

Blind Citizens NZ

FOCUS

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Experiencing Parenthood and Grandparenthood As a Blind Person Editorial from Carolyn Weston

Many things have happened since our September Focus magazine was published. National Conference took place in early October and Clive Lansink and I both comment on this later in this edition of Focus. In early November Clive Lansink was elected to the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind's Board of Directors, initiating his resignation as National President of Blind Citizens NZ. Processes are well underway in organising an extraordinary election to fill the vacancy of National President. Returning Officer Rose Wilkinson has important information about the extraordinary election later in this magazine. Then just after midnight on Monday 14 November, many of us felt the massive earthquake centred in North Canterbury. That night my guide dog Tane and I were stuck in Christchurch, and this was the longest and strongest earthquake I'd ever felt. I wondered if the ground would ever stop shaking. Our aroha and good wishes go out to those of you who continue to be affected by the earthquake and the aftermath.

Let's now turn to the topic I wish to feature. In our September magazine I asked readers for comments about their experiences as blind or vision impaired parents, or grandparents. There was little response and many thanks to the two people who chose to send me their comments. I shall also include some comments made by a blind mother, posted on our email list some weeks ago.

As a blind mother, and now grandmother, I can share some of my personal experiences. I married Tony, and after two and a half years of marriage our first son Darren was born. Two and a half years later, Kelvin completed our family. At this time, I had a little useful sight in my left eye and even less in my right. Being very short-sighted, I can't see people on the other side of the room.

I was delighted when I became pregnant because my eye specialist had told my mother, (back in the 1950s) that I would not get married and have a family. During my high-school years I grew determined to prove Dr Parr wrong. Years later, I have no idea of his reaction when I walked into the consultation room with a baby in tow. I would have loved to see the expression on his face. He didn't say a word about me being a blind parent.

My family and friends appeared supportive of my pending motherhood. I prepared for our coming baby in the usual way, obtaining clothes, furniture, pram, etc. for the birth but I also learnt practical mothering skills so I could be a confident mother. I hadn't had an opportunity to experience caring for babies in my family.

Occasionally some people expressed concern that I was blind and had a baby to care for. Often these were complete strangers who made negative remarks in the street. At that time, I used a White Cane, and when Darren was fifteen months old he started wearing glasses. One day, waiting at a bus-stop, a woman I didn't know, queried that as I was blind, why had I given birth to a baby whom I'd passed my sight loss on to. The funny thing is that I have never worn glasses other than when I read print. I explained that Darren had not inherited my eye condition but that he was long sighted like his father and he had a lazy eye (a common condition which ran in Tony's family).

On becoming pregnant with Kelvin, I informed my older sister. I was surprised that she wasn't happy for me. She asked me how was I going to manage with two children. As a positive thinker, I responded a little angrily that I would cope. I was surprised my sister didn't have the confidence in me to care for two children - a new baby and a toddler.

After Kelvin's birth I became involved in our local playcentre, and decided to study as a playcentre supervisor.

I performed all the duties of a parent helper during the sessions and I passed the Otago Playcentre Supervisor's Certificate. Each playcentre is operated by families and I was employed by three playcentres as Supervisor. These parents must have trusted me to care for young children, despite my sight loss. At home I also cared for young children whilst their parents were working or had appointments. I always received positive comments on how I had given their child an educational experience whilst they were in my care.

It was a different story when I applied for paid employment within the early-childhood care industry. Despite my qualifications (by then I had passed some papers on education through Massey University), and my experience, I was never offered any of the jobs. After one interview I discovered another applicant who wasn't qualified for the position was offered it. When I rang and asked why I hadn't been offered the job; they gave me a lame excuse that they didn't think I could see well enough to do the job. Unfortunately, this incident happened prior to Government passing the Human Rights Act (including disability) so I couldn't use that to make my point. I found that whilst society may accept and in some cases tolerate blind parents, it didn't accept a blind mother as a full-time paid child care-worker.

Now my sons are adults and I hadn't experienced negative attitudes towards being a blind parent for years until earlier this year. Darren and his wife Petra had a baby girl in June. Emilene is our first grandchild. After Emi's birth, Petra spent several weeks in hospital. Darren asked Tony and I to help care for our little girl. Emi was born with some health issues and a hospital social-worker frequently visited to see how things were going. After the social-worker first met me, when she next rang Darren she asked him that due to my blindness was I capable of caring for a four-week old baby.

Darren was dismayed as I had been his main care-giver when he and Kelvin were babies. I felt angry and astounded that a social-worker should question my ability to care for a young baby when I had brought up my sons. I thought that negative attitudes about blind people caring for babies had disappeared many years ago. It seems that some people working with young families don't understand the abilities and rights disabled people have these days – that we, like anyone else, can bear and rear children. No more about my experiences, let's hear from others...

Anne has been totally blind most of her life. She married and brought up two daughters. She is now a grandmother. Anne enjoys taking her granddaughter to swim at the local pool. They play and swim together in the pool. Recently, a woman remarked to Anne's granddaughter, "It's nice that you can take your grandmother swimming". Anne told the woman that she took the little girl swimming, not the other way round.

Some weeks ago there was a newspaper article shared on our Blind Citizens NZ email list. It featured the experience of a young Christchurch blind mother. It appeared that she had no or limited contact with other blind and vision impaired parents. She outlined positive attitudes some teenage boys had demonstrated by giving up their seat to her whilst they were riding on the bus. But she also expressed her concern over people's negative attitudes towards her being a blind mother. People have accused her of being selfish, that her children are missing out on experiences she cannot provide as she is unable to drive them around in a car. It's terrible to think that in 2016 a young blind mother is hearing negative views from so called friends and strangers. She is also afraid that the public will think that she is a bad mother because her child sometimes cries and plays-up whilst travelling on the bus.

Whilst this blind mother recently learnt how to use a White Cane for mobility, there was no mention that she had opportunities meeting with other blind parents and grandparents. I'm sure that we could support this mother in many ways.

Now here's Jonathan Godfrey's experience as a blind father... I am yet to have a negative experience with respect to parenting that is a direct consequence of my blindness. I've had plenty of positive experiences though and I guess some of them arise because of the way I've approached being a Dad. My kids are now 6, 4, and 3 years old. I'm often so proud of being a father that I've been a little insensitive about the fact that some blind people around me have decided not to have children, and on occasion, like sighted people, circumstances have meant that some awesome blind people I know have not ended up being parents. As it happens, I know lots of sighted people through my working environment that haven't become parents, and sometimes it's for much the same reasons. The thing is though, talking about not being parents seems a lot more taboo in the blind community than it is at work and I'm curious why. I'd like to know if we need to do anything about it.

This year my kids were at conference; not in the room of course, but in the hotel. My older daughter came to one breakfast and my son came to one lunch and one dinner; as chance would have it, he sat next to the only other young person in the room who was with his grandfather. So where are all the kids? Why don't more of us have kids of our own? As I looked around the room, I counted perhaps only eight or nine blind people I knew to be parents or grandparents. Is the world changing enough that some of the things that stopped today's blind people over 40 years old from having kids are irrelevant to the next generation of blind people? I do hope so. In the meantime, I know my kids have a whole bunch of honorary Grandparents, uncles and aunts to see at conferences for many years to come.

On reflection, I recall a phase in life when I didn't want to be a father. That changed as I matured, mostly as I gained experience dealing with other people's children. I do recall listening to a radio show where the host talked about the decision not to have children being a reflection of our perception of our validity as disabled people, and more to the point not having children as a consequence of not feeling equal to our non-disabled peers. That seemed to be quite an extreme view to me, but did give me something to think about. For me, my decision to have children is evidence that I came to terms with being a disabled person.

Now back to the editor, Carolyn Weston... I agree with Jonathan that having children has moulded me into a more confident person who has come to terms with my disabilities. I know that without Darren and Kelvin I would not have studied papers at university, and met other disabled and able-bodied parents where we enjoyed fun together with and without our children. My sons, and now my granddaughter have enhanced the quality of my life. Like Jonathan, my boys were exposed to other blind and disabled people. They've also attended some of our Conferences and it's a shame that more blind parents haven't attended Conference but they may be too busy doing things with their children out in the community.

Historically adults with a genetic disability were either discouraged to get married and have children or be prevented having children by under-going medical intervention without these disabled people's consent. We know a few blind people who bucked the trend and married and had children. I am aware of a number of blind people whom I attended Homai College with who are parents and grandparents. However, it is true that like other disability cohorts, compared with the general population, our percentage of parents and grandparents within our blind community is far less than the norm.

It would be interesting if someone carried out research in this area, demonstrating the true percentage of parents within our blind community and identifying the reasons why we choose whether to have children or not. Let's hope that today and into the future young blind adults are encouraged to form personal relationships and enjoy the joys and sorrows of having children and grandchildren.

**National President's Resignation
and
2017 Annual General Meeting and Conference
From National Office, Blind Citizens NZ**

Our Focus Editor has commented on Clive Lansink's success being elected as a Director to the Blind Foundation's Board of Directors, and that his article in this Focus issue, will be his last as National President. This has set the wheels for change in motion – the evening of Thursday 17 November, Clive Lansink formally resigned as National President of Blind Citizens NZ. The Board at its November meeting, finalised the timeline for an extra-ordinary election to fill the vacancy, the details for which are included in this publication. In the interim, and until the election process is complete, the Board has appointed Jonathan Godfrey as Acting National President, and Martine Abel-Williamson as Acting Vice President.

The Board provides early notice to members, stakeholders, and readers, that in 2017, a three-day Annual General Meeting and Conference will be held. Whilst the lower South Island is the intended location, there is the potential for the event to be held in Wellington. The Board's final decision will be dependent on the availability of suitable venues, and cost. The dates and venue will be publicised in the March 2017 Focus issue, and sooner if possible. Ideas for a theme and guest speakers are welcomed. These should be sent to the Executive Officer. They will be collated for the Board's attention.

From the Outgoing President - Clive Lansink

Greetings again from the National Office of Blind Citizens NZ. This is the last in my series of columns written as National President of Blind Citizens NZ. In our last issue, I said I was standing for election to the Board of the Blind Foundation. Thanks to your support, I was elected, along with Judy Small who has been returned for another term. I had always made it clear that this would be my last term as National President of Blind Citizens NZ, a role I have had for the last nine years. Now I have been elected to the Foundation's Board, I have resigned as National President of Blind Citizens NZ. Jonathan Godfrey is currently the Acting National President, and an election will now be held to formally elect a new National President for the balance of my term. My thanks to Jonathan for asking me to write this final column, which is a nice chance for me to "sign off".

First however I want to let you know that the Government has now adopted its new Disability Strategy, which will guide disability-related planning at least for the next ten years. Blind Citizens NZ has played our part alongside other Disabled People's Organisations in telling the Government what we are looking for in this next strategy. We made two written submissions and I know a number of you also made submissions as individuals which is really fantastic. I was also one of two people representing disabled people's organisations (DPOs) on the Government's reference group that they worked with to develop the new strategy. Anyway that job is done and the strategy is now adopted.

The strategy is pitched at a very high level, and cynics might just feel it is nothing more than just words. But the next step which is already happening is for the Government to work with us to develop some clear outcomes they will commit to deliver on.

These outcomes need to be the practical things disabled people are looking for that we know will make a difference in our lives. We are looking for real tangible progress. So watch out for more on this in future issues of our magazine.

Our Conference this year explored what it is to be a DPO and what it means for disabled people to have our own independent voice through our own organisations. I will conclude my final President's column with my thoughts and observations on this.

For almost as long as I can remember, I have been aware that disabled people have had to fight for our right to be fully accepted as equal members of society. I recall that even in my early teens I was a member of a local scout troop. A swimming trip was planned, but it was suggested that they couldn't take me because the parents who would be in charge of this swimming trip did not want to be responsible for me. Does being blind mean that I would drown or what? I was probably too young to know how that problem was resolved, but somehow it was and in the end I did go on the swimming trip. But that is just one of many incidents I can recall in which I and other disabled people are just marked out as different because of our disability.

It is clear to me that if disabled people were happy with our lot and did not have that fundamental drive to be fully included and accepted in all aspects of society, then most of us would still be living in institutions, separate from the rest and perhaps playing those roles that were traditionally assigned to disabled people. The fact that we have moved away from that philosophy to one which sees disabled people as having the right to be fully included in society came about because disabled people were prepared to stand up to be counted.

They challenged the prevailing philosophy as patronising and fundamentally wrong. If you have not yet read "Quest for Equity", in which Greg Newbold charts the history of Blind Citizens NZ, then I recommend you do read it because it will give you an insight into what life was like for most disabled people when our organisation began its life in 1945.

We have come a long way since then. I did not really join that journey until I became really active at the national level of our organisation in around 1981. In those days we did not think in terms of human rights like we do now, but we were absolutely clear that we wanted to participate fully in all aspects of society like everyone else took for granted.

Nowadays we do have some recognition of this principle in our laws. We also have the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Yes, the word is "rights". Through this Convention, our country along with many other countries declares that disabled people do have the right to be fully included in all aspects of society, and these are all laid out in the Convention's various articles.

Some people might believe therefore that our job is done and DPOs like Blind Citizens NZ are no longer needed or relevant. But no. Organisations like ours are just as important today as they always were. The main reason for this is there is still so much to do. We may have won our legal rights to equity, but there are many decisions still to be made as society comes to grips with what this means going forward. Those decisions must not be made without us, because it is already accepted, and in fact it is upheld as a principle of the Convention, that disabled people must be involved through our representative organisations in the key decisions that impact on our lives.

The Convention gives DPOs a status we never previously had in that DPOs are by definition formed to represent disabled people, as directed by disabled people, and Governments are obliged to include us in such decision making.

DPOs are often criticised because we formally represent only a small portion of the total number of disabled people. I believe this is a strategy designed to undermine the new status we now have under the Convention. But if apathy is the problem, then it is a problem right throughout the whole disability sector. The sector now needs to reinforce what is already provided for by the Convention, and encourage more disabled people to take an active part in our collective voice. We now live in the age of the DPO, which means disabled people having the right to speak for ourselves through our own independent representative organisations.

Of course it is critical that new people, especially younger disabled people, are willing to step up and continue to represent disabled people in dialogue with Government and other organisations. It is important that the voice of disabled people continues to be directed by disabled people ourselves, following our own agenda as we meet and communicate in ways that suit us. I expect Blind Citizens NZ and other DPOs will change radically as new people take over, and we might see new DPOs come into existence and old ones disappear, particularly when you realise how technology allows us nowadays to interact and communicate in exciting new ways.

As I bring my last of these columns to a close, I just want to thank you all for your support. I wish our Board and the new National President every success as they carry on the good work on our behalf. I hope you all have a wonderful Christmas break and that 2017 will be kind to you. I look forward to my new role on the Foundation's Board but I hope to stay close to the true independent voice of blind people through Blind Citizens NZ and other consumer organisations.

Notice of Extra Ordinary Election to fill the Vacancy for National President From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

The resignation of Clive Lansink as National President leaves a vacancy for this position. The term of office he was serving, concludes at the end of the 2017 Annual General Meeting. To fill the National President vacancy, an extra-ordinary election will be held. The Board has confirmed procedures to conduct the election. Voting members are reminded the Board has the delegated authority to set timelines for an extra-ordinary election, and that these can vary to those of scheduled elections. Timeframes to fill the vacancy of National President are now notified.

- 1. Term of Office for this Vacancy:** the successful candidate will commence in the position immediately following the conclusion of the election procedure. Their term of office will conclude at the end of Blind Citizens NZ's 2017 Annual General Meeting and Conference. Guidelines that outline duties and responsibilities of the National President, and of Board Members in general, are available from the National Office upon request.

- 2. Who can participate in the extra-ordinary election process?**
You are eligible to participate if you are recorded as a financial Ordinary Member on the member database held by National Office of Blind Citizens NZ, by **4pm, Tuesday 31 January 2017**. This is the closing date / time, for nominations. If you are standing for election to this position, you must also live in New Zealand. Associate members are not eligible to participate in Blind Citizens NZ's election processes.

- 3. The nomination process:** Nominations must be endorsed by the nominee (the person standing for election), the person proposing the nomination, and the seconder.

Nomination forms require the signature of each of these three individuals. Email procedures similarly require each of the three individuals to actively confirm their role in the nomination process. Candidates choosing the email procedure, are required to contact the Returning Officer to notify their intent to initiate their nomination using the email option, prior to this occurring. Instructions for the email nomination procedure will be provided. Candidates are required to submit their CV with their completed nomination.

Completed nominations must be received, and in the hands of the Returning Officer by the close of nominations at **4pm, Tuesday 31 January 2017**.

- 4. Conducting the election:** After nominations close, and in the event that more than one nomination is received to fill the National President vacancy, ballot material will be prepared and provided to everyone who is eligible to vote i.e. Ordinary Members, recorded as financial on the member database at National Office as at **4pm, 31 January 2017**. Ballot material will be distributed in the member's preferred format no later than 20 February 2017.

Completed ballots (votes cast) must be received at the National Office no later than **4.00 pm, Tuesday 21 March 2017**. The counting of votes will take place the afternoon of Wednesday 22 March 2017.

- 5. Choose how you receive ballot material and vote:** Voting members are encouraged to ensure you are receiving election material in your preferred format, as this may differ from routine communications from Blind Citizens NZ. You have several options for receiving election material, and three options for casting your vote in this extra-ordinary election, to choose from.

The choices are: large print, CD (audio), electronically (email), braille, or utilising Blind Citizens NZ National Feedback Line bulletin on the Blind Foundation's Telephone Information Service (TIS). Options for casting your vote are using a paper-embossed ballot paper, braille, or TIS. If you are yet to experience TIS as an option to independently access information about candidates standing for election, and to cast your vote, then we encourage you to give this empowering option a go. A definite advantage using TIS these days, is that an oversight occurs and you have overlooked completing and returning your hard-copy ballot, that you avoid the hassles and worry of wondering if posting it back later than planned, has impact on your vote being received in time.

If you are standing for election for the National President position, and you prefer to use the print nomination form, this is included with the print version of Focus. You will find it located towards the end of this Focus issue.

If you require more information, whether a print nomination form, finding out more about use of the email option, checking if you are financial, using TIS, checking that we have your preferred format correctly listed, or any other aspect of the election procedure, you should contact our National Office on any of the following options:

Phone 0800-222-6940 or 04-389-0033; post to PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242; Fax: 04-389-0030; or email election@abcnz.org.nz

Focus Editor – Call for Expressions of Interest

From Rose Wilkinson, Executive Officer

Carolyn Weston has held the role of Focus Editor since December 2007, and as many readers will be aware, Carolyn has a desire to hand the reigns over to someone else. Bearing this in mind, the Board is refreshing its quest for expressions of interest in Focus Editor.

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

- the appointment will be for a two-year term;
- Focus is the official national publication of Blind Citizens NZ;
- Blind Citizens NZ's membership is the target audience;
- editorials are intended to raise and promote debate on issues that are current and topical to the blindness community, and stimulate reader-interest in submitting Letters to the Editor.

At its recent meeting, the Board considered how Focus presents to members, individuals and entities who like to remain abreast of Blind Citizens NZ's work. Noting the presentation of Focus remains largely unchanged since early 2000, the Board promotes the opportunity for the Focus Editor to influence change.

Expressions of interest from amongst financial members of Blind Citizens NZ for this position, are now called for. Should further information be required, applicants should contact National Office for full details of the position. Expressions of interest close at 4pm Monday 10 April 2017. All expressions of interest will be considered by the Board at its meeting the weekend of 28-30 April 2017.

2016 Annual General Meeting and Conference Report From Carolyn Weston, Focus Editor

I know that National President Clive Lansink has provided an eloquent summary of this year's Annual General Meeting and National Conference on our email list. However, there are many members not on email so this will be their first time hearing about the outcomes. So I apologise if you have heard this before. This year the Annual General Meeting and Conference was held from Friday 7th to Sunday 9th October at the Brentwood Hotel, Wellington.

As usual the Annual General Meeting commenced on Friday afternoon, informing attendees of the Board election results, the National President's verbal annual address, and presentation of reports. Later Friday afternoon, we started deliberating on the six remits that two branches (Auckland and Wellington), had submitted for consideration.

After dinner on Friday evening, Darren Ward from Direct Impact Group, who worked with Blind Citizens NZ's Board about the sustainability of Blind Citizens NZ, presented his paper called "Sustainability Plan for Blind Citizens NZ". This plan focused on ideas to keep Blind Citizens NZ alive and well into the future. The Board had previously begun addressing one concept from this paper, the establishment of local networks to replace or in place of a branch. Later in the weekend, Conference agreed that the Otago Branch be dis-established and replaced with the Otago Blindness Network. It is obvious that other struggling branches may follow suit in due course.

The problem branches have, is not the lack of membership but the lack of people willing to stand up and take leadership roles. Our Constitution disallows branches from operating without having a Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, National Councillor and Committee to operate them. However now that our Constitution is to be amended to allow local networks to be established under Blind Citizens NZ, blind and vision impaired people still have the ability to get together and discuss blindness issues, without having the worry of being so formal. Conference agreed that these networks will be able to submit remits to Conference, the same as branches can, and they will be able to send one representative to Conference to speak and vote on behalf of members within the network.

It is hoped that where we have a number of members in regions where there is no branch, members will be encouraged to form networks.

The Sustainability Plan also discussed other concepts and if you are interested in reading more on Darren Ward's ideas, I am sure Rose Wilkinson at National Office will provide members a copy of the Paper.

On Saturday morning, Paul Foster-Bell (on behalf of Hon Wagner, Minister for Disability Issues), officially opened Conference. He spoke about the development Government is making on the new Disability Strategy (which was launched on 29 November), focusing on disabled people's choices. The current Disability Action Plan will be updated to mirror the requirements of the Disability Strategy, and Government Ministries will be required to meet the goals within the Strategy.

Dr Duncan Joiner, Chief Architect, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment then talked about disabled people's access within public buildings. Whilst the Building Act isn't bad, there is lack of understanding about it because many people in the construction industry lack knowledge on the needs of disabled people. This can improve with educating people working within the construction industry. The Building Code states that everyone has access to public buildings.

The next speaker was Judge Peter Boshier, Chief Ombudsman who presented a very interesting talk on his role as a Family Court Judge, then about the role of the Office of the Ombudsman. He entertained us with some stories on cases and people he met whilst a Family Court Judge. Often the justice system didn't accommodate for the needs of disabled people. The Office of the Ombudsman monitors the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention). This office can ensure that if a state entity is possibly not complying with the Convention, then they can be investigated, identifying what is happening. It's important that we as blind and vision impaired people use the Convention to advocate for our rights in New Zealand's society.

I think the most valuable information Judge Peter Boshier gave us, was that if we come to the Office of the Ombudsman and they are not able to assist us, they will advise where we can go for help.

Victoria Manning, General Manager Strategy, Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand, who was not available to participate in the DPO (Disabled Persons Organisation) Panel to be held in the afternoon, made her presentation. Victoria is deaf and she uses a NZ Sign Language interpreter to assist her communicating with other people. DPOs work alongside Government monitoring disabled New Zealanders' experiences of among other things, access to the built environment and advising when there needs to be changes made so our country is complying with the Convention.

Anne Hawker, Principal Disability Advisor, Ministry of Social Development, talked about improving access to Government information. An important message Anne gave was that we need to get all Government Chief Executive's to sign up to a statement on making both hard-copy and electronic information accessible to everyone, including blind, vision impaired and deafblind people. She also spoke on other access issues facing disabled people when dealing with Government agencies.

Jonathan Godfrey in his capacity as Vice President of Blind Citizens NZ, facilitated the discussion on DPOs. The panel comprised of six leaders, three from disability consumer organisations such as Clive Lansink our then National President of Blind Citizens NZ, and representatives from disability service providers for example, Rick Hoskin, Chair of the RNZFB's Board of Directors. Each of the six involved in the panel discussion were given two minutes to outline important issues related to their organisation then questions were taken from the floor. This debate was interesting and lively.

The Saturday evening Conference Dinner was enjoyable. The meal was superb and I enjoyed the three courses I chose.

At the table I sat with other members from the Southland Branch, a couple from a branch further north, and the two people representing blind youth. It was great to hear more about their trip to Canada and Camp Joe. It was a great surprise to learn my branch, the Southland Branch, had won the John McDonald Trophy this year. Arts Access Aotearoa won was awarded the Extra Touch Award for making a difference for blind and vision impaired people with its promotion of audio description, and awareness raising in general, of the needs of our community. Martine Abel-Williamson was presented with the Beamish Medal for her work on behalf of blind New Zealanders, and drawing upon her international achievements within the World Blind Union. It was great to recognise the work of two extra-special blind people from the past, Merv Reay QSM, and Arthur Cushen MBE, who we inducted into our Memorial Hall of Honour.

The RNZFB's Board of Directors Candidates' debate was informative, and I personally enjoyed this session. All six candidates participated - three were present at the conference venue, and three joined via teleconference. The quality of sound over the phone was excellent. Some members sent in their question prior to Conference, and these were read out and each candidate had a set time to answer the question. Questions were submitted by email from people listening in to the discussion via the internet. These, and questions taken from the floor, were asked of the candidates. As Clive Lansink was one of the candidates, again, Jonathan Godfrey as Vice-President hosted the session. This exercise demonstrated that finding out all we can about each candidate enhances our personal knowledge about each one, and we are able to make a more informed vote during the elections of the RNZFB's Board of Directors.

There didn't appear to be so many members present on Friday. However, there were a lot more on Saturday, especially during the open sessions.

My highlights of this year's Annual General Meeting and Conference were the talk from Judge Peter Boshier, Saturday evening's dinner, and the RNZFB Board of Directors candidates' session.

If you ever have the opportunity to attend one of our Annual General Meeting and Conferences, I urge you to do so as the experience can be encouraging and motivating.

Titbits and Outcomes of the Board's November Meeting From Rose Wilkinson, Executive Officer

Some of the more significant outcomes of the Board's three-day November meeting (this includes the Annual Planning Meeting component), are publicised, in brief...

- **Board Governance Training in 2017:** The Board recognises and is grateful to Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui, for funding achieved to carry out governance training. Graeme Nahkies from Boardworks International, will carry out the training over one full day, and two half-days. Where possible, these will coincide with scheduled Board meetings.
- **Board meetings in 2017:** five face-to-face meetings and one meeting by conference call have been scheduled. In some instances, to accommodate governance training and other aspects of its work, the Board has factored Friday's into its face-to-face meeting dates as follows:
 - ✓ February: 17-19, involves a full-day of governance training.
 - ✓ April: 28-30, involves a half day of governance training.
 - ✓ June: 23-25, involves a half-day of governance training.
 - ✓ August: 18-20.
 - ✓ November: 24-26, includes Annual Planning component.

- **Changes to Board Committees:** Conference and Funding and Finance committees have been disestablished. The Management Committee will be responsible for funding and finance matters, and once the Board has made decisions about the Annual General Meeting and Conference, these will be implemented and referrals back to the Board made on a case-by-case, as needed.
- **Communications and Engagement:** With a view to making better use of existing mechanisms, as well as social media, the Board has transitioned its Facebook group into a Communications and Engagement Committee. This Committee's first task is to draft a communications and engagement strategy for presentation to the Board.
- **Youth Forum:** Funds from the Vanessa Lowndes Leadership and Develop Fund will be utilised to complement funding received from the Alice & Stan Flavell Trust, for this purpose. Expressions of interest from blind and vision impaired youth will be called for, and their views about topics and guest presenters will be sought and will influence content for the Youth Forum.
- **Networks:** following the establishment of the Otago Blindness Network, the Board's Rules and Policies Committee is tasked with building upon existing guidelines, and reviewing the constitution and bring proposed amendments to the Board early in 2017.

Membership Renewal Reminder

Membership renewal for Ordinary (voting) and Associate (sighted family and friends), falls due on 1 July annually. This reminder is a general one, for members yet to renew their membership to 30 June 2017. If you are unsure of your financial status, it is best to check by contacting our national office, or your local branch treasurer.

Letters to the Editor

Articles that can potentially be published in Focus are encouraged. When writing articles, submitters are encouraged to take into consideration that we have limited resources, coupled with space constraints. This imposes an approximate work-limit of 400 words which equates to one page, approximately. Submitters are therefore asked to please bear in mind our word-limitation.

Articles can be posted to our mailing address PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242, or emailed to the editorial group at the following: focus@abcnz.org.nz

Cyril White Memorial Fund

Closing Date for Applications - 1 February 2017

Through the Cyril White Memorial Fund, funding opportunities that encourage and cultivate leadership skills and qualities among blind, and vision impaired people, occur annually. Blind Citizens NZ, together with the Blind Foundation, is responsible for publicising these opportunities. The next round closes on 1 February 2017.

Cyril White was a pioneer in the blindness advocacy movement, and the Cyril White Memorial Fund was established following his death in 1984. Eligibility of applicants is aimed towards assisting individuals eligible for full registration with the Blind Foundation primarily. However, individuals or projects that are likely to be of direct benefit or interest to blind and vision impaired people are also eligible for consideration.

If you have a project or activity and want to find out whether this meets the fund criteria, please do not be shy. Contact us for full details. Then when you submit your application, you'll be confident you've ticked all required boxes, and most of all, that you meet the eligibility criteria.

Applications to the Cyril White Memorial Fund must be received by 4pm, 1 February 2017. They should be sent to: Cyril White Fund, C/ Blind Citizens NZ, PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242. They may also be emailed to: enquiries@abcnz.org.nz including in the subject line, Cyril White Fund application. If you require any information regarding eligibility criteria, this can be requested via either of the above mechanisms, or by phoning Blind Citizens NZ's national office (0800-222-694 / 04-389-0033).

Prospective applicants should note there are two rounds annually, the first closes on 1 February and the second on 1 October.

Support Our Income Generation Efforts

Readers are informed from time to time, of Blind Citizens NZ's revenue generation work, which is now a key component of operational activities. Through our efforts and your financial support, we are working on the removal of the barriers we face so we can make our mark in the world. We are not an organisation helping blind people. We are blind people ourselves putting our own personal time and energy into pursuing our vision of a world in which we can be fully independent and able to contribute to our full potential.

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. Making Blind Citizens NZ the recipient of a bequest, is another way you can support us. Information about each of these options is provided.

Payroll Giving: this is an easy way for employees to make donations to a charity of their choice, such as Blind Citizens NZ. One of the key benefits of donating through your wages, is that you may decide to donate your refund to the charity as well.

Charitable Payroll Giving is purely optional and not all employers participate. Only employers who file their payroll electronically can offer the scheme. Blind Citizens NZ has Donee Status, and is eligible to receive payroll gifts. To make a payroll giving donation:

1. Ask your employer if payroll giving is an employee benefit. Advocate for Blind Citizens NZ, and outline why you are passionate about the organisation.
2. If payroll giving is available, provide your employer with the bank account details for Blind Citizens NZ. Your Human Resource Manager may seek verification. If necessary, provide the contact details for the Executive Officer Rose Wilkinson.
3. Decide how much you can afford, considering the immediate tax benefit. Decide how frequently you will make payments.
4. Notify Blind Citizens NZ that you are making a payroll gift. Your employer may simply transfer the money into Blind Citizens NZ's bank account without any notification.

Making a Bequest: 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, suggested wording for your will is:

I give and bequeath (_____) percent of my estate to the **Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Incorporated** to be applied for general purposes. A receipt taken by my trustee as being given on behalf of Blind Citizens NZ will be a complete discharge to my trustee for the legacy.

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

- Rose Wilkinson 04-389-0039; or
- **Email:** bequests@abcnz.org.nz

Personnel - Blind Citizens NZ

Board

- **Acting National President:** Jonathan Godfrey (Member-at-Large / Management Committee) jonathan@tactileimpressionz.co.nz
- **Acting Vice President:** Martine Abel-Williamson (Member-at-Large / Management Committee): martine.the1@xtra.co.nz
- Andrea Courtney (Member-at-Large): andycout@xtra.co.nz
- Geraldine Glanville (Member-at-Large): gbglanville@xtra.co.nz
- Shaun Johnson (Member-at-Large): shaun.zdots@xtra.co.nz
- Murray Peat (Member-at-Large / Management Committee): phone 021 081 66126; murraytp@xtra.co.nz
- Amanda Stevens (World Blind Union Representative): amanda.stevens824@gmail.com
- Paula Waby (Member-at-Large / Management Committee): paula.waby4@gmail.com

Focus Editor

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Email: enquiries@abcnz.org.nz or admin@abcnz.org.nz

Executive Officer, Rose Wilkinson: rwilkinson@abcnz.org.nz

Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc
Extra Ordinary Election 2017
Nomination Form – National President Vacancy

We the undersigned, being financial Ordinary Members as at 4pm, Tuesday 31 January 2017, of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand (refer Constitutional Rulings 5 and 10) hereby nominate:

Nominee's name in full: _____

Proposed by (signature): _____

Seconded by (signature): _____

I the undersigned, accept this nomination to fill the vacancy for National President. I declare that as at 4pm, 31 January 2017, I am a financial Ordinary Member of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc, and that I have been a financial Ordinary Member for no less than 24 full months measured cumulatively during the period of five consecutive years ending on said date. I acknowledge that:

- my CV is required to be circulated with the Ballot Papers; and
- the term of office for this position concludes at the end of the 2017 Annual General Meeting and Conference, noting this completes the remainder of the term of office vacated due to resignation.

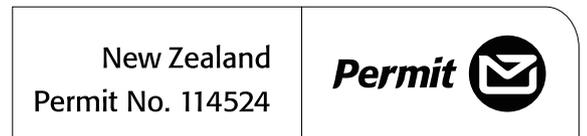
Nominee's signature of acceptance: _____

Reminder

- a) Completed nominations (includes CV), must be received by the Returning Officer by 4pm, Tuesday 31 January 2017 at:
 - **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242; or by
 - **Email** (instructions from the Returning Officer must be obtained): election@abcnz.org.nz;
 - **Fax:** 04-389-0030.
- b) The nominee's CV, not exceeding one thousand [1,000] words, must accompany the nomination.

Blind Citizens NZ is appreciative of donations received from our members, for funding from the Blind Foundation, Lotteries Grants Board, Think Differently, and Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui.

If undelivered within 14 days please return to
Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand inc.
PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242.



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