



Blind Citizens NZ

Focus

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In this Edition **by Áine Kelly-Costello, Focus Editor**

Kia ora and welcome to the year's second Focus issue. It's Áine here and I'm honoured to be your new Focus editor. In this packed issue of focus, you'll find reflections on the creation of a new Ministry for Disabled People (name to be confirmed), on trust and good faith, on disabled-led Disability Convention research, on the Equipment Solutions shopping experience, and more.

Settle in and enjoy. Please do send me your feedback. I'm just learning the ropes but I'd love to hear what you'd like to see more or less of in Focus.

Email me at focus.abcnz@gmail.com

In addition, your ideas for written pieces on any topic of relevance to our community are welcome. For the September issue, I particularly encourage you to share your views on the theme for the upcoming Blind Citizens NZ Annual General Meeting and Conference which is "Diversity and Inclusion - Respect for Each Other". Your views on the Government's new accessibility legislation are also welcomed.

Disabled people are getting a Ministry - It's our job to hold it to account **Editorial, by Áine Kelly-Costello**

Note: views in this article are those of the Focus editor.

On July 1, a Ministry for Disabled People (whose name is still to be confirmed) will officially come into being in Aotearoa New Zealand. Considering that half a century ago, a significant number of disabled people still lived in institutions, the recognition, status and visibility of our community has shifted considerably. It's a moment for celebration and reflection, both on how we got here, and how we now move forward and hold the Ministry to account.

Disabled people wanted a Ministry. Government listened

Calls for a ministry for our community date back at least to the '90s, when the governmental approach to disability took a medical turn. Previously disability service provision had mainly been managed by social welfare, but with the repeal of the Disabled Persons' Community Welfare Act and introduction of a market-oriented, budget-driven approach to service provision, disabled people lost their statutory right to support. It was at this point that the Needs Assessment Service Coordination system along with its strict eligibility criteria were introduced, and service providers started bidding for funding contracts.

In 2020, when the Government's Health and Disability Review was released, then president of Disabled Persons Assembly Gerri Pomeroy described it as, "as we feared, a health review with disability tacked on". Media articles speaking to multiple disabled people and whānau again indicated broad support for a ministry.

In this sense, the Government has listened to the disability community on this point, which is a significant victory. But what's next?

Setting up the Ministry

The establishment of the Ministry involved steering and advisory committees with considerable disability representation, also ensuring Māori disabled were prominently represented. An effort has been made to give the majority of us who are not on those committees ourselves, ways to give our feedback, too. Initially, feedback was only invited through the online portal known as AmplifyU and its Facebook page. However, largely thanks to the advocacy efforts of Blind Citizens NZ, feedback via email, phone and post is now possible and these details are listed at the end of this article.

Regarding leadership, a significant number of disabled people, including myself, were less than impressed that a non-disabled person was chosen as the Ministry's establishment director late last year, when disabled candidates with senior leadership experience publicly stated they applied. Calls for seeking a disabled ministry Chief Executive did get picked up, perhaps as a result, though whether and how diverse disabled leadership will be assured in the Ministry's staffing remains an open question.

When the Ministry's communication's team was recruiting a Communication's Advisor in March, it sought a recent graduate and suggested the role could be a good CV-building experience. There was no mention given to knowledge of accessible and inclusive communication practices, flexible working arrangements, nor networks within the disability community and sector.

I emailed the communication's team about this at the time and they updated the advert addressing some of my concerns. Hopefully, that's the last time such an oversight happens.

Once set up, what will the Ministry do?

As specified during the announcement of its establishment, the Ministry will:

- Drive better outcomes for all disabled people,
- Lead cross-government strategic disability policy,
- Deliver and transform Disability Support Services, and
- Progress work on Disability System Transformation.

What about the resourcing? According to a budget day press release, the Ministry will employ an additional 50 full-time equivalent staff and the Office for Disability Issues will sit inside the Ministry. It's not clear how much of those 50 FTE are compensating for the Ministry of Health service delivery staffing element, which the new Ministry is taking over, though one hopes that "additional" staff really does mean new capacity.

What will change for disabled people's daily lives?

The proposed outcomes are big picture and general. That's arguably as it should be and provides plenty of scope for disabled people to hold the Ministry to a high standard.

Still, it's not unreasonable to ask, in a public service where disabled people are vastly under-represented, coupled with the ever-present political reality of rhetoric outstripping the extent and pace of meaningful change, what, concretely, will improve for disabled people as a result of establishing this new Ministry? I'm particularly thinking of the disabled people who are less connected with political processes and Disabled People's Organisations. I'm thinking of Māori and Pasefika disabled, of those in insecure housing and poverty, of migrants, of survivors of family and sexual violence, of gender and sexual minorities, of those who are not even eligible to receive disability support because of the narrow diagnostic criteria determining eligibility. I'm thinking, too, of those with multiple disabilities such as Deaf /deafblind people, and those with both mental health and other disability support needs, service provision for whom has been siloed for too long.

The announcement of the Ministry states it will “deliver support and drive better outcomes for all disabled people, embedding a ‘whole-of-life’, whole-of-family/whānau approach to disability”. I hope that this assurance has the diversity of folks currently missing out the most in mind.

Asking what's going to meaningfully change in the day-to-day lives of disabled people as a result of this Ministry is a long-term question, but long-term transformation requires deep roots and sturdy foundations to orient it.

Driving cross-government change

I recently sought to submit to a Government-promoted consultation. Upon downloading the requisite document to peruse, I found that not only were actual images not described but that significant chunks of text were hiding from screen reader users inside undescribed figures. Eventually, a design team member of the Ministry in question rectified this. I took the opportunity to suggest that the Ministry ensure it has more robust guidance for making accessible documents, and pointed them at the Accessibility Charter, which all Government agencies have signed. The Ministry confirmed they would indeed review their processes for making documents accessible.

I share this anecdote to emphasise that it should never be our job, as individuals, to chase up accessible information from the Government. Disabled People's Organisations can't possibly monitor every single government release or consultation for accessible formats, either. But a Ministry, well-resourced and with the requisite expertise, can play a proactive role in ensuring a high level of awareness across the whole of Government on things like making sure all public facing consultations provide information accessibly, including in alternate formats like Word, large print, audio, Braille, New Zealand Sign Language, and Easy Read.

However, accessible information is just the tip of the iceberg. While disability research has often been sparse, the last few years have seen a plethora of reports with concrete recommendations on how the Government could better serve disabled people. Whether it's on family and sexual violence, pandemic measures, disabled people's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, housing, health and wellbeing or the welfare system, so many of the steps the government could take to enable disabled people to live with choices and dignity are clear.

It's up to MPs to give Government agencies the mandate and the resourcing to follow the recommendations. The new disability Ministry would, if adequately resourced with the requisite expertise, be well-placed, to keep that change on track.

That's particularly the case for complex cross-Government issues like climate change and COVID-19, where disabled people's needs and expertise still frequently get overlooked.

Unshackling disability from health

The Ministry will be responsible for rolling out the self-determination-based Enabling Good Lives approach to disability service funding. That should go some way to unshackling disability from being subsumed under health, though there's no news yet on rectifying the deep funding inequities between ACC recipients and those whose disability did not result from injury or accident.

I also fear that we'll get a Ministry for disabled people, we'll get accessibility legislation, we'll get the self-determination-based Enabling Good Lives funding system, and yet, the prescriptive diagnostic systems used to classify who counts as disabled in Aotearoa ****New Zealand**** may be much slower to change. This has massive implications for what income and disability support people can access whether at home, at school or at work. By and large, chronically ill people, who tend to have extreme limitations on available energy among other symptoms, don't qualify.

Neither do people with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, nor do those who have any number of rare conditions. I for instance happen to be both blind and chronically ill. My blindness, ironically considering that my chronic illness is physically and cognitively disabling, provides a far more direct route to disability support.

If we, blind and disabled people, don't hold this Ministry to account, who will?

Disabled people have every right to set our expectations high, to band together, and collectively advocate for our present and our futures.

After all, all we're ever asking for is equity, redress and redesign for the systems which trap us in poverty, or make us fight for access to education or websites, or which make getting around our towns and cities a stressful chore.

It's our job to hold this Ministry, and indeed all of Government, to account, for ourselves and for each other. When we envision a better future together and advocate for it, we hold on to hope-in the knowledge that we more than deserve to stand in our own power as disabled people. So, tell the Ministry what you think, tell Blind Citizens NZ what you think. Together, let's seize the moment, as our new Ministry gets into gear, and make these months transformational, on our, blind and disabled, terms.

Give the Ministry your feedback

- **Freephone:** 0800 566 601
- **Email:** contact@whaikaha.govt.nz
- **Online portal:** <https://www.amplifyu.org.nz/>
- **Post:** Ministry for Disabled People, Reply Paid:262204, P O Box 1556, Wellington

References

Disabled Leadership Now website: <https://dln.org.nz>

MSD: Establishing a new Ministry for Disabled People – Budget 2022.

ODI: Government announces transformative changes for disabled people.

RNZ: Disability sector calls for separate Ministry, support unshackled from health system.

Trust and good faith: Is it too much to ask for?

Jonathan Godfrey, National President

It's hard to believe we're almost half way through 2022, but given how busy everyone around me has been, I shouldn't really be so surprised.

This column, reflecting on the importance of trust and good faith and what can happen when these values are eroded, is being drafted as we approach the launch of a new Ministry for Disabled People (actual name yet to be announced).

I've got my invitation, and if all goes to plan, I'll be there at the function to be held in Parliament to celebrate the outcome, and to honour the people that made it all happen.

2022 is panning out to be a massive year for us as disabled people and for Blind Citizens NZ in particular. Not only do we get a new Ministry, but Access Legislation will be introduced pretty soon, NZ gets examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN Committee). Then in October, we're off to Invercargill for our AGM and Conference.

I don't consider myself to be a great writer. If I'm honest, I'd rather be at another meeting with people who want to work with us than spend an evening drafting this column. I also get to worry that a new Focus editor will pick it to bits and demand better from me.

In the end though, I wouldn't have it any other way.

I'm very pleased that we have been able to attract Áine Kelly-Costello to take the role of Focus Editor. The Board has appointed her because we are willing to trust that she will do what is required of her. Even though I'm in line to be challenged by her editorial oversight, I'm also excited to be challenged by that prospect because it will help bring out the best of me.

My last contribution to Focus was a result of being challenged. I shared my speech delivered as Chair of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' Independent Monitoring Mechanism (IMM) with you because I thought it summed up so much of what we do, and how we do it. We do need to do some tough talking at times, but that is because we are speaking on behalf of people doing it tough. There's no ill-will towards anyone who works for Government, even if we must be critical of what Government does or does not do, and the consequences of those actions or inactions. We are trusted to say what needs to be said, and we do it in good faith.

I took on the role of IMM Chair because I knew I could add value to the IMM's normal processes, as well as the National Forum held in March and April. The Forum, although more work than I anticipated, was a success. I'm proud of the work done by Blind Citizens NZ as part of a team working in good faith, with a high level of trust.

The IMM's Governance Group has asked me to continue as Chair until after NZ's examination by the UN Committee. We will go to the United Nations in August and say to them that we have examined NZ's progress on realising the rights of disabled people, and that we've worked out what we think are the strengths and weaknesses of NZ's efforts over recent years. They'll have their say too of course and then we'll come back to NZ and work out how to address the recommendations put to us by the UN Committee. We'll be able to do so proactively because the IMM partners (DPO Coalition, Human Rights Commission and Office of the Ombudsman) work in good faith and have a high level of trust in one another. The IMM will continue to monitor the work done by our Government, but the IMM doesn't usually do much more than make recommendations and pass comment.

The work done with the Government is done in different ways. From the perspective of Blind Citizens NZ, this is done through the DPO Coalition when we can, and occasionally on our own or with the one or two other DPOs with an interest in a particular matter. We work with our DPO Coalition colleagues in good faith and with a high level of trust. Good faith and trust are the glue that keeps the Coalition working well as a coalition, but it is also what makes the DPO Coalition effective in our collaborative work with Government agencies.

Having trust that other parties come to the table in good faith means we can share views that aren't necessarily what the other parties would like to hear. We tell it like it is, because that is what they need to hear. When all parties know we are playing the ball, not the players, they learn to trust us. That trust and good faith is built up, and it is a reputation I believe Blind Citizens NZ is at pains to protect.

However, the trust and good faith Blind Citizens NZ enjoys when working within the DPO Coalition, with our IMM partners, and with Government ministers and officials, is not what we experience in all situations.

Let me back up a little to explain that the role of a DPO is to take the diverse views of a community and collectivise them in order to promote the wishes of that community as a whole. Everyone in NZ, including in our community, has freedom of speech. We do not though, have the right to breach anyone else's right to be free from abuse, including abusive language.

That means DPOs also have a role in moderating the more extreme views and looking for a constructive way to express even the most negative collective concerns.

Understanding the role of disabled people's organisations, or consumer organisations to use the language common among blindness sector organisations, is core to upholding the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the NZ Disability Strategy, and a number of other human rights instruments, as well as the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It is crucial that disability service providers appreciate this.

Article 2 of Te Tiriti is all about tino rangatiratanga. That is, the right to self-determination. The UNCRPD is full of reference to the English version of this very same right, notably in Article 4.3. Article 3 of Te Tiriti talks about equality of rights and outcomes; the UNCRPD is full of articles mentioning the need for disabled people to enjoy the same rights and outcomes as anyone else in society. Article 1 of Te Tiriti puts the onus for ensuring Articles 2 and 3 are upheld back on the Government. The UNCRPD also makes this abundantly clear.

In 1992, Bishop Manuhuia Bennett described Te Tiriti as a way two peoples (tangata whenua and tauwiwi) should take good care of each other.

This is not what actually happened between the signing of Te Tiriti in 1840 and 1975 (when the Waitangi Tribunal was established) or since, but surely we can learn from that history and apply those lessons in a disability context. That history is littered with examples where people did not work in good faith, or trust one another. That history is littered with good reason why Tangata Whenua were justified in not trusting the Government that was supposed to protect their rights under Articles 2 and 3.

During my adult lifetime though, there have been plenty of examples where Tangata Whenua have worked with Government in good faith, built trust, and helped create solutions that do uphold Article 2 and should lead to the realisation of Article 3.

Within the context of New Zealand disability service provision, I believe jointly honouring Te Tiriti and upholding the UNCRPD are core tenets of respecting disabled people's self-determination.

There is a lot of effort being put into making various organisations more Tiriti-led. They are embracing the principles of Te Tiriti and improving their policies and practices. Equally, I believe Tangata Whenua members within our own membership need to have an opportunity to express their collective aspirations and lived experience. How that is to happen is not for me to determine. Blind Citizens NZ is working with a group of members to find out how they as Tangata Whenua believe their collective voice would best be served within our organisation.

In May 2021, the RNZFB Chair and I worked on a joint statement. I would say we worked on this with trust and in good faith. That statement referred to an independent inquiry (still underway), a survey of staff to assess organisational culture, and a review of services. A year on from that statement being made public, we are still to learn what the review of services will look like. We do not yet know how clients and governing members of the RNZFB will be able to contribute to the review. We are told the review is going to happen, but people are losing confidence in that process while we are waiting for any news of substance to emerge. My conclusion is that even the best of intentions can lead to an erosion of trust. That trust will be eroded, no matter how often the RNZFB Chair asks us to have faith that the review is coming.

I do believe the RNZFB Board wants clients and governing members to be able to express themselves in a meaningful fashion.

This is self-determination at its best. Self-determination was at the very heart of the transformation from the Royal New Zealand Foundation **for** the Blind to a foundation **of** the blind twenty years ago.

I'm obviously a massive believer in collective self-determination. I'm actually really comfortable if my ideas get trumped by something better if it is the will of a democratic process or a well-governed process. I've been involved with numerous modifications of policies and constitutions because this is a key activity in many governance roles. For the most part, these various forms of accountability are designed to make sure the people being represented can have trust in the process and the people involved. But seldom do these documents ever mention "good faith" as a notion.

In recent times, I've been witness to an attempt to alter the terms of reference for some work I'm involved in. In every other terms of reference-update I've ever seen, there has been agreement among the affected parties before the new terms of reference are adopted. This is an exercise in good faith negotiation, because it needs to be if the collective work is to stay on track. If the parties can't agree to alter the terms of reference collegially, then there is little hope that the work will continue in good faith. When one party to a terms of reference thinks they can unilaterally update them, and does so in the knowledge that other parties do not agree to the proposed changes, then can that person or entity be trusted to continue in good faith with the work covered by those terms of reference?

Trust is important to me, and to Blind Citizens NZ. Knowing we are respected for working in good faith is important to me, and to Blind Citizens NZ.

My maternal grandfather taught me how to shake hands. He worked for a very well-known multinational food company, ultimately in a role that we would now call "Chief Executive".

He shook hands with everyone who entered his office, his home, and he did so again on their departure. He commented that I would be judged by others by how I looked them in the eye and shook their hand. He said that this mattered for letting other people know that I was meeting in good faith and that I could be trusted.

OK, we might just have to get past the eye-to-eye bit, but the litmus tests for trust and good faith aren't actually important. It is the ability to operate in good faith with others that matters. It is the degree of trust others place in each of us that matters. My grandfather died when I was fourteen, but I know how to shake hands properly and why it matters.

2022 Annual General Meeting and Conference Diversity and Inclusion - Respect for Each Other Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Plans are moving ahead for this year's AGM and Conference, at the Ascot Park Hotel in Invercargill. This year, we are condensing our business and open day to two full days. We start at 9am Friday 7 October, finishing up after the Conference Dinner the evening of Saturday 8 October. Business sessions will happen throughout Friday, and the open day with guest speakers is on Saturday. The full AGM and Conference registration package includes three night's accommodation (arrive Thursday 6 October, departing Sunday 9 October), all meals from Thursday evening's dinner to Sunday's breakfast, and morning / afternoon tea: Single accommodation \$655, and shared accommodation \$455.

There are also daily rates for those who live locally, or will be staying somewhere other than the Ascot Park Hotel. For more information contact our National Office (refer details at the back of this Focus issue). Your local Branch or Network will also have this information.

Financial assistance for 'first time' attendees: The Board is allocating funds to support '**first time**' attendees. Funding for '**first time**' attendees is about providing financial assistance for Ordinary (voting) Members. Other than attending the entire event for the first time, there are three conditions that a 'first time' attendee must meet before they can be considered for financial assistance.

The first is the requirement to make a financial contribution (determined on a case-by-case basis). The second is the commitment to attend the full two days of the AGM and Conference, whether on a daily basis, or staying at the Ascot Park Hotel. The third is that you are an Ordinary(voting) member who is financial.

If you meet the requirements and would like to take advantage of this opportunity, please contact the Chief Executive for further information via one of the following options:

- **Email:** admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz and put “2022 first-time attendee” in the subject line;
- **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242; **Fax:** 04-389-0033

Applications for financial assistance for first time attendees close 4pm, Thursday 4 August 2022. The Board will make a final decision about the number of members it can support following the close of expressions of interest.

To lighten the load a little with paying your registration costs, you can take advantage of the option to pay by instalment. You can find out more and put a payment plan in place by contacting National Office. Each situation is considered on a case-by-case basis.

We hope you have saved the dates, have booked your travel and that you're planning to join us all...

Disabled-led research finds wide-spread housing, health and wellbeing rights violations

Robbie Francis, Donald Beasley Institute

In May 2022 the Donald Beasley Institute, in partnership with the New Zealand Disabled People's Organisations Coalition, released three reports documenting the housing and health and wellbeing experiences of disabled New Zealanders.

Since 2018, I have had the privilege of leading this work, known as the Disabled Person-Led Monitoring of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Together with a team of disabled researchers we have talked with hundreds of disabled people and their family, whānau and close supporters about how their human rights are (not) being met.

The stories they shared were deep, insightful, raw and painful. From housing, to health and wellbeing, disabled people in Aotearoa experience significant injustice, disadvantage and rights violations - perhaps more so than any other sector of society. This is particularly true for people with multiple and complex disabilities, people with learning disabilities and our tāngata whaikaha and whānau hauā, and tagata sa'ilimalo colleagues.

On the housing front, our work investigated disabled people's right to adequate housing. Participants shared that the housing market (both private and public) lacked physical access and there were often long delays in getting modifications. Others reflected on the lack of affordable or adequate housing (for example, insulated and mold-free accommodation). The negative attitudes held by people in positions of power (such as landlords) were also identified as barriers, together with disabled people's lack of control over their living situations. Many Interviewees felt physically and mentally unsafe in their homes, with inadequate housing negatively impacting on their mental health.

A number of Interviewees weren't aware of their housing rights under the UNCRPD, but still demonstrated a strong ability to advocate for themselves. Many felt that their right to "live in the community with choices equal to others" and to an "adequate standard of living" were not being upheld. As observed in the conclusion, "disabled people know what they are entitled to and what needs to change for their rights to be made real".

Regarding health and wellbeing, we found that many disabled people experience financial, physical, mental, communication and sensory barriers when accessing affordable and high-quality healthcare. Negative attitudes held by health professionals about disability were also reported as a barrier, and many Interviewees felt deprived of choice and control over the services, medication and treatment they received. Blind interviewees reported additional challenges such as the inaccessibility of health apps, a lack of email addresses for direct communication with medical professionals, and limited options when managing basic necessities during COVID lockdowns, particularly in circumstances where online ordering wasn't a possibility. The health and wellbeing report concluded that “while the concept of ‘progressive realisation’ indicates that some aspects of the Convention can be implemented over time, it has taken more than 13 years to begin to address disabled people’s right to the highest attainable standard of health”.

To those we interviewed or who resonate with the experiences shared in these reports, we hear you. We see you. We read your words. We listened. We shared in your pain. We must do better.

You can now access all three monitoring reports through the Donald Beasley Institute website in PDF, Te Reo Māori, NZSL, Easy Read, Braille, Large Print, Plain Text and audio:

1. My Experiences My Rights: A Monitoring Report on Disabled Person's Experience of Housing in Aotearoa New Zealand.
2. Housing for Disabled People: Family, Whānau and Close Supporter Perspectives.
3. My Experiences My Rights: A Monitoring Report on Disabled People's Experience of Health and Wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The full range of alternate formats can be found at this link

<https://tinyurl.com/mwf8c2vp>

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

This year's election process for the positions of National President and two Members-at-Large began with publicising dates etc., in our April Focus issue. Individuals (and positions) for those 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. This is the final notice and call for nominations for the 2022 scheduled election. 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 should take the time to 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.

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 via one of the following options:

- **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 is needed.

Candidates will be declared elected unopposed. Should nominations exceed the number of positions being elected an election will 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.

Blind Citizens NZ members call for Equipment Solutions overhaul **by Áine Kelly-Costello**

NB: this article reflects the views of various contributors to discussions among Blind Citizens NZ members on Equipment Solutions. It does not necessarily reflect any position of Blind Citizens NZ or the author.

Pressure is building for Blind Low Vision NZ management and the RNZFB Board to convert purchasing from the country's main blindness equipment store into a user-friendly and efficient experience.

The topic gathered steam on the Blind Citizens NZ mailing (e-mail) list in April and May, after a member reported challenges obtaining online bank account details for item payment and difficulties tracking their order. The member also noted disappointment that, despite the availability of instructions in multiple formats, this availability wasn't communicated and only print instructions were included.

The ensuing e-mail list discussion canvassed dissatisfaction with the current alleged profit-oriented approach to managing Equipment Solutions, which, a former RNZFB Board director suggested, was resulting in Blind Low Vision NZ management pursuing regressive least-cost decisions like administering the online purchasing process via Trade Me. Blind Low Vision NZ Chief Executive John Mulka declined to respond in writing on this point.

Members noted that the previously-available online system had been more functional, and also that an easy-to-use option was a must for those unable to resort to purchasing via the call centre. Others pointed out that it also used to be possible, at least in Auckland, to visit the store onsite, check out items that way and purchase them there.

An extensive collection of suggestions for improvement included:

- running Equipment Solutions in a non-profit-making way;
- providing descriptions and prices of all items in multiple formats;
- an email address for placing orders;
- phone ordering which can be done outside office hours;
- faster response times;
- a regular newsletter with specials and product tips;
- making all product instructions available online as well as providing them in preferred formats;
- wider product selection, product testing to advise on suitability, and encouraging recommendations from members on the products they'd like stocked;
- the ability to check out products hands-on across the country.

As a result of the discussion, many members flagged their concerns to the Board via email. Board Chair Judy Small responded that the organisation's Board and management were aware of the concerns, and that, since the 2021 AGM, management have been undertaking “significant actions to investigate possible solutions to the items raised”.

Judy also noted that the FY23 Business Plan includes the following provision: “Review the current offerings and determine the best future method for the provision of Equipment Solutions with key principles / determinants of broadening to a wide range of available products, fully accessible online presence, web store and subsidised purchases for Blind Low Vision NZ members”.

Judy noted that the Board would table the correspondence at its July 2nd meeting. This was met with calls to bring the timeline forward by raising the concerns with the newly-formed Client Services Committee. As at June 14, there has been no further update from the RNZFB Board about whether or how this could be done.

Blind Citizens NZ National President Jonathan Godfrey pointed out in an email that the organisation has been advocating for a modern fit-for-purpose service for years.

“Blind Citizens NZ has shared its long-held position on Equipment Services with numerous BLVNZ staff over many years,” he wrote. “The views expressed in recent times align with our vision that blind people need dedicated equipment at an affordable price. We need to know that the products are the best on offer and are recommended by other blind and low-vision people. We don't have that today”.

As was clear from the list discussion, multiple blind people are questioning how this core blindness service was allowed to regress to such a user-unfriendly state in the digital age of 2022. This was, some list members felt, one symptom of a wider disfunction within Blind Low Vision, where the concerns of users of blindness-specific services were not receiving timely attention. This was, members pointed out, coupled with Blind Low Vision staffing shortages and perceived decreasing quality of services.

Blind Low Vision Chief NZ Executive John Mulka declined to provide a written response on these points. However, a communication jointly prepared by the RNZFB Board and Blind Citizens NZ, distributed back in May 2021, strongly suggested such matters would be reviewed. It stated:

“After considering issues brought to its attention by Blind Citizens NZ, the RNZFB Board has committed to taking a number of steps to review issues relating to its provision of services, relationships with clients, organisational culture (particularly focusing on employee relationships) and decisions around service changes”.

Thus far, the RNZFB Board has only confirmed that the organisational culture component is under review.

In conclusion, will Equipment Solutions transform into a store blind folks can enjoy visiting, in the knowledge that ordering the Braille paper or talking thermometer or whatever it is they need will be a convenient, affordable and hassle-free experience? Will that happen in FY23 as the business plan suggests it could? Will a wider review of services also be on the cards sooner rather than later? Time will tell, and Blind Citizens NZ members will be watching.

Reflections on the New Ministry for Disabled People From Andrea Ann Kepes

Editor's note: In the last edition of Focus, I asked for your views on the new Ministry for our community. Here's a contribution from Andrea Ann Kepes of Nelson. Over to Andrea.

This Ministry is well overdue and exciting news for those of us who are challenged on a daily basis by a disability/ies.

It's about equity of opportunity, including good access for all and disability-friendly building design and adaptation.

It's powerful for the visually-impaired community to align itself with the new Ministry and all other Kiwis with a disability of any kind.

Personally, I would like to see better, stronger lighting in buildings, light-coloured carpets not dark and forms /menus with larger fonts.

I'd also really welcome a public education campaign around how we can better support Kiwis with disabilities – and how everyone benefits when we do. Let's stress that anyone can develop a disability and, inevitably and partly because of our ageing population, the numbers of people with disabilities will continue to grow and grow.

We need to focus on the 'ability', not the 'dis' and celebrate the contribution and unlimited potential of Kiwis who live with disabilities and are therefore differently abled.

Bring on the Ministry, I say!

Editor's note on language: "disabled people" is the term most widely adopted by the disability community in Aotearoa **New Zealand**, as well as by Government. There are lots of things that disable us rooted in ableism and social prejudices, so "disabled" isn't a bad word. But Andrea makes a great point about challenging low expectations so that disabled people can flourish.

Opportunity for Ordinary Members to submit Nominations for the Beamish Memorial Medal, and Johnston Cup for Leadership

Annually Blind Citizens NZ provides the opportunity for Ordinary Members, to submit nominations for the Beamish Memorial Medal and Johnston Cup for Leadership. The Board receives all nominations and makes its decision about each of these awards. The Board's decision remains confidential until Blind Citizens NZ's Annual General Meeting and Conference, when it presents organisational awards. Here now, is information about each of the awards and the respective closing dates.

- **Beamish Memorial Award:** the most prestigious award Blind Citizens NZ has the honour and privilege of awarding to anyone within the organisation. Recipients of this award must be Ordinary Members of Blind Citizens NZ. To be eligible they must have made an outstanding contribution to society in their particular field of service to the community. If you know someone deserving of this award, who meets this criteria, and for whom recognition is needed for their outstanding efforts, send the information to National Office.

- When you submit your nomination, please include the person's name and contact details, as well as information and reasons in support of the nomination. Beamish Memorial Medal nominations must be received at National Office no later than **4pm, Tuesday 30 August 2022.**
- **Johnston Cup for Leadership:** Blind Citizens NZ aims to encourage members to accept leadership responsibilities inside and outside the blind community. Also, to develop an environment that recognises members for their leadership wherever and whatever that might be or mean for them. This award encourages and recognises leadership potential from amongst Ordinary Members of Blind Citizens NZ. If you know someone whose leadership has contributed in a demonstrable way, or they have assumed leadership responsibilities that exceed their role, send your nomination to reach National Office **by 4pm Wednesday 24 August 2022.**

Appointment Updates

By Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

In recent Focus issues, the Board has called for expressions of interest in nationally appointed Blind Citizens NZ positions. In this Focus issue you hear from and we welcome Áine Kelly-Costello to her first editorial and Focus edition.

The Board at its June meeting, made the following appointments:

- **National Feedback Line Coordinator:** Vaughan Dodd is appointed to this role, taking over from Shaun Johnson as of 3 July 2022. Shaun has pretty much single-handedly been running Blind Citizens NZ's National Feedback Line since 2017. The Board's thanks are conveyed to Shaun for his contributions, and at the same time welcomes Vaughan Dodd.

- **Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ):**
The Board welcomes Pauline Melham as its appointee to the BLENNZ Board of Trustees. Pauline will attend their first meeting in August, and the Board looks forward to the contributions they will be making on behalf of Blind Citizens NZ and blind, deafblind, vision impaired and low vision learners.

Auckland Disability Law's assessment of proposed Accessibility Legislation

Note from Editor: Auckland Disability Law (ADL) is a Community Law Centre that provides free legal services to disabled people to help with their disability related legal issues. ADL have provided us with an independent assessment of the Government's proposed accessibility legislation, which is slated to be introduced into Parliament in late July. Some months after that, it will be before select committee, when all of us can comment on what we think of it to government. ADL's independent assessment is a great public service to our community and I encourage you to read it.

Introducing the assessment, ADL writes:

Deaf and disabled people and their supporters have for a long time been calling for better accessibility so as to fully participate in all aspects of society. This covers areas such as public buildings and facilities, the urban environment, education, retail, services, information and culture.

The current Labour Government, in its 2020 election manifesto said it would "introduce an Accessibility for New Zealanders Act to help New Zealand to become more welcoming and accessible for disabled people and other New Zealanders with accessibility needs".

This new legislation is nearly here. It will have a profound impact on how we as Deaf and disabled people participate in society. But will it meet our expectations?

ADL decided to address this by publishing its own independent assessment of the current law and the steps the Government will take to make New Zealand more accessible. ADL has no formal position on access legislation and its paper makes no recommendations. Rather, it is an independent objective assessment, based on legal research into the publicly available information, by an experienced disability lawyer contracted by ADL for this work. ADL hopes it will help deaf and disabled people and their supporters to be better informed about the proposed disability access legislation.

You can access the paper, as well as a summary of it, in various alternate formats here:

- Accessibility Legislation - An Initial Critique (MS Word): <https://tinyurl.com/29e4hpsp>
- Summary of ADL's Accessibility Assessment (MS Word) <https://tinyurl.com/jffjaz5r>
- Summary of ADL's Accessibility Assessment (New Zealand Sign Language) <https://tinyurl.com/ycx7a58v>
- For audio, Braille or large print versions, contact Blind Citizens NZ National Office.

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.co.nz
 - ✓ Wendy Chiang: wendy.chiang@gmail.com
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- **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 the Lotteries Grants Board, and Blind Low Vision NZ.