



Blind Citizens NZ

Focus

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Welcome to the December 2023 Focus Issue

Áine Kelly-Costello - Focus Editor

Whew, we made it to the end of 2023! In this Focus edition, my editorial shares some whakaaro (thoughts) about exploring te ao Māori and te reo Māori as one blind Pākehā person. The National President's column discusses the value of people to Blind Citizens NZ and dates for engaging with him directly are presented later in the edition. There's a rundown on the 2023 AGM and Conference from the Chief Executive, including awards presented. Don't miss an exciting announcement about the creation of the Braille Special Interest Network, coordinated by Chantelle Griffiths.

Finally, there are expressions of interest for the Blind Citizens NZ Primary World Blind Union Delegate position as well as for the Focus Editor role. My final edition will be in March 2024. I'm more than happy to talk informally to anyone considering applying for the role if that would be useful, you can email my personal address ainekc@gmail.com.

Wishing you all the happiest of holidays and all the best for 2024!

Exploring te ao Māori and te reo Māori - whakaaro from one Pākehā blind person Editorial - Áine Kelly-Costello, Focus Editor

He whakataukī

“Tūwhitia te hopo”: Feel the fear and do it anyway.

Hopo: fear, trepidation, a sinking feeling of dread

From Aroha: Māori wisdom for a contented life lived in harmony with our planet by Hinemoa Elder

Note: for reference, the Māori terms used in the rest of the article are listed at the bottom with approximate brief translations to the best of my understanding.

I'm a Pākehā immigrant to Aotearoa New Zealand, my family arriving when I was nine. Though details are blurry now, I remember the hospitality of the mana whenua as my marine ecologist father along with the rest of the family received a powhiri at his new workplace based in the small northern Auckland town of Leigh, complete - as is customary - with the sharing of kai. I am lucky to have a place to stand in this country by way of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, something I, like probably most of you reading this, learned very little about at school. The few times I have been on marae, I have felt really welcome, and participating in kapa haka at school there was always an effort to make sure I was fully taking part.

Still, for disabled people, focusing on blind people for the purposes of this piece, there are real barriers to exploring or being immersed in te ao Māori and te reo Māori.

Before delving into that, I want to note upfront that this whole kaupapa hits differently, and much harder, for tāngata whenua. By virtue of being Pākehā, it's important that I recognise the intergenerational hurt and alienation from land and culture which results from colonialism.

I don't have to choose between services which meet my disability or cultural needs, for instance. And I want to make sure that my well-intended interest in learning reo Māori doesn't take a limited course enrolment place away from Māori themselves.

But I wanted to write about this topic because while I see so much discussion and sharing of resources among many of my (mostly sighted) friends and social media circles, I think all of us need the space to talk about what we might notice as blind people too. This piece is in the spirit of sparking that conversation.

Where to start learning?

There are as many answers to that question as people. But if you have access to the Blind Low Vision NZ library, preferably on a device that lets you write down your search terms, you will discover a growing collection of books examining the history of te ao Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, along with books about Māori spirituality, about learning the language, and books which are themselves in te reo Māori. I'm currently contemplating my way through the wisdom-filled collection of whakatauki by Hinemoa Elder referenced at the top of this editorial. And I'm very appreciative of access to audiobooks, because I can relax and temporarily forget that screen readers and reo Māori are yet to make friends.

The basic BLVNZ library search is found at

<https://blindlowvision.org.nz/our-services/accessible-library/>. Typing "Māori" into the box, for instance, brings up 27 results for me.

Underneath each book, you are presented with a number which you can feed to an Alexa if you want to read the book on there, or type it into the search box of the Easy Reader app. For the advanced search form that allows you to dive into categories, specify the book format and more, follow the link on the above page for "Classic and Braille search".

If listening is your thing and you're after something shorter than books, there are a lot of excellent podcasts out there which you can subscribe to through your podcast app of choice. Try The Aotearoa History Show from RNZ, or for learning some reo, I'm really appreciating Everyday Māori by Hēmi Kelly and Āpera Woodfine. A super informative show that goes much deeper into many varied kaupapa, for anyone who already has some familiarity with te ao Māori, is the Taringa podcast from Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

Screen readers and te reo Māori

Let's face it, however much we might want to immerse ourselves even in English texts with reo Māori throughout, the abominable pronunciation of our screen readers is, at least, distracting, and at worst, so off-putting that we stay away. There aren't any silver bullets here, yet unfortunately, but there are things we can do to make the situation a little more tolerable. If you don't yet know how to reach your screen reader's pronunciation dictionary, look that up. This is the place where you can customise (to a point at least), how words are pronounced. Fiddle around with some spellings until whānau sounds more like faa-no and less like wa-now, and until you get the hard g out of tāngata (try something like taang attah...). Onehunga and Papatoetoe are other notorious clangers until treated to similar assistance.

If you are trying to read full sentences, as opposed to the odd word or two, using the free Windows-based NVDA (non-visual Desktop access) screen-reader with the eSpeak NG synthesiser does give you options of voices called "Māori" and "Hawaiian", whose pronunciation is certainly a lot closer to what you're after than the English. My preference out of the two is the Hawaiian one and if anyone gets stuck trying to configure them for easy switching, consult section 12.4 of the NVDA user guide or let me know and I'll go through it with you. Just make sure you know how to return to the English voice before enabling either of them because those voices have absolutely not been programmed for pronouncing English!

Braille and te reo Māori

Luckily, the only new symbol to know for Braille readers who haven't read any reo Māori in Braille before is dots 4-5-6 for the macron. A vowel with a macron in front of it is pronounced with the same sound but is longer in length. Meanwhile, the wh contraction is used for the corresponding sound (which is like an English f) and other than that the Braille is in grade 1. Note that a macron symbol in Unified English Braille, such as you'll find if you're using an iPhone set to the UEB table, is dot 4 and a dash, so 4, 3-6. With that knowledge, inputting reo Māori with Braille screen input using UEB suddenly becomes much easier.

With the NVDA screen reader on windows, it's also possible to customise how macrons are output on a Braille display using the Braille extender add-on.

Typing macrons on a computer keyboard

On Windows, by far the quickest way to type the vowels with macrons is to use the keyboard called "NZ Aotearoa". In the world of Windows settings, keyboards get added under a specific language, so have a look for preferred languages, select "English (New Zealand)" and then add that keyboard under there. To type a macron, you'll use the little key above the tab, typed directly before the corresponding vowel. Macrons aren't optional particularly as meaning often shifts based on the presence of macrons alone. If you're not able to type macron symbols, an alternative is to double the vowel, so Pākehā becomes Paakehaa for instance.

Staying on a marae

Accessing in-person activities in general is difficult for me due to a mix of the familiar transport barriers and my being chronically ill. But I fortunately had the privilege to stay on a marae this year, among a group of people from a shared kaupapa.

The manaakitanga shown was wonderful though I made myself a few mental notes about logistics.

When greeting individually with hongi as part of the powhiri, I realised it was easier for me to let myself be swept along by the general direction of the group rather than to try to maintain sighted guide which was resulting in my being missed sometimes. Following the tikanga of taking shoes off before entering the wharenuī and placing them among 50 odd other pairs of shoes meant I needed to know how to describe my shoes well to anyone who'd never seen them before. The same went for all my belongings. When it was time for sleep and the mattresses were placed pretty much filling the room, I made sure I knew who I was sleeping beside. If doing it again, I'd probably have tried to bags a spot beside a wall, in case I did need to independently manoeuvre out of the space. Out of respect for tikanga, I needed to pay attention when I was entering the wharenuī to not inadvertently carry food inside and to check that I wouldn't accidentally sit on a pillow on the floor (though these were promptly cleared away in the mornings).

During our wānanga, there was a moment where one of our group of manuhiri accidentally bumped one of the photos of tīpuna on display on the walls in the wharenuī. The person apologised and the local hau kāinga was gracious about it. All the while, I hadn't clocked until that point that we were literally surrounded by this very tangible visual reminder of the presence of ancestors watching over and guiding us.

In general, I always have some worry in the back of my head that I'll do something that doesn't follow tikanga without realising it and that no one will tell me. That, obviously, isn't a purely non-visual issue, though whether it's the presence of signage or people copying others, sometimes you really don't know what you can't see if someone doesn't make a point of communicate it in another way.

Accessing the arts

While there traditionally hasn't been as much audio description available to Māori and Pacific communities, that's meaningfully shifting in recent years. Audio Described Aotearoa and Te Rōpū Waiora organised audio description at this year's Te Matatini Kapa Haka festival. Some performances centred within te ao Māori and Pacific culture like The Haka Party Incident, Upu, Dawn Raids, Red White and Brass and a Siva Afi festival have also been described. Audio Described Aotearoa also received funding this year to train Māori and Pacific audio describers in collaboration with blind consultants. Nicola Owen spoke to Arts Access Aotearoa about this at the time [1].

“In a few years’ time,” she said, “we want to be in a place where online audio description extends to Māori and Pacific arts; where films like Whina and Muru come with audio description tracks written and recorded by Māori describers; and where Disney films like Moana, with the soundtrack recorded in te reo Māori, also have te reo Māori audio description.”

Joining in the waiata or kapa haka

I love the richness of singing waiata together, and often groups will learn them together so everyone who doesn't know the waiata in question can follow along. In recent times, Auckland Arts Festival has ensured that some of its events centred on waiata have had the option to request Braille song sheets in advance. I attended and thoroughly enjoyed one such sing-along.

Conversely, just as when singing in any other group, getting stuck without access to the kupu if everyone sighted does have access to the words doesn't feel great, especially because it's hard to glance at them on a phone at a moment's notice given the aforementioned problems with screen reader pronunciation. This is just another of those: plan in advance if possible, and advocate for what you need situations, I think.

I was lucky that when I took part in kapa haka at school, I did have access to the kupu while learning, most of the time, and I did usually have assistance with learning the movements and actions so I could fully participate. Admittedly, I gave up on trying to coordinate the long poi pretty quickly, but still, I was shown them, and I had a go!

Returning to the whakatauki I opened with, tūwhitia te hopo. For tangata Tiriti like me, it's such a gift to be able to explore te ao Māori. Let's try not let fear stand in the way of starting to learn, and to accessing the bounty of resources and experiences that we can, while being open about the challenges too.

References

1 Audio Described Aotearoa to train Māori and Pacific audio describers. Arts Access Aotearoa. <https://t.ly/exJlk>

2 Environment as marae locale. Kawharu 2010. <https://t.ly/t2yvF>

Māori language words used in the article

- **Te ao Māori:** the Māori world.
- **Hau kāinga:** home people, local people of a marae.
- **Hongi:** a form of greeting involving touching noses frequently done as part of powhiri.
- **Kai:** food.
- **Kapa haka:** performance of Māori song and dance which is affirming of Māori culture and identity.
- **Kaupapa:** (roughly) subject, values-based orientation.
- **Kupu:** word(s).
- **Manaakitanga:** hospitality, care.
- **Manuhiri:** visitors.

- **Marae and wharenuī:** a Marae is a place where tangata whenua, (Māori) people of the land, have sovereignty. It is "the focal point where values of stewardship and management in relation to the environment and to people are grounded" [2]. The site often includes a courtyard, wharenuī or meeting house and other buildings, as well as an ancestral burial ground or urupā.
- **Pākehā:** (loosely) New Zealand European or white people.
- **Poi:** "a light ball on a string of varying length which is swung or twirled rhythmically to sung accompaniment" (Te Aka Māori dictionary definition).
- **Powhiri:** a customary Māori welcome for visitors given by the local tangata whenua or hosting people of the land.
- **Tangata Tiriti:** people living in Aotearoa by virtue of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (in contrast to tangata whenua).
- **Tangata whenua:** literally people of the land, here referring to Māori.
- **Te Tiriti o Waitangi:** the Māori text of the Treaty of Waitangi, the country's founding treaty signed by Māori chiefs and the Crown in 1840.
- **Te reo Māori:** the Māori language.
- **Tikanga:** Māori customs and values.
- **Tīpuna (or tūpuna):** ancestors.
- **Waiata:** song, singing.
- **Wānanga:** gathering for discussion and sharing knowledge.
- **Whakaaro:** thinking, ideas.
- **Whakatauki:** a proverb (where the author isn't known).
- **Whānau:** loosely meaning family/extended family.

He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata
Jonathan Godfrey - National President
Blind Citizens NZ

He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata.
What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is
people, it is people.

I love the sentiment expressed here which comes from a longer
whakataukī Māori or proverb. It asks how the bellbird would sing if the
shoot at the heart of the flax bush was plucked out and focuses on
the importance of the whānau unit for nurturing people. [1]

I've referred to this proverb in so many situations to remind my
audience about the importance of people to me, our work, and
hopefully, our society.

At the Blind Citizens NZ Board meeting in November, I put forward
the idea that the title of this column should be the theme for our 2024
Annual General Meeting and Conference and that it should also be
the over-arching theme of all we do as an organisation over the next
twelve months. This was accepted for so many reasons, chief among
which is that we must turn our focus towards our people, our
branches and networks, and to securing the future of our
organisation. Central to this thinking is that people are the future of
our organisation.

If the next twelve months are to be transformative, we will need to
commit organisational resources, both financial and human resources
to the effort. We will need ideas and cooperation from people to make
the transformation a reality we all wish to share in.

We will be running an advocacy/ | leadership workshop, and we will put energy into supporting branches and networks to help make Blind Citizens NZ more relevant to a wider number of blind and low-vision people.

In discussing what we need to think about, one Board member asked what we could do with artificial intelligence to help us do what we do. I've had a bit of experience working with ChatGPT this year, both to help me do what I want done, but also so that I can tell when my students are doing their own work. The next three sections of my column were generated with the help of ChatGPT. Each piece is 400 words long, and was generated by a single sentence describing what I wanted. I have modified the resulting text to remove obvious clangers in terminology. I think many of you will see that it is definitely not my style, but each section could theoretically have been written by a real person. I hope you'll consider what take-aways you have from reading them. I've provided mine at the end.

Building Bridges: The Crucial Role of Collaboration for Blind people in New Zealand

In the vibrant tapestry of New Zealand's diverse society, the significance of collaboration cannot be overstated, especially for individuals with vision impairments. For the blind community, the journey towards inclusion and empowerment is paved with the bricks of cooperation and understanding.

Navigating the world without sight requires resilience and adaptability. In a society that often prioritizes individual achievements, the blind community in New Zealand thrives when the spirit of collaboration takes center stage. Working with people isn't just a preference; it's a necessity for fostering an environment where everyone, regardless of their abilities, can contribute meaningfully.

One of the fundamental aspects of collaboration for blind individuals is the cultivation of an inclusive workplace.

By embracing diversity and breaking down barriers, employers not only create a more welcoming atmosphere but also tap into a wealth of untapped talent. Blind individuals bring unique perspectives, problem-solving skills, and a tenacity that enriches the collective experience.

Moreover, collaborative efforts extend beyond the professional realm. In a country known for its breathtaking landscapes, blind individuals often rely on the support of their community to explore and enjoy the beauty of New Zealand. Whether it's participating in local initiatives, joining recreational clubs, or engaging in communal activities, the blind community's involvement is not just about being present but actively contributing to the shared experience.

Technology, too, plays a crucial role in enhancing collaboration for the vision impaired. In a world dominated by screens and vision cues, assistive technologies have emerged as powerful tools, bridging gaps and enabling seamless communication. By investing in and promoting accessible technologies, New Zealand can further empower its blind citizens to connect, collaborate, and thrive in the digital age.

The essence of collaboration lies in breaking down stereotypes and fostering a culture of empathy. By working hand-in-hand, sighted and vision impaired people can dispel misconceptions, promote understanding, and dismantle the barriers that hinder full participation in society. New Zealand has the opportunity to lead by example, showcasing the strength that comes from unity in diversity.

In conclusion, the importance of working with people, especially for blind people in New Zealand, cannot be overstated. Collaboration isn't just a means to an end; it's the cornerstone upon which an inclusive and empowering society is built. By embracing diversity, fostering inclusivity, and harnessing the power of technology, New Zealand can pave the way for a future where everyone, regardless of their abilities, can contribute to the rich tapestry of the nation.

Co-Governance: Navigating New Frontiers for Blind Māori in Disability Organisations

In the realm of disability advocacy and support, the concept of co-governance stands as a beacon of empowerment and inclusivity. For blind Māori individuals in New Zealand, the importance of co-governance within disability organisations cannot be overstated. It's not just about representation; it's about crafting a narrative that resonates with the unique intersection of blindness and Māori identity, steering towards a future where diverse voices shape the path to inclusivity.

Co-governance, at its core, is a commitment to shared decision-making. For blind Māori individuals, this translates into an opportunity to actively participate in shaping the policies and initiatives that directly impact their lives. In a landscape where cultural nuances and accessibility requirements intersect, co-governance becomes a vehicle for bridging gaps and fostering a more holistic approach to disability advocacy.

Disability organisations that embrace co-governance recognize the need for diverse perspectives at the decision-making table. Blind Māori individuals bring not only their experiences with blindness but also a rich cultural heritage that adds depth to the discourse. By weaving the threads of Māori identity into the fabric of disability advocacy, co-governance ensures that the unique challenges and aspirations of this community are not only acknowledged but woven into the very fabric of support systems.

Moreover, co-governance promotes a sense of ownership and agency among blind Māori individuals. When they actively participate in the decision-making processes of disability organisations, it empowers them to become agents of change within their own communities.

By fostering a sense of responsibility and leadership, co-governance becomes a catalyst for dismantling barriers and fostering an environment where blind Māori individuals not only receive support but actively contribute to shaping the future landscape.

Cultural competence is paramount in co-governance, especially in a country as culturally diverse as New Zealand. Disability organisations need to cultivate an understanding of the unique challenges faced by blind Māori individuals, from navigating cultural expectations to ensuring that accessibility initiatives align with cultural values. Co-governance becomes a bridge, connecting the expertise of disability advocates with the lived experiences of blind Māori individuals, resulting in more nuanced and effective support systems.

In conclusion, co-governance is not just a buzzword; it's a transformative approach that holds immense significance for blind Māori individuals within disability organisations in New Zealand. By embracing shared decision-making, acknowledging cultural nuances, and empowering individuals to actively shape their destinies, co-governance becomes the compass guiding disability organisations towards a future where the voices of blind Māori individuals resonate loudly, shaping a more inclusive and culturally sensitive landscape for all.

Empowering Blind Māori: Fostering Inclusivity for the Blind Community

In the pursuit of empowerment and inclusivity within the blind community in New Zealand, it is essential to address concerns about potential feelings of threat or disenfranchisement among non-Māori individuals. The goal is not to create divides but to foster a collective strength that embraces diversity and ensures that the empowerment of one group enhances the overall fabric of support and understanding within the blind community.

Firstly, transparent communication is paramount. Initiatives aimed at empowering blind Māori individuals should be communicated as efforts to enhance the overall inclusivity of the community. Clear messaging helps dispel any misconceptions and assures non-Māori members that the goal is to create a space where everyone's unique experiences and needs are acknowledged and addressed.

Education plays a pivotal role in promoting understanding. Non-Māori individuals within the blind community should be provided with opportunities to learn about the cultural richness and historical context of blind Māori experiences. By fostering cultural competence, the community can build bridges of understanding, mitigating any potential feelings of threat or disenfranchisement.

Collaborative platforms that encourage open dialogue can further strengthen unity within the blind community. Forums, workshops, and discussions that involve both Māori and non-Māori members allow for shared experiences to be heard and valued. It is through these interactions that a sense of community solidarity can be cultivated, reinforcing the idea that empowerment for one group enhances the collective strength of all.

Leadership and representation should be inclusive. Efforts should be made to ensure that leadership positions within the blind community reflect its diversity. This inclusivity sends a powerful message that all voices are valued, regardless of cultural background. When individuals see themselves represented in leadership roles, it fosters a sense of belonging and diminishes any perception of exclusion.

Moreover, initiatives aimed at empowering blind Māori individuals should be designed collaboratively, with input from diverse perspectives. Inclusive decision-making processes ensure that the needs of all members are considered, fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. This approach reinforces the idea that empowerment is a collective journey where each member contributes to the community's growth and strength.

In conclusion, the empowerment of blind Māori individuals should be approached as a catalyst for broader inclusivity within the blind community. Transparent communication, education, collaborative platforms, inclusive leadership, and shared decision-making are key elements in ensuring that non-Māori individuals do not feel threatened or disenfranchised. By embracing diversity as a source of strength, the blind community in New Zealand can create a harmonious and empowering environment where everyone feels valued and supported.

Back to a real person

The text lacks a human touch that I try to incorporate into my writing. I've spent about two hours on this column, from idea to submission. I've used a tool and it has saved me perhaps four (or more) hours of time. There is a cost though. You don't know if I agree with the statements made in the generated text. As it happens I generally do but there are some implications of the text that I'd prefer you asked me about in a person to person setting.

As for the content, some of the sentences are beautifully crafted, but they aren't me. And the responses about blind Māori are coming from a computer, not coming from tāngata whenua themselves. ChatGPT has not embraced proper use of macrons on vowels, and some of the language used for blind people who also identify as Māori feels a bit clunky. I think it might be seen as disrespectful; well it feels wrong to me anyway. More to the point, the responses undermine the very essence of self-determination.

So what bothers me about the generated text is that it feels disingenuous to me. I haven't engaged with it and nor has anyone else. I don't feel like it is mine or that I own what is said. To know me, you must talk to me, or converse with me in a way that shows you who I am and what I stand for. We can only do that if we engage with each other as people. Yes, we can use tools to facilitate our communication, but we cannot afford to let the tools define us.

To that end, in order to play my part in our organisation having an increased focus on people, I will be making myself available at 5pm on designated Tuesdays to talk to anyone about anything you like. We will be online, but people will be able to connect using their landline or mobile phones. This will happen on a six-week cycle starting on Tuesday 20 February. I hope you can join me.

1 He Taonga Tuku Iho no Ngā Tupuna. Maori proverbial sayings -a literary treasure. Joan Metge And Shane Jones. <https://rb.gy/5h8dui>

Call for Applications to fill Blind Citizens NZ's World Blind Union Primary Country Delegate Position Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Blind Citizens NZ is New Zealand's country member to the World Blind Union (WBU). The number of delegates (representatives) assigned to country members is based on the country's population. New Zealand has two delegate (representative) positions. Each of these positions differs in terms of the status given to them. However it is important to recognise that the work the two delegates carry out is complementary and requires them to work together. Each of the two positions must be held by an Ordinary Member (voting | financial) of Blind Citizens NZ. Details to inform interested members about this position are a little further on in this item.

On this occasion the Board is calling for applications for the primary WBU Country Delegate position. These close **4pm, Tuesday 7 May 2024**.

At its May 2024 meeting, the Board will finalise its approach and timeline towards short-listing and interviewing candidates. This information will be conveyed to those who have submitted applications.

The Board has determined the term of office for this position will align with the secondary WBU Country Delegate position. Once appointed, the successful candidate will serve their term through until November 2025.

About the WBU Country Delegate Position

Applicants must be aware the successful person appointed to this position, if they are not already on the Board of Blind Citizens NZ as an elected member in their own right, will be co-opted to the Board. This is a constitutional requirement which in turn means the successful person becomes a Board Member. They are then obliged to attend Board meetings and to fulfil the duties and responsibilities expected of a Board Member. The point of reference for this constitutional provision is Rule 6.3 “Co-opting Additional Board Members”.

Applicants should be certain to request in the first instance, the position description for WBU Country Delegate. It is also advisable to obtain a copy of the role and responsibilities of Board Members. Each of these documents sets out the respective skills, requirements and attributes the Board believes necessary for the person in this role. Applicants shortlisted for this position will be interviewed by a sub-committee of the Board of Blind Citizens NZ.

Where to send applications

A reminder that applications close **4pm, Tuesday 7 May 2024**. These are to be submitted to Blind Citizens NZ’s National Office via either of the following two options:

- Email to: admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz
- Post to: PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

Challenging Others, Challenging Ourselves

Highlights of Blind Citizens NZ's

2023 AGM and Conference

Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Blind Citizens NZ's 2023 AGM and Conference was held from October 13-14 at the Naumi Auckland Airport Hotel. Approximately 65 attendees participated in-person and online via Zoom or the YouTube livestream. This article provides some highlights of the AGM and Conference. More in-depth details will be available in the Minutes.

The day prior to the AGM and Conference three very separate, informal events happened. Whilst publicised at short notice these events for people to attend in person reflect items topical to the blind community. They are also relevant to Blind Citizens NZ's ongoing programme of work. Attendance was open to anyone from the blind community to join in-person (not just members of Blind Citizens NZ). Events by topic were held in relation to:

- Blind Citizens NZ's Guide Dog Handler Special Interest Network, bringing together current and aspiring Guide Dog Handlers.
- Braille – an opportunity for users and readers of Braille to discuss the potential for a Braille Special Interest Network.
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi – members of the Board's Advisory Group talked about the work they are doing in relation to Blind Citizens NZ's journey to being more inclusive of everyone.

During each of these occasions, participants talked freely within their group, sharing related aspirations, experiences and areas that Blind Citizens NZ might potentially address. For many attendees the opportunity also provided much-valued peer-support. There were 'report-back' opportunities during the AGM and Conference during which outcomes could be shared. Some reporting back influenced resolutions for the Board to action.

Blind Citizens NZ continues to build knowledge as it progresses on its Te Tiriti o Waitangi journey. The Board's Te Tiriti o Waitangi Advisory Group comprises John Puhara, Daniel and Harete Phillips, Victor West, Maria Stevens, Joseph and Francis Twomey, and Sharleen Tongalea. Working alongside Te Huia Bill Hamilton, the Tiriti o Waitangi Advisory Group's work influenced tikanga for Blind Citizens NZ's AGM and Conference. This influence was evident throughout the AGM and Conference and will continue to be developed moving forward.

Immediately following the Conference opening by Paula Tesoriero, Chief Executive Whaikaha | Ministry of Disabled People, we enjoyed a performance by the Kapa Haka Group from Mangere Bridge School. This group of tamariki | young people aged 8-12 led by Matua Jordan Kaie gave an outstanding performance. Description from Audio Described Aotearoa highlighted what the group was wearing, facial expressions, along with body movements and actions for each of the songs performed.

Guest presenters spoke to the theme 'Challenging Others, Challenging Ourselves', each bringing their thinking and experiences to the forefront, while relating these back to the purpose of their presentation. Presenters were:

- Paul Hutcheson, mediator and facilitator;
- Prudence Walker - Kaihautū Tika Hauātanga Disability Rights Commissioner;
- Joy Lanini - National Manager Connections and Funding, Your Way | Kia Roha;
- Ben O'Meara – one of six Deputy Chief Executives to the Chief Executive Whaikaha | responsible of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships;
- Robbie Francis-Watene – Co-founder of the Lucy Foundation.
- Clive Lansink - Chair RNZFB Board of Directors.

Award presentations are always a highlight, and this year was no different...

Beamish Memorial Medal and Bar: This is the first time in Blind Citizens NZ's history that the Beamish Memorial Medal has been awarded to anyone a second time. A second presentation of this award will be known as the Beamish Memorial Medal and Bar. Presentation of the Beamish Memorial Medal and Bar was made to each of Mary Schnackenberg and Clive Lansink. This recognises the respective continued outstanding contributions to society by Mary and Clive in their particular fields of service to the community.

Extra Touch Award: Metlink Public Transport | Ngā Waka Tūmatanu is the recipient of the Extra Touch Award. This recognises their work across the disability community and with Blind Citizens NZ in particular to improve accessibility of public transport. Advocacy with Metlink Public Transport has occurred at both a national and with Wellington Branch. Following many years of advocacy Metlink are introducing across the Wellington Region Audio and Visual announcements on its bus services.

Johnston Cup for Leadership: presented to Carl Halliburton, this award recognises the contributions he has made both for and on behalf of Blind Citizens NZ. Amongst his experiences Carl has been a Board Member, he remains Chair of our Wellington Branch and is moderator of each of Blind Citizens NZ's Blind-Discuss and Member Forum email lists. Carl's unassuming manner are amongst factors that influence others.

Remit and Resolutions

For each of the following items, updates will be provided as progress is made.

Auckland Branch's Remit raising concerns about Braille, and requiring the Board to commission a comprehensive, externally conducted investigation into the state of Braille in New Zealand was passed by a significant majority.

Three resolutions of significance are being progressed and in brief these relate to:

- **Guide Dog Handlers** and the provision of Guide Dog Services.
- **Blind Low Vision NZ Library Service** - accessing and using this service.
- **Pedestrian Crossing Safety** – the variable types of pedestrian crossings and the lack of consistency of implementation of these throughout New Zealand.

Focus Editor – Call for Expressions of Interest Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Áine Kelly-Costello produced their first Focus publication and editorial in June 2022. At the time of their two-year appointment, Áine explained that due to a range of commitments they would likely not be available for a further term. March 2024 is when Áine's term comes to an end and they will provide their final Focus editorial. It is for this reason that the Board is calling for expressions of interest from amongst Ordinary (financial) Members of Blind Citizens NZ for our Focus Editor position. The Board will consider expressions of interest in the Focus Editor position during its July 2024 meeting.

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

- the appointment will be for a two-year term (and may be renewed at the Board's discretion);
- Focus is the official national publication of Blind Citizens NZ;
- Focus is sent to all members who are registered on our database as of 1 July 2018 in their preferred format (audio, Braille, large print, electronically) and it is uploaded on Blind Citizens NZ's website;
- Focus is the mechanism for communicating a number of constitutional requirements such as notices of the national AGM and Conference and scheduled elections;

- Blind Citizens NZ's membership is the target audience but the publication is provided to all Members of Parliament, stakeholders, supporters, etc;
- editorials are intended to raise and promote debate on issues that are current and topical to the blindness community, and stimulate reader-interest in submitting 'Letters to the Editor'; and
- there is an opportunity for the Focus Editor to bring their editorial style to Focus.

Anyone interested in finding out more should contact National Office for full details of the position. Áine is also happy to talk to anyone considering applying for the role. You can contact them using their personal email ainekc@gmail.com

Expressions of interest close **4pm, Tuesday 2 July 2024.**

Opportunities to engage with the National President Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

As indicated in National President Jonathan Godfrey's Focus column, he will be setting aside time on a regular basis to engage with members on topics you might like to raise. These opportunities will be quite separate to any other opportunity that might be offered for a specific reason such as for example, the Total Mobility Scheme which will be a specific topic during April or May 2024.

Dates for these regular opportunities with the National President via ZOOM, where people can join by phone or using other technology, will routinely be held from 5pm-6pm on the following Tuesdays:

- February 20th;
- April 2nd;
- May 14th;
- June 25th;
- August 6th;

- September 17th;
- October 29th;
- December 10th.

Timely reminders along with Zoom details will be provided via our TellMe bulletins, Branches, Networks and email.

Blind Citizens NZ Braille Special Interest Network Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Blind Citizens NZ now has a Braille Special Interest Network. This brief news item is intended to let Braille users and readers, and anyone aspiring to learn Braille about this recent development. A key element of Special Interest Networks is that it is the topic that attracts people's interest and where peer support flourishes.

Although a majority of members of a Special Interest Network must be Ordinary (voting) Members of Blind Citizens NZ, anyone who is blind, vision-impaired, deafblind or has low vision who is not a member, can also join.

Chantelle Griffiths is the elected Coordinator of the Braille Special Interest Network. The Network's first AGM will happen between 1 July and 31 August 2024.

If you have email and would like to be connected to this Network, you can send a request to join by using the following email address:

BlindCitizensNZ-BrailleNetwork+subscribe@groups.io

As the Network creates its way of supporting each other and sharing experiences etc., there will be information provided on a regular basis on our TellMe bulletin.

For further information please feel free to contact the National Office on 0800 222 6940 or email to admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz

National Office 2023 Closing and 2024 Opening Dates Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

It's been another busy year and the Board and I have begun mapping out the necessary approach to our work for 2024. As we begin to wrap up the year for 2023 I encourage members to stay in touch with Branches and Networks for information that comes from National Office. Alternatively, let me know if you wish to directly receive information that comes out. You can contact me via 0800 222 694 number or email admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz Phone calls and emails will be passed along to me for my attention.

Our National Office closes at noon on Thursday 21 December 2023. We reopen on Wednesday 17 January 2024. In between times and although I am on annual leave, I remain available as always for emergency situations.

Last but not least to our members, supporters, stakeholders and readers, from the Board and staff of Blind Citizens NZ, all the very best for Christmas and the New Year and above all else, stay safe. We look forward to engaging and | or working with you in 2024.

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Focus Editor, Áine Kelly-Costello

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