



Focus

Blind Citizens NZ

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Eulogy to Ann Bain 17 (March 1937 - 22 June 2020)

From National President, on behalf of Blind Citizens NZ

As with many people we meet in life, they start off as just a name. For me, Ann started as a named person of importance for the Wellington Branch of Blind Citizens NZ. It took a few years to meet her at one of our annual conferences; if memory serves, it would have been in Wellington in 2003. Even from the first time I heard her introduce herself at a Conference, I knew that her voice was one I would recognise instantly, anywhere, anytime; not just because of her accent, but for the calmness, personal strength, and dignity that her voice portrayed. I came to learn that behind that voice was a calm, strong, and dignified woman.

Several years later, Ann joined the Board of Blind Citizens NZ. She had taken various roles in our advocacy work including quite a few years as our representative to the Banker's Association. Her commitment and diligence were obvious. If Ann's hand went up, it meant that she felt she could do the job that she would do the job, and you soon got to learn that she did do the job.

Perhaps you might be forgiven for assuming that Ann might have taken the limelight, and then held onto it. Not in my experience. Ann's personal approach was to show others how they could be given a chance to contribute; encouragement to step forward that was then supported by her commitment to a different role so that she was still there, ready to be depended on if she was needed. If Ann told you that you could do something, you probably heard it as being equivalent to "tell me why you think you can't do this"; her belief in people was a gentle yet affirming pressure to get them believing in themselves.

There are quite a few young and perhaps not so young people who can attest to Ann's guiding hand in their lives. Guidance with dignity, even if not always with total calm. The Wellington Branch will miss her calmness, her strength, and her dignity.

Ann's calmness and dignity often masked her strength. Her ability to force a dignified response from someone put on the spot by a challenging question offered with dignity made working with her at board level or as part of a debate a pleasure even if you disagreed with her view.

It was with some surprise that I discovered how old Ann was when she decided she was "too old" to carry on as a board member, but really I suspect age was just an excuse. She was still contributing at branch level and in ways less obvious to the public. She was also making a point about making sure there was room for younger leaders to step forward. She knew those younger people existed and she knew they would step forwards if given the right support. Blind Citizens NZ is fortunate to have had Ann. As National President, I'd love to have had Ann at my board table over the last few years. Our paths crossed less frequently in recent years, but Ann was always still Ann; still calm, still strong, still dignified, but now asking me those challenging questions.

“Were you Champing at the bit or is it as it is”

Editorial, by Allan Jones

I have taken this quote from a Mike Hosking interview. For me it indicates the polarisation of the attitudes towards the COVID-19 “lock down”.

I am pleased to say that I was firmly towards the “is it as it is” end of the continuum”. Perhaps I “champed at the bit when I experienced pangs of caffeine withdrawal.

During the “lockdown,” I mainly took on a relaxed daily routine. I didn’t arise early and whenever possible took my breakfast out into the front garden and enjoyed the sunshine. I attempted a short walk each day with my wife, being very careful not to walk into people passing by our gate, maintaining a two-metre gap between other pedestrians.

At 1:00pm each day during the “lockdown” I tuned in to hear Ashley Bloomfield and Jacinda Ardern giving the latest status on the COVID-19 virus. During “lockdown” the radio was a good companion with input from experts like Chris Smith, Cambridge virologist, Michael Baker, and the irrepressible Siouxsie Wiles. I stopped face-to-face contact with “service users” I work with, around about 17 March. Taking note of the risk to over 70 year olds a category I am firmly ensconced in, I didn’t see a “service user” face-to-face till 27 May. I maintained contact by “Zoom”, “Skype” and “Face-time, and the old fashioned telephone. We had several staff meetings by “Zoom”. We also had a virtual Friday drinks’ session by Zoom, which included a staff quiz.

For me I struck more issues when we went into Alert Level 2. I haven’t queued since I was in the UK in the 1970’s. Cafés I frequented certainly weren’t consistent in maintaining the distancing regulations. I came across issues as to whether I should be taking the elbow of a worker in a café. The café that came out tops for me was Fidels Café in Cuba Street Wellington, a café I like but don’t visit regularly. I visited this establishment early in Alert Level 2. Guided by wait-staff to a table by voice – they maintained their distance and served me in an appropriate manner. I also adopted raising my hand to indicate I wanted service. I don’t particularly like this option as it reminded me of primary school, and not speaking till you were invited to do so. But, in these conditions, it certainly has a place.

During “lockdown”, I experienced Blind Citizens NZ’s work in two major areas - both areas made an incredible difference to my life. The first was negotiating with the major supermarkets for accessible and prompt access to online shopping. I used both Countdown and New World. Then, after some fast track computer learning, I managed to achieve this.

The second area is the negotiation to have Total Mobility subsidised and free up to the regional capped fare.

This has been especially helpful, as using buses did not appeal to me, when we were working around distancing and limited passenger capacity. By the time you all receive this Focus issue, the subsidy will have concluded as this lasted until 30 June, irrespective of the COVID-19 level. From 1 July 2020, the normal fare payment processes will resume.

On 1 July, standard Total Mobility requirements resume, and we again being paying our 50% of the fare up to the regional cap.

I am glad to say “lockdown” wasn’t without its humour. Soon after Alert Level 2 came in, Annette and I went to meet a friend at a local café. I ordered six pikelets. Somehow the order got “lost in translation”, and I ended up being surrounded by six “plates” of pikelets, a photo of which I share with you all. C’est la vie!!!

Photo below, of Allan Jones, seated inside the café. He is smiling as he faces towards the camera. The order number “17” sits on his left, towards the middle of the table. Lined across the front of the far edge of the table away from Allan, are four plates. There are two, to Allan’s left - each has six pikelets, a bowl of cream and jam, and knife and fork wrapped in a serviette. The wait staff delivering pikelets stands to his right. She is poised with knife and fork, smiling at the camera, ready to spread cream and jam on his pikelets.



On another Saturday, I walked into a café I go to quite often. I was aware of a group of people outside the café, as people often sit outside. When Annette caught up with me sitting at a table, she said, “weren’t you aware of the queue?”

John Mulka, Blind Low Vision’s NZ’s Chief Executive, also worked hard to keep in touch. His first task was carrying out a welfare check, which included making sure members who weren’t online, had the basics of food and medicine, and that they were aware of Blind Low Vision services they could access, and other services they could contact. John said that there were 325 staff from 18 office locations around the country, mobilised to be able to work from home. John ended an email by saying, “these are unprecedented times and we all have a role to play, please look out for your colleagues, neighbours, family, friends and most importantly stay well”. Blind Citizens NZ’s Chief Executive Rose Wilkinson signed her communications in a similar vein, urging us as we work through COVID-19, to take care, be kind, and keep safe. Rose worked to influence government officials about the need for alternate formats for us all. With Blind Low Vision’s support, then meant people without online access received COVID-19 information in braille and audio. She also included COVID-19 information with our March Focus issue.

I would like to see more work go on jointly between Blind Citizens NZ and Blind Low Vision NZ, in analysing reasons as to why 60 percent of registered members of Blind Low Vision NZ do not have computer and internet services. I would be especially interested in the affordability question, and would like to know how many members would like to have a computer and cannot afford one. Computers and cell phones a few years ago may have been luxuries. Now I would suggest they are a necessity.

Another event, which occurred during “lockdown”, was Government’s 2020 budget. I believe disabled people including the blind did very well – this news will be music to the ears of many of our members.

There is an investment of \$833 million into Disability Support Services over five years. Additional funding to support initiatives for disabled people include:

- \$12 million to fund an additional year for the Enabling Good Lives pilots in Canterbury and the Waikato, and the Mana Whaikaha service prototype in the Mid-Central Region.
- \$4.4 million to support disability carers for travel between their clients.
- Employment-\$12.5m (over 2 years) to expand and strengthen disability employment services.
- Social-\$43.3m (over 4 years) for keeping community-based services open for disabled people which support participation in, and contribution to, their wider community, enhancing their mana and quality of life.
- Arts and Culture-\$25m for sustaining crucial media platforms to provide content to under-served audiences and includes support for providing captioning and audio descriptions for disabled people.

Being a bit of an insomniac, a broadcast of a “detail” program made me prick up my ears. The program concerned the future of “boards” of organisations and the discussion covered “gender balance”, “inclusiveness”, and “diversity”. I believe both the Blind Low Vision NZ, and Blind Citizens NZ do well on gender balance and inclusiveness. In my opinion however, they could both do better in “diversity”. One possibility raised, was having a quota system to achieve these three factors. There are drawbacks as possibilities of tokenism and paternalism arise. However, to get these provisions “kick started”, a short period of quotas may assist. Norway does have such a provision, with fines for not achieving this concept.

In the 1970’s when I was working in the UK, I received a phone call from an excited “boffin” who said, “good you can fill our disability quota”. As I needed the work, I didn’t argue.

During “lockdown”, I did get hold of a DVD I very much wanted to see. It was the film “Leonard and Marianne”. Like many films, it would have been enhanced with audio description. Much the same as other films about pop stars, there was certainly sex, drugs, but folk music not rock and roll. I saw Leonard Cowen at the Albert hall in 1974. It certainly was a concert to be remembered, and I am glad I watched the DVD.

Finally, a big “shout out” to all involved in getting Focus out in April – Blind Low Vision NZ with audio, Mary Schnackenberg from AI Comms for braille, and Rose and the printer. Everyone worked in “lockdown” conditions to get Focus out to us all. For me, receiving a braille copy was a great feat.

What Makes News

From Jonathan Godfrey, National President

All too often, the noise we see on TV in the name of news is full of how badly some people can treat other people. The content airing on the news each evening has markedly changed since the COVID-19 pandemic turned almost everyone’s life upside down though. On numerous occasions during lockdown, I found myself asking what was actually newsworthy in a news story and what was little more than speculation. I had hoped that as we moved out of lockdown that we’d get less of the speculation and more reporting of facts and the impact on humans. I now reflect that perhaps we ought to be careful what we hope for...

Anyone watching the news will know that in late May, yet another American man (George Floyd) died in the hands of no less than four policemen. It made the news, just like a similar event in 1991 that led to a trial and then the acquittal of four police officers who were filmed beating Rodney King; following the 1992 court action, there were mass riots that led to the deaths of 63 people and property destruction valued in the millions.

Back to 2020, and we've seen more rioting; it spread across the US, and the outrage has been expressed all over the world. The specifics of the two instances are different in many respects, but in both situations, the fact that the police officers were white and the victim was black were critical in the human outcry that followed.

I find it hard to believe that there hasn't been another death of an unarmed black person at the hands of an American police officer during the intervening 28 years, so I asked myself if the outrage is related to the death, or a consequence of the filming and subsequent broadcasting of the brutal acts. The philosophical question about the tree falling in the forest, and whether it makes a sound if no one is there to hear it comes to mind. How much brutality have we overlooked, ignored, and therefore to some degree accepted? In my opinion, an unreported tragedy is instantly multiplied if the person deciding what makes the news decides it isn't important enough or won't make for audience captivating television.

I really do not want to sound at all dismissive of the death of a single man in Minnesota, but where is the outrage at the loss of many thousands of citizens who thought their governments were supposed to look after them, and why isn't it on the news? I totally support the need for the black lives matter campaign, but COVID-19 hasn't asked anyone about their ethnic background during its deathly rampage through cities in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The communities, whose people have had less access to quality health care, have carried a heavier burden as the pandemic took its toll. In many developed countries, that access is linked to socio-economic status, which is in turn linked to ethnicity.

I've spent a lot of time watching the news; on television, on email lists, on Facebook, etc. I've seen how different countries have fared, and for the most part have suffered, through the COVID-19 outbreak. I've felt privileged and proud to be a New Zealander in so many ways.

At the same time though, I've really struggled at the huge inequities we've observed here in New Zealand, with the way disabled people's needs have been overlooked or diminished by Government officials, and that hasn't made the news.

Blind Citizens NZ has needed to defend the rights that all blind, deafblind, low vision and vision-impaired people have, to receive the information we need to play an equal role in our country's fight against COVID-19. We needed information to ensure that we did not put ourselves, our families, our friends, and anyone else in our communities at greater risk while we all came to understand COVID-19. Ultimately to share equally in New Zealand's success against what was then a great unknown. We still need information on how we will undertake daily activities of all kinds, and we still cannot be sure that we won't return to a form of lockdown again. There is definitely a need to find out what didn't work well for our community and to then make sure the decision-makers get the message that they need to be working for all New Zealanders, not just the nondisabled ones.

Within my role as an academic, I am expected to contribute to public debate, to act as a social conscience for the betterment of society, and to enlighten people about my area of expertise with respect to current affairs. As a consequence, I and many other statisticians have watched developments as we gained new understandings of how COVID-19 was spreading or being contained, and helping people understand why they need to follow the guidance coming from Government. Like many of my colleagues in New Zealand and Australia, I was reading the findings of statisticians and epidemiologists in the United Kingdom before we had our first confirmed case. This work ultimately formed the basis of the expert opinions given to our Government, and therefore contributed to the decision to put us all into lockdown. One document seen by our Prime Minister and Cabinet hypothesised a best-case scenario of 1500 deaths if they took no action to protect New Zealand and New Zealanders.

That mathematical “what-if” is so very different to what has ended up happening, but that doesn’t mean the mathematicians were wrong.

I fully supported the decision to go into lockdown, but people who do not understand how their decisions will impact on disabled people when life is ticking along happily, aren’t likely to be equipped to start considering disabled people when things go pear-shaped.

Unfortunately, there have been numerous oversights and invalid assumptions, but fortunately, this has not led to a noticeable death toll among disabled people because New Zealand has been fortunate as a country.

Yes, New Zealand has been fortunate. Our Government has been able to close our borders and implement a raft of regulations that have collectively kept New Zealanders safe. Our death toll stands at around five per million of population. The only other country with a population equal or larger than ours, with a notably low death toll is Australia. New Zealand and Australia are similar in that we are island nations that have low population densities; we might also be benefitting hugely from the lack of proximity to other countries whose leaders haven’t managed so well. For comparison, the UK has over 600 deaths per million (over 40,000 deaths and about 66 million people) and the US over 300 per million (over 100,000 deaths for roughly 330 million people), and neither of these countries looks remotely close to knowing when an end to the deaths is in sight. The United States has now lost many more citizens to COVID-19 than were killed during the Vietnam War, but the toll is about the same (about 285 deaths per million people). These numbers are staggering, and so I’m left with unanswered questions that start “Why...” or “How...”. The societal impact of the Vietnam War is arguably still taking effect in the US, so I find myself asking when will we question the way Governments have approached the war against Covid-19? When we look back on how 2020 unfolded, will we judge this tragedy against the tragedies wrought through military actions and/or various acts of genocide? Who knows?

All I know is that the lockdown period has impacted us all, and many of my friends living overseas are still worried today.

My children will always remember when they were in lockdown; for the most part, their memories are likely to be positive. Based on what we learned from watching the news unfold in other countries, and the fast pace of planning for New Zealand's response, my family decided to import my mother from Auckland. We didn't know how long it would be for, and we didn't totally understand the rules for lockdown, but this less than fully informed decision-making is what took place in many households as New Zealand hurtled towards lockdown. My kids had an extra adult to play with, and as a consequence, our household found lockdown relatively easy. We bought the 20kg bag of flour, picked apples off the tree in the back yard, and discovered how robust the apple shortcake recipe was to the influences of various people helping Nana with the cooking.

Right from the outset though, I had time on my hands to observe how people, businesses, education facilities, sports clubs, and service providers were approaching a time of uncertainty. I should also note that most statisticians I know have a huge personal desire to reduce uncertainty or its impact; we're so professionally conditioned to understand how uncertainty arises that we know what aspects are within or beyond our control, and I have to admit that this definitely affects the way I plan things for myself and my family. In addition, I suspect that like many disabled people who seem to have things in order, I am planning ahead further than my nondisabled peers. Having said that, I now find that many disabled people had to work harder to find a new solution to problems because the lockdown environment reduced the effectiveness of their best laid plans. For some, this means lockdown questioned their independence, right at the time our Government was calling on all New Zealanders to reduce our societal interdependence.

I think it took me a week to work out that my sphere of influence had been reduced considerably by lockdown that fewer people were asking me for help or to do something, and that in our bubble, we'd done everything possible for our friends and family. I admit to struggling; I don't do inactivity well, whether that be mentally or physically. In hindsight, I accept that I was fortunate because while my normal weekday activities were being reduced by decisions well outside my control, the things that I like to do on weekends were still feasible. The farm animals needed feeding and without a farrier to keep the donkeys' hooves in order, they needed more exercising on the roads than was planned during April and May. So, my exercise levels went up, my consumption of apple shortcake went up, more plants went from pots into the ground, fence posts went into the ground, wire and wooden rails went onto new fence posts, and my waistline narrowed considerably. Photos of me with a donkey or two in one hand and phone in the other show how I managed my reduced professional commitments, watched out for the latest news at global, national, regional, and personal levels, and kept track of what was being done behind the scenes for any blind people that might find themselves needing support.

There have also been a raft of more visible actions taken to support our members, most of which I know about, some of which I have helped plan for, and some others which I felt were best left entirely to others. I don't know the names of every person that needs to be thanked for their willingness to help others in our community over the last three months. While there is a danger in forgetting or overlooking someone by starting to name others, there is also a danger in making people feel less worthy when they did not have as much opportunity to help others, as they would have liked. So, to everyone who thought about how to help someone else, I say thank you; to anyone who tried new ways of doing things in order to reduce their real or perceived burden on others, I say thank you; and to everyone who did find ways to help others, I say thank you to you too.

What makes news? I am left feeling quite despondent if I answer that question using just the 6pm television bulletin as a guide; on the other hand, I am hugely encouraged if I base my answer on what I learned about the importance of people hearing from other people. At the moment, we're all supposed to have returned or be gearing up for a return to normal, or at least to some sort of new normal. Somehow, as part of the new normal, I'd like to see some balance or perhaps even an excess of good news over bad. Lockdown gave me the time to share news with my friends and family in a personal way. I observed first-hand or heard stories of people reaching out to help other people. I learned about the impact that Blind Citizens NZ and other Disabled Peoples Organisations had on ensuring the needs of disabled people were considered in a time of crisis, and realised that what we've done for and with each other is a COVID-19 lesson we cannot afford to forget.

PS On her return from Auckland for her birthday weekend, Cordelia brought home a batch of Nana's apple shortcake; Callum took one look at it and worriedly asked if we were going back into lockdown.

75 Year Celebrations Postponed to 2021

We will be hearing about the impact of, and implications arising from COVID-19, for some time. This unprecedented pandemic, has contributed to people facing challenges, but also having positive experiences, as we have worked our way from lockdown, through to Alert Level 1. While there is a semblance of normality, there is a way to go. The implications are far-reaching in so many areas, including for planned events and activities this year, such as Blind Citizens NZ's 75-year celebrations.

At its June meeting, the Board considered the pros and cons of proceeding in October as planned, or deferring until a later date. Considerations taken into account include the many COVID-19 related aspects that fall outside the Board's control. These contribute to uncertainty about where New Zealand will be in October 2020.

The Board has therefore made the pragmatic decision to defer Blind Citizens NZ's 75-year celebrations to October 2021. Blind Citizens NZ's 75-year celebrations will happen 8-10 October 2021, at the Sudima Christchurch Airport Hotel. The book launch of Blind Citizens NZ's 25 years (1995-2020), which Greg Newbold is writing, will happen at the same time.

This was not an easy decision for the Board to make, and it hopes you will agree this is in everyone's best interests, as well as for Blind Citizens NZ.

Anyone who has paid for travel to Christchurch for October 2020 is encouraged to contact the Chief Executive Rose Wilkinson. She will work with you to ensure you are not out of pocket.

Blind Citizens NZ 2020 Annual General Meeting

On 10 October 2020, Blind Citizens NZ will hold a one-day Annual General Meeting. The physical venue is the Brentwood Hotel, Wellington, and the AGM will commence at 11:00am, concluding no later than 4:00pm. There is every endeavour to ensure that where someone wishes to attend, and travel is not preferred, that people can join remotely (from home).

Remits – Modified Process for 2020

COVID-19 has caused disruption for some Branches and Networks, with respect to calling for Remits at planned General and Local Meetings. The Board considered the situation, and for this year, it has introduced a modified Remits' procedure.

When a Branch or Network is unable to convene a specific "Remits" meeting, or other mechanisms are out of reach, the Board's approach ensures members are not disadvantaged from this democratic process. The modified procedure enables an Ordinary (financial) Member disadvantaged for any of the reasons provided below, to submit a Remit direct to National Office.

A brief explanation about circumstances for utilising the modified approach must accompany the Remit. Additionally, the Remit, and submitter, must meet all the usual Remits' requirements. The Board's Governance Committee will initially consider Remits submitted via this process.

Reasons members may submit an individual Remit, and which the modified approach for 2020 recognises include:

- there are circumstances around COVID-19, which prevent you attending a scheduled meeting;
- Branches/Networks may have been unable to hold a meeting to call for Remits;
- there are challenges to coordinate five Ordinary (financial) Members to come together to submit a Remit.

The Board's decision will be final with respect to determining Remits submitted via this modified procedure, meet all requirements. Friday 10 July, 4pm, is the closing date for receiving all Remits at National Office.

Nominations for Organisational Awards

Beamish Memorial, Extra Touch, Johnston Cup for Leadership

Ordinary (financial) Members have an opportunity to submit nominations for the Beamish Memorial Medal, Extra Touch Award, and Johnston Cup for Leadership. The Board considers and makes a decision about these awards. Their decision however, remains confidential until the Annual General Meeting. This is when the Board will present organisational awards. Here now, is information about each of the awards and the respective closing dates.

- **Beamish Memorial Award:** This is the most prestigious Blind Citizens NZ has the honour and privilege of awarding to anyone within the organisation. Recipients of this award must be Ordinary Members of Blind Citizens NZ.

They must have made an outstanding contribution to society in their particular field of service to the community, are eligible. If you know someone deserving of this award, who meets this criteria, and for whom recognition is need for their outstanding efforts, send the information to National Office. All you need to do is provide the person's name, their contact details, and information and reasons in support of your nomination. Nominations for the Beamish Memorial Medal close and must be received at National Office by **4pm, Monday 31 August 2020** (the extension of one day recognises 30 August falls on a Sunday).

- **Extra Touch Award:** This award recognises an individual or organisation where, as part of the process of providing service to the public, there is an outstanding contribution towards improving access or services to blind and vision impaired people. Opportunities to recognise these contributions include access to: information, society, technology, transport and pedestrian safety, everyday equipment, educational, vocational or recreational opportunities, shops and customer service, and services in general. When making a nomination, be sure to include the nominee's name and contact details. Be sure to include information that tells the Board how the nomination meets the Extra Touch Award criteria. Nominations for this award close at our National Office at **4pm, Wednesday 8 July 2020** (this is a slight extension to the usual closing date of 30 June).
- **Johnston Cup for Leadership:** Blind Citizens NZ aims to encourage members to accept leadership responsibilities inside and outside the blindness community – to develop an environment that recognises them for their leadership wherever and whatever that might be or mean for them. This award encourages and recognises leadership potential from amongst Ordinary Members of Blind Citizens NZ. If you know someone whose leadership has contributed in a demonstrable way, or has assumed leadership responsibilities that exceed their role, send your nomination to reach National Office **by 4pm Wednesday 19 August 2020**.

Call for Applications for Blind Citizens NZ

World Blind Union Representative

The term of office for the current WBU Representative position concludes at the end of Blind Citizens NZ's 2020 Annual General Meeting. While there are discussions happening with blindness organisations with respect to country representation, Blind Citizens NZ is in the position of needing to carry out for the first time, its process to fill the WBU representative position it currently holds. Until October 2019, this was an elected position. Now, as set out in the new Constitution, this is appointed. Once the Board makes its appointment and if the person is not already on the Board as an elected member in their own right, the Board then co-opts them. Rule 6.3 "Co-opting Additional Board Members", is where you will find information about constitutional requirements.

Anyone interested in applying for the position as Blind Citizens NZ's WBU Representative, should request in the first instance, the position description. This sets out skills, requirements and attributes the Board believes necessary for the person in this role. Applicants should be certain to refer to these. Applications close at Blind Citizens NZ's National Office, 4pm Monday 21 September 2021. Interviews will happen during October (date yet to be set), following Blind Citizens NZ's AGM.

COVID 19 – A Personal Experience

From Carolyn Weston

At the beginning of 2020, who would guess that within weeks, life would change so much but as the Corona 19 Virus began to sweep the World, striking down healthy people and killing the vulnerable, our Government placed restrictions on us, endeavouring to reduce the spread of COVID 19 in New Zealand.

Whilst I started writing this article, we await stepping from Level 3 to Level 2, hopefully allowing more movement around our communities and farther afield.

We are aware of the challenges we all faced during Lockdown Level 4 and 3 however I think those of us who are blind, have low vision or are deafblind experienced extra challenges. Before outlining my personal challenges, I want to share some positive aspects I experienced during our lockdown such as:

- Enjoying the companionship within my bubble,
- Exploring our neighbourhood whilst out walking,
- Listening to bird songs in our garden and nearby native bush,
- Chatting to family and friends on the phone, Skype or Zoom and;
- Have time to bake bread.

Now for the challenges:

- In mid-March, when I visited the supermarket, I found people standing in the foyer. I didn't know why they were waiting there so I just walked past. A male voice yelled, "yes you can go in". I couldn't see the owner of the voice so I didn't know he was talking to me. Luckily, I continued on my merry way into the store. After collecting our shopping bags from the car, my husband Tony joined me as I was entering the supermarket proper. Once completing our shopping, Tony asked me to go and wait at the checkout area. He went off to collect an extra item he needed. I walked towards the nearest checkout. I almost reached the conveyer belt when a voice yelled, "Carolyn stop". The shop assistant ran to me and advised that there was a mark on the floor indicating where we were to wait in line. As I couldn't see the mark, I suggested they paint it a bright colour and stick tape around it as well, so blind people could feel it with their white cane. Even then, I often don't realize I have walked over the social distance line. I wonder why people haven't made these floor marks more accessible for all.
- Another early experience was when our bandleader rang informing me that we could no longer play at rest homes due to COVID-19 isolation. A few days later, Blind Low Vision NZ closed their buildings to clients and the public. Planned social events were cancelled.

Now the band I'm in could not play music at any rest home until they asked us to return. Whilst I phoned blind friends, we were unable to attend social gatherings in our Centre until Level 1. I understand the reasoning behind these decisions, and am pleased now to be meeting friends again in person.

- Government and other organisations continually provide COVID-19 information via the internet. I have a computer so I can access this information. About nine months ago, when I first got this computer, I experienced issues navigating around some websites. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, our Minister videoed our Sunday Services on the Church website but I was unable to access these services until my son investigated and rectified my long-term computer problem. This was done without compromising our bubbles. I can thank COVID-19 for giving me a reason why I needed to resolve my adaptive technology problem. But I have some blind friends who do not have access to the internet and I wonder how they are coping without modern technology.
- Living in our bubbles has meant all my meetings have been via teleconference, Zoom or Skype. During the COVID-19 crisis, Our Church Parish Council, (we currently meet once a week), and Blind Citizens NZ Southland Committee both held virtual meetings. As Secretary of both entities, I was kept busy. For example, I usually type the Minutes up during the meetings however, it is difficult to hold a phone with one hand and type with the other. I was therefore writing Minutes in print during the meetings then typing them up on my computer, (I often say I need to grow an extra hand). It's great we can hold virtual meetings but they can sometimes pose challenges. Imagine if the world underwent the events of COVID-19 40 years ago? No mobile phones, home computers or virtual business meetings. Although I experienced challenges when taking minutes, the quality of sound in virtual meetings may vary at times, and lengthy meetings become very tiring for all, they are better than nothing.

- During an RNZFB's Board of Directors' meeting via Zoom, I was able to share in the conversations during this meeting, but I felt isolated from the centre of events. Virtual meetings are handy but they should not become the norm, they should only be used for short or special committee or board meetings.

When we moved to Level 2, we knew life wouldn't be the same as before. There were still restrictions on our life-styles.

We also had more responsibilities such as keeping trace of our movements whilst out. I've read some concerns on our Blind Discuss Computer List, people worried about new challenges like searching for a spare seat on a bus and maintaining social distancing. We are now in Level 1, and have more freedom. But we've been told that COVID-19 will be with us for months or even years so we can expect new challenges in the future.

As we travel this new journey together, I wish you all well and let's hope we can meet at our National Annual General Meeting in October.

Disability Support Service from Manawanui during COVID-19 Lockdown - From Beverley Duncan

I have always had good service from Manawanui over several years. However, during the lockdown they have ramped up their services even further. Manawanui are an Individualised Funding agency, which means the client, Individualised Funding Manager, (IF Manager), has the control, as they are the employer of their own staff.

First of all the Customer Experience Centre, CEC opened for extended hours whilst they were all working from home. It was business as usual for my staff, which means they were able to do shopping with me, cooking of meals support and home help. I didn't need to stand down my employee due to Covid-19, however, if I had had to I could have paid a resident family member or friend to cover in the meantime and be paid whilst my own staff would be paid to.

I believe that Manawanui would have helped me to find someone else to cover if I had not had someone from family or a friend to do so.

During lockdown, I received emails and phone calls from Manawanui checking in to see if they can help with anything else. Their Chief Executive Officer, Marsha Marshall, started weekly emails of updates about their service and other disability information relating to COLVID-19.

On Tuesday and Thursday of each week there were live streams providing information and questions and answers to clients plus interviews by staff at Manawanui and others such as the Ministry of Health. The live streams are to continue on now as part of their ongoing service.

They have provided a letter for all clients to give to their staff. This advises that the staff are employed by the client and are deemed to be essential workers, so that if they were stopped while travelling to and from work, or out and about whilst working for the client, the letter would be shown to the police or shop assistant etc., to prove that they need to be on the road or shopping etc.

They provided two rounds of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), to all clients such as masks, aprons and gloves at no cost to the client. However, I understand that the client can order more PPE through Manawanui, but they will need to pay for it. Cost unknown however it will be less than what you would pay at the supermarket.

Manawanui are always looking at ways they can improve or increase their services to people with disabilities and to this end, they are always open to ideas for improvement of service.

Blind Citizens NZ New Strategic Plan 2021-2023

The Board at its June meeting, considered one piece of feedback (from Auckland Branch), with suggested amendments that contribute towards achieving outcomes in relation to Goal 5. The Board welcomed the suggestions, which it has included. Blind Citizens NZs' Strategic Plan 2021-2023, is now finalised. The Board has decided to implement this as of 1 July 2020.

Ministry of Social Development Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

Changes for medical certificates

In April, MSD made some temporary changes for medical certificates as part of the COVID-19 response. This was to make it easier for clients to get the support they needed during Alert Levels Three and Four.

From Monday 15 June 2020, MSD has started asking people to provide a medical certificate (when needed) to support their applications for benefits and other assistance. This includes Disability Allowance medical certificates for new applications and new costs. Having initial medical certificates for benefit applications means clients can get the right type of assistance straight away. Other temporary changes we've made around medical certificates are still in place. These are:

- No medical certificate renewals for existing clients;
- No proof of costs for Disability Allowance (e.g. receipts);
- No annual reviews (for example for Disability Allowance or Child Disability Allowance) or social housing reviews.

Rent Arrears Assistance

If you're going to lose your housing because you can't pay your overdue rent, you may be able to get Rent Arrears Assistance.

- You don't need to be on a benefit to qualify for this help.

- It depends on your income and assets.
- It's a one-off payment.
- You'll need to pay the money back.

Who can get Rent Arrears Assistance?

You may be able to get Rent Arrears Assistance if you:

- have overdue rent you need to pay;
- may be evicted because you haven't paid your rent;
- will be able to stay in the house after you pay the overdue rent.

For example:

- your tenancy isn't about to expire;
- you can afford to keep paying the rent;
- have signed the tenancy agreement (or you're a tenant by way of a Family Violence Act order).

You also need to be:

- 16 or older;
- living in New Zealand and intending to stay here; and
- either:
 - ✓ a New Zealand citizen; or
 - ✓ a permanent resident living in New Zealand for more than two years; or
 - ✓ getting a main benefit, like Jobseeker Support.

It also depends on your income and assets.

What you can get

How much you get depends how much rent you owe. The most you can get is \$4,000 and you'll need to pay it back. You can only get this payment once in 12 months, unless there are exceptional situations. If your application for rent arrears assistance is approved, we usually pay the rent arrears to your landlord.

How to apply

- Call us on 0800 559 009
- If you get NZ Super or Veteran's Pension, call 0800 552 002

- If you get a Student Allowance or Student Loan, call StudyLink on 0800 88 99 00.

We'll talk about your situation and book an appointment for you to apply.

Find out more

- www.workandincome.govt.nz/rentarrears
- For more information www.workandincome.govt.nz/housing

Blind Citizens NZ 2020 Scheduled Election

Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

The election of positions and procedure will happen as set out in the new Constitution, adopted in October 2019. In 2020, there will be an election of two Member-at-Large positions, each of whom will serve a three-year term. Please note that the terms of office of three Member-at-Large positions concludes at the end of this year's Annual General Meeting (and Conference). In alphabetical order, individuals holding whose terms conclude are Dave Allen, Andrea Courtney, and Carl Halliburton. The World Blind Union Representative position also concludes at the end of this year's Annual General Meeting. As set out in the Constitution, the Board is responsible for the appointment of this position i.e. it is not an elected position. This information is on page 18, of this Focus issue.

Rule 10 Elections, clause 10.1, directs Blind Citizens NZ in its election procedures. In publicising the 2020 scheduled Member-at-Large election procedure, and the call for nominations, please be aware:

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

- nomination forms and / or email nomination procedures are available upon request from National Office.

Anyone standing for election is encouraged to take the time to ask for, and become familiar with the duties and responsibilities of Board Members. Additionally, the skills, experience and knowledge needed. Contact details for Blind Citizens NZ's National Office and our website (where information can be found also), are located at the end of this Focus issue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Focus Editor – Call for Expressions of Interest

From Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

The Board annually, reviews all representative appointments and from time to time, makes a decision to call for expressions of interest to open up opportunities, as a matter of course. When this happens, unless the incumbent has stated they do not wish to continue, they can reapply. The Board considered terms of appointment of representatives at its November 2019 Annual Planning Meeting including the position of Focus Editor. Allan Jones has held the role of Focus Editor since December 2017, and was in touch about this. His advice to the Board being he was happy to continue, while encouraging it consider a refresh during 2020. This is the first of two calls for expressions of interest in the Focus Editor position, and Allan Jones is welcome to apply.

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 2 November 2020. The Board will consider all expressions of interest at its meeting the weekend of 20-22 November 2020.

Membership Renewal Reminder

Membership renewals fall due on 1 July annually. If you are uncertain whether you are financial, you should contact our National Office and check. Phone 0800 222 694, or send an email to admin@abcnz.org.nz (include "membership query" in the subject line).

To assist, there is a membership renewal form on the next page. You can post your membership renewal along with your subscription to National Office, PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242. Cheques should be made payable to Blind Citizens NZ.

If you prefer to renew your membership using internet banking, Blind Citizens NZ account details are: 06-0230-0002634-00. Please include your name and the reference "MembSub". Ideally, let National Office know you have renewed your membership using online banking.

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

Membership Renewal Form, 30 June 2021

Return your completed membership renewal form along with your subscription to our National Office (or hand to your local Branch Treasurer). You can post your membership renewal along with your subscription to National Office, PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242. Cheques should be made payable to Blind Citizens NZ.

If you prefer to renew your membership using internet banking, Blind Citizens NZ account details are: 06-0230-0002634-00. Please include your name and the reference "MembSub". Ideally, let National Office know you have renewed your membership using online banking.

Queries by phone to 04-389-0033 / 0800-222-694; or email admin@abcnz.org.nz

Full Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone No: _____ **Date of Birth:** _____

I prefer to receive information (select preferred format): Braille / Audio / Print / Large Print / Email

Email Address: _____

Please select your membership category from the options below, and delete information that does not apply to your membership renewal.

Enclosed please find:

- \$ 10 / \$20 = one year's unwaged / waged **Ordinary Membership.**
- \$ 10 / \$20 = one year's unwaged / waged **Associate Membership (sighted friends and family, etc.)**
- **\$300.00** = my one-off payment for Membership-for-Life.
- A donation of: \$_____ is included. My donation should be utilised for (please select from **Board / National Office**, or **branch activities.**

Blind Citizens NZ – Board and National Office

Board

- **National President:** Jonathan Godfrey: a.j.godfrey@massey.ac.nz
- **Vice President:** Martine Abel-Williamson (Member-at-Large): martine.the1@xtra.co.nz
- David (Dave) Allen: dave.blindsight@gmail.com
- Wendy Chiang: wendy.chiang@gmail.com
- Andrea Courtney (Member-at-Large): andycoute@gmail.com
- Christine (Chrissy) Fern: fernmeek@gmail.com
- Carl Halliburton: carl.j.halliburton@gmail.com
- Shaun Johnson (Member-at-Large): shaun.zdots@xtra.co.nz
- Paula Waby (World Blind Union Representative): paula.waby4@gmail.com

Focus Editor, Allan Jones

Email articles to: focus@abcnz.org.nz

Post: PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

National Office

- **Physical:** Ground Floor, 113 Adelaide Road, Newtown, Wellington.
- **Postal:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242.
- **Phone:** 04 389 0033; 0800 222 694.
- **Fax:** 04 389 0030.
- **Website:** <http://www.blindcitizensnz.org.nz>
- **Facebook Page:** <https://www.facebook.com/BlindCitizensNZ/>
- **Email:** admin@abcnz.org.nz
- **Chief Executive, Rose Wilkinson:** rwilkinson@abcnz.org.nz

Blind Citizens NZ is appreciative of donations received from our members and supporters, and for funding from Blind Low Vision NZ, and the Lotteries Grants Board