December, that Blind Citizens NZ had two major issues to take up with the RNZFB Board about its deliberations. First, we were not told anything about the reasons for the lack of support expressed for Martine in 2019. Second, the lack of transparency itself and the poor choice of language used to communicate the outcome created yet more angst.

In my communications with the RNZFB Board Chairman, I explicitly asked if the statement I received was to become the public-facing description of their deliberations. The public statement suggested that no RNZFB director supported nominating Martine. In hindsight, I think that even the RNZFB Board must now realise that the way this was communicated to our community impugned the directors who may have supported Martine. At that point, the views of all directors as individuals became important to Blind Citizens NZ and to some of our more vocal members. A call for greater transparency had already been passed at our AGM and Conference back in October 2019, before any decisions about nominations were considered by either board. As part of the resolution, the importance of knowing what directors think on important issues was cited as a critical element of the democratic process that elects them to the RNZFB Board.

In January, one director came clean about his personal views. It certainly did not come as a surprise that Clive Lansink supported Martine's candidacy, but still the process of the RNZFB Board's deliberations were being questioned. The Blind Citizens NZ Board received letters from our members and two branches. The RNZFB Board then received letters from Blind Citizens NZ and from other organisations with members in the blind community. A petition was started that gathered hundreds of signatures, both online and by way of telephone. Mary Schnackenberg presented this petition to the RNZFB Board on 29 February.

In early February, the Blind Citizens NZ Board determined how to take up the issues with the RNZFB. The failure of the World Blind Union Forum (made up of three people from each of Blind Citizens NZ and the RNZFB) to properly deal with the nomination at the outset was one issue, and the other was the nomination itself and the associated negotiations about financial and other support. A meeting was possible, but only if we agreed to talk about the WBU Forum and nothing about the nomination. We agreed on the proviso that the matter of the nomination was not yet closed as far as we were concerned. That meeting was held in mid-February and cleared the air properly and highlighted the problem that led to a failure to follow the proper process for working out how a nomination would be considered. Both Blind Citizens NZ and the RNZFB personnel at this meeting agreed that the WBU Forum is supposed to have decided the process, but that it could not have forced the hand of either Board. I have to observe that the way the WBU Forum has worked over a long period of time is perhaps only possible if there is open dialogue between the two partner organisations involved. We do not currently have a way to get past a split vote. It is in fact the WBU Forum that must agree to nominate anyone from NZ to any role at the WBU, but while the WBU Forum is not functional, we must operate as two separate parties, and the door is therefore wide open for a stalemate.

Open and honest communication between Blind Citizens NZ and the RNZFB has been crucial in getting through this challenging period. The final decision I had to make on 20 February was whether to demand a time slot at the RNZFB Board meeting to be held on 29 February; we needed to know that all of our concerns were going to get a proper airing. We were also aware of course of the petition mentioned above, and other efforts to get the RNZFB Board to re-consider its support for Martine (yet again). In the end, and partly based on a verbal commitment from the RNZFB Chairman that all matters would be raised again in some fashion, I decided to write a letter to all RNZFB Directors instead of presenting in person.

The last paragraph of that communication says, “We also ask on behalf of our members, and the wider blind community, that each director be prepared and permitted to explain themselves in any public or private forum.” I cannot tell you at the time of writing how that call has been addressed by the RNZFB Board, but the RNZFB Chairman did commit to providing a response to our letter following their meeting.

So, where are we at? Well, perhaps the events of the February 29 RNZFB Board meeting need some sharing. I did not attend, but from what I can gather from observers present (there were at least five present in person and others listening from home), directors held a discussion in open session with Martine and her lawyer present as a support person. They went in to ‘Committee’ to discuss the nomination further (without Martine present), and then announced their decision. That decision was reported as a 6-2 vote to support Martine for seeking to become the next World Blind Union President. I’m so very pleased for Martine, and for all the supporters who have kept faith that in the end, the RNZFB Board has changed its collective view.

Of course, it’s not all over just yet. The rest of the world gets to choose between the candidates, and that means work for Martine and her supporters to make sure delegates from all over the world learn why she should get their vote. All I can say is that the world’s blind people just need to know that Martine will fight as hard on their behalf as she has been forced to do for herself over the last five and a half months.

To anyone who may have misgivings about the leadership role New Zealand can have at the World Blind Union, I ask you to put your negativity to the side. I now call on everyone across our community to get in behind Martine and give her 100% support.

I know some members will still want to know who the two directors voting against the nomination were, and perhaps I'm a little curious too. I find it quite distasteful that two individuals can hide behind a veil of secrecy. Surely, these individuals should be given a decent chance to explain themselves. Maybe they'll earn my respect for doing so. I know that if any member of the Blind Citizens NZ Board votes against a motion they are given a chance to have their name publicly recorded.

One day we'll find out how and why so many of us had to expend numerous hours as individuals, or as boards to get us finally to this point. For the time being, I hope you'll join me and many others as we celebrate the triumph of openness and fairness in 2020 over who knows what in 2019.

2020 – 75th Annual General Meeting and Conference

Working Together

Planning for this year's celebratory 75th AGM and Conference, "Working Together", is on track. We publicised in December the dates of Friday 9 to Sunday 11 October 2020 for you to join us all. We will be at the Sudima Hotel Christchurch Airport.

Details for all costs and a range of attendance options are on the registration form. For the time being, registration forms are available on our website, and can be mailed out on request. As always, there are options to suit individual needs. To support members who want to come and be part of the 75 year celebrations, and to avoid making a one-off large payment all at once, please feel free to take advantage of the opportunity to put a payment plan in place, to suit your budget. By making regular payments, your registration costs (which are about accommodation and meals), will be paid for before the AGM and Conference.

Blind Citizens NZ - Draft Strategic Plan 2021-2023

The Board has begun work on a new organisational Strategic Plan 2021-2023. Members now have a further opportunity to provide input, share thoughts, and offer suggestions. The draft strategic plan is included in this Focus Issue.

As advised in December 2019, the Board's intention is to finalise the new organisational strategic plan as soon as practicable. While it will come to the 2020 Annual General Meeting and Conference, the Board's aim is to implement the new Strategic Plan once it is finalised.

Input from members is both welcome and encouraged – please send your thoughts and suggestions through to National Office by 9am, Friday 29 May 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 Draft Strategic Plan 2021-2023...

Purpose

Blind Citizens NZ exists to give voice to the aspirations and lived experiences of blind, deafblind, low vision, and vision-impaired people living in New Zealand.

Vision

Every blind, deafblind, low vision, and vision-impaired person is choosing the life they live.

*In the context of this document, the word “blind” encompasses all those who are blind, deafblind, low vision, or vision-impaired, or who use any other blindness term that describes them, 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;
- We will always portray blind people in a positive light.

Goal 3: Blind people advocate on both a personal and systemic level.

- We will provide and support advocacy training;
- We will demonstrate through collective action, how blind people can improve their life, and the lives of others.

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

- We will assess blindness and disability services to ensure they are meeting the needs and expectations of blind people;
- We will advocate for a better experience for blind people using publically available services;
- We will advocate for improvement in both quantity and quality of service where there is evidence of unmet need.

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

- 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;
- 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 belong.

- We will maintain a consistent flow of information to the blind community, and seek every opportunity to engage with them 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: Blind Citizens NZ is recognised for what it adds to the blind community and society.

- We will actively promote the benefits of joining our organisation to the blind community;
- We will demonstrate that we are a dynamic and constructive Disabled People's Organisation worthy of everyone's support.

Important Information from the Ministry of Social Development and Work and Income

Benefit increases

From 1 April 2020 all main benefits will increase by \$25 per week. For couples, the increase will be \$25 in total.

This increase to the after-tax rate will apply to:

- Jobseeker Support
- Sole Parent Support
- Supported Living Payment
- Young Parent Payment
- Youth Payment.

This is in addition to rate changes on 1 April. This increase in your benefit payment may affect some of your other payments such as Temporary Additional Support, Accommodation Supplement and Childcare Assistance.

The total amount you get from us will not be less than what you were getting before 1 April.

Winter Energy Payment rates for 2020

Payments will begin on 1 May 2020 and end on 1 October 2020

- Single people with no dependent children - \$40.91 a week
- Couples, and people with dependent children - \$63.64 a week

Essential costs (Work and Income)

For those who are struggling to meet urgent and essential family and whānau costs, there might be help available from Work and Income. Work and Income call centres are experiencing very high demand at the moment, so we recommend you check the website first

<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/urgent-costs/index.html>

If you don't have access to the internet you can call **0800 559 009**, but please be patient. As you can imagine, many people are trying to call.

Support through local Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups

During these challenging times, some people in our communities may need extra help to access the things they need during self-isolation, like food and medicines.

For people who have an urgent need for essential supplies, and they don't have the means or transport to get it themselves, they can contact their local Civil Defence and Emergency Group (CDEM) for help.

The service operates 7 days a week from 7am to 7pm.

Visit <https://www.civildefence.govt.nz> for information for regional contacts.

Default expiry on payment cards extended

From Sunday 29 March, we extended the default expiry for hardship granted on payment cards. Clients will now have seven days, instead of three, before their payment expires. This will give clients more time to get the essentials they need, such as from their pharmacy or supermarket.

Good news - this will happen automatically, you won't need to do anything.

Information that applies during COVID-19 Alert Level 4

- Please don't worry – you'll continue to be paid your regular benefit payments.
- MSD has done a bunch of things to make it easier for now.
- If you're already getting Jobseeker Support, Sole Parent Support or Supported Living Payment, you don't need to provide another medical certificate (for renewals/extensions).
- If you're already getting Disability Allowance and Child Disability Allowance you don't need to do anything - they will continue to be paid.
- For now there will be no annual reviews, including confirming your circumstances, annual circumstances, social housing reviews or life certificates.
- Special benefits won't expire.
- Any new obligations failures will be put off.

Blind Citizens NZ Annual General Meeting and Conference

A Rave, by George Taggart

About July I get word the conference is on in Auckland and I have the date and time. This will be my ninth conference and as I have enjoyed every one I start to look forward to the 2019 conference.

I know that later I will receive the programme and there will be lots of reading to do, but right now I have some forms to fill in with details of my requirements for accommodation and meal preferences. I usually have a room to myself as if the event is held outside of Wellington Mary [my very significant other] and I try to stretch out the weekend with a little side trip. Of course there is also the challenge of looking for the best airfares I suppose that part is living up to my Scottish reputation, although I would strenuously deny that we Scots are tight.

Lets jump forward a few months with lots of reading and thinking and I am ready to depart, this will be my second flight with Guss my beautiful and clever guide dog, so I am just a little nervous as it has been two years since Guss as my brand new dog travelled on a plane. However no worries. Air New Zealand staff as usual were wonderful both on the ground and in the air. The hotel courtesy van was waiting for me, and as I had been to the Naumi Hotel before I had a rough idea of the layout, [I explain to sighted people that I have eyes in the back of my memory]. I still find it a wonderful experience being at a gathering of blind people as I literally bump into people I have not met up with for at least a year.

Let the business begin! Well no, I am sure that others have already gone through the remits and the wonderful and sometimes inspirational speakers that we listened to. I would like to relate my experience of meeting and sharing our journey as blind people in a world that at times makes our journey challenging to say the least. I met some young ones struggling to find and hold down a job. I met fellow guide dog handlers all of us in love with our faithful friends. I met a wonderful academic who has written a very informative book on the history of the Association that I found fascinating, and gave me an insight into the struggle to get free of, however well intentioned, patronising behaviour.

Greg Newbold the author, is bringing his work up to date this year, to recognize the Association's 75th anniversary. I am very interested in this time as it coincides with a time for me of being a bit more involved in the activities of the Foundation, both as a volunteer and as a recipient of services. Needless to say, I think the frontline staff that I have encountered, are pretty wonderful people. However it is pretty well known that I have had my struggles with centralised management and the Conference is a wonderful place for expressing our views. By the way, this expressing of concern is about actions taken and not the person.

I am very sorry as I now have rambled on. So to wrap this up I think our Conference is very special for meeting new people, making new and meeting old friends, challenging ourselves as blind people to be out in the real world and stating our claim as a member-led organization to have our views heard and taken account of.

So if you have never been to Conference please think seriously about coming in this anniversary year.

2020 General Election and Referendums From the Electoral Commission

The 2020 General Election will be held on Saturday 19 September 2020. Referendums will also be held on whether the recreational use of cannabis should become legal and whether the End of Life Choice Act 2019 should come into force.

Those living with a disability, or caring for someone who does, should not miss out on having a say on who runs the country. It's your right to have a say on who makes local and national decisions that affect your lives. Everyone's voice is important, but only those who are correctly enrolled can vote.

Make sure you are enrolled to vote so you can have your say in the 2020 General Election and referendums. If you're not on the electoral roll or if you need to update your details, do it now! It's easy. Go online at www.vote.nz, call 0800 36 76 56, text your name and address to 3676, or pick up an enrolment form from any Citizens Advice Bureau. Forms are also available from most public libraries.

If you need help to vote, you can get help from a friend, family member or an electoral official at a voting place. That person can go behind the voting screen with you and can read out the words and information on the voting paper. They can also mark the voting paper for you according to your instructions. But they can't tell you who you should vote for.

Anyone who is enrolled to vote and is blind, partially blind or has another physical disability that prevents them from marking their ballot paper without assistance can choose to use the telephone dictation service to cast a secret vote.

If you want to vote using the telephone dictation service in this year's General Election and referendums you will have to register, even if you used the service at previous elections.

You can register to use the dictation voting service from Monday 17 August and you will be able to vote by dictation voting from Wednesday 2 September.

More information about telephone dictation voting will be available closer to the election.

If you know someone who needs assistance to enrol, or you have any questions about enrolling or voting for the disabled, visit www.vote.nz or get in touch with us on 0800 36 76 56.

Blind Citizens NZ 2020 Scheduled Election

Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

The election of positions and procedure will happen as set out in the new Constitution, adopted in October 2019. In 2020, there will be an election of two Member-at-Large positions, each of whom will serve a three-year term. Please note that the terms of office of three Member-at-Large positions concludes at the end of this year's Annual General Meeting (and Conference). In alphabetical order, individuals holding whose terms conclude are Dave Allen, Andrea Courtney, and Carl Halliburton. The World Blind Union Representative position also concludes at the end of this year's Annual General Meeting. As set out in the Constitution, the Board is responsible for the appointment of this position i.e. it is not an elected position. The Board will publicise the process for this position in June.

Rule 10 Elections, clause 10.1, directs Blind Citizens NZ in its election procedures.

In publicising the 2020 scheduled Member-at-Large election procedure, and the call for nominations, please be aware:

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

Anyone standing for election is encouraged to take the time to ask for, and become familiar with the duties and responsibilities of Board Members. Additionally, the skills, experience and knowledge needed.

Contact details for Blind Citizens NZ's National Office and our website (where information can be found also), are located at the end of this Focus issue.

Here now, are the details about timelines and the procedure for the election of all positions.

To be eligible for nomination for any position, you must:

- a)** live in New Zealand; and
- b)** have been a financial Ordinary Member of Blind Citizens NZ for at least 24 months of the past five years, up to August 2020. If you are uncertain whether you meet the criteria, please contact our National Office to find out.

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

Ordinary Members, financial as at 20 August 2020, are eligible to stand for election to these two positions.

Nominations close at 4pm Thursday 20 August 2020. They must be received and in the hands of the Returning Officer by this date / time. Candidates must provide their CV at the same time as they send their nomination to the Returning Officer. Send nominations and CVs to the Returning Officer at one of the following:

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

Once nominations close: If the maximum number of nominations for the two positions is received, no election will be needed. Candidates will be declared elected unopposed. However, if nominations exceed the number of positions being elected, an election will then be held.

Ordinary Members have a say: Ballot material (names of people standing for election, information they have provided about themselves, and voting information), will be sent to all Ordinary Members recorded as financial on the member database at National Office as at **4pm, Thursday 20 August 2020**. No later than **Thursday 10 September 2020**, ballot material will be distributed in the voting member's preferred format.

When does voting close: Completed ballots (votes cast by voting members) must be received at National Office no later than **4.00 pm, Tuesday 29 September 2020**. Vote counting will take place no later than Tuesday 6 October 2020.

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

Time to consider your preferred voting option: When voting in Blind Citizens NZ elections, you can choose one of three options. It is important to remember that the way you vote, can be different from the way you choose to receive your election (ballot) material.

You can cast your vote using the large print form, the braille-card option, or TIS. For many reasons, we encourage you to try TIS as this offers a truly independent and empowering voting experience. TIS means you can independently do all the things you need to do in an election – you hear about the candidates standing for election, and you cast your vote. Casting your vote by TIS, means you can be certain it will be received by the due date and time. The postal vote option offers less certainty around your vote arriving by the close of voting. If you would like to know more about using TIS, and / or casting your vote using this option, please contact our National Office.

Norfolk Island Paradise

By Allan Jones

As I write this contribution, I am hearing the 8 am “pips” from Radio NZ. The voices of Corin Dann and Susie Ferguson are faded down, and I hear on this particular morning, the dulcet tones of Spider Web. I am sure he wasn’t christened Spider but in all of his different personas, that is what he is known by. Spider is a well-known radio announcer - he and his wife run a coffee shop. He is a “Lion” and is to be seen at the local Sunday market selling chocolate, which he and his wife make. Today there is no mournful or joyous music to lead off. So no one has died or been born in the last 24 hours. Norfolk Island time is 7 am, and in time it is 6 am, Brisbane 5 am and in Perth it is 3 am. These time zones matter, especially if you are listening to different radio or TV stations.

I listen to Radio Norfolk to hear the local news and to get the weather report although I don’t know why I bother with the weather report. It hovers around the 25 degree mark on most days.

I have now visited Norfolk Island about a dozen times. Of these, nine times on my own, and three times with other people. I have two cousins living in Norfolk Island.

I write this contribution for Focus, because I believe that the “village” of Norfolk, even though there may be a few challenges, is a reasonably friendly place to go. People say the island is for “newly Weds”, or the “nearly Deads”. Well for me, I guess I perhaps I am in the latter category...

Norfolk Island is right out in the Tasman Sea. It is level with Brisbane but slightly closer to New Zealand than Australia. It has a population of 1,800 and can take up to about a thousand tourists a week. The Island is about 7 kilometres in length, and it having been a “convict settlement” has a colourful history.

I want to focus on what I call the “village”, which is about three blocks running from the Liquor Bond Store to just past the Return Services League. There is a footpath on both sides of the road with a few traps. On the left side coming from the store, just past the Bowling Green there are inserts for cars to “nose in to”. Concrete kerbs border these inserts. The best way to avoid them is to use the buildings as a shoreline on the right-hand side of the road. The footpath is a bit of a dogleg, sometimes twisting out towards the road, and at other times, going towards the buildings. With care and patience, this can be negotiated.

My first decision for the day is to decide where to go for breakfast. I have five options, but today it will be the “Tempo”. I am staying at Fletcher Christian Apartments, right next door to the RSL. Tempo would be not more than a five-minute walk.

Nearby the tempo is a "commonwealth" bank now the only bank on the island. It does have an "ATM" with speech, although the volume was not too good for my ear buds. A good pair of old-fashioned earphones would have been better and I will be sure to take these on my next trip.

Be aware that if you don't have a commonwealth bank account, you will be "stung" about \$7 per withdrawal. Luckily, I didn't need a lot of cash as both EFTPOS and Visa worked for most transactions

There are a multitude of tours you can do. One, which I have done twice, is a trip around the island. I believe you gain a lot of information by doing this. The choices I made for dinner are all in walking distance of where I stay. The RSL serves excellent "trumpeter's fish", the Bowling Green has good hearty meals, the Haitai is open most nights of the week and the Leagues Club serves a decent meal.

I have stayed in three places within the radius of the "village". Fletcher Christian Apartments, the Hibiscus Eloha, and the Castaway Hotel: The Castaway is down quite a long driveway just opposite the RSL.

There is a weekly air service to Norfolk from Auckland. Chatham Island Air are running a return flight every Friday. For my last couple of visits I have flown Wellington to Sydney, had a few days there, and then flown on to Norfolk. Air NZ does this trip from Sydney or Brisbane, five days a week.

Norfolk is extremely "tourist friendly". Tourism is their main industry - the locals are friendly and helpful hence I look forward to my "tempo" breakfast with Coleen, Lee, Geoff, and Teddy the latter a very friendly dog, and many others.

Membership Renewal Reminder

Membership renewals fall due on 1 July annually. With 2020 shaping up to be an eventful, busy year, this reminder may prove useful. If you are uncertain whether you are financial, please check by contacting our National Office (0800 222 694) or your local Branch Treasurer.

There is an option to renew (or join as a new member) online. Here is the link <https://abcnz.org.nz/join/renew-your-blind-citizens-nz-membership/>

Branch and Network Contacts

Branches

Auckland: Ms Mary Schnackenberg - Secretary, 09 520 4242; mary@lansink.co.nz.

Rotorua: Mr John Williams - Chair, 07 347 0967.

Whanganui: Mr David Couling Chair, 06 343 3117; glendave1975@gmail.com

Wellington: Mr Carl Halliburton - Chair, 021 101 0459 preferred (or 04 972 9138); carl.j.halliburton@gmail.com

Nelson: Mr Mike Stevens - Chair, 03 548 1528; mikestevens@xtra.co.nz

South Canterbury: Ms Janice Mehrtens - Secretary, 03 689 1089; janicemehrtens@gmail.com

Southland: Mrs Carolyn Weston - Secretary, 03 216 4616; cweston@kinect.co.nz

Networks

Taranaki: Mr Gary Tanswell - Co-ordinator, 06 758 0001; garyjohn2@callplus.net.nz

Christchurch: Mr Mark Luxon - Co-ordinator, 03 960 4278; marcoshark999@gmail.com

Otago: Ms Raeleen Smith - Co-ordinator, 03 455 8508; smithraeleen@gmail.com

All other areas: 0800 222 694

Join Blind Citizens NZ's "BlindDiscuss" Email List: send a blank message to: blindcitizensnz-blinddiscuss+subscribe@groups.io

Blind Citizens NZ – Board and National Office

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- Wendy Chiang: wendy.chiang@gmail.com
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Blind Citizens NZ is appreciative of donations received from our members and supporters, and for funding from Blind Low Vision NZ, and the Lotteries Grants Board