



Blind Citizens NZ

Focus

Publication of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc Volume 58 No 1 – April 2022 In this Issue

- What's in store... editorial by Rose Wilkinson pg 2
- A column with a difference, National President pg 3
- Blind Citizens NZ 2022 Scheduled Election pg 12
- Count Me In, Dr Robbie Francis Watene pg 15
- Audio Description Update from Able, Sophie Jones pg 19
- Update on the Establishment of the proposed new ministry for disabled people pg 22
- Kia ora from upcoming Focus Editor, Áine Kelly-Costello pg 24
- Blind Citizens NZ - National Feedback Line Coordinator pg 27
- 2022 Annual General Meeting and Conference
Diversity and Inclusive: Respect for each other pg 27
- Support Blind Citizens NZ's Income Generation Efforts pg 28
- Discounted Total Mobility to June 2022 pg 29
- Membership Renewal pg 29
- Blind Citizens NZ Board / National Office Contacts pg 31
- Acknowledgement of financial support pg 32



What's in store...

Editorial, Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Our first issue for 2022 brings a wide, but interesting selection of contributions. Perhaps if you've checked out items for this issue you will have a sense of what you can enjoy reading about. Readers will know that Allan Jones stepped down from the Focus Editor role late in 2021. Allan's editorials and contributions appealed to many of our readers and he enjoyed your feedback. It is fitting that we recognise the many voluntary hours Allan contributed over several years as Focus Editor. Oh yes, along with the many cafes visited, and coffees enjoyed in his quest for information and contributions for Focus. From the Board, staff and members of Blind Citizens NZ, thank you Allan for your work on our collective behalf.

The National President's contribution is surely a "column with a difference". You'll learn more about the intrigue behind this reference when you get to his column.

We have an awesome contribution from Dr Robbie Francis Watene, Senior Researcher, Donald Beasley Institute. Robbie (along with her colleagues) plays a significant role on behalf of the DPO Coalition with disabled-person led monitoring work.

There is an update from Able, New Zealand's leading producer of Audio Description and Captioning for television. Of note and not referenced in the article is Wendy Youens' decision to resign from her Chief Executive role. Wendy has held this position since Able's inception. Her last day is 19 May when she will look forward to spending more time with her husband and daughter, and be focused on welcoming their second child. As Focus goes to print there is news of Dan Buckingham's appointment as Wendy's successor. Many readers will know, or have heard of Dan who has been with Attitude Pictures since 2008 - congratulations Dan on your appointment. Remember to check out the questions Able is asking about audio description. There are accessible options to provide your response.

The proposed new ministry for disabled people (name yet to be confirmed) is extremely topical. We have a contribution from the Establishment Unit which may plug a few informational gaps.

As we recognise Allan Jones' contributions, we welcome Áine Kelly-Costello, who picks up the baton as our next Focus Editor. Keen to familiarise you with the approach she will take, Áine's contribution in this publication paves the way for her Focus editor role which starts with our June issue.

In this issue there are also organisational items notified. You will read about timeframes for the election of National President and two Member-at-Large positions. Expressions of interest in the National Feedback Line Coordinator position are called for. We also share early information about this year's Annual General Meeting and Conference.

Enjoy this Focus issue...

A column with a difference

From Jonathan Godfrey, National President

One of the greatest highlights of my time as your National President occurred in early April. As I am currently the Chair of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism (IMM), I gave the final address at the IMM's National Forum where we asked questions of Government about the progress NZ is making towards full realisation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention). I've decided to share that address with you as my column for this edition of Focus, but first I need to explain why I'm breaking the rules on how we provide Focus in alternate formats.

The way you are about to receive my speech depends on which format you're using. The Braille and the (large) print versions are the same as each other, but the audio will be different.

Many sighted people write their speeches as a complete set of grammatically correct sentences. They take that speech and read it out, hopefully after practicing it a few times. Some blind people do this too, but I'm not one of them. I don't read a speech because I can't do so with confidence. My Braille reading speed just is not good enough, and so I need a plan that works for me, both in delivering speeches as National President and delivering lectures in my day job. I make use of my screen reader to get the quick reminders I need, and if I've prepared properly, I'll get my messages across. The more I listen the less natural I sound.

So, I don't have a prepared speech. I have my speech notes. The speech was live captioned and translated into New Zealand Sign Language. I shared my speech notes with those services so that they could get the gist of what I would be talking about. The set of captions might suffice as a transcript of what I said, but only once they'd been cleaned up a bit. A perfect transcript would reveal my mispronunciations and any ums and ahs that I might utter so that won't make a good reading experience. My thanks therefore go to the editorial process.

This means the Brailled or printed words are not a perfect transcript of what I said, but they'll be what I would have said if I was perfect in my oration.

A substantial number of people who receive Focus do so in audio. They're listening to someone else reading the content aloud. I certainly mean no disrespect to the human narrators who've recorded my column over the years, but we can save them a bit of work if we make use of the original recording. It might also be a novelty to hear from the National President by listening to him.

So here is my speech, in a variety of forms: print, Braille and electronically if you want a second-hand rendition, and the original recording if you're listening in audio. I sort of like that the print version is the alternate format for a change. I hope you do too.

Editor's note: Anyone reading the Braille or print editions can listen to the recording on our National Feedback Line on TellMe, menu option 1-4-9. Or you can request an audio copy from our National Office.

Speech begins... Our Government is elected to govern in the best interests of all of us, and this Forum has asked if successive Governments have done so.

There is a balance of responsibility required to ensure that actions are not further disadvantaging disabled people. Therefore, I am conscious that every time Government suggests what disabled people need to do, that we must ask collectively if Government is empowering disabled people, or shirking its responsibility and shifting the burden onto already overburdened disabled people.

For example, would Government dare to tell Maori that their rights under the Treaty can be a discussion at Select Committee? I think not, but that's what's being done to disabled people this year. In the context of experiences of disabled people, going to Select Committee is progress.

The issues facing disabled Kiwis are topical. We're in a pandemic; they are being talked about.

No one should forget the horrors of the past for disabled people, but we must move forwards if we are to avoid the same outcomes affecting the next generation of disabled people.

This forum heard officials acknowledge there are things that are wrong for disabled people. We all need to acknowledge the wrongs and move on to what is right.

We are making progress. Disabled people are better off in absolute terms. I suspect very few of us would want to go back to 2008 when we ratified the Convention let alone the 20th century when the first New Zealand Disability Strategy was born.

But even so, disabled people do not have parity, disabled people do not have equity, and that is being felt by their whanau and families too.

The Government has presented evidence to show us that there is plenty of action being taken. This action will improve the lives of disabled people. We must acknowledge the work as progress, but I ask you while this work is necessary, is it sufficient? Hold that thought! The work needs to be valued even if it is not enough.

Life for many disabled people might be better than it was, but that doesn't mean it is easier, or as easy as it should be if we have parity with non-disabled people. We do not know if we are better off in relative terms and so I am left asking, is the gap between disabled and non-disabled people closing or widening?

Government has not shown us which way things are tracking, because this data and evidence does not currently exist. Disabled people know we do not have parity. In 2022, equity for disabled people would look like a determined effort to help move us towards parity, and if not in 2022, then in 2023 and 2024 and every year until we do have parity.

We, and in this instance I actually think I mean New Zealand, need an absolute commitment from every agency and every Government Minister that effort will be put into determining which way we are tracking. This would be a start on ensuring equity for disabled people.

I've said it and I'll keep saying it, New Zealand has made progress in collecting data and evidence on the outcomes for disabled people. We've heard a lot of that over this forum. We can get a lot of the data we need right now.

For those people who do not know, I am a statistician in my day job. I understand what can be done with data and I understand what many of the limitations we are facing right now are.

New Zealand can get the data and evidence that we all need, but the resource to do this job is quite limited. My professional assessment is that the tools to provide considerably more data on the outcomes for disabled people do exist. For example, turning to tāngata whaikaha Maori in particular. We can link the outcomes from Te Kupenga with the last census so that we can obtain more data and evidence specific to tāngata whaikaha Maori. We've seen that with the evidence presented and reminded to us all about the vaccine roll out in particular. But the workforce required to undertake all the work collecting the data and evidence does not currently exist. We have a collective shortage of capacity and capability because we have insufficient numbers of people with the analytic skills required to use the existing tools and we haven't got a real way forward to solve that problem.

We recognise that we have far too many disabled people spending far too much energy worrying about how statisticians and analysts measure the disability equity gap. If there is an equity gap, stop worrying. It is evidence that work is required. Sometime down the track, when we find that there is no equity gap, then let's start worrying about who is being overlooked. To be honest, who is being overlooked in data collections right now isn't exactly one of our major problems.

The Washington Group Short Set of Questions was used in the last Census but they are not about us as individuals. They are not about how and who should be receiving services. They're only good as the best tools for gathering statistics and that's all they are good for. Disabled people are not statistics. We are people!

Now having put that on the table, I'm going to turn around and say but data is not enough. We are not extracting full benefit from the data we already have, let alone any more data that we might obtain.

When we do have data, we have an obligation to use it.

Disabled people need to see how all Government agencies are planning to close the identified equity gaps. Those were gaps identified by Government and highlighted by the IMM.

Disabled people need to work out how they will help agencies. We need an absolute commitment from every agency and every Government Minister that effort will be put into closing equity gaps, and we need to know that disabled people are going to have an integral part to play in closing those gaps.

To understand the equity gaps, agencies must understand the difference between disabled and non-disabled people. Government will need help to do this. Agencies could do this by employing more disabled people to normalise the needs of disabled people in their organisational cultures, their planning and their service delivery. This will help, but it is not enough. Agencies must ensure that meeting the needs of disabled people truly becomes a business as usual transaction. Agencies must understand disabled people, and that requires a fundamental shift in thinking in many agencies.

I'm going to single out the National Emergency Management Agency in this instance. The organisational culture clearly includes disabled people as business as usual already. I accept that they want to do more. But when the next flood happens, the National Emergency Management Agency and the activities on the ground will be judged by how many disabled people get left in the water, so they're already thinking about disabled people as part of their natural job. I suspect that's because they don't look at disabled people as a special project and that's because they are looking at the diverse needs of the entire population.

Business as usual does not mean treating disabled people the same as non-disabled people. That's what we were doing in the past. The status quo is what disables people. I'll repeat that the status quo is disabling people. If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.

So, agencies must do things differently. Government Ministers must be held to account for holding their agencies to account. We must look for the levers that force action that is in favour of disabled people to reduce the disabling caused by Government doing what they've always done.

The IMM has had to make choices on what topics we tackled in this Forum. It's certainly encouraging that the IMM didn't need to raise every topic critical to disabled people. We heard Government mention such major topics as the digital divide.

There are some really big issues that seriously impact on decisions disabled people and their families are making today. The feedback the IMM has received includes:

- inequities arising by the way we receive support (ACC versus not ACC) is an example. The harsh reality is that some people think it would be better to have had a nasty accident rather than be born with an impairment;
- the vexed issue of relationship status effecting disabled people. Why should my partner be financially responsible when my parents weren't?

The list of other issues that we haven't touched upon is long.

Through its reports I have to reflect that the IMM is not convinced that Government officials on the whole are sufficiently aware of the impact these and other policies are having on the desire of disabled people to live a good life.

Our questions over the last week were often aimed at the equity gaps that exist, and often the Government response did acknowledge the equity gap being highlighted. Other answers were less forthcoming in terms of the recognition that a problem exists for disabled people.

So, I say, to all agencies from Chief Executives down, and your Ministers - if agencies do not work with disabled people and their representative organisations, you will continue to do what you've always done to disabled people. When agencies did tell this forum that they had worked with disabled people when telling us about what they had done, the efforts for what was done for disabled people showed a real partnership approach.

I could express the frustration felt by disabled people when that doesn't happen with a couple of phrases:

- If you're not working with us, you're working against us.
- If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem.

These are the natural frustrations of disabled people. So, I'm going to paraphrase that last one and say, if you're not working to close the equity gaps for disabled people, you're probably helping sustain them.

There is too much happening already for the disabled people making themselves available. There's too much work already for those people to be able to respond, and more work is clearly coming.

The expectation of the IMM is that the Government has the responsibility to listen to disabled people. Yes, the IMM must do so from time to time as well, but that's because it's our job in monitoring. Our monitoring work and our interactions with Government calls for greater engagement with disabled people.

As a personal observation I see too many people in society, not just disabled people, complaining about what other people are not doing. I see plenty of disabled people thinking that their concerns aren't being addressed because they aren't at the table. I've even recently seen disabled people being critical of other disabled people. We need to acknowledge what people are doing; we need to believe that anyone who takes on a role to represent others is giving it their all.

I therefore thank the numerous disabled people and their whanau and family members who are giving it their best. There is so much work that needs to be done, and disabled people and their whanau need to be involved, but we can't be involved in everything. Anyone who wants to be working with and for other disabled people can do so by getting involved with a disabled people's organisation (DPO). Any disabled person who wants to go it alone can do so, but I suspect that that's the hard way.

In my time working with Government Officials, I see them respond much more willingly if I tell them that what they are doing or proposing is good, but that they can do better. Officials do not have all the answers, that's why they come to DPOs. Government officials love it when disabled people give them hope that answers exist, and offer them ideas that they can progress. Government Officials value cooperation. After all, everyone responds to positive encouragement. People do not need to feel beaten up or bashed around if they're giving it their best, and I thank everyone who is giving it their best.

While there is not room at every table for every disabled person, and every one of their family members, there are a lot of tables already to sit and share your views. There are going to be more tables to sit at in the very near future. We have to somehow increase the level of trust and confidence that whoever is at each table is doing their best. We have to accept though, that in total the grand sum of everything that everyone is doing, while it might be their best, isn't enough. We need more people getting involved and doing their best.

We have hundreds of thousands of disabled people waiting for change today. They want parity. However, they won't ever get parity until such time as we all use equity as the basis for our decision making. We have the data. New Zealand's disabled people have an appetite for change, and we need to see that mirrored by Government at all levels.

On behalf of disabled people, I close by saying:

We want to see parity. We need to see equity.

On behalf of the IMM I close by saying, the purpose of the Convention is to attain parity for disabled people. The rights of disabled people need to be the same as for non-disabled people in actions and outcomes. Not just words.

We have to demand to see effort being made to close the disability equity gaps.

The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now. We can't do the best thing, but we can act now (end of speech).

Blind Citizens NZ 2022 Scheduled Election From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

This year's election is for the National President and two Member-at-Large positions. In alphabetical order, individuals whose terms conclude at the end of this year's Annual General Meeting and Conference are Martine Abel-Williamson and Chrissy Fern (Members-at Large) and Jonathan Godfrey (National President).

Rule 10 Elections, clause 10.1, directs Blind Citizens NZ in its election procedures. In publicising the 2022 scheduled election and the call for nominations, members are advised that:

- people currently in these positions are eligible for re-election;
- the term of office for all 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 all three 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 identifies 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 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 and including 18 August 2022. If you are uncertain whether you meet the criteria, please contact our National Office to find out.

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 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 18 August 2022, are eligible to stand for election to these three positions.

The closing date for nominations is 4pm Thursday 18 August 2022. 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 each of the three positions is received, no election will be needed. Candidates will be declared elected unopposed. Should 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 18 August 2022**. No later than **Thursday 8 September 2022**, 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 27 September 2022**. Vote counting will take place no later than Wednesday 5 October 2022.

Participating in Blind Citizens NZ election: Blind Citizens NZ has several options available for members to participate in the 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 bulletin on TellMe. If you are in any doubt about your preferred communication option for Blind Citizens NZ's election being correctly documented, please contact our National Office to check.

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 TellMe. For many reasons, we encourage members to try TellMe. This offers a truly independent, confidential, and empowering voting experience. Using TellMe 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 can cast your vote.

Casting your vote by TellMe, means you are in control through every step of the process. This includes certainty that your vote will be received by the due date and time. There is no worrying about whether a postal ballot will reach its destination in time to be counted.

That is to say, the postal vote option offers less certainty that your vote will arrive by the close of voting. If you would like to know more about using TellMe and casting your vote using this option, please contact our National Office.

Count Me In – Dr Robbie Francis Watene Senior Researcher, Donald Beasley Institute

In 2018 I had just graduated from university when I received a phone call that would change my life's direction. For months, my attempts to find meaningful work had been fruitless, despite having a fairly good CV; qualifications, references, professional and lived experience to boot. The person on the other end of the line was an academic idol of mine. Associate Professor Brigit Mirfin-Veitch and I had worked together before, so the call wasn't entirely out of the blue. However, I never imagined that a casual catch-up would lead to the offer of full-time employment doing what I loved - advancing the rights of my community, the disability community.

The position I was being recruited for was Project Lead for the Disabled Person-Led Monitoring of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

It's a bit of a mouthful, but as Brigit explained it was a role that needed to be filled by a disabled person who could conduct academic research on the human rights experiences of disabled Kiwis, while also leading a team of disabled researchers. Having just completed my doctorate on disability rights and peacebuilding, I knew it was the role for me. "Count me in!" I said without hesitation.

What is Disabled Person-Led Monitoring?

In 2008 the New Zealand Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) - an international human rights treaty that promotes, protects and ensures the rights of disabled people so that we may have full equality under international law. To become a party to the UNCRPD, a government must first sign the agreement to signify that it agrees in principle. Next, the government is required to ratify it, and in doing so indicates that it intends to undertake the legal rights and obligations contained within the agreement.

Following ratification, the government must submit regular reports to a Committee of 18 independent disability experts, detailing how disability rights are being implemented in their country.

However, it's not only the signatory government that has the opportunity to have their say before the Committee - civil society can too. One of the most innovative aspects of the UNCRPD is Article 33.3 which ensures civil society (specifically disabled people and their representative organisations) are involved in monitoring the government's progressive realisation of the Convention. Here in Aotearoa, civil society monitoring is primarily carried out by the Disabled People's Organisation Coalition (DPO Coalition). Having already completed five monitoring reports since 2010, in 2018 the DPO Coalition decided to seek the additional expertise of a research provider to produce reports on how Aotearoa is doing when it comes to progressing disability rights.

The Donald Beasley Institute (DBI) was commissioned to do this work - a national, independent, non-profit organisation based in Ōtepoti Dunedin, which aims to advance the health and wellbeing of disabled New Zealanders through applied research, evaluation and education.

And this is where I come in. That life-altering call in 2018 made by the Director of the DBI, Associate Professor Brigit Mirfin-Veitch, led to me being employed as Project Lead for the Disabled Person-Led Monitoring under Article 33.3 of the Convention.

How do we monitor disability rights?

In its broadest sense, monitoring involves the collection, verification and use of information to address human rights problems. As mandated by the DPO Coalition, we use a methodology known as Disability Rights Promotion International (DRPI), which seeks to:

- Provide a voice to marginalised populations;
- Enhance public awareness by documenting abuses and violations;
- Reinforce a collective identity amongst the disability community;
- Support efforts to achieve social justice.

After going through a rigorous ethics process, disabled people from around Aotearoa are invited to share their human rights experiences with our disabled research team (monitors). This might be through an interview, a focus group, questionnaire, or any other data collection method that reflects an individual's cultural and communication will and preference. Furthermore, all research documents are provided in official languages and accessible formats, meaning all disabled people and their family, whānau, aiga and close supporters can participate.

During the first cycle of monitoring the right to adequate housing was selected as the key issue to be investigated, followed by the right to the highest attainable standard of health.

We are now about to launch the next cycle of monitoring which will investigate disabled people's experiences of supports and services under the newly established Ministry for Disabled People (name yet to be confirmed). It is expected that by the end of 2024 we will have engaged with over 600 disabled people, and produced four in-depth reports detailing disabled people's human rights experiences.

Why is monitoring research important?

One of the most important aspects of disabled person-led monitoring is that the findings contribute to new knowledge about disabled people's lived experiences. This knowledge is expert knowledge, and will both contribute to civil society's reporting to the UNCRPD Committee during the government's examination, as well as help to monitor the Convention's progressive realisation over time. This is a crucial aspect of improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of our community. Comprehensive information on the experiences of disabled people is a powerful tool for promoting the social change that is needed to realise the UNCRPD. For example, credible and accurate data about human rights can persuade governments that abuses are occurring and that action is needed to fulfil human rights obligations.

Another important aspect of disabled person-led monitoring is that it gives us, disabled people, an opportunity to lead our own research agenda. There is no doubt that disabled people have historically had a fraught relationship with 'research' - we have been poked, prodded, gawked at and studied, all in the name of science. But rarely has that science advanced our human rights. On the other hand, disabled person-led monitoring aims to be transformational at every step of the research process. From the project lead, coordinator and monitors, to the transcribers and translators, disabled person-led monitoring is an embodiment of "nothing about us without us."

For me, however, perhaps the greatest part of this work is having the privilege of training emerging monitors and building their capacity as disabled researchers, leaders and scholars in their own right. While human rights research is not without its challenges, we, disabled people, are undoubtedly the right people for the job at hand. I am so grateful to be on this journey and it is my dream that UNCRPD monitoring will continue to generate many more opportunities for budding disabled researchers to answer the call, and to confidently respond “count me in” without hesitation.

Audio Description Update - Sophie Jones, Communications and Marketing Manager, Able

As many of you may know, Able is New Zealand’s leading provider of audio description to make TV and film accessible for the blind and low-vision community. Able are on a journey of expanding how much audio description they provide for television, and have created an update to share with audio description users.

Sophie Jones (Able’s Communications Manager) sat down with Wendy Youens (Chief Executive) and Virginia Philp (Audio Description Team Leader) to discuss Able’s audio description expansion progress so far, and what's next for AD in New Zealand.

Below is an extract from the interview. Thomas Bryan is distributing a copy of the update as both a podcast, and a transcript, so please email him at thomas.s.bryan@gmail.com if you would like to listen to or read the full update.

Wendy Youens: “So 2020 was a big year for Able and a big year for the world. We had the COVID-19 pandemic hit us, and following that we had a really significant funding boost from New Zealand on Air. So, this additional funding almost doubled our operational funding, and that has enabled us to embark on a three year strategy of growth and expansion to provide more captioning and audio description to New Zealanders.

In that first year we focused on building the foundations for the expansion, so we implemented new cutting edge technology. We started to grow the size of our staff team at Able and then we started to focus on increasing the services.

We're into the second year of our expansion now and we're really starting to see the dial shift in terms of our output. So last year, after growing our audio description team, we were Able to grow our audio description output by a whopping 62%. So, we were really proud to expand our service by that amount and provide more audio description than we've ever been able to before. We are now audio describing 34% of possible content on TVNZ 1 and 27% of possible content on TVNZ 2. And we also audio describe a small selection of content on DUKE. Although we certainly hope to continue to grow our services even more, we have grown them really significantly in the past year. And that difference has come down to this, that most of the funding through the Public Media Fund that was available a couple of years ago.

What we currently have is a really high proportion of coverage on a small number of channels. So that's been great to expand to that point. But what we'd really love to see in the future and what we're consistently hearing from viewers is that people want more choice in terms of channels and platforms. So online streaming is absolutely huge. It's growing, and our goal is to work with broadcasters to improve the channels and the platforms so that they can host our audio description. It's a really crucial focus for us to have more of our services available online, and it also makes sense, obviously, if it's available on broadcast TV, we absolutely want to make it available online as well. We're also focused on expanding the number of channels that audio description is available on, and our ultimate vision is that all media is accessible and we want to provide our services across as many channels and platforms as possible.

Really, now we're in a situation where the ball is in the broadcaster's court, so they have to choose to invest in the technology so that we can provide the services to them. New Zealand on Air funds Able to provide the services. Broadcasters are responsible for making sure those services actually get to air. So actually, broadcasters are in quite a fortunate position because they're receiving these services for free, which is fantastic for them. And it's their responsibility, a social responsibility - and also it makes business sense for them to make the content available to as many viewers as possible. So, we really want to support and encourage broadcasters to make their platforms and channels as accessible as possible. And so, our goal over the next year is to keep working with broadcasters to make that possible, so that we can expand our services and give our viewers more choice.” – Wendy Youens, Chief Executive at Able.

Sophie Jones: “We’d now love to hear from you. As you’ve heard, our focus is on expanding the channels and platforms we host AD on, and we’re committed to doing as much as we can to influence change. It can’t all happen at once, so we’d love to hear from you in terms of what you’d love to see first.

We have two questions for you

1. Where would you love to see more AD - on OnDemand platforms, or on other channels (e.g. Three, or Prime?)
2. What impact would this have on your life?

You can send these through to me at hello@able.co.nz, or call our freephone number (0800 225 300). This is an opportunity to have your voice heard, and to support our work in advocating for improved accessibility across platforms.

Again, thank you for listening - and my inbox is always open. If you’re an AD aficionado, or if you have any complaints, compliments, or wonderings, please send them through to me at hello@able.co.nz. I look forward to hearing from you.”

Update on the establishment of the new Ministry for Disabled People

Kia ora koutou

In October 2021 the Government announced the establishment of a Ministry for Disabled People by 1 July 2022 as an opportunity to take a bold and transformative approach to how government supports disabled people and whanau. We know this has been a long time coming for disabled people, who are present in every community and across all parts of society.

The new ministry will include New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), reo Māori and English components, a first for government ministries. The name will replace the current working title – Ministry for Disabled People.

The ‘Nothing About Us Without Us’ mantra is central to the establishment of the new Ministry. It’s demonstrated in our unique governance structure – which has equal representation of disabled people, disabled Maori and the Crown.

How can I be involved or get information?

We’ve launched AmplifyU – an online platform that provides opportunities for two-way engagement on key topics such as the name of the new Ministry (www.amplifyU.org.nz/amplifyU). There’s also an AmplifyU Facebook page (www.facebook.com/amplifyU.nz). Developed and managed by disabled people for disabled people, the purpose of AmplifyU is to help people understand what’s happening, facilitate discussion and engage with the community to help ensure the establishment work is mana-enhancing, and that disabled people are central in the new Ministry's DNA.

You can also subscribe to email updates from the team working to establish the new Ministry by contacting this email address establishmentunit@msd.govt.nz.

In the subject line just say “updates please!” or something similar. We’ll also be communicating in a variety of non-digital formats.

What does the establishment of the new Ministry mean for people receiving disability support services?

Disability support services will continue with no disruption.

System transformation will happen after the transition to the new Ministry.

What’s happening now?

In the lead up to 1 July, the establishment team is focusing on transitioning systems and operations and ensuring disability supports are not disrupted through the change.

The temporary establishment team won’t set the identity, vision or strategy of the new Ministry or embark on disability system transformation – this will be led by the new chief executive and their team, in partnership with the community, once the new Ministry has been established and organised its operations.

What happens when the new Ministry is established?

From 1 July, there will be a stabilisation period as the new Ministry assesses options, and builds and embeds them, while ensuring there is no disruption to disability support services. During this period, the new Ministry would plan to design the approach for disability system transformation, consider how that might be phased and assess their priorities and timing.

To embark on disability system transformation, the new Ministry will need agreed values in place that are mana-enhancing, a partnership and governance structure that represents the disabled community and tāngata whaikaha Maori, and an effective, working voice mechanism that informs all mahi.

What does the future hold for the new Ministry?

Under the new chief executive, once operations are organised, the Ministry will:

- Drive better outcomes for all disabled people.
- Lead and coordinate cross-government strategic disability policy
- Work to deliver and transform disability support services.
- Progress work on the broader transformation of the wider disability system.

We have lots of work to do between now and 1 July and that's just the beginning of a new journey! Please do jump on the AmplifyU platforms and share the links if you'd like to. We're keen to hear from you and your whanau, friends and colleagues!

Other options to connect with our mahi include hui, Freepost to: Establishment Unit – ministry for Disabled People, Reply No. 262204, PO Box 1556, Wellington 6140. Our free-calling number is 0800 566 601.

Nga manaakitanga

The Communications & Engagement team

Ministry for Disabled People Establishment Unit

Kia ora from your upcoming Focus Editor by Áine Kelly-Costello

My name is Áine (pronounced On-ya), and I have the immense privilege of taking over the reigns as your next Focus Editor.

To introduce myself, I'm tangata tiriti and I whakapapa to Ireland, Scotland and Canada. I've grown up in Aotearoa since I was nine. I'm blind since birth in an otherwise sighted family, and I share that so you know something about the vantage point of my lived experience, given the diversity within our blind, deafblind, vision-impaired and low vision community.

I've been a member of Blind Citizens NZ for about nine years now, over which time I've done a stint on the Auckland Branch committee, have written for Focus and been part of many conferences. Some of you have been mentors to me. As someone in my twenties, I'm humbled learning about the long history of steadfast blindness advocacy in this country which has paved the way for blind folks like me to live fuller and more dignified lives on our own terms.

I've been active in the wider disability community for several years now, and advocated for kaupapa including disability pride, accessibility law, disability inclusive climate justice, migration discrimination, independent living and political participation.

I've also done some consulting, worked as a journalist and I host a podcast called Disability Crosses Borders.

I'm also chronically ill, having spent the last two years adapting to living with long COVID-19. I'm currently based in Norway where I have excellent support from my parents. I'm excited to hopefully be returning to Aotearoa in October this year.

With the editorial responsibility the Blind Citizens NZ Board has entrusted me with, I will strive for Focus to be an informative, accessible and engaging read first and foremost for our blind, deafblind, vision-impaired and low vision community, but also for the wider disability community and those striving to be our allies, from elected representatives to family, friends and colleagues. I'll do my best to feature contributions which represent a snapshot of the breadth and diversity of our community, especially perspectives from people who are marginalised in multiple ways. As it has always been, I see Focus as a space to probe both the political advocacy which has such a bearing on our lives, as well as reflecting on the trials, tribulations and joys of making our way as blind people in a sighted world.

For each Focus issue, I'll be setting a theme which will guide its focus (excuse the pun), including in my editorial. For the upcoming June issue, the theme is "Ministry for Disabled People: our hopes, fears and dreams." On July 1 this year, history will be made as this ministry (whose official name is still in the works) opens its doors. The question is, will the Ministry put in place the infrastructure and tikanga needed to deliver on the long-standing aspirations of disabled people for transformative, systemic, disability-led change? I want to know what you think.

Please send me your top hope for the ministry, your greatest fear or worry for what could set it back, and your bold and wild dream about the transformation you'd love it to propel. Keep it short, under 150 words. Include your name or indicate if you'd prefer it to be published anonymously. A selection of your views will be featured in the next Focus issue. Deadline Sunday 5 June.

Email address: focus.abcnz@gmail.com

I also welcome your pitches for substantive contributions to Focus on any subject. You can send in pitches on a rolling basis though those which tie into the theme will be prioritised. No problem if you're new to getting published. Please do check your idea with me before you start to write so I can let you know if it's a good fit and also if there's physically space for it! Please send your June issue pitches by 23 May, sorry about the tight turn-around. While Blind Citizens NZ is unfortunately not currently able to offer payment for contributions, Focus is widely distributed within our community, to MPs and stakeholders, so we endeavour to get your writing to a wide audience.

In closing, many thanks to outgoing Focus Editor Allan Jones for his service in editing this fine publication for the past four years. He has thoughtfully blended issues of relevance to blind people's lives with music, film and his own personal experience. All the best in your future and for stable health Allan!

Blind Citizens NZ is on the lookout for a National Feedback Line Coordinator

From time to time, Blind Citizens NZ provides opportunities for members to share their expertise and knowledge in a way that benefits members, and our community of people. On this occasion, the Board is looking for someone to take over the role of National Feedback Line Coordinator. Currently Shaun Johnson is the coordinator and has been doing a great job for many years. Shaun does however, wish to step down from this role.

Members interested in this voluntary position, are required to contact National Office for the National Feedback Line guidelines.

If you are interested but unfamiliar with Blind Citizens NZ's National Feedback Line, this is a great opportunity to learn more about a mechanism that helps keep members informed.

The Board will consider expressions of interest at its June meeting. Expressions of interest close at National Office, 9am Tuesday 2 June 2022.

2022 Annual General Meeting and Conference Diversity and Inclusion - Respect for Each Other

The dates and venue for this year's AGM and Conference are confirmed. We will be at the Ascot Park Hotel in Invercargill. To make the most of everyone's availability, and mindful of people's travel time, the Board has decided this will be a two-day event. We start at 9am Friday 7 October, finishing up after the Conference Dinner the evening of Saturday 8 October. Business sessions will run through Friday and the open day which includes guest speakers is on Saturday. Registration costs etc., will be shared in our June Focus issue. In the meantime we hope you will save the dates, and start planning to come along.

Please Support Our 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. Making Blind Citizens NZ the recipient of a bequest or legacy, is another way you can support us.

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, we suggest the following will assist your legal advisor...

“I give and bequeath to the **Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Incorporated (CC41040)**:

- \$ (a specific dollar amount); or
- A specific percentage of my estate; or
- The whole or a specific percentage of the residue of my estate.

Free from all duties and charges, as a contribution to the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc to be applied for general purposes only, for which the receipt of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc shall be sufficient discharge to my trustees.”

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

Discounted Total Mobility to 30 June 2022

In March the Prime Minister made an announcement regarding temporary concessions to public transport and petrol across the country to ease the cost of living. The concessions / discounts apply 1 April 2022 to 30 June 2022. Blind Citizens NZ fairly quickly advocated to Waka Kotahi-NZ Transport Agency for this consideration to apply to the Total Mobility Scheme. We advocated for a national approach. We acknowledge others may also have advocated for a concession.

On 29 March, Waka Kotahi–NZ Transport Agency confirmed with us, that it had ascertained all regions were able to implement the discount for public transport, including the Total Mobility Scheme (where the scheme operates). The discount applies from 1 April 2022 through to 30 June 2022 inclusive. Total Mobility users do not need to do anything different to benefit from the additional discount. Travel will be as normal. The only change is that the subsidy will be 75% per trip up to a maximum subsidy (as opposed to 50%). You will present (swipe or tap) your card as normal. The usual subsidy will be applied as well as the additional discount. You will pay the driver your balance.

For more information of a local nature, please contact your public transport / Total Mobility Scheme provider.

Membership Renewal Reminder

At our National Office and for many of our Branches, we are unable to accept cheques. Renewal of your annual membership subscription at a branch or network event remains an option. If you are unable to get your subscription to someone local, there are safe options to replace the in-person approach. You can ask your bank to assist with making a one-off payment. Or, you could ask your bank to set up an annual membership renewal payment to be paid at the same time each year. Otherwise, internet and phone banking are options you can independently use to pay your subscription. There is a form on the next page that may be useful when renewing your membership.

Membership Join / Renewal Form, 30 June 2023

Membership renewal falls due 1 July annually. You can return your completed membership form along with advice about payment of your membership renewal subscription to our National Office. Or you can hand this to your local Branch Treasurer. If depositing funds into Blind Citizens NZ's bank account, sending this form complete with all details will be really helpful. You can mail to PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242, email us admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz, or phone us on 0800 222 694. Unfortunately, we are no longer able to accept cheques.

Renewal of your membership by internet banking is encouraged. Blind Citizens NZ's bank account details are: 06-0230-0002634-00. Please include your name and the reference "MembSub" and let National Office know you have renewed your membership using online banking.

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.

- \$ 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.

I include a donation of: \$_____. This is a contribution towards (select from) **Board and 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
- **Members-at-Large:**
 - ✓ Martine Abel-Williamson: martine.the1@xtra.com
 - ✓ Wendy Chiang: wendy.chiang@gmail.com
 - ✓ Andrea Courtney: andycoute@gmail.com
 - ✓ Tewai Halatau: tewaihalata@gmail.com
 - ✓ Paula Waby (& WBU Representative): paula.waby4@gmail.com

Focus Editor,

Email articles to: focus.abcnz@gmail.com

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@blindcitizensnz.org.nz
- **Chief Executive, Rose Wilkinson:**
rwilkinson@blindcitizensnz.org.nz

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