



Blind Citizens NZ

Focus

Publication of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc Volume 57 No 4 – December 2021 In this Issue

- Seasons Greetings pg 2
- Rules, Guidelines and Promises, National President pg 6
- Blind Citizens NZ needs your expertise... pg 10
- 2021 AGM and Conference highlights pg 12
- Cyril White Memorial Fund – February 2022 Application pg 16
- Support Blind Citizens NZ's Income Generation Efforts pg 17
- Membership Renewal pg 18
- Blind Citizens NZ Board / National Office Contacts pg 19
- Acknowledgement of financial support pg 20



Season's Greetings

Our December 2021 Focus Issue includes several regular items. The National President Jonathan Godfrey's thought-provoking comments about rules, guidelines and promises will have you thinking about COVID-19, vaccine passes, and our collective responsibility as a nation as we move through this pandemic.

The expertise of our members is often called upon. On this occasion, you'll read about two positions that are vacant due to resignation. These are for Focus Editor, and Blind Citizens NZ's appointee to the Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ Board of Trustees.

We share highlights of the 2021 Annual General Meeting and Conference, primarily about guest presenters and award presentations.

Although our December Focus Issue is shorter than usual, you will receive at the same time, important COVID-19 related information. With so many changes happening, we hope this will prove useful.

Last but not least, if Focus arrives a little late in your mailbox, we hope you will take time to read it in the New Year.

From the Board and staff of Blind Citizens NZ, all the very best to you all for Christmas and the New Year. Mask up, record your visits and outings, use your vaccine pass, and above all else, stay safe.

Rules, Guidelines and Promises From Jonathan Godfrey, National President

I'm all too aware that New Zealanders are currently experiencing a lot of changes in the "rules" created by the new COVID Protection Framework, commonly being called the Traffic Light System. Businesses are being told to comply with rules, and the nature of those rules depends on the type of business being conducted.

One hopes the system that is supposed to simplify the rules and offer more certainty for us all, in fact does deliver certainty for everyone. Only time will tell.

Certainty requires knowledge of what to expect, and for all New Zealanders that means having the right information at the right time. Every blind, deafblind, vision-impaired and low-vision person should be benefitting from the work Blind Citizens NZ has done to improve the flow of information from Government, including that COVID-19 ads on TV are pretty much fully narrated now. The reality is though, that this only supports those of us in the blind community who have a television. In a similar vein, the fact that we've ensured the websites with information are presented in accordance with Government's own guidelines, only benefits the people that can make use of those websites. Our presence in website presentation is not only seen in ensuring implementation of the Government's Web Access Standard, but also in helping modify that standard so that it continues to work well for our community.

Sharing information by email and more modern social media avenues only gets to those people who engage with email, Facebook, or Twitter. We know there are other social media outlets too, but even the most commonly used ones aren't reaching everyone who needs to be kept informed of the latest changes. It feels like every second email I receive sharing information offers me a starting titbit and then gives me the link to a website for more information.

I do have the skills and equipment to allow me to go off and read that information, but there are plenty of blind, deafblind, vision-impaired and low-vision people who are less able to do this. Or, they simply do not have the technology to know what is available.

A rule that no one knows about isn't any use to anyone; ditto for guidelines and promises. Rules and guidelines that aren't followed don't serve society's needs, and promises that are broken end up compromising people's faith that anything will change.

The Government has set rules for society as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. If Government wants everyone to comply with those rules, the onus is on Government to make sure that everyone is made aware of their rights and responsibilities. The new Traffic Light System is quite well explained for anyone who wants to know about it, but isn't explained to everyone that **needs** to know about it. In addition to the information being put on a website, Blind Citizens NZ has worked with AI Comms to get the most up to date information on TellMe (0800 TellMe = 0800 835 563) so anyone with a phone can get to the official information provided by Government.

I've already experienced the uncertainty of life under the Traffic Light System. I went to my second favourite store just after the new system started. I do have a vaccination pass, but wasn't asked to present it at the door. I checked in as we are required to do, doing so using my COVID-19 Tracer app.

Life as a fully vaccinated person has its certainties. I know I can go into any store or attend any event that requires a vaccine pass, because I have one. I've already had to adapt my planning under the new system. I must either have a paper copy of my pass or start to take better care to make sure my mobile doesn't run out of battery. I was wearing my face mask, and I have to believe other customers were too. I definitely had no certainty that all customers were fully vaccinated, and I know that for some people in our community, that single element of uncertainty is enough to keep them in their homes.

There are already businesses and events that are choosing to promote themselves as requiring a vaccine pass, as well as those businesses and events that must check people's vaccine passes by law. Self-promotion of vaccination status was even happening several months ago on social media, well before the new system was announced. Let's face it, vaccine passes will affect our lives in the coming months, possibly years. How will we know who is doing what though?

We know that hospitality businesses in particular must check the vaccine status of their patrons. Anyone who is not vaccinated is certain that they are not going to sit down for coffee in a cafe until we get to the green level in the system, so they know not to go out for coffee. That is certainty and it does mean those people can make plans that avoid an embarrassing confrontation. How though, will anyone know if the business they want to go to on any given day is insisting on viewing the vaccine pass? I guess we could contact each business before we go out, but it's going to be more practical to assume the pass will be needed and get on with life.

Blind Citizens NZ has put serious energy into making sure all blind, deafblind, vision-impaired and low vision people can get their passes. It doesn't matter if you don't have a computer, because we were involved in ensuring there is a solution. You can get a vaccine pass using your telephone (0800 222 478) or go into a pharmacy that is dispensing vaccines. Blind people are getting the certificate onto their smart phones, sometimes with some help. **We can use the vaccine pass system, so blindness is not what will shut us out of businesses and events.

There are some people from our community who made a choice not to get vaccinated. As long as they made this choice with decent information and of their own volition, then I acknowledge their right to make that decision.

I have to accept though, that if they have chosen not to get vaccinated, that they will find it harder than an unvaccinated sighted person to get on with life because the flow of information on how they will do things currently comes with a lot of uncertainty. Businesses are already putting (visual) signage on their premises and sharing information with customers on their databases. Every business will make choices about how they communicate, and we'll almost certainly be powerless to do much about it.

In contrast, we should expect to have an impact in voicing the concerns of clients receiving services from BLVNZ. We've already been told that an unvaccinated person will still receive services, albeit in their own homes. Ensuring people do receive an essential service is critical, and from my point of view, the services that BLVNZ clients receive are just as essential as those provided by other disability service providers. I think it is important to note that it was with help from Blind Citizens NZ in 2020 that led to BLVNZ being deemed an essential service. I wasn't to know it back then, but I have personally benefitted from BLVNZ being an essential service because my new guide dog was allowed to leave Auckland during lockdown so that he and I could get on with our training.

Surely every business that wants to be seen as essential, must also live up to the moral obligations that come with being essential, and I'm not just talking about BLVNZ here. Any business that was ever considered essential must now be making sure that all people are able to use that business, with or without a vaccine certificate. This is a classic case of rights and responsibilities, normally mentioned in relation to individuals. Businesses wanted the right to be essential when it suited them, now they have the responsibility to be essential no matter how much it inconveniences them. I would like to acknowledge that many businesses do seem to have made a plan for all of their customers, even if the rules they impose differ for their vaccinated and unvaccinated customers. My favourite store does this in its weekly email to customers.

The advantage we now see is that the way businesses will serve unvaccinated people means that many of those businesses have expanded the ways they do business. That can create an opportunity for people to choose the way they will be a customer. It creates a way an unvaccinated person can continue to enjoy life without confronting any stigma associated with their preference.

Even better though, there is also some chance that a disabled person can get an improved outcome without having to explain every detail of their personal situation in order to get the services they need.

Unfortunately, some of the opportunities haven't been as good for all disabled people. My pet peeve is the lack of detail about products on websites because the seller seems to think that the single photograph of the product is sufficient. If I was in store, I'd be able to pick up the item and decide if it was the right size. A photo creates uncertainty and guesswork, and in my case often leads to me saving my money for another day.

So, where will we be able to go and when in the coming months? The answer depends on where we live of course, and the colour of our region's traffic light. When will our branches and networks get back to having the face to face meetings we've missed out on for so long? The answer to this question depends on where that meeting is to be held. Every facility should have its own clearly specified set of rules, and we're confident that there are ways for blind people to show and verify each other's certificates if we need to. As a smart phone user, I can let anyone see or listen to my vaccine pass details. If I want to verify someone else's details, the verifier app does work, but perhaps some practice is required to get everything lined up just right. If I didn't have a smart phone, I'd be unable to verify a paper certificate though. At present that means blind people who don't have a smart phone cannot check the vaccination status of anyone else. On balance, this inability is one key reason why Blind Citizens NZ is comfortable in supporting the requirement on individuals whose employment role involves provision of face to face disability support services.

It is looking like the need for Zoom room meetings is going to continue into 2022. I was fortunate to join the Auckland branch's virtual end of year meeting just before this column was submitted. The call included twelve people who've only tried Zoom because the branch had to move its meetings online.

Well done Auckland branch for supporting your people. Our AGM and Conference this year was a hybrid event. A lot went well, and a few things could be done in a better way next time. I do see us having more and more totally virtual or hybrid events in future, so we're all going to need to support people whose confidence in staying connected with their communities remains low.

In 2022, I hope to get more people joining me in Zoom chats on a range of topical matters. Look out for promotion of these sessions in the next issue of Focus. I do think we can lift the confidence of more members in joining events online. Yes, it takes some assistance from time to time, but people turning up to our face to face meetings also needed advice and guidance of a different kind. We've looked after each other in a physical sense well in the past. Now it's time we did so in the new environment, whatever form that takes.

One of the most important developments of a political nature was announced at the end of October. The Government has promised to introduce access legislation into Parliament in the middle of 2022. We will have a chance to interact with the legislation through Select Committee and through discussing what we need with Members of Parliament from all parties. If disabled people ever needed a reason to learn how to have their voices heard by politicians, this legislation is it. We owe it to ourselves to help politicians learn what it means to be disabled in New Zealand, and how they must represent us too. MPs love to hear from people who are well informed and ready to share their personal experiences. Every disabled person has a story to tell. To be disabled means something is disabling us and that makes our stories. Many of the things that disable us can and should be sorted out so that they stop disabling us.

We need to see that the system created by the new legislation will have the power to make things change for us. We do not need to just hear promises, we need to know that someone will take responsibility for fixing our problems and therefore actually reduce the frequency of disabling situations.

We need to know that the new system has a chance of wrongs being righted, that our place in society is valued, and that we see decisions made on the basis of equity not just equality of rights.

The current ways of working through strategies and action plans are better than not having them, but they aren't closing the gaps fast enough. A fundamental improvement in the system is needed if New Zealand is serious about improving disabled people's lives. I've written about taking complaints in a previous column. It takes a lot of effort and fortitude to take a case through the Human Rights Act's processes. Many of those outcomes solve a problem for an individual without ever stopping the same situation arising for other disabled people, often because they are resolved through mediation. We need mechanisms that seriously penalise people, agencies, and businesses from discriminating against disabled people. We need to know that a wrong-doer will get their comeuppance. Without some sort of enforcement mechanism, the cost of doing wrong to disabled people could remain a better option than putting things right. New Zealand needs a system that incentivises doing right over wrong. Politicians need to know that the status quo often lets wrongs overrule rights when it comes to disabled people. We need to ask who, if anyone, is willing to let that continue.

Hopefully you can see that I think we've got some exciting times ahead. Life will have its challenges for individuals, so we do need to put more effort into supporting each other. We've got an excellent opportunity to make New Zealand a better place for disabled people, and I hope you're looking forward to it as much as I am.

Bring on 2022!

Blind Citizens NZ Needs Your Expertise, Knowledge and Interest

From time to time, Blind Citizens NZ provides opportunities for members to share their expertise and knowledge in a way that benefits both our members, and community of people. On this occasion, there are two opportunities being publicised – one is for Focus Editor, and the other is the appointment of Blind Citizens NZ's representative to the Board of Trustees, Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ.

You may recall we publicised in our previous Focus issue, the appointment of Kylee Maloney to each of these positions. Regrettably, for health and personal reasons, Kylee has advised the need to resign with immediate effect, from both roles.

Details for each of these positions follow - expression of interest are open to Ordinary (financial) Members of Blind Citizens NZ. The closing date by which expressions of interest must be received (applies to both roles), is 4pm, Monday 28 March 2022. Your expression of interest should identify relevant skills, expertise and/or knowledge you bring to the role.

Focus Editor: Key aspects for prospective editors to bear in mind include that:

- the term of appointment is determined by the Board – this may be one or two years;
- Focus is the official national publication of Blind Citizens NZ;
- Focus is the mechanism for communicating constitutional requirements such as scheduled election notices;
- Blind Citizens NZ's membership is the primary audience however the publication goes to all Members of Parliament, stakeholders, etc;

- editorials should raise and promote debate on issues that are current and topical to the blind community, and stimulate reader-interest in submitting Letters to the Editor;
- the successful person will bring their editorial style to Focus.

2. Blind Citizens NZ Appointed Trustee - Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ, Board of Trustees

BLENNZ is a special character school, providing education services to blind and low vision learners (including those who are deafblind, or have additional specific educational needs) from birth (or diagnosis) to age 21. BLENNZ is located at its residential campus at Homai, Manurewa, Auckland.

Through its Visual Resource Centres and mainstream schools attended by blind and low vision learners, BLENNZ provides services throughout the country.

The successful person will be required to complete the current term which concludes November 2024. If you can make this commitment, and meet the following expectations, the Board is extremely keen to hear from you. You will be eligible for consideration provided you:

- have experienced the education system as a blind person at primary and/or secondary level;
- understand the implications of special education as it relates to the core curriculum;
- identify with the needs of a wide range of students who are at different points in the schooling process;
- can demonstrate familiarity with Blind Citizens NZ's position on life-long education.

Having read about fundamental requirements of this appointed trustee position, we hope you remain interested in this exciting position.

Your next step, before putting in your expression of interest, is to contact Blind Citizens NZ's National Office to obtain the full set of duties and responsibilities. The final step is to put forward your name and supporting information.

At its meeting on 9-10 April 2022, the Board will consider expressions of interest for both Focus Editor and for the BLENNZ Board of Trustees' position.

Expressions of interest close 4pm, Monday 28 March 2022. Please submit your expression of interest via one of the following options:

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

Highlights of Blind Citizens NZ 2021 Annual General Meeting and Conference

Sharing a few highlights from Blind Citizens NZ's Annual General Meeting and Conference. Held Friday 8 to Sunday 10 October at the Brentwood Hotel, Wellington, COVID-19 did not get the better of this three-day event. Attendees were present in person, they joined virtually by Zoom, and from across the world linking to our live stream. Some were unable to join in real-time, but enjoyed watching and feeling part of proceedings via our YouTube channel.

Friday evening, from his collection of recordings and sound clips dating back to 1951, Clive Lansink presented an informative, engaging session, that showcased historical aspects of Blind Citizens NZ and the blind community, with many people from his video recording present. He referred to this as taking a walk down memory lane.

Award presentations are always a highlight, and this year was no different...

Beamish Memorial Medal: this year there were two recipients of this prestigious award, Geraldine Glanville, and Latoa Halatau.

- **Geraldine Glanville** has served on the governing bodies of both Blind Citizens NZ and the RNZFB Board. In the early 1990s she was one of two Blind Citizens NZ trustees on the RNZFB Board. Geraldine's voluntary contributions include well in excess of 20 years to Blind Citizens NZ and 18 years to the RNZFB Board where she was the first woman Chair.

In her role as Blind Citizens NZ's appointee to the RNZFB Board, Geraldine played a major part in the RNZFB's transition from a benevolent welfare and service organisation governed under a public Act of Parliament, to a member-driven, self-determining Incorporated Society. During the many years of challenging advocacy and negotiations that contributed to the RNZFB becoming an Incorporated Society, she was closely involved in work that led to the repeal of the RNZFB Act 2002. Such was her involvement in the transition that Geraldine documented this in her publication "The RNZFB from 1995 to 2003 - Putting the Past Behind Us".

Geraldine's involvement with Blind Citizens NZ includes at branch level where she held the roles of both Chair and Secretary, and also on the Board of Blind Citizens NZ. The significance of her contributions to Blind Citizens NZ's publications, policies, strategic plans, and new Constitution are testament to the passion and expertise she brings.

In recognition of her services to the blind community, Geraldine was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2015.

- **Latoa (La) Halatau** has spent over 30 years working in the disability, non-government sector. He has delivered presentations at United Nations conventions on issues concerning disabled people. La was a social worker for the RNZFB for 20 years. For 15 plus years, he has provided support for blind and Pacific people extending beyond New Zealand to the Pacific Region.

Currently, in partnership with his wife Tewai, he manages Vision Pacific Charitable Trust. Vision Pacific is a not-for-profit provider contracted by the Ministry of Health to work with individuals to help them achieve their independent living goals.

In 2003 through Vision Pacific he helped establish the Pacific Disability Forum, which aims to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Pacific countries and territories. La's guidance has contributed towards more than 20 countries receiving assistance to form National Disabled Peoples Organisations and unite under a regional body. La is a member of a number of entities that provide support and guidance to the disability sector.

A long-time member of Blind Citizens NZ, La has been on the Auckland Branch Committee, and nationally, he has served in a governance capacity on the National Executive of Blind Citizens NZ.

A founding member of the New Zealand Disability Support Network, La remains active in this work. Likewise the Enabling Good Lives Leadership Group to which he was appointed in 2013, La remains an active member of this team. La has held significant roles on many of the entities he has served, and continues to serve including as vice chair of the Health and Disability Consumer Advisory Committee.

In 2015, in recognition of his services to the blind and Pacific community, La was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

Johnson Trophy for Leadership: presented to Wendy Chiang, this award recognises the contributions she has made both for and on behalf of Blind Citizens NZ, and also within the deafblind community. Wendy's unassuming manner, her guidance, coupled with a firm, energetic approach towards all that she commits to, are factors that influence others.

Guest Presenters We were honoured to be joined by prestigious speakers. You will read more about them in the minutes. Many recognised Blind Citizens NZ for the work it does on behalf of blind people. We include an overview of what presenters talked about ...

Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Disability Issues, carried out the official opening on Saturday morning. She had taken the time to do a pre-recorded video for the opening. She spoke primarily about work happening in relation to accessibility legislation, and government's commitment to introducing this.

Peter Boshier, Chief Ombudsman, Office of the Ombudsman, spoke to the topic: Kaitiaki Mana Tangata – working together to make disability rights real. His work with, for, and on behalf of disabled people, and his learnings were a significant focus throughout his presentation.

Paula Tesoriero, Disability Rights Commissioner, talked about the work in which she is involved in her role, and the number of issues and disability-related matters overall, addressed through the Human Rights Commission.

Brian Coffey, Director, Office for Disability Issues spoke in broad terms about some of the challenges faced as Government progresses disability-related matters including accessibility legislation. He gave an indication there may be a new ministry, and of course, we have subsequently learned that is happening. It is worth noting that once established, this will be the first ministry for disabled people in the world.

Martine Abel-Williamson, President World Blind Union shared some of her experiences and learnings that have accumulated “... en route to the top job”.

The Panel of Blind Citizens NZ's Past National Presidents each spoke to two topics, and joined in the ensuing question and answer opportunity. All National Presidents from 1983 to the present joined in the panel:

- Mary Schnackenberg, 1983-1987
- Clive Lansink, 1987-1991; 2007-2016
- Doug Johnston, 1991-1997

- Jonathan Mosen, 1997-2001
- Vaughan Dodd, 2001-2003
- Carolyn Weston, 2003-2007
- Jonathan Godfrey, 2017-

Cyril White Memorial Fund

Closing Date for Applications – 1 February 2022

The Cyril White Memorial Fund facilitates funding opportunities that encourage and cultivate leadership skills and qualities among blind, and vision impaired people. Blind Citizens NZ, together with Blind Low Vision NZ, is responsible for publicising these opportunities. The next round for applications closes 4pm, 1 February 2022.

To provide some context about the fund, Cyril White was a pioneer in the blindness advocacy movement. His passion and legacy led to the establishment of the Cyril White Memorial Fund following his death in 1984.

Eligibility of applicants is primarily for those people who meet the requirements for full registration with Blind Low Vision NZ. In addition, 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 whether this meets the fund criteria, do not hesitate to contact us for full details. This way, you can be confident you have ticked all the required boxes. Most of all, that your application meets funding eligibility criteria.

Applications to the Cyril White Memorial Fund must be received by 4pm, Tuesday 1 February 2022. 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.

Please Support Our Income Generation Efforts

Blind Citizens NZ has both Charitable and Donee status. This is important for anyone thinking about the mutually beneficial outcomes of payroll giving and making us your charity of choice. Income received through donations, bequests and payroll giving for example, go a long way towards supporting the many facets of our work i.e. our advocacy, promotional campaigns, and communication and community education. Making Blind Citizens NZ the recipient of a bequest or legacy, is another way you can support us. Here is information about each of these options.

Payroll Giving is an easy way for an employee to donate to a charity of their choice, such as Blind Citizens NZ. When an employee donates to a charity through their payroll, they receive a tax refund immediately. For all other types of donation, the donor must wait until the end of the tax year to receive their tax refund. A key benefit of donating through your wages (Payroll Giving) is that as an employee you may decide to donate your refund to the charity as well.

Charitable Payroll Giving is optional and not all employers will participate. As Blind Citizens NZ has Donee Status, it is eligible to receive payroll gifts. You can talk to your employer to enquire if payroll giving is an employee benefit. Your employer will guide your approach for payroll giving to Blind Citizens NZ.

Making a Bequest: Through our efforts and your financial support, we are working on the removal of barriers faced by blind, deafblind, low vision, and vision impaired people. Blind Citizens NZ has been extremely fortunate to benefit from legacies, and we take this opportunity to recognise generically, the generosity of those people and their families. Your Will can make a lasting gift and Blind Citizens NZ would be extremely grateful for any contribution. If you choose to leave a gift to Blind Citizens NZ, we suggest the following will assist your legal advisor...

“I give and bequeath to the **Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Incorporated (CC41040)**:

- \$ (a specific dollar amount); or
- A specific percentage of my estate; or
- The whole or a specific percentage of the residue of my estate.

Free from all duties and charges, as a contribution to the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc to be applied for general purposes only, for which the receipt of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc shall be sufficient discharge to my trustees.“

To find out how we inform those who have pledged their support to us, if you have questions, or you wish to make a contribution contact:

- Rose Wilkinson 021 222 6940 / 0800 222 694
- **Email:** bequest-info-blindcitizensnz@groups.io

Membership Renewal Reminder

Membership renewal falls due 1 July annually. If you are uncertain whether you are financial, please check by contacting our National Office (0800 222 694) or your local Branch Treasurer.

Cheques are being phased out and so less banks use them. At our National Office, and for many of our Branches, we are unable to accept cheques. Renewing your annual membership subscription at a branch or network event remains an option. Even if you are not an internet-user, you can ask your bank to assist you make one-off payments, or to set up an annual payment for your membership renewal to be paid on the same date each year. To make payments through your bank, via the internet or phone-banking, Blind Citizens NZ's bank account details are: 06-0230-0002634-00.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us here at National Office, phone 0800 222 6940, or email admin@abcnz.org.nz

Blind Citizens NZ – Board and National Office

Board

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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.