



Focus

Blind Citizens NZ

Publication of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc Volume 57 No 1 – April 2021

In this Issue

- April Focus Issue Overview, by Rose Wilkinson
Chief Executive Blind Citizens NZ pg 2
- Just lay a complaint... yeah right! Jonathan Godfrey,
National President pg 4
- Celebrating 75 years of advocacy pg 10
- Blind Citizens NZ 2021 Scheduled Election pg 12
- Survey for Assistive Technology Users pg 15
- World Blind Union Updates pg 16
- Getting COVID-19 Information out and about pg 19
- Ministry of Social Development updates pg 20
- Focus Editor – Call for Expressions of Interest pg 21
- Board Trustee appointment, Blind and Low Vision
Education Network NZ pg 22
- 2020 Onkyo Braille Essay Contest, Essay by Martine
Abel-Williamson pg 24
- Support Blind Citizens NZ's Income Generation Efforts pg 26
- Cheques are being phased out pg 28
- Membership Form (Join / Renewal) pg 30
- Blind Citizens NZ Board / National Office Contacts pg 31
- Acknowledgement of Financial Support pg 32



An overview of our first edition for 2021

By Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Astute readers will note that by the time our first Focus edition for 2021 reaches many of you, that we are fast heading towards May. This is later than our March norm. However, there has been much happening behind the scenes at Blind Citizens NZ, which has contributed to the lateness of our first issue. As readers work through this edition, and unrelated to lateness of this Focus issue, you will realise that on this occasion, there is a big gap. Yes, we are missing the usual news-worthy editorial from our Focus Editor, Allan Jones.

Allan Jones has taken a much-needed break over the past few months – this has been important for Allan and Annette, and their family, to work through news of a personal nature. Allan wants you all to know the information you are reading here, is shared with his blessing. Allan is sharing that he learned he had cancer of the bowel, which required treatment. He is now recovering from surgery and wants you to know he is doing really well. Allan is back to frequenting his favourite cafes, and discovering new ones, to share with us all. I'm a fan of Allan's café adventures, and he and I often catch up at some of his favourites. Allan intends to be back on deck in time for our June Focus. In the mean-time, we know you will all join with Blind Citizens NZ, wishing Allan all the best for his ongoing recovery.

Now to a brief explanation about the approach we are taking towards our first Focus edition for 2021. Instead of the usual editorial, there is, in no particular order, an overview of the articles you will find. We know that compared to the editorial you would ordinarily have from our Focus Editor, this will be a somewhat dry approach.

The contribution from our National President Jonathan Godfrey is thought-provoking. All too often people across society can be challenged when wanting, or needing to provide feedback to businesses, service providers and the like.

When feedback is more about a complaint, the situation can become quite challenging, and often, disempowering. The National President's contribution speaks to these and many other scenarios.

We have the timely notification of Blind Citizens NZ's annual election cycle. The timeline and first call for nominations to fill two Member-at-Large positions, happens now, with the follow-up happening in our June Focus issue. There is also a refresh for expressions of interest in the Focus Editor position, and for Blind Citizens NZ's appointed trustee position on the Blind Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) Board of Trustees. You may recall the Board's appointment of Ms Martine Abel-Williamson to this position late in 2020. Regrettably for Blind Citizens NZ, Ms Abel-Williamson, needed to resign. While saddened to lose her so quickly as our appointed BLENNZ trustee, her ability to prioritise and manage new roles as you will see, are understandable. We know you will join with us in congratulating Martine Abel-Williamson on her appointment as Senior Human Rights Advisor, with the Human Rights Commission.

Plans are back on track to celebrate Blind Citizens NZ's 75-year advocacy history. Many of our readers have played an active role in the organisation's history. We hope as many of you as possible will set aside the weekend of 8-10 October, and join with us for those celebrations.

You'll learn about an opportunity for assistive technology users living in Australia and New Zealand to participate in a survey. The outcome will eventually inform decision makers in our respective countries what they need to consider when designing online services and products to be accessible for everyone. There are updates about Blind Citizens NZ's role with World Blind Union. We also share Martine Abel-Williamson's winning essay contribution to the 2020 Onkyo Braille Essay Contest.

Information from the Ministry of Social Development highlights its restarting of medical certificates for Disability Allowance clients. Also, about help with essential costs that may be available for people who can't work at the moment, have lost their job, or are working fewer hours.

The phasing out of cheques is progressing. We highlight the challenge this has for our members who would usually pop a cheque in the mail to renew their membership.

We hope you enjoy this Focus edition. If you have items you'd like to see publicised, or want to know more about, let's know...

Just lay a complaint... yeah right!
From Jonathan Godfrey, National President

A few months ago, I was part of a discussion about access to education on an email list for blind people interested in access to all things mathematical. The list is owned by the National Federation of the Blind in the USA, but there are many list participants living around the world. The topic started with someone from the UK asking why a particular book wasn't available in Braille, and pretty quickly the topic flowed, evolved, and then got to the point of borderline offensive. Why? Because someone from the US suggested that blind students just needed to start laying more complaints if they wanted more books in accessible formats.

Getting any book in Braille is hard. Getting a specific book needed for study is even harder. Once we get into the creation of accessible material for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (collectively known as STEM) there are considerably slower processes to get from inaccessible print to a document that meets a blind person's needs.

No matter what the subject matter, or the level of education the resource is for, the blind student needs that accessible version to be at least as good as the original printed work, because unlike their sighted classmates, a blind student seldom has the luxury of a second resource that can be used to verify a particular detail.

If a needed formula has an error, the work done using that formula will be flawed from the start and the learning will be compromised. The consequences of mathematical inaccuracies are therefore much greater than the impact of a typo in a polysyllabic word like "heteroskedasticity". Muffing the spelling of this word is unlikely to materially affect the reader's ability to understand it in context. After all, if it is an important term, then it will almost certainly appear elsewhere in the text, and the reader has a chance to check the word's proper spelling and/or pronunciation. (Try breaking the word up like this: hetero-ske-das-ti-city.)

I can already hear someone complaining about that polysyllabic word in the last paragraph. I'll happily discuss the word with anyone interested in knowing more about it. Complaints can be sent to my email address, found near the back of this magazine. Is it really worth complaining about though? I mean, a "complaint" is a big deal, isn't it? Maybe you should wait until we next meet to discuss it. I'm sure that would be better for both of us.

Now let's take a look at complaints from another angle... For example, Government agencies need to offer citizens a meaningful way to air their concerns, and if necessary, to be able to lay a complaint. The same goes for service providers and their clients, as well as businesses and customers. By not offering my email address when I said you could complain, I've given you a small example of how a good intention can quickly become hollow, shallow, or meaningless. I made it hard to complain by not offering the information needed to complain right up front. I also made it sound unappealing to contact me.

Then I fobbed you off before we got started. (OK, I did it on purpose to make a point, so please don't give me too much grief over it.)

I'd like to think that everyone we work with understands that Blind Citizens NZ raises real concerns on behalf of real people. Sometimes though, the people who have the power to make the world a better place for disabled people are all too ready to make us out to be a bunch of whingers in order to diminish our contributions. Blind Citizens NZ and blind citizens offer constructive criticism all the time because we want to help make New Zealand a better place for blind, deafblind, low-vision, and vision impaired people. Surely that feedback should be welcomed, encouraged, and maybe even sought. Government agencies are doing so by working with us and six other Disabled People's Organisations at the DPO Coalition. It is time for other publicly funded organisations to step up to the mark and invite the views of all disabled people.

Perhaps some of us have had enough of being treated like second class citizens and want to get a bit more grumpy once in a while; our criticism might then be loaded with the negativity that comes from our experiences. Sometimes though, that negativity needs to be heard. The person being wronged needs to get it off their chest, and the wrong-doer needs to know that they are creating that negativity. To deny a person's history and their personal experiences can be considered an act of abuse and re-victimisation. Some people might even call it bullying. It's all too easy to label someone a whinger in order to diminish their concerns, but this is a form of bullying we must see come to an end.

I reckon most readers will recognise use of the advertising tagline for Tui beer in my column's title. I've enjoyed many of the jokes that result from this long running quintessentially kiwi campaign, but some of the billboards try to make a joke out of something that just isn't funny for everyone. The person who advised blind students to "just lay a complaint" wasn't trying to be funny.

But the young woman who responded with that quote followed by "yeah right" didn't know anything about a beer advertising campaign from the South Pacific. As the only kiwi on that particular list, I imagine I was the only one who made the connection.

Any individual or organisation that has a responsibility to other individuals or organisations must be ready to respond meaningfully to anyone who raises a concern or goes so far as to lay a complaint. It takes energy to write the letter or to set aside time to make a phone call. The recipient of the letter or phone call must show they respect the person's need to reach out. When a voice of authority dismisses the concerns of a citizen, a client, or a customer, I believe it is an act of bullying.

The young woman followed her unintentional candidate for a Tui billboard with a "how dare you!" type message. It turns out that her experience as a complainant led to her feeling unwanted, unappreciated, and ultimately, an outcast.

I wasn't surprised by her outburst as I was well aware of her history from her previous contributions. But I still smiled at the "yeah right" and quietly cheered on her point of view that complaining was not the answer to everything. Especially if each complainant can be picked off one by one and easily dismissed as a whinger or a squeaky wheel. But she stood up and was counted, and for that she gains my respect. Even if I disagree with a person's complaint, I'll support anyone who exercises their right to be heard.

All too often though, people feel that they cannot expose themselves because the process of raising a concern or complaint is too hard. Or the ramifications of doing so are too costly to bear. My own workplace has been in the news for the need to make structural changes. I've seen how my employer has "invited" feedback on proposals for change, and how quickly my colleagues are standing up or ducking for cover. To be seen fighting change is viewed by some people as a recipe for their redundancy. It might be called smart strategy.

Not fighting change is unfortunately being called weakness by those people who want everyone to stand up and be counted. Whether we like it or not, the saying about biting the hand that feeds us carries a lot of weight in so many situations where concerns and complaints need to be raised.

Surely it is reasonable for people to think that our Government, our service providers, and everyone we deal with is interested in our lives getting better not worse. If that is actually true, then surely these organisations and anyone working for them ought to welcome feedback of all kinds, especially if our interactions with them are less than perfect. After all, who is it that knows what we need better than us? Dismissing the views of a customer is business suicide; dismissing too many voters is political suicide; dismissing the views of disabled people who want to have a say about the services we receive, regardless from whom we receive them, isn't suicide, it's a return to the climate our forebears endured up until around the late 70s.

George Santayana wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." I suggest that we need to remind people what changes were fought for, and therefore why they were valued so much.

For example, I've heard too many times of late, about people's perceptions that have resulted because someone's concerns were dismissed by a service provider's representatives. At a personal level, I've been on the receiving end of communications that were intended to stop me from having a view and daring to express it. I know that this is bullying. I know that others in our community, and disabled people in general have felt bullied. I now need to state that Blind Citizens NZ has a zero tolerance for bullying, and anyone who uses their position of authority to bully anyone.

It is past time that the leaders of every organisation that claims to have the best interests of any disabled people in mind open themselves up to constructive criticism, has a meaningful complaints procedure that empowers disabled people, and is seen to value the opinions of the people they serve. To do otherwise perpetuates a patronising culture, potentially allows a culture of bullying to pervade, and almost certainly erodes the level of trust anyone has in that organisation and its leaders.

Let's take the blind community as an example. Throughout the 80s, the then Royal New Zealand Foundation **for** the Blind started a process of taking blind people seriously. Led by blind people themselves, and organisations such as Blind Citizens NZ throughout the 90s and early 2000s, change ultimately took a lot of effort. In the end, the change to the Royal New Zealand Foundation **of** the Blind was to herald an era of blind people truly being taken seriously. We're nearly twenty years on from that change, and it is time to review progress.

When we consider outcomes of the Health and Disability System Review, perhaps we should also be considering the status of all disability service providers.

We might ask which organisations we consider, from the perspective of disabled people ourselves, to be modern disability service providers. As clients and service recipients, surely, we have the right to ask questions of service providers. We should feel free to ask questions that in the end inform us of a specific service, structure, decision, and so on. When questions are asked, they deserve a proper answer. But, for reasons too many to list, the reality is there are people who are afraid to ask those much-needed questions.

The message Blind Citizens NZ takes to Government on behalf of blind people is that "more services of high quality are required if we are to see better outcomes for disabled people with the greatest need".

We're not complaining, we're telling it how it is. Anyone afraid of the truth of how it is for our people today needs to ask if the situation is the problem, or if it is the people that openly talk about the problems that disabled people face today. Those of us that do put in the energy to seek change know that if nothing changes, disabled people will be facing the same challenges ten years from now. Starting a discussion isn't creating a problem, it's about starting to create a solution. Blind Citizens NZ has been at the forefront of discussions that created solutions for blind people throughout our 75-year history. Our work is not yet done...

New Zealand has a rich history of people standing up for what is right. All those people who stood up and were counted in the issues of their time (anti-nukes, votes for women, anti-apartheid, land rights, workers' rights, legalisation of same sex relationships), and so many more social issues. My reading of our own community's history through Equity and Governance (Blind Citizens NZ 75-year history), shows me that the blind community has its heroes too. I hope those heroes think that Blind Citizens NZ and its leadership is carrying on their work by standing up for the rights of blind and other disabled people.

Celebrating 75-years of Advocacy Blind Citizens NZ 2021 AGM and Conference Working Together

It is only very recently that the Board has been in the position of confirming it will proceed with its plans to celebrate more fully, Blind Citizens NZ's 75-year history. The theme, "Working Together" is symbolic of Blind Citizens NZ's proud history – it represents the fact that so many people over the years, have been involved in, and contributed to, the many successes achieved for the blind community i.e. for those who identify as blind, deafblind, vision-impaired, low vision etc. Additionally, the many allies and supporters Blind Citizens NZ has attracted and whose support has also been pivotal.

There is however, one significant change to advise. This falls outside the Board's control and relates to the AGM and Conference venue.

While New Zealand is beginning to move forward from the impact of COVID-19, there continue to be side-effects across a range of areas. For example, the need for Government to continue utilising some hotels for Managed Isolation and Quarantine is one of these side-effects.

You will recall the Sudima Hotel Christchurch Airport is the preferred South Island venue identified for Blind Citizens NZ's three-day event. The hotel was withdrawn from use for the general public from April 2020 through to December 2020 inclusive. Regrettably, we have learned the Sudima Hotel Christchurch Airport remains unavailable to us for 2021. This is because the hotel will continue to provide services to the New Zealand Government for Self-Isolation guests returning to New Zealand.

A range of options across the country from amongst preferred venues known to meet Blind Citizens NZ's AGM and Conference needs, have been explored. With the exception of one option, all other venues are unavailable. This is because they either continue to provide services to the New Zealand Government for Self-Isolation guests returning to New Zealand. Or, they are unable to accommodate our booking due to heavy demand. Options either side of the preferred weekend 8-10 October 2021 have been explored.

At an extra-ordinary meeting on Monday 19 April, the Board addressed the situation. While disappointed it is unable to proceed with plans for the Sudima Hotel Christchurch Airport, a three-day event is confirmed. This will happen 8-10 October 2021, at the Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington.

Now that the Board has made its decision, plans shelved in 2020, are being refreshed for implementation. Registration details and related AGM and Conference information will shortly be finalised. This will be published in our June Focus issue.

Blind Citizens NZ 2021 Scheduled Election From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

Once again, the election of positions and procedure will happen as set out in the Constitution, adopted October 2019. This year, there will be an election of two Member-at-Large positions, each of whom will serve a three-year term. In alphabetical order, individuals whose terms conclude at the end of this year's Annual General Meeting and Conference are Ms Wendy Chiang and Mr Shaun Johnson.

Rule 10 Elections, clause 10.1, directs Blind Citizens NZ in its election procedures. In publicising the 2021 scheduled Member-at-Large election procedure, and the call for nominations, members are advised that:

- 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 Blind Citizens NZ's Board Members. This information will also identify the skills, experience and knowledge needed. Contact details for Blind Citizens NZ's National Office 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 2021. If you are uncertain whether you meet the criteria, please contact our National Office to find out.

What you need to do to be nominated: 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. You can use a paper form, or the email process. If using the paper form, signatures of each of all three members involved in the nomination 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 at National Office prior to commencing this process. This is important, as there are instructions unique to the email procedure that must be followed. The email process mirrors as closely as possible, requirements for the paper-based option.

Ordinary Members, financial as at 19 August 2021, are eligible to stand for election to these two positions.

The closing date for nominations is 4pm Thursday 19 August 2021. All nominations must therefore be received and in the hands of the Returning Officer by this date / time. Candidates are required to provide their CV at the same time as their nomination is submitted to the Returning Officer. Nominations and CVs should be sent 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 19 August 2021**. No later than **Thursday 9 September 2021**, 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 28 September 2021**. Vote counting will take place no later than Wednesday 6 October 2021.

Participation in Blind Citizens NZ election process: 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, 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's election 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, confidential, 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 are in control of your involvement through every step of the process. This includes that you can be certain your vote 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.

Survey for Assistive Technology Users

Blind Citizens NZ's organisational approach towards raising awareness of accessibility of information, websites, the environment etc., leads us to team up from time to time, with like-minded organisations. Intopia is a classic example of such a relationship. An Australia-based entity with a reach into New Zealand, Intopia is internationally recognised for its accessibility work, including around inclusive digital design and development.

For around 12 months now, Intopia has been focussed on developing and carrying out a survey for disabled people who use assistive technology. That is because, around the world there are big and small surveys of the technology used by people who are blind, deafblind, vision impaired or have low vision. None of these include much representation from Australia and New Zealand. Blind Citizens NZ along with other disability-related organisations have teamed up with Intopia to assist promote the survey.

To be eligible to participate in the survey, you must be over the age of 18, live in Australia or New Zealand, and use any type of assistive technology (such as a screen reader or screen magnifier) or any accessibility settings on your computer or mobile device to help you use the Internet.

Results from the survey will be used to create awareness about the types of assistive technology used.

The results will also inform decision makers on what they need to consider when making their online products and services more accessible and inclusive for everyone. Results will be free for anyone to access through the [Intopia website](#).

The survey is anonymous, and almost every question is optional, meaning you only need to share the information you're comfortable with sharing. The survey will close on May 5.

You can find out more about the survey and take part on [the Intopia website](#) (<http://bit.ly/ATSurvey21>). If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact them at ATsurvey@intopia.digital.

World Blind Union Updates

In May 2020, the RNZFB Board of Directors determined for reasons well publicised, that it would step back from its membership of WBU. Its position as one of New Zealand's two country delegates came to an end on 31 December 2020. This date is important because it is when WBU's financial year ends, and also when country membership ceases.

From May 2020, through to November 2020, Blind Citizens NZ the RNZFB and Blind Low Vision NZ worked to address the RNZFB Board of Directors' decision. The outcome involved meetings with consumer organisations interested in WBU affairs. Selected for his in-depth knowledge of, and involvement within WBU, Mr Neil Jarvis facilitated a meeting on 3 November 2020, to explore with consumer organisations, their interest in the country position that would be vacated by the RNZFB. The meeting involved representatives from Blind Citizens NZ, BLVNZ and the RNZFB, along with representatives of interested consumer organisations.

Mr Jarvis' much-needed facilitation and WBU expertise was funded by BLVNZ. This left the RNZFB, BLVNZ, and Blind Citizens NZ free to be involved in discussion.

Agreements reached, and undertakings given by respective consumer organisations were progressed following the 3 November 2020 meeting. The RNZFB's membership concluded on 31 December 2020, leaving Blind Citizens NZ as the sole country member from 1 January 2021. Upon realising there were no consumer organisations in a position to immediately pick up the second WBU country role for the financial year to 31 December 2021, the Board made urgent decisions.

Taking a purely pragmatic approach, and holding true to its commitment to ensure New Zealand is fully represented at WBU, the Board resolved Blind Citizens NZ would accept responsibility for the second country position. While this means there are cost implications for Blind Citizens NZ, having recently recommenced discussions with consumer organisations, the Board is hopeful this will be a one-off situation. Discussions include exploring the potential for interested organisations to come together and make a financial contribution towards the second position. Also, to agree a process to fill the position.

At its March meeting, and mindful of pressing WBU deadlines, the Board made two appointments. First it finalised its constitutional requirement with respect to the WBU delegate position for which it had called for expressions of interest during 2020. That process involved a panel of Board Members (National President, Vice President and Board Member Martine Abel-Williamson) being appointed to interview short-listed candidate(s). The Board acted upon the recommendation from its interview panel, appointing Paula Waby for a period of two years. She now holds the position recognised in Blind Citizens NZ's constitution. As Paula Waby is already a Board Member, the constitutional requirement for co-option of the WBU delegate position to the Board, is therefore irrelevant.

The Board then addressed the second country position for which Blind Citizens NZ is responsible through to 31 December 2021.

Concerned at the lack of time at its disposal to run a transparent process the Board determined a way forward that led it to identifying a number of people each of whom it believed, has in-depth knowledge of WBU. Its approach took account of ensuring from its perspective, that the people the Board identified, would be a safe pair of hands to hold the second delegate position through to 31 December 2021.

In taking this holding pattern approach, the Board will move forward with interested consumer organisations, in readiness for a longer-term approach for the second country position, as of 1 January 2022. The Board prioritised its list of potential candidates. It authorised the National President to work through the list in order of priority, until such time as the position was accepted.

The Board subsequently endorsed the appointment of Thomas Bryan as the second country delegate to WBU. His term will be to 31 December 2021. In support of Thomas Bryan being one of the prioritised candidates, the Board recognises his involvement within Blind Citizens NZ for several years with respect to its WBU Committee and related activities. Thomas Bryan has represented New Zealand on WBU Asia Pacific committees such as technology and employment. He has also represented the RNZFB as its delegate to WBU.

In June, Paula Waby and Thomas Bryan will be attending by ZOOM, the WBU General Assembly. They may be keeping some unusual hours to ensure New Zealand is well-represented. As WBU-related information comes to hand, they will be sharing this for people's information. If you are interested in WBU matters, don't hesitate to contact our national office to be put in touch with Paula Waby or Thomas Bryan. Or you can contact them direct as follows:

- Paula Waby: paula.waby4@gmail.com and
- Thomas Bryan: thomas.s.bryan@gmail.com

The Board extends its congratulations to Paula Waby and Thomas Bryan in their respective WBU roles.

Blind Citizens NZ has once again provided country support for Martine Abel-Williamson to stand for the global WBU positions of President and Treasurer. The aim being that she is successful in her bid for one of the two positions. If unsuccessful for the position of President, then the nomination for Treasurer would remain.

WBU has very recently made changes to its election process. It has preferred that its candidates stand for only one position. Martine Abel-Williamson has subsequently withdrawn her Treasurer nomination, but retains her nomination for President. The Board wishes Martine Abel-Williamson all the very best in her WBU election endeavours.

Getting COVID-19 Information Out and About

Blind Citizens NZ continues to advocate (along with many others), for all COVID-19 related information, including about the Vaccine roll-out to be available in the full range of alternate formats. This includes audio, Braille, large print, New Zealand Sign Language and Easy Read.

Our advice to government agencies and stakeholders is that meeting people's informational needs is paramount. Agencies are listening. Information is slowly, but surely being made available. The biggest challenge is the timeliness of information reaching people who for a range of reasons, are unable to use, or do not have technology to access the internet. It is the internet, and some social media where trusted Government-produced information is readily available. Shortly, vaccine roll-out information will be available in all alternate formats. In the meantime, if you have questions, the following contact details may be useful:

- For COVID-19 symptoms, call the dedicated COVID-19 Healthline on **0800 358 5453**;
- For any other health queries, call the general Healthline on **0800 611 116**;
- Government's COVID-19 Website – take this link covid19.govt.nz



Ministry of Social Development Updates

Restarting medical certificates for Disability Allowance clients

From 23 February 2021, the Ministry of Social Development has reinstated Disability Allowance reviews.

This means Work and Income clients who are receiving the Disability Allowance and have new or increased costs may need to go to their GPs and health professionals to get an updated Disability Allowance Medical Certificate. You'll recall we paused this requirement due to COVID-19.

The Ministry of Social Development will be in touch with you again in the months ahead with any other changes.

Help with essential costs – Work and Income may be able to help you even if you're working

If you can't work at the moment, have lost your job, or are working fewer hours:

- You may be able to get a benefit or some other financial help from us.
- If you're struggling to pay your rent or your bills, you might be able to get some help – even if you're still working or on a low income.
- We can also help you look for work or training and help with the costs of getting started in a new job.

If you're sick or need time off work because of COVID-19: If you're being tested for COVID-19, it's important you stay home until your results come back. If you can't work from home, your employer may be able to apply for the **Short-Term Absence Payment** to help them pay you.

If you've been **told** to self-isolate because you or someone you've been in contact with has COVID-19, and you can't work from home, your employer may be able to apply for the **Leave Support Scheme** to help them keep paying you.

Talk to your employer about the help that's available so you can keep getting paid. If you're **self-employed** and can't work from home, you can also apply for these payments.

If you need help with essential costs - depending on your situation, there are lots of other ways we may be able to help you and your family. You don't need to be on a benefit to get help, it's also available to people on a low income. We could help with:

- Food;
- Accommodation costs (rent, mortgage, board);
- Power, gas and water bills or heating;
- Medical and dental costs.

Find out more - even if you don't think you qualify, call us to talk about your situation.

You can also visit workandincome.govt.nz and select **Check what you might get**.

For more information, you can:

- Go to workandincome.govt.nz; or
- Call us on 0800 559 009, 7am to 6pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 1pm, Saturday.

Focus Editor – Call for Expressions of Interest

Readers will know there have been a couple of calls now, for expressions of interest in the Focus Editor role. The Board is refreshing this opportunity and calls for expressions of interest from amongst Ordinary (financial) Members of Blind Citizens NZ for Focus Editor.

Allan Jones has been our Focus Editor since December 2017. He indicated early in 2020, his willingness to continue through to the end of 2021.

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;
- Focus is the mechanism for communicating a number of constitutional requirements such as scheduled election notices;
- Blind Citizens NZ's membership is the target audience however the publication goes to all Members of Parliament, stakeholders, etc;
- 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; and
- there is an opportunity for the Focus Editor to bring their editorial style to Focus.

Interested people should contact National Office for full details of the position.

Expressions of interest close **4pm, Monday 19 July 2021**. The Board will consider expressions of interest at its 14-15 August 2021 meeting.

Expressions of Interest – Blind Citizens NZ Appointed Trustee - Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ, Board of Trustees

Readers will note introductory comments about expressions of interest to fill Blind Citizens NZ's appointed trustee position on the Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) Board of Trustees. Information about this appointed trustee position follow...

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

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

If you can commit to a three-year appointment that concludes November 2024, and meet the following expectations, the Board is extremely keen to hear from you.

You will be eligible for consideration provided you:

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

Now that you know about the fundamental requirements of this appointed trustee position, are you still interested? Great if you are!

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

Finally, you are encouraged to put your name forward. Expressions of interest, along with supporting information, should be received no later than **4pm, Monday 31 May 2021**. The Board will consider all expressions of interest at its meeting on 19-20 June 2021. Please submit your expression of interest via any of the following options:

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

2020 Onkyo Braille Essay Contest

Braille, a Major Key to Independence

By Martine Abel-Williamson

Introduction... In 2020, the World Blind Union Asia Pacific Region, with the support of The Onkyo Corporation Ltd. of Japan, conducted the 18th Onkyo Braille Essay Contest. An objective of the contest is to promote Braille literacy opportunities for Braille readers and writers aged 14 and above. Contestants choose a topic from the options provided, and submit their essay. In 2020, Martine Abel-Williamson's essay, "Braille, a Major Key to Independence", was in relation to the essay topic "The people / organisations who have helped me overcome my blindness and be a useful person". Awarded one of seven "Appreciation Prizes" of US\$150 for her category, her winning essay is now shared...

Homage to Estelle Abel, the one who let me believe that braille and blindness is normal and okay.

I was born to a single parent in Namibia, South-West Africa, and at the age of 6 months I was diagnosed as blind as a result of a congenital retinal condition.

So many people, including teachers, friends and other persons, played a role in me becoming an independent blind adult, but in this instance, I wish to present this tribute to someone quite close to home.

At the age of 5 I was sent to a school for blind children in South Africa, as mainstream or inclusive education opportunities were not available in neither Namibia nor South Africa at the time, but the latter did have at least a school facility for blind children. And although this was very difficult for my mother, she would rather sacrifice having me stay at home in order for me to acquire an education and thus future employment and lifestyle options. She wasn't able to move to stay close to the school, so, I went into a residential or boarding situation.

This meant that I was only able to go home 4 times a year.

Most of my peers received hard copy print letters from home, which the hostel staff would read to them. From the beginning Estelle, my mother, wanted me to be able to read her letters to me at my own pace and time, so, she posted me tape recorded letters which I was able to listen to in private.

The moment I learnt enough braille, as those lessons commenced at the age of 5, she then decided to correspond with me in braille. She took out a bank loan in order to buy a Perkins Brailier, taught herself braille and was able to write to me. I was so proud to be able to write to her privately and confidentially and to read her notes to me in my preferred format. She wanted to normalise braille in my life and she wanted me to feel that I'm not the only one in our family to use it. Her philosophy was that, if I was a sighted child, she would have written to me in print, so, why not in braille if that's what is most appropriate. In this way I never felt that only blind persons used braille and that it compounded my difference.

Then, when I knew sufficient braille in order to wish to use it for other practical uses such as to label music tape recordings, to name one example, Estelle purchased a braille dymo-labeller to enable her to, not simply hand me recordings of my favourite artists, but she'd label those in braille for me so that I could identify those easily.

Later on in my life, during my teenage and following years, Estelle then took it upon herself to involve braille in my life as an artistic and fashion accessory. As a very skilled seamstress and amateur designer, she incorporated braille symbols and characters onto T-shirts and other clothing items, and she also discovered that there was the opportunity to have braille on jewellery.

For birthday and Xmas gifts she'd surprise me with items such as bracelets with braille on. In this way she assured me that braille is cool, sassy and beautiful, and not simply a practical code.

In the mid-90's our family moved to New Zealand where I was able to find employment, mainly influenced by my fluent braille and technology (soft braille literacy skills). So, in engraining into my life the sense that braille can be modern and exciting, she enhanced my independence in general.

Then, recently, my mother was diagnosed with Dementia and she is in a care facility now. She hardly remembers names and faces, even of those closest to her, but I do trust, that, in reading this essay, she'll be able to, even if not remember what she's done for me, sense my feeling of appreciation and love.

So, Estelle, this essay is for you, to thank you for a gift that, at times, I struggle to find words to describe, and that, even when you're not able to, I'll hold dearly.

Support Blind Citizens NZ's Income Generation Efforts

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

Payroll Giving: This is an easy way for an employee to donate to a charity of their choice, such as Blind Citizens NZ. When an employee donates to a charity through their payroll, they receive a tax refund immediately. For all other types of donation, the donor must wait until the end of the tax year to receive their tax refund.

One of the key benefits of donating through your wages (Payroll Giving) is that as an employee you may decide to donate your refund to the charity as well. Charitable Payroll Giving is optional and not all employers will participate. Blind Citizens NZ has Donee Status, and is eligible to receive payroll gifts. Steps to Payroll Giving donations include:

1. Asking your employer if payroll giving is an employee benefit. You can advocate for Blind Citizens NZ, and outline why you are passionate about the organisation. Some employers match payroll gifts with a contribution of their own.
2. If payroll giving is available, provide your employer with the bank account details for Blind Citizens NZ.
3. Decide how much you can afford, and how frequently you will donate, considering the immediate tax benefit. For Blind Citizens NZ, every little helps us in our work to make a blind bit of difference for blind people.
4. Notify Blind Citizens NZ that you are making a payroll gift. Your employer may transfer the money into Blind Citizens NZ's bank account without any notification.

Making a Bequest: Through our efforts and your financial support, we are working on the removal of barriers faced by blind, deafblind, low vision, and vision impaired people. Blind Citizens NZ has been extremely fortunate to benefit from legacies, and we take this opportunity to recognise generically, the generosity of those people and their families.

Your Will can make a lasting gift and Blind Citizens NZ would be extremely grateful for any contribution. If you choose to leave a gift to Blind Citizens NZ, 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, if you have questions or you wish to make a contribution contact:

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

Cheques are being Phased Out Impact for Membership Renewal and Joining Blind Citizens NZ

Despite advocacy carried out by many of us, cheques are slowly but surely being phased out. Some banks have already stopped receiving cheques. Others such as ANZ, the bank Blind Citizens NZ's National Office utilises, will stop at the end of May 2021. By the end of 2021, we understand all banks will have ceased accepting (or issuing) cheques. For cheque users, this will have an impact for example, on the way you make your day-to-day bill payments. For some, this will also have an impact on the way you pay your membership renewal to Blind Citizens NZ.

There is no doubt that the phasing out of cheques has created challenges. As this work speeds up across remaining banks, it will create challenges for a lot of people, businesses and organisations including Blind Citizens NZ.

It is important to recognise there are ways to work around the situation. With the phasing out of cheques, there are banks that are prepared to assist people with their payments. While the services banks offer vary we encourage cheque-users to utilise whatever options your bank has available, to assist you. If you are unsure, give them a call, or pop in to see them.

Internet and phone banking are options that have been around for some time.

Either of these options, if you have the technology and/or confidence to use them, enable you to carry out your banking independently. If new to using these options, it can take time to build up the confidence to try them. It is worth the effort and we encourage you to talk to your bank to learn more about these options.

For Blind Citizens NZ, we are fast heading towards 30 May, which is the date ANZ have stated we must cease using cheques. This does of course clash somewhat with our membership renewal timeline. Many of you often pop your cheques in the mail during May and June to ensure your membership is renewed by 1 July. If you prefer to pay your membership renewal by cheque to our National Office, we encourage you to post this as soon as possible. The gap available to you to do this, is small. Given the delays that happen with mail, we suggest posting your membership subscription to us no later than Wednesday 19 May. This should allow sufficient time for your membership renewal to reach us here in Wellington, and for us to ensure the cheque is banked by 30 May 2021.

When visiting your bank to find ways to make payments, you might consider for your membership renewal to Blind Citizens NZ, setting up an annual payment. You can pick the date, and the amount you will pay. Including your name and a reference to membership renewal is best. If in doubt, and we can be of assistance, contact our National Office for guidance. To progress payments through your bank, or via the internet, here are Blind Citizens NZ bank account details:
06-0230-0002634-00.

If you have a query do not hesitate to contact us here at National Office by:

- Phone: 04-389-0033 or free-call 0800-222-694; or
- Email admin@abcnz.org.nz

Membership Join / Renewal Form, 30 June 2022

Membership renewal falls due 1 July annually. Return your completed membership form along with your subscription to our National Office (or hand to your local Branch Treasurer). For our National Office post to: PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242. **If paying by cheque, posting by Wednesday 19 May is encouraged - cheques should be made payable to Blind Citizens NZ.**

To avoid hassles with cheques, we encourage paying your membership subscription by internet banking. Blind Citizens NZ's bank 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 (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:** Christine (Chrissy) Fern: fernmeek@gmail.com
- Martine Abel-Williamson (Member-at-Large):
martine.the1@xtra.co.nz
- Wendy Chiang: wendy.chiang@gmail.com
- Andrea Courtney (Member-at-Large): andycoute@gmail.com
- Shaun Johnson (Member-at-Large): shaun.zdots@xtra.co.nz
- Paula Waby (Member-at-Large / WBU 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.