



Focus

Blind Citizens NZ

Publication of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc Volume 60 No 4 – December 2024

- In this edition, by Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive pg 2
- Walking backwards into the future,
Jonathan Godfrey, National President pg 3
- Blind Citizens NZ 2024 Election Update
Rose Wilkinson Returning Officer pg 8
- Guest Focus Editorials pg 8
- Ka mua, ka muri | Walking backwards into the future
Preparation for 2025 AGM and Conference pg 9
- New Membership Subscription Structure pg 10
- Memorial Hall of Honour | Call for nominations pg 11
- He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata | Highlights of
Blind Citizens NZ's 2024 AGM and Conference pg 13
- Large Print Calendars for sale pg 17
- Season's Greetings| National Office Closing and
Opening Dates pg 18
- Blind Citizens NZ Board | National Office Contacts pg 19
- Acknowledgement of financial support pg 20

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In this edition
Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Welcome to our December Focus issue, the last for 2024....

Readers will note from the list of contents several items of an operational nature. We encourage you to read them all as these are relevant in some way, to everyone.

The National President's contribution is somewhat reflective while at the same time linking to both present and future activities and planning.

Then, in no particular order, and not intending to cover every item, there are updates about the election of two Member-at-Large positions and this year's AGM and Conference. You will learn about the new membership subscription structure which takes effect 1 July 2025. The theme for our 2025 AGM and Conference, celebrating 80 years and ways you can influence speakers and topics are highlighted.

There is a call for nominations for the Memorial Hall of Honour and an update to the approach the Board has decided to take concerning the Focus Editor position.

As we finalise our December Focus issue, the sad news of Vaughan Dodd's passing has been shared by Vaughan's family. On behalf of the Board, staff and members, Blind Citizens NZ conveys our condolences to Vaughan's family, and his circle of friends and acquaintances.

Walking backwards into the future

Jonathan Godfrey, National President

I've often joked that when moving furniture, I should be the person walking backwards because I can see just as much whichever direction I'm facing. The title of my column is one translation of the *whakatauki* "Ka mua, ka muri" which is the core of the theme chosen for Blind Citizens NZ's 2025 AGM and Conference, our 80th anniversary. (More on that elsewhere.) The image of a world full of people actually walking backwards makes me smile, but there is a serious side to this phrase, one that I remind myself and others of all too frequently.

No matter how we express it, we need to know where we came from to understand where we are going. Why did a group of people come to a collective decision to establish the Dominion Association of the Blind? Okay, to appease the train spotters, that is the second name of our organisation, but it did last for longer than any other name we've used over our (nearly) 80 years, and it is the one on the first constitution.

Quest for Equity (Newbold, 1995) is an awesome resource to which I frequently turn when I need to remind myself of events that occurred before my time with Blind Citizens NZ. The follow-up volume "Equity and Governance" (Newbold, 2020) was published under my presidency and covered matters that for the most part were unfolding around me. There was also a summary of the first 50 years, but I love the detail found in Quest for Equity.

I first read Quest for Equity (on talking book) before I paid for my Membership-for-Life. At the time I was an activist for disabled students. Yes, an activist, not just an advocate. The troubles we students were facing seemed so trivial in comparison, but the things I read gave me more desire to stand up for disabled students in need. I learned of the battles fought and the (sometimes underhand) tactics employed, by blind people and their supporters who stood up and were counted for what they believed in. They were fighting for quite basic rights. They were often fighting against an organisation that was considered to be the morally upstanding friend of blind people.

Unlike many of the people I read about, the efforts I make today seldom serve to benefit me directly. I'm not subject to cruelty in school, or an abused employee in the workshops or library. I used to think I wasn't in a battle over the way individual blind people were treated by a domineering attitude of a service provider.

My predecessors won many of those battles. This meant I inherited a world where blind, deafblind, low-vision, and vision-impaired adults are supposed to be treated with dignity by the service provider of blindness services and society at large. I became National President at a time when there was tension but respectful dialogue with the service provider. We didn't always agree, but we were never nasty to each other.

The reality is though that Blind Citizens NZ still exists and needs to exist because blind citizens do not have equity of outcomes even if we do have equality of rights in the 21st century.

We went through a period in recent years though when some behaviours, not unlike those last seen in the 1970s, were being revisited on clients and staff of Blind Low Vision NZ (BLVNZ). Our own history and the legacy we inherited meant that when the going got tough, the victims came to Blind Citizens NZ for advice, support, and ultimately, to find a defender of their rights. I found myself being among the people victimised, perhaps because I was the National President of Blind Citizens NZ, and only after Blind Citizens NZ stood up for the rights of clients and staff at BLVNZ.

Maybe one day in about twenty years' time, someone will want to write the next history book and I'll be interviewed about the last few years.

History is often said to be written by the victors. Blind Citizens NZ could have spent time making a lot of noise about the outcomes of our toil over the 2021-2023 period, but our response has been relatively modest. I believe the historians will say we were on the right side of history. To those who were found to be on the wrong side, I invite you to set aside any remaining acrimonies. It's time we looked towards the future.

A little under a year ago, a new Chief Executive was appointed to join Blind Low Vision NZ (BLVNZ). Andrea Midgen spoke to our 2024 AGM and Conference. She acknowledged the hurt wrought in the years leading up to her appointment, and that it will take time to put things to right.

In the meantime, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions published its findings, and a National Apology was given. At the same time, we all learned that the RNZFB was named as an organisation that had wronged people in its care.

During the development of the Royal Commission's work, I was representing Blind Citizens NZ on the DPO Coalition and speaking up for the needs of blind, deafblind, low vision, and vision-impaired people. I was able to do so because I had immersed myself in the content within Quest for Equity. I hope the small part I played in promoting the needs of survivors, and the memories of those people who did not survive long enough to contribute to the Royal Commission's inquiry, have played some part in the National Apology and the Crown Response Unit's work.

I didn't benefit directly because I was not an affected person, or at least not in any way related to services provided by the RNZFB in the 20th century. I do though benefit because I am a New Zealander, whose society will be better off because we had a Royal Commission and because there was an apology.

I will observe the apology from the RNZFB in memory of those people who will not be alive to hear it. I understand that there is criticism about the RNZFB Board's ability to do the right thing by those people who were directly affected by actions taken in the 20th century. I don't share those misgivings. I thought the public announcement made by the RNZFB Board was measured and respectful.

That does not mean I expect their statement or any apology they will make in the future will entirely wipe away all the ongoing damage done by wrongs of the 20th century. The RNZFB's statement and apology are absolutely critical though. Inaction almost certainly would add to the pain, hurt, anger, and/ | frustration felt by those affected.

It's about eight years since I became National President, in an acting role at first and then elected to the role a few months later. I am the sixteenth person to hold this office. I've had numerous conversations with the six people who held the office from 1983 to today. I think I met one other former President when I was a kid, and only once at that, but the legacy of the other nine leaders is equally important to me. I've heard recordings of two former Presidents, but mostly, their legacies speak to me off the pages of Quest for Equity.

I sincerely hope that each of you takes some time to look back at your past, our past as a community, and puts what is happening around us today in perspective, so that we can work together on what we want for our future.

I've chosen to close my column by sharing a poignant perspective from Vaughan Dodd (National President 2001-2003). As part of his resignation as our National Information Line Coordinator in November Vaughan wrote, "I am proud to be active in Blind Citizens NZ and will of course for my foreseeable future watch with interest as our great organisation continues to do beautiful things for blind people."

Rest in peace Vaughan (18 January 1965 – 8 December 2024)

Blind Citizens NZ 2024 Election Update

From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

Voting in this year's election of two Member-at-Large positions closed at 4:00pm on Tuesday 8 October. As is customary, election outcomes were formally announced during Blind Citizens NZ's AGM and Conference.

The term for each of the two Member-at-Large positions being elected, concluded at the end of this year's AGM and Conference on Saturday 19 October.

Three candidates stood for election for the two Member-at-Large positions i.e. Beverley (Bev) Duncan, Tewai Halatau, and Maria Stevens.

Congratulations are extended to Beverley (Bev) Duncan and Maria Stevens on their successful election to the Board of Blind Citizens NZ. They each serve a three-year term ending in October 2027.

Outgoing Board Members Wendy Chiang, and Tewai Halatau are thanked for their mahi on behalf of Blind Citizens NZ during their respective terms of office.

Guest Focus Editorials

Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

In the absence of expressions of interest for the position of Focus Editor, the Board has decided that for each of the 2025 Focus issues, we will have 'guest editorials.

A refresh for the position of Focus Editor will happen during the second half of 2025.

Focussing on the coming 12 months (excuse the pun), anyone interested in providing a 'Guest Editorial' and | or finding out more about this opportunity should contact the Chief Executive via any of these options:

- **Email:** admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz | please put 'Focus Editorial' in the subject line;
- **Phone:** 04-389-0039 | if reaching voice-mail leave a message and the Chief Executive will return your call.
- **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

Ka mua, ka muri
Walking backwards into the future
Preparation for Blind Citizens NZ
2025 AGM and Conference

As highlighted at this year's AGM and Conference, and mentioned in the National President's column, 2025 is a milestone celebration for Blind Citizens NZ. In preparation for this significant occasion, the Board considered ways this can be celebrated during its recent Annual Planning Meeting. Its starting point is settling on a theme...

In the work in which Blind Citizens NZ is involved, a fundamental approach is looking at what we've done in the past to inform next steps. The theme for 2025 comes from a whakatauki | Māori proverb - 'Ka mua, ka muri | Walking backwards into the future'.

This whakatauki promotes the idea that we should look to the past to inform the future.

Having settled on the theme, the Board asks members to give some thought to guest presenters and topics. You are encouraged to send your suggestions through for consideration as soon as possible. The Board's preference is for these to be provided to the Chief Executive by Sunday 26 January as the Board will be giving further attention to these items when it meets the following weekend.

The Board also offers timely advice regarding the closing date for receiving nominations for all awards that will be considered for presentation at the 2025 AGM and Conference. The closing date of Sunday 10 August (midnight) applies to:

- Extra Touch Award;
- Beamish Memorial Medal;
- Johnston Cup for Leadership.

Information concerning these awards will be publicised in the 2025 March and June Focus issues.

New Membership Subscription Structure

Well-informed discussion resulted from the Board's paper to the AGM and Conference about its review of membership subscriptions. Ultimately the Board's review reconciles with Blind Citizens NZ's Constitution which requires the Board to take such steps from time to time. The pertinent Constitutional reference is Rule 5 Membership, clause 5.2.3 which states:

“Annual subscriptions for Ordinary Membership shall be set at rates to be determined by the Annual General Meeting from time to time.”

Points raised in the discussion paper were wide-ranging which ensured people had options to think about. Primarily the Board needed to hear from members about membership subscription rates. In particular, should they remain the same, should there be one rate for everyone regardless of whether waged or non-waged, or were there other options to consider.

The decision reached by members at the AGM and Conference is that... From 1 July 2025, Blind Citizens NZ's base membership subscription will be \$10 per year, or \$30 per year for those who can afford it. Ultimately, by remaining financial, voting members have the right to be involved in Blind Citizens NZ elections, and all other democratic processes. The Member-for-Life subscription remains \$300.

However, in the meantime, and through until 30 June 2025, the Board's decision of July 2023 applies. This decision is that individuals who have not paid a subscription since 1 July 2018 have access to Blind Citizens NZ events, communications etc., as if they have paid a subscription.

Memorial Hall of Honour | Call for nominations

The Board is calling for nominations for inductees to Blind Citizens NZ's Memorial Hall of Honour. Nomination criteria include that an inductee to the Memorial Hall of Honour:

- can be for any blind, deafblind, low vision or vision-impaired individual who was born or has lived in New Zealand (they do not need to have been a member of Blind Citizens NZ);
- has passed away at the time the nomination is made;
- must be someone who either:
 - ✓ has made a substantial and outstanding contribution over many years towards the advancement of the interests and well-being of blind people in New Zealand; or
 - ✓ has, through their trail-blazing efforts or personal example, inspired others in the blind community to overcome the barriers to participation in a sighted world.

Nominations, with supporting information, must be received at Blind Citizens NZ's national office no later than 5pm, Thursday 1 May. Nominations should be sent to:

- **Email:** admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz; or
- **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington.

The Board is responsible for making all decisions regarding the suitability of proposed inductees following thorough research of their credentials. When proposing inductees, the Board must bring its recommendation and supporting information to the 2025 Annual General Meeting and Conference for endorsement.

He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata

Highlights of Blind Citizens NZ's

2024 AGM and Conference

This year's event was held at the Sudima Christchurch Airport Hotel, 18-19 October. Attendees joined in person, online via Zoom, and our live YouTube channel. This article provides some of this year's highlights with greater detail being available in the Minutes.

A lead-in to our annual event is the informal side events held the day before the AGM and Conference. Each of these relates specifically to Blind Citizens NZ's ongoing work programme and our Special Interest Networks. The opportunity was specifically about people attending in person. Attendance was open to anyone from the blind community not just members of Blind Citizens NZ and | or those directly involved in each of the three items. Events by topic were held concerning:

- **Te Tiriti o Waitangi Advisory Group:** Te Huia Bill Hamilton and members of the Board's Advisory Group spoke about the work they have continued doing to progress Blind Citizens NZ's journey towards being more inclusive of everyone. Te Huia Bill Hamilton has assisted and guided Blind Citizens NZ on its journey during the past two-plus years. Members appreciated the time taken by Te Huia Bill Hamilton and the Advisory Group to inform them about each of the three recommendations in the paper that would be considered during the AGM and Conference.

- **Blind Citizens NZ's Guide Dog Handler Special Interest Network** brought together a diverse group of people comprising current and aspiring Guide Dog Handlers and those who have been handlers. Facilitated by the Coordinator Beverley Duncan, the sharing of tips, techniques, and experiences including those relating to services were among the many topics discussed.
- **Braille Special Interest Network** was formally established earlier this year. Braille users and readers discussed the significance of Braille and its daily relevance in their lives. Chantelle Griffiths Coordinator, facilitated discussion which unequivocally recognised the need for Braille and the benefit of more widely promoting this to people in the blind community.

These side events provided valuable peer support opportunities. Report-back opportunities from each of the three side events occurred during the AGM and Conference.

Commencing with Waiata, Te Huia Bill Hamilton officially opened the two-day event. He spoke to this year's theme 'He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata', which comes from a Maori proverb. In translation, the words and meaning are "What is the most important thing in the world?" "It is people. It is people. It is people."

Guest presenters spoke to the theme 'He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata', each bringing their interpretation and linking this to their respective presentation. Presenters included:

- Paula Tesoriero, Chief Executive Whaikaha | Ministry of Disabled People;

- Maria Williams, triathlete (blind);
- Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Disability Issues, and Minister for Social Development and Employment;
- Robbie Taylor, Senior Advisor External Stakeholders – Kaitohutohu Mātua | Money and Cash – Te moni me te ukauka, Reserve Bank of New Zealand – Te Pūtea Matua;
- Te Huia Bill Hamilton, Ngati Kahungunu, Nga Rauru, Ngati Raukawa, Owner of Treaty Solutions;
- Andrea Midgen, Chief Executive Blind Low Vision NZ;
- Matt Waight, Customer, Communications & Change Lead for the National Ticketing Solution NZ Transport Agency | Waka Kotahi.

Memorial Hall of Honour: There was unanimous support for the Board's recommendation to induct Cissie (Margaret) Jarrett (nee Bryan, Mitchell) | 1926-2014 to the Memorial Hall of Honour. An excerpt from the nomination captures the essence of Cissie's many contributions...

“As an early advocate for the rights of blind women and for women generally, Cissie can claim to have been at the forefront. The example she set at a personal level and in the help she gave others to overcome any real or perceived barriers they might attribute to their vision loss, were just part of what she gave back to her community.”

Organisational awards: Attendees look forward with anticipation to the presentation of organisational awards which occurred during the Conference Dinner.

In recent years the 'mystique' introduced by the National President heightens everyone's enjoyment of the occasion. Congratulations go to these award recipients:

- **Beamish Memorial Medal** presented to Allan Jones, a long-standing and active member of Blind Citizens NZ based in Wellington. This award recognises Allan's outstanding contributions to society and his service to the blind community over 40-plus years.
- **Johnston Cup for Leadership** presented to Liz Anstice from Invercargill. This award recognises contributions made for and on behalf of Blind Citizens NZ that benefit blind, deafblind, low vision, and vision-impaired people in Invercargill and the Southland region.

Remits and Resolutions: Each of the three Remits was passed. These along with resolutions of significance will be progressed and updates provided from time to time. The topics and general approach towards these include:

- **Creators of the YourRide App for taxi Services:** we will work with the creators of this App to ensure it is accessible to all users, including the ability to use Total Mobility with the App.
- **Electronic voting in General Elections:** Blind Citizens NZ will continue to work with the Electoral Commission and other interested disabled people's organisations toward electronic voting being available to all voters as an option for General Elections.

- **National Ticketing Solution:** Blind Citizens will continue to work with other disabled people's organisations (DPOs) and Waka Kotahi | New Zealand Transport Agency to ensure the National Ticketing Solution is fully accessible to all users.
- **Te Tiriti o Waitangi Discussion Paper:** all three recommendations from the Te Tiriti o Waitangi Advisory Group's paper were adopted. The Advisory Group will provide the Board with further guidance about each recommendation.
- **Accessible online voting:** Blind Citizens NZ affirmed its commitment to continued advocacy for accessible online voting in National and Local Body elections.

For sale - Large Print Calendars

Produced by Blind Citizens NZ

Our 2025 Large Print Calendars are available. These are ideal for anyone needing, or preferring to have larger-sized print when checking dates. The calendars are approximately 59 cm wide and 42 cm long. They can be purchased for \$12 through our National Office, or your local Blind Citizens NZ Branch or Network. When posted from our National Office there will be additional costs. The most cost-efficient option is therefore, to purchase these direct from your Branch or Network.

Phone our National Office on 0800 222 694 if you want to purchase one of our Large Print Calendars. We can put you in touch with the local Branch or Network, or we can arrange delivery to you directly. As mentioned postage incurs additional costs which vary depending on the number you require and where in the country they are being sent.

Here is the first month for 2025... While somewhat smaller, this gives an indication of size.

JANUARY						2025	
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	
1st New Year's Day 2nd Day after New Year's Day 27th School Term 1 commences			1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
26	27	28	29	30	31		

JANUARY

For information about **Blind Citizens NZ**
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 Fax 04-389-0030 Website: www.abcnz.org.nz
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 PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

We have branches and networks around the country.
Your support for our voice is vital to ensure we can play our full part in the community.

A blind BIT OF difference
 Blind Citizens NZ

NOTES

Season's Greetings| National Office Closing and Opening Dates

As we reflect on what has been another busy year, and we prepare for 2025, Blind Citizens NZ Board and staff take this opportunity to wish you and yours seasons' greetings.

Our National Office closes at noon, Friday 20 December 2024. We reopen on Wednesday 15 January 2025. In between times, and although on annual leave, the Chief Executive remain available for emergency situations. Stay safe, and we look forward to engaging and | or working with you in 2025.

Blind Citizens NZ – Board and National Office

Board

- **National President:** Jonathan Godfrey:
a.j.godfrey@massey.ac.nz
- **Members-at-Large:**
 - ✓ Martine Abel-Williamson: martine.the1@xtra.co.nz
 - ✓ Andrea Courtney: andycoute@gmail.com
 - ✓ Beverley Duncan: bev.d.duncan@gmail.com
 - ✓ Chrissy Fern (appointed Vice President by the Board):
fernmeek@gmail.com
 - ✓ Maria Stevens: mariastevens31060@gmail.com
 - ✓ Paula Waby: paula.waby4@gmail.com

Focus | Items for publication

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- **Facebook Page:** <https://www.facebook.com/BlindCitizensNZ/>
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Focus, Volume 60 No 4 – December 2024