



A  
**blind**  
BIT OF  
difference

Blind Citizens NZ

# Focus

## Publication of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc Volume 60 No 3 – September 2024

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## **In this edition**

### **Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive**

Welcome to our September Focus issue...

The National President shares his personal views about success, his successes and how these have happened including his efforts towards achieving these.

You will read a little about candidates standing for election to the three Member-at-Large positions. Yes, we have three candidates for two positions.

The Board has again turned its attention towards membership subscriptions. A discussion paper on this topic is on the agenda for the AGM and Conference and it is included in this Focus issue. This provides members unable to attend and / or participate in this year's event to have a say.

There are two positions the Board is promoting. There is a further call for expressions of interest in the Focus Editor position. This is not an arduous role and would take perhaps 10 hours of your time per Focus issue. Expressions of interest are also publicised for the Blind Citizens NZ's appointee position on The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust (BANZAT). If you are as passionate about Braille as Blind Citizens NZ is, the Board looks forward to hearing from you with your expression of interest.

Then we have a brief update about the AGM and Conference, and late registrations can happen... Links for online registration are provided. Further information about guest presenters etc., can be obtained from our National Office.

If there are items of interest you would like to see publicised in Focus, let's know. We hope you enjoy this issue...

## **Success is not an accident**

### **Jonathan Godfrey, National President**

Getting involved in new projects is something I do a lot. When someone asks if I can help, or can I do something, the first word I think of is usually “yes”. Being National President of Blind Citizens NZ has increased my exposure and given me some chances. I’m not telling this story to be boastful. I’m sharing because of the consequences of taking my chances, making some opportunities, challenging a mindset or two, and the impact that a handful of people have had with relatively small acts with massive long-run effects.

Way back in 2015, the DPO Coalition needed someone to join a working group looking into disability data and evidence. Perhaps the only uninspiring thing for me was the name. You guessed it, the Disability Data and Evidence Working Group. At that time, the DPO Coalition was quite reluctant to appoint representatives who were not sitting at the DPO Coalition table. I don’t feel at all immodest in saying that I was a natural selection. I was Vice-President of Blind Citizens NZ and a statistician. As it happens, there are very few people in the statistics community who identify as disabled, and even fewer who are linked to any disabled people’s organisation (DPO).

I’m still part of that work, and it is because of my engagement with it, that Stats NZ were very aware of my interest and knowledge. Key Stats NZ staff had also seen me in action when they attended a DPO Coalition meeting, which I happened to be chairing at the time. In late May, I was asked to Chair the Independent Evaluation Panel advising the Government Statistician on the Future of Census for 2028 and beyond.

That one position for the DPO Coalition led to a few other opportunities, including the one that matters most so far.

To take up this opportunity meant several things had to be sorted out in a real hurry, not least of which was dropping to part-time at Massey. The salary saved on me was needed to pay someone else to cover teaching commitments so my students weren't adversely affected. This had the support of my line managers at work because they could see this opportunity as recognition of my contributions to my profession. One of those people was also critical in some other employment opportunities which I will mention soon.

At the beginning of September, I was a panellist in the opening session of a series of webinars exposing the value that disabled people can bring to research if collaborations are inclusive. In preparation for that session, I was asked to prepare a short description of what I do and a little about how I do it.

Well, I teach undergraduate students, supervise postgraduate students, do research, and I do Statistical Consulting with clients all across campus. The tricky part was describing how I do it. The question really did not need me to say that I answer emails, do Zoom meetings, etc. because that's what everyone does. They wanted me to talk about something I do which is not usual to people in my profession or perhaps something the audience doesn't think I can do which must be an insurmountable barrier. I chose to mention that "today, I do all of my own marking", and that "I no longer need a sighted person to read the students' work to me". I chose this because it is not an accident.

We were also asked what had made a difference in our lives as students and as professionals. I chose to mention two people.

One was a Mathematics lecturer. The course in question was 300-level Axiomatic Geometry. The diagrams needed in the assignment were proving difficult to explain to anyone who hasn't taken this course, because the diagrams did not use the rules of geometry we were all taught in primary school. Everyone I asked to help draw the diagrams for me, proved that the education system had successfully conditioned them all to the point that the abstract geometry of my assignment was utterly foreign and therefore impossible to draw.

I approached the lecturer and told him that I had a problem with the assignment and a potential solution. Maybe you've guessed it, but I told him that I couldn't find anyone to draw the diagrams but I was prepared to tell him what I wanted drawn. I thought this was brilliant. I would not have to suffer the consequences of a person's inability to deal with abstract rules of geometry because the lecturer was the most qualified person around and I knew he could follow my instructions. In my excitement over the genius of the solution, I wasn't ready for him to answer, "I'll think about it". Maybe the disappointment I felt was written all over my face because he then said something like, "no wait, I shouldn't have to think about it; let's give it a go". We did it a couple of days later, and this time I admit it, I am boasting; I nailed it. His willingness to try was all I needed.

The second noteworthy event was about the first job I obtained as a member of the academic staff. The role was called "Graduate Assistant" which meant I would have to do 180 hours of work per year doing student support jobs which the lecturers didn't want to do for themselves.

There were five Graduate Assistants in the Department of Statistics as we were known back then. We had to do tutorials, computing labs, assignment marking, and hours in a drop-in clinic for struggling students. When my application was discussed, the fact that I could not do any marking was apparently raised at the appointment committee meeting. I learned much later which person had gone into bat for me and pointed out that the workloads could be arranged so that there was no marking for me to do. I also learned that the point was made that they could fit one Jonathan into the mix, but not two.

As an aside, one of the other four Graduate Assistants was not all that happy that she would have to do more marking. However one of the others loved the idea of doing marking and not having to deal with as many students so the work was juggled even further.

The attitude that carried the appointment committee's favour represents an approach that looks to what a person can contribute as against what they can't do. I'm sure we still need to convince people that we can be productive contributors if only we are given the chance to do so.

Many readers will know that I seem to have been the first blind person to get a job as a lecturer in statistics anywhere in the world. My first opportunity to be a lecturer came down to a two-horse race, and for reasons that don't matter for this article, I came second.

By that time, I had over four and a half years proof that I could do everything lecturers were doing except marking. I interviewed really well, but the panel chose the other guy.

I was asked though, if I would consider taking a fixed-term contract as an Assistant Lecturer instead. I hadn't even heard of such a job title, because there weren't any around. It turned out that an Assistant Lecturer was the same as a Lecturer but on 80% of the salary. That sucked.

I could have refused, but it was obvious to me that the same someone had gone into bat for me again. I pretty quickly decided that it was not a matter of 80% v 100%. I was being offered 80% instead of nothing, 80%, and a chance to prove the panel chose the wrong candidate. I had two years to prove it.

As it happens, another position came up in our department about eighteen months later. This time there were lots more applicants. This time the panel had no wiggle room because I had totally proven my worth, and my marking had been completed courtesy of Job Support funding for a support person to read all that handwriting. It has just ticked over the twenty-year mark since I gained that permanent full-time position. The "other guy" has gone off to academic obscurity.

There are plenty of other events in my life where a person has done something that has had a profound and lasting impact. The events I chose to mention above all came about because someone or a small group of someones gave me a chance to do something new. Some of these relatively small thoughtful acts have led to much greater things. I do however need to mention how I can mark my students' assignments today.

The finished product of what most people think of as statistics is piles of numbers in lists or tables as well as graphical displays. It's the graphical displays that stifle many blind and low-vision people's interest in taking courses in statistics at university.

Maybe the ugly mathematics has something to answer to here too, but there are plenty of blind mathematicians out there.

The reality is though that the tabulated results and the pretty graphs are just the endpoint. In a modern world, so much of being a statistician involves thought, planning, experimentation, and talking about it.

The main way statisticians work with data is by using a programming language because the mouse-driven point-and-click, dialogue box and menus-type software are inefficient.

As it happens, I studied statistics at a time when blind people could not use Windows. I was reliant on the old DOS environment. While my classmates were quickly pointing and clicking their way around, I was learning obscure code and typing a lot. I had to learn more programming skills than my immediate peers.

In the last ten years, I have removed all interaction with the point-and-click software still used by some of my colleagues. When their software of choice gets its latest cosmetic facelift, they have to re-write all their notes. I only have to re-run the programs I wrote years ago. Today, I am amongst the most efficient of my colleagues because I made more forward-looking decisions.

What is truly beneficial to me, and to any blind person forced to take courses in statistics, is that the way I process my programs leads to output documents that are in stock standard HTML. That's right, my output is effectively a web document. My screen reader reads this content very well, perhaps better than the same content would be read in any other standard format.

What's even better though, is that because this is now the modern practice for 21st century statisticians, it is also what we have to teach our students.

To prove to me that they've learned how to do statistical work properly, my students now need to give me the code they wrote and the final document they created. Their original work is plain text which works well with my screen reader, and my Braille display, as does the final output HTML document. Sure, I can't see the graphs they created, but I can see the code they used to make their graphs. If I don't understand their code, I can put it into ChatGPT to get an explanation.

I'm also interested in understanding how good ChatGPT is in giving me a description of the actual image. ChatGPT is the latest tool I have worked with as part of the research component of my day job.

Over the years, I've looked into a host of ways to help a blind person understand their data or the tools needed to succeed in mathematics or statistics courses at university. Primarily because I need to be able to do this to do my job. This is why I said that it is no accident that today I can do my own marking without sighted support.

## **Blind Citizens NZ 2024 Election Update From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer**

All Ordinary (financial) Members should have received ballot material for the election of two Member-at-Large positions. There are three candidates for the two positions. In alphabetical order by surname they are: Beverley (Bev) Duncan, Tewai Halatau, Maria Stevens.

Ballot material (CVs, voting paper etc.), were dispatched | posted on Thursday 19 September 2024. Voting closes at 4pm, Tuesday 8 October 2024. The official announcement will be made on Friday 18 October 2024, at the AGM and Conference.

## **Membership Subscription Review Discussion Paper**

**Background:** At Blind Citizens NZ's 2022 Annual General Meeting and Conference, the Board submitted a discussion paper about membership matters. This is an area the Board continues to focus on.

Before sharing the next steps, we reflect on outcomes of the subsequent Special Meeting of Members held in March 2023 which required the Board to implement the following process...

<begins> That Blind Citizens NZ as per the Membership Subscription Review proposal, offers individuals who have not paid a subscription in the last five financial years to be given access to Blind Citizens NZ events as if they have paid a subscription, with this offer ending on 30 June 2025.

What this means is that for anyone who has not paid a subscription since 2018, that for the next two years to 30 June 2025 inclusive you:

- will receive information such as newsletters and notices of meetings from your local Branch or Network;
- will receive Focus, along with updates informing members of our work from National Office;

- can participate in activities including General and Annual General meetings, but you can't vote or stand for election to the Board, a Branch Committee or a Network. <ends>

## **Constitutional Requirement | Membership Engagement**

**Plan:** Membership matters are primarily set out in Rule 5 Membership. Rule 5.2.3 states: “Annual subscriptions for Ordinary Membership shall be set at rates to be determined by the Annual General Meeting from time-to-time.”

This requires the Board to bring the matter to an Annual General Meeting for discussion. The topic is also identified in the Membership Engagement Plan as an action to occur in conjunction with this year’s AGM and Conference.

Related actions are as follows... Item 5: Review the organisation’s annual membership subscription rates and any impact this may have on prospective members and those overlooking membership renewal.

**Actions Involve:**

- The Board taking a paper to the 2024 AGM and Conference that considers whether the rates should remain the same, or should there be one rate i.e. \$10 regardless of whether the person is waged or non-waged.
- Consider whether there are other ‘membership’ elements that should be refreshed for discussion at the same time (during this year’s AGM and Conference).

**Points for discussion:** Blind Citizens NZ’s membership subscriptions include an unwaged rate (\$10) and waged rate (\$20).

This applies to both Ordinary and Associate Members. Branches retain membership subscriptions which contribute towards supporting expenses for various activities, travel to and from General and Annual General Meetings, and other costs such as for newsletters etc. Annually, Branches receive a \$20 payment from National Office for each Member-for-Life registered with their Branch. National Office covers costs for items such as Focus which is distributed to all members, and Branch and Network Representatives to attend in person, the national AGM and Conference.

The Board has heard from some Branches and Ordinary Members that membership subscriptions should be the same rate for unwaged and waged membership categories. In some instances, it has been suggested that Blind Citizens NZ do away with membership subscriptions i.e. that these should not be charged.

In addition, the Board is aware for example, that of the seven disabled people's organisations that are members of the DPO Coalition, Blind Citizens NZ is the only DPO currently charging a membership subscription.

The Board is asking Ordinary Members for your views – should subscriptions be one rate regardless of being unwaged or waged. If so, what should the rate be?

Should Blind Citizens NZ stop charging a membership subscription? If this happened what would the implications be for Branches, Networks, and those who have chosen to make a one-off payment for our Membership-for-Life category?

If there is no membership subscription, then consideration must be given to identifying how someone becomes a member of Blind Citizens NZ. There is a requirement under section 26 of the Incorporated Societies Act 2022 that in part addresses this situation. This makes it clear there is a requirement for someone to consent to being a member of an organisation.

**Next Steps:** This paper is being presented to the 2024 AGM so that it can be discussed. It is also being publicised in this Focus issue to reach as many of our members as possible.

The views shared at the AGM and Conference will be a starting point. The Board welcomes further contributions from Ordinary Members, Branches, and Networks by 20 November 2024. The Board will then give further consideration to this matter at its November meeting.

The Board is clear that all decisions need to be well-informed. It is not intending for there to be any sort of decision reached at this year's AGM and Conference.

Related decisions will be reached by the Board at its November 2024 meeting. One of its decisions may be to convene a Special Meeting of Members early in 2025 to further discuss this topic.

## ShakeOut 2024

New Zealand ShakeOut is our national earthquake drill and tsunami hīkoi. ShakeOut 2024 is happening Thursday 24 October at 9.30am. It is a self-run earthquake and tsunami drill. Civil Defence will not send a notification.

It takes place across the world to remind people of the right action to take during an earthquake.

You can start the drill in whatever way works for you. All you need to do is Drop, Cover, and Hold for 60 seconds and practice your evacuation if you are in a tsunami evacuation zone.

## **In an earthquake Drop, Cover, and Hold.**

### **Pāheke, Hīpoki me Pupuri**

- Drop down on your hands and knees.
- Cover your head and neck.
- Hold on to your shelter.

Drop, Cover, and Hold are the right actions to take in an earthquake. This:

- stops you from being knocked over,
- make you a smaller target for falling and flying objects, and
- protects your head, neck, and vital organs.

Do not run outside during earthquake shaking or you risk getting hit by falling bricks and glass. Practising Drop, Cover, and Hold means you can quickly take the right action in an earthquake.

There is information, including in large print, audio, and Braille about how to Drop, Cover, and Hold in different situations or if you have a mobility impairment here:

<https://getready.govt.nz/emergency/earthquakes/drop-cover-hold>

There is also a range of information on general emergency preparedness available in alternate formats including large print, audio, and Braille here: <https://getready.govt.nz/alternate-formats>

If Blind Citizens NZ can assist you in obtaining any of this information, do not hesitate to let us know. Contact details are at the end of this Focus issue.

## **Focus Editor – Call for Expressions of Interest**

### **Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive**

This is another call for expressions of interest from Ordinary (financial | voting) Members of Blind Citizens NZ for our Focus Editor position. Expressions of interest will be considered by the Board at its November 2024 meeting.

The term of appointment can be for 12 months although a two-year term is preferred.

Anyone interested in finding out more about this position can contact National Office for full details. Expressions of interest close at **4pm, Thursday 14 November 2024**.

## **2024 Annual General Meeting and Conference**

### **He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata**

We are counting down the days now to our AGM and Conference. Anyone who intends to register needs to contact our National Office as soon as possible i.e. registrations closed on 25 September. Please be assured we will do all we can to assist people requiring accommodation. People registering to attend virtually (using Zoom) also need to register please.

On Thursday 17 October, for people attending in person, we have three side events planned. If you are present in person, you are welcome to come along and join in. There is no cost involved, and you do not need to be a member or linked directly with any of these activities which include:

- Te Tiriti o Waitangi Advisory Group, 1:00pm-3:00pm: before the AGM and Conference information will be shared that tells people about the korero | discussions that will be held at this event.
- Guide Dog Handlers' Special Interest Network, 3:15pm-4:15pm: this is an opportunity for Guide Dog Handlers, those who aspire to be a Handler, anyone who may have been and family | whānau, to come together and share experiences. Also to learn more about the Guide Dog Handler Special Interest Network.
- Braille Special Interest Network, 4:30pm-5:30pm: Braille users, readers, learners and anyone interested in learning more about Braille will benefit from this event. You will also learn more about the Braille Special Interest Network.

Moving to our two-day AGM and Conference event, this starts at 9am Friday 18 October when Te Huia Bill Hamilton honours us with the official opening. We finish after the Conference Dinner on Saturday 19 October during which we also present organisational awards. Business sessions and guest presenters are spread across the two days.

Registration Forms are available from our National Office, Branches and Networks. Alternatively, you can register online from these options:

- Blind Citizens NZ Members: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VZVYN9J>
- Observers | Guests: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/V5XG26P>

**Is Braille one of your Passions?  
Consider putting your expertise and knowledge to  
use and support Blind Citizens NZ to  
make a Blind Bit of Difference**

If Braille is one of your passions, we hope you will read on... Blind Citizens NZ has representative | appointee positions on several national organisations. When the terms of office for these positions fall due the Board decides whether to reappoint the incumbent or to publicise the position. When publicised, unless otherwise notified by the incumbent and | or they have served the maximum term set by the respective organisation, they may submit a further expression of interest.

The Board resolved it would publicise its appointee position to The Braille Authority of New Zealand Aotearoa Trust (BANZAT). The term of office is three years.

Leyna Coleman has served two terms as Blind Citizens NZ's appointee (six years) and is eligible and welcome to reapply. Expressions of interest from financial Ordinary (voting) Members of Blind Citizens NZ who meet the required criteria for this position are likewise welcomed. As an overview only is provided in this Focus issue, anyone interested should request the position description which outlines all requirements, attributes etc. The Board of Blind Citizens NZ will give preference to prospective appointees who can demonstrate competence and | or are suitably qualified in the following areas. You will:

- be able to read uncontracted Braille by sight or by touch;
- be able to demonstrate some experience in one or more of the following:
  - ✓ be a Braille reader who uses Braille on a daily basis;

- ✓ be a parent of a Braille user;
- ✓ have some experience of the production of Braille;
- ✓ have some experience of the teaching of Braille;
- ✓ have knowledge of deafblindness;
- ✓ have had some involvement in advocacy for Braille.

Skills in three of the following five areas are also required. You will:

- be a touch reader of contracted Braille and rely on Braille as your primary means of literacy; and | or
- be the holder of either a Trans-Tasman Braille Proficiency Certificate, a Braille Writer's Certificate, a Braille Proficiency Certificate, or an equivalent qualification as determined by the Board of Trustees from time to time; and | or
- have a sound knowledge of technical aspects of codes, e.g. mathematics, music, foreign language; and | or
- have an understanding of international attitudes and standards; and | or
- have had three years' experience in either Braille transcription or Braille teaching.

Expressions of interest in this position will be considered by the Board at its November 2024 meeting. These should identify the strengths, expertise, knowledge, and attributes you bring to the position. Please contact National Office for the position description (contact details at the end of this Focus issue).

Expressions of interest must be received at National Office by 4pm, Thursday 14 November 2024 via either of the following:

- **Email** articles to: [admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz](mailto:admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz)
- **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

## Blind Citizens NZ – Board and National Office

### Board

- **National President:** Jonathan Godfrey:  
[a.j.godfrey@massey.ac.nz](mailto:a.j.godfrey@massey.ac.nz)
- **Members-at-Large:**
  - ✓ Martine Abel-Williamson: [martine.the1@xtra.co.nz](mailto:martine.the1@xtra.co.nz)
  - ✓ Wendy Chiang: [wendy.chiang@gmail.com](mailto:wendy.chiang@gmail.com)
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### Focus | Items for publication

- **Email** articles to: [admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz](mailto:admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz)
- **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

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- **Website:** <http://www.blindcitizensnz.org.nz>
- **Facebook Page:** <https://www.facebook.com/BlindCitizensNZ/>
- **Chief Executive:** Rose Wilkinson:  
[rwilkinson@blindcitizensnz.org.nz](mailto:rwilkinson@blindcitizensnz.org.nz)

**Blind Citizens NZ is appreciative of donations received from our members and supporters, for funding from Blind Low Vision NZ and Te Pou**

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