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Community Impact Report 2023

Pūrongo Whakaaweawe Haporia

Adapted in 2023 by Accessible Formats Service, Blind
Low Vision NZ,
Auckland

Total print pages: 55

Total large print pages 75

Notes for the Large Print Reader

Print page numbers are indicated as:

Page 1

Main text is in Arial typeface, 18 point.

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Heading 1

Heading 2

Heading 3

Alterations

Photographs have been enlarged.

Transcriber's Notes

Transcriber's notes are indicated with **[TN]** and are in a separate box where possible.

Community Impact Report 2023

Pūrongo Whakaaweawe Hapori


Epigraph

Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini
My success should not be bestowed onto
me alone, as it was not individual success
but success of a collective.

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Audit key:


 denotes an audited number. It was verified as part of our FY23 financial statements.

The Year in Review Pūrongo

Arotake i Tēnei Tau

Kia ora,

Blind Low Vision NZ continues to support Kiwis who are blind, deafblind or have low vision to live the life they choose. It's thanks to our generous donors, our passionate volunteers, and our dedicated staff and leadership that this is all possible.

We're thrilled to announce that our community at Blind Low Vision NZ has grown to 15,463  clients (as of June 2023). It's particularly heartening to witness how our fresh brand awareness campaign and collaborative partnerships have paved the way for us to connect with a wider audience.

Through strategic partnerships and collaborations with third-party providers, we've expanded our reach. This expansion has enabled us to extend our services to a broader audience, reaching even those residing in remote rural areas. This effort aligns seamlessly with the core priorities laid out in our 2020-2024 Strategic Plan titled "Our Vision, Your Future." This plan focuses on fostering independence, facilitating education and empowerment, encouraging social inclusion, and upholding our mission as a "For Purpose Organisation". Our commitment to walking alongside people on their path towards independence has resulted in providing education, tools, and resources for

their success. This empowering experience opens doors and supports them to achieve their personal goals, shaping their active participation in society. Our clients remain the heart of our organisation, driving us to remain centred around people, knowledge, adaptability, and the pursuit of positive change.

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Several major projects have come to life for our organisation recently, which will play a pivotal role in how we support our community.

The Mobility Centre in South Auckland, opened this March, will help our clients lead empowered and independent lives for years to come.

The development of our new kennels helps us take a comprehensive approach to breeding, training, and graduating accomplished guide dogs. As we consistently review our methodologies and align with international best practices, the reconstruction of our kennels marks the next stride towards the future success of guide dogs in New Zealand.

The recent launch of our new equipment service, provided in partnership with Vision Australia, means our clients now have access to a much wider range of useful products that can really help overcome the everyday challenges they face in the home, at work or when out and about in the community.

The recent launch of our new advocacy service will directly help clients facing discrimination or who feel they are not fully able to participate in society on equal terms with everyone else.

We have made strenuous efforts to make Blind Low Vision NZ a great place to work, through initiatives such as an emphasis on improved health and safety and a health and wellbeing allowance. Our commitment to fostering a healthy work environment not only benefits our team but also translates into improved services for our clients.

And finally, I would be remiss to not highlight the achievements that our outgoing Chief Executive, John Mulka, made in FY23—we thank him sincerely for the impact that he made on our organisation during his tenure.

The dedicated individuals at Blind Low Vision NZ remain committed to championing the rights of individuals who are blind, deafblind, or living with low vision. Witnessing our clients engage in society on their own terms is what truly gives purpose to our efforts. Every year, we strive to break through limitations, and we recognise that this journey is a collective one.

Our progress is made possible through the invaluable contributions of our volunteers, generous donors, and the New Zealand public. Together, we are working towards building an inclusive and accessible Aotearoa for all.

Clive Lansink

Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind (RNZFB)

Board Chair

Greg Hurn

Blind Low Vision NZ

Acting Chief Executive

Me mahi tahi tātau hei whakapakari
te hunga kāpō.

Work together to give strength to people
who are blind, deafblind or have low vision.

Who we help

Blind Low Vision NZ in numbers

Ka āwhina mātou i a wai

At June 2023: Total Clients: 15,463

Clients by age

0–21	1,160	7.5%
22–44	1,917	12.4%
45–64	2,366	15.3%
65–75	1,856	12.0%
76+	8,164	52.8%


Note: 5 clients with no age on file

Clients by region

The figures below are based on the Blind Low Vision NZ office that the client has been assigned to.

Upper North	3,016
Auckland	3,908
Lower North	2,621
Wellington	1,742
South Island	2,193
Christchurch	2,193
Other South Island	2,043

Total clients who received services in FY23:

5,149 

We received **31,000** calls in the last year.

Books in our accessible library: **37,000**

Total Library loans = **66,155** (Digital Loans)

All types of books, magazines and newspapers.

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A snapshot of blindness in Aotearoa He tīpako matapōtanga i Aotearoa

Some people assume that blindness, deaf-blindness, or low vision are rare and that it could never happen to them or someone they love. But blindness and low vision are more common than you might think.

- Every three hours, someone in New Zealand develops blindness.
- One in six children wear glasses or contact lenses.
- 64% of all New Zealanders wear glasses or contact lenses.

The Most Common Eye Conditions in New Zealand

The four most common eye diseases causing blindness and low vision in New Zealand are age-related macular degeneration (AMD), diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and cataracts.

Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

Currently, over 1,500,000 of Kiwis are at risk of developing AMD, and that number will rise to 1,800,000 by 2023.

One in seven New Zealanders over the age of 50 will develop AMD. AMD usually affects people over 50, although it can affect people of any age.

Why preventative eye care is so important

There are many people in Aotearoa who (sometimes unknowingly) have diseases that may lead to blindness, deaf-blindness, or low vision. These diseases are often treatable if diagnosed in time, which is why raising awareness is an important part of what we do at Blind Low Vision NZ.

Did you know:

- More than 35% of people don't have regular eye checks, including one-in-10 who've never had an eye test.
- Over 70% of New Zealanders aged between 40 and 49 do not have a regular eye examination.

- The NZ Association of Optometrists recommends a regular eye examination every two years for healthy adults. After age 65 more frequent exams are a wise precaution to ensure early diagnosis and

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treatment of sight threatening conditions such as glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration.

- 58% of New Zealand children have never had an eye test, despite the recommendation that a child's first eye test should take place around the age of 3-4 and then every two years as they progress through school.
- 75 percent of blindness and low vision in New Zealand is avoidable (50 percent can be treated and 25 per cent can be prevented).
- Only 51% of New Zealanders take regular measures to protect eye health.
- 32% of New Zealanders wear eye protection or sunglasses to protect their eyes.

Our Services

Ā Mātou Ratonga

- A wide range of mobility services to help you get around.
- Emotional support for adjustment to vision loss and ongoing wellbeing.
- Skills to help retain independence.
- Support and community.
- Employment readiness for career stability.
- Work readiness for youth to support their future career.
- Accessible library for knowledge and cultural enrichment.
- Specialised services for Māori, Pasifika, youth, and children.
- Support for businesses around accessibility.
- Support and assistance for technological needs.
- We breed and train guide dogs, who help people get around safely and confidently, they also make wonderful companions.

Support Grants

Blind Low Vision NZ administers several funds that provide additional financial help and support to people who are blind, deaf-blind or have low vision. If you need financial assistance meeting the costs of vision rehabilitation, or tertiary education we may be able to help.

Sir Arthur Pearson Memorial Fund

The Pearson Fund can provide grants to applicants for a range of items that support with the additional cost of being blind, deaf-blind or have low vision. Applicants must be a Blind Low Vision NZ member with a fully eligible membership type. For more detailed information please see the Pearson Fund Guide or get in touch with us.

Kindred Sharp Children's Trust

This Trust provides grants to children aged 15 or below who are registered with Blind Low Vision NZ. Grants may be approved for the funding of equipment, improving quality of life, or personal development programmes.

Henderson Fund

This Trust seeks to support those who are blind, deaf-blind or have low vision up to the age of 21 years in the Greater Wellington region, from the Otaki River in the north and the summit of the Remutaka range in the east.

The Shirley Owen Trust

If you are a client of Blind Low Vision NZ, and you are learning a classical instrument, or having singing lessons, you can apply for some funding assistance through the Shirley Owen Trust.

Oppenheim Tertiary Education Trust Fund

The Oppenheim Trust Tertiary Education Fund provides assistance to registered members of Blind Low Vision NZ who are presently undergoing or are about to enter tertiary education.

Forsyth Fund

- The Forsyth Fund welcomes applications for financial assistance to clients of Blind Low Vision NZ who live within the boundaries of The Waikato Regional Council, or the former Waikato District Health Board boundary.

Our Team

Ō Mātou Tāngata—ngā Kaimahi o Kāpō Matarehu Aotearoa

Number of Staff:

276

Gender breakdown:

Female: 203 (74%)

Male: 71 (26%)

Undeclared/gender diverse: 2 (1%)

Number of staff who are also clients: 28 🔍

Age breakdown:

18–34 years: 61 (22%)

35–54 years: 108 (39%)

55–64 years: 63 (23%)

65+ years: 23 (8%)

Undeclared: 21 (8%)

Ethnicities breakdown:

European: 20 (7%)

Māori: 16 (6%)

Asian: 14 (5%)

Pasifika/Pakeha: 178 (64%)

MELAA: 11 (4%)

Undeclared: 37 (13%)

🔍 Audited and verified as part of our FY23 financial statements.

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Employee Engagement Survey

Every year we check in with staff to see how they are going. We are pleased with the results of our most recent Employee Engagement Survey with a 90% participation rate.

- 81% of staff are happy with the work/life balance.
- 92% can arrange time out from work when they need to.
- 88% know what they need to do to be successful in their role.
- 89% know how their work contributes to the goals of Blind Low Vision NZ.

Internship Programme

The People and Performance team launched an internship programme in FY23 to provide recent graduates who are blind, deaf-blind, or have low vision with work experience to help kick-start their careers. Three new graduates have joined Blind Low Vision NZ and will be with us for the next 12 months.

Te Ao Māori

Blind Low Vision NZ have engaged Education Perfect to deliver online training to all staff on Te Ao Māori covering topics such as NZ History and Tikanga.

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Fundraising Highlights

Hiranga Mahi Moni

The Fundraising and Philanthropy department is Blind Low Vision NZ's main source of income. We are always looking at ways to improve from the previous year. We are passionate about raising funds, and exploring new ways to raise funds, to be able to support Kiwis who are blind, deafblind or have low vision.

Paws For Purpose

An exciting new engagement and fundraising opportunity this year came from our vast collection of disused Trudy Dogs. Many New Zealanders will be familiar with our life-sized dog coin collection boxes, also known as Trudy Dogs. As a result of our increasingly cashless society, and with retail space at a premium, many of our coin collection sites prefer smaller counter-top boxes, (which now also have QR codes). Trudy Dogs are now, sadly obsolete.

To give them a new "leash" on life so to speak, these iconic Trudy dogs have been transformed into truly unique,

highly collectible works of art by some of Aotearoa's top artists: including Tim Christie, Ian Mune, Dame Denise L'Estrange-Corbet, Dick Frizzell, and more. Thanks to all our generous donors and bidders who raised \$70,000 for our first ever Paws For Purpose art auction. A big thank you also to our sponsors at Resene, 2degrees, Hyundai NZ, and Donor Republic for all their incredible support!

Guide Dog Puppy Appeal

While looking for new ways to raise funds, we also continue to deliver our most popular campaign—the Guide Dog Puppy Appeal which this year raised \$562,125.

The street appeal proved to be particularly successful, and with this being the only street appeal from this year on, it is very encouraging to know that it continues to raise the most funds for our Guide Dog Services.

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The Blind Low Vision NZ Lottery

Following the changes to the Blind Low Vision Week Street Appeal, the Fundraising team launched an online "prizes or cash" lottery this year. Five lucky winners from Auckland, Wellington, and Bay of Plenty won exciting prizes, including a car, a luxury trip, gaming package, e-bike, or an iPad Pro. We not only raised \$76,320, but also gained a brand-new audience of over 7,500 who now know more about Blind Low Vision NZ and are likely to support the cause.

The Great Kiwi Bookathon

Now in its third year, The Great Kiwi Bookathon challenged all young book lovers across Aotearoa New Zealand to read as many books as they can to raise awareness and much-needed funds. This year's challenge attracted over 5,220 keen readers across the country who together raised over \$171,471.

Community

Fundraising Highlights

I te Hapori

Pinehurst School Fundraiser

In what seems to be becoming a fabulous annual show of support, Pinehurst School in Auckland's Albany suburb ran a fundraiser with the Student Council. Pinehurst School has a special connection to Blind Low Vision NZ as one of their students is blind. This year, the students raised \$1,091 surpassing last year's grand total.

Pet and Animal Expo

The Pet and Animal Expo celebrated its tenth anniversary this year and we were delighted to be a part of it. The Expo is designed to be a celebration of pets and animals and the positive role they play in society.



Capital Rodders

Affiliated to the NZ Hot Rod Association, Capital Rodders organises an annual Guide Dogs Fun Run in September. So far, they have raised over \$30,800 for Blind Low Vision NZ.

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Volunteer Highlights

Hiranga Tūao



Volunteers are woven into the tapestry of Blind Low Vision NZ's history. With a foundation spanning 133 years of

volunteer involvement, we're building this legacy by introducing a diverse range of volunteering opportunities. The significance of our volunteers and their role within our organisation cannot be overstated.

Our interactions with various communities have illuminated the importance of having multilingual abilities within our volunteer team. This capacity has enriched our clients' experiences. As we look to the future of volunteering, it's clear that our ability to connect with our communities and embrace the wide spectrum of skills, life experiences, beliefs, and viewpoints our volunteers bring is where the potential lies.

The Volunteer department's alignment with Blind Low Vision NZ's values and core priorities is important. This alignment manifests in the connection between our teams, volunteers, and clients.

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communication, and comprehensive training. Our commitment rests upon establishing an enduring and impactful volunteer structure within our organisation.

A heartfelt mihi extends to all our exceptional volunteers who dedicate their own time to assist individuals dealing with blindness, deaf-blindness, or low vision.

Volunteer Story

Carol Conte: 33 years of community and connection through volunteering



Carol Conte's journey as a dedicated volunteer with Blind Low Vision NZ is an inspiring story of compassion and friendship. Her history reveals how lending a helping hand

can create lasting bonds and make a difference in people's lives.

As a curious soul, Carol saw the difficulties brought on by blindness or low vision and the challenges they bring, and she wanted to help. This sparked her interest in volunteering with Blind Low Vision NZ.

When her son left for university, Carol felt the call to give back to her community. She joined Blind Low Vision NZ and began a remarkable

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journey that transformed her perspective. After training, she discovered that volunteering wasn't just a good deed—it was about respecting others' lives and struggles.

Carol's journey involved forming deep connections. For over 25 years, she read to individuals with low vision, sharing their passions and interests. It was a challenge, but it became an exciting experience that she valued.

Later, Carol's commitment to our community took a new direction. She moved and started a coffee group—a space where people with low vision could connect, share stories, and build friendships. The group was more than just coffee; it was a place of unity and understanding.

Talking with Carol, it's clear that her focus is on the future. She wants her coffee group to carry on, a place of support and camaraderie even when she's not there. Her legacy is about creating connections that matter.

With a warm smile, Carol says, "Volunteering isn't about me; it's about the lives we touch." Her humility captures the heart of her journey—kindness, respect, and the power of making a positive impact.

Carol's story reminds us that small acts of kindness create strong connections that shape lives in powerful ways.

Thank you, Carol, for your commitment to the blind, deaf-blind, and low vision community.

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Policy and Advocacy Highlights

Hiranga Kaupapa Here, Kaupapa Whiri

The Policy and Advocacy team at Blind Low Vision NZ turns ideas into action to create positive change at central and local government levels. Advocacy is about using evidence and people power to encourage public support for a particular cause or policy. We advocate for the change that people who are blind, deaf-blind or have low vision need and want. We produce evidence-based solutions and work collaboratively to achieve results, advocating for an accessible society here in Aotearoa.

To do this, we dedicated our time working on multiple projects with various partners, to build their visibility and spread awareness.

Project Highlights

Our Policy and Advocacy Department operates at the intersection of ideas and actions, ensuring that our initiatives lead to tangible outcomes:

1. Our commitment to securing government funding for the groundbreaking National Eye Health Survey was a milestone, significantly impacting New Zealand's eye health landscape.
2. We lobbied for change on vital matters directly affecting our clients, from addressing challenges posed by e-scooters and quiet vehicles to navigating ID requirements and promoting accessible information.
3. Recognising the critical juncture of the 2023 general election, we strategically convened a series of meetings with Members of Parliament, working to elicit policy commitments that revolve around eye health and the National Eye Health Survey.
4. The launch of our Individual Advocacy Service, coupled with the provision of resources, empowered our clients to advocate for themselves effectively and navigate challenges with confidence.
5. We developed user-friendly resources tailored including the Snap Send Solve app. This tool not only empowers our clients but also equips our staff to gather vital data on accessibility barriers.

6. We elevated our engagement in two campaigns: Eye Health Aotearoa Trust and Access Matters Aotearoa Trust. Through these initiatives, we actively contributed to enhancing access to eye health services, preventing avoidable blindness, and advocating for robust accessibility legislation that benefits all New Zealanders.

Policy and Advocacy Achievements

The past year has been marked by significant achievements:

1. We engaged in influential discussions with numerous Members of Parliament, including esteemed figures such as Hon. Dr Duncan Webb, and Christopher Luxon.
2. A resounding achievement was our presentation of a petition to Parliament on September 29, 2022, advocating for government funding to support New Zealand's inaugural National Eye Health Survey.
3. We established a strategic partnership with Roche New Zealand on February 8, 2023, aimed at mapping the patient journey for retinal disease.
4. We presented a petition to Parliament on February 22, 2023, bearing over 14,500 signatures, urging for the fortification of the Accessibility for New Zealanders Bill.
5. We introduced EHA's Draft Action Plan for Eye Health in Aotearoa New Zealand through a series of influential

meetings with Members of Parliament and officials on May 29-30, 2023.

6. We successfully launched the Individual Advocacy Service on July 3, 2023, resolving eight cases within the initial three weeks and generating positive outcomes for our clients.

The Year Ahead

Our energies will be directed toward securing commitments on eye health and accessibility from political parties in the aftermath of the 2023 General

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Election, with the aim of translating these commitments into actionable change.

Preparations are already underway for the 2024 EHA Love Your Eyes Tactile Art Competition, a continuation of our tradition of harnessing creativity to raise awareness about visual health.

Leveraging the data collected through the Snap Send Solve app, we are poised to initiate tangible improvements for Blind Low Vision NZ clients by addressing the access barriers that continue.

As we move forward, we remain committed to our mission of transforming policy ideas into tangible actions, ensuring that the voices of those with visual impairments are heard and their needs are met.

Guide Dogs Services Highlights

Hiranga Ratonga Kurī Arataki

As at June 2023:

- 86 🐶 puppies born
- 134 dogs with our volunteer puppy raisers
- 38 qualified guide dogs from training
- 129 dogs in training
- 552 days: the average wait time to receive a guide dog
- 27 clients waiting to be matched with a dog
- 144 active handler teams



Current and Future Guide Dogs Projects

A total of 40 Guide Dog teams have successfully qualified, showcasing the dedication and effort put into training our beloved pups. Across the country, there are now 144 active guide dog teams, a remarkable number that highlights the increasing impact of this service.

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The Mobility Training Centre

The Mobility Training Centre's completion is a milestone that's showing positive results. This facility is already contributing to enhanced productivity.



The Vision Loss Assistance Dog (VLAD) programme

The VLAD programme was implemented to re-purpose dogs that do not qualify to be a fully trained Guide Dog but have the skills to help our clients in other areas. These dogs will not be used for guiding work, but will help clients in a variety of other roles giving confidence, helping with balance, visibility when out in public, assisting with mobility or tasks to enable a wider range of BLVNZ clients to become more independent.

The programme's success is now evident, as it transitions from a pilot phase to a full-fledged initiative. Two working teams have graduated from the programme, underscoring its effectiveness in training and pairing guide dogs with those in need.

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Exciting developments are on the horizon with a new kennel construction in progress. The upcoming move to the new facility in 2024 marks a new chapter in providing even better care for these incredible animals.

The collaboration with Guide Dog Queensland is noteworthy and is continuing to showcase a strong working partnership across the Tasman. Not only have we invested in a stud dog, but also acquired four qualified guide dogs for clients. This collaboration extends to staff exchange, as their personnel have been overseeing our cadets for the

past six months, fostering a mutually beneficial learning environment.

Further research into breeding quality



Over a 12-week period in 2023, our Dog Care Specialist, Nikita Groot, worked with PHD student Mel Dawson and National Data & Process Improvement Manager, Jen Mey to develop a series of statistical tests which used the Behaviour Checklist Data generated by the Guide Dogs team to better predict which dogs might be most likely to succeed as a guide dog, based on their assessment scores before and during training.

With these tests, we were able to identify that a poor scoring of a "Slow return to productive state"—a behaviour signalling a dog's ability to recover from stress or distraction—was highly predictive of that dog's later

success, especially in later training stages. We also identified that dogs who scored

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badly on handler-dog team, noise sensitivity, dog distraction, or who scored either very well or very badly on sniffing, less often graduated as qualified guide dogs. As more data continues to be generated, these predictions will become even clearer, and better able to inform the team at Guide Dogs so that we can continue to improve and optimise our operations.

A special thank you to all our wonderful guide dog volunteers.

We couldn't do what we do without your contributions and support. Thank you for letting our dogs into your hearts and homes as part of their important training. We are truly thankful, as are our clients.



Audited and verified as part of our FY23 financial statements.

Client Stories

Chandni



Chandni lives in Auckland with her husband, five-year-old daughter, and her 2-year-old guide dog named Yuki. Describing herself as generally easy-going, Chandni enjoys quality time with her family and circle of friends.

She has a penchant for music and occasionally tries her hand at baking. Yuki joined them a few months ago, bringing new experiences into her life.

For Chandni, owning a guide dog is a novel experience. As someone who wasn't accustomed to dogs, adjusting to this change took a learning curve. The initial stages were a bit nerve-wracking, given her lack of prior experience, but as time went on, Chandni and her family adapted. Her newfound freedom to venture outdoors has been truly transformative.

At first, Chandni's daughter also had reservations about Yuki. However, over time, a strong bond formed between them. Now, Chandni and her husband find their daughter sleeping in Yuki's bed.

Chandni's story is intertwined with a medical condition she has faced with resilience. Diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa in her 20s, her vision impairment results in blurry central and peripheral vision, although she is

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still able to perceive contrasting colours. This condition curtailed her ability to drive and posed challenges in reading and writing.

The journey began with a routine eye check, revealing a spot at the back of her eyes. This ultimately led to her diagnosis of retinitis pigmentosa, despite no familial history of vision loss. Gradually, her vision deteriorated, affecting

her work on the computer, and prompting her decision to stop driving.

Chandni faced some challenges professionally due to her eye condition, and she made the decision to temporarily step back from her job. This decision allowed her to embrace her next phase: marriage and motherhood.

But an introduction to Blind Low Vision NZ through a referral was a gamechanger for Chandni, providing her access to our support services, including our employment assistance. Chandni seized the opportunity to get back to work. She became an integral part of the Blind Low Vision NZ team, dedicating time as a volunteer coordinator and administrator.

Assistive technology played a pivotal role in helping Chandni navigate both her professional commitments and personal life with greater ease. Cane training boosted her mobility, and counselling provided her with strategies to navigate life's challenges while her vision evolved.

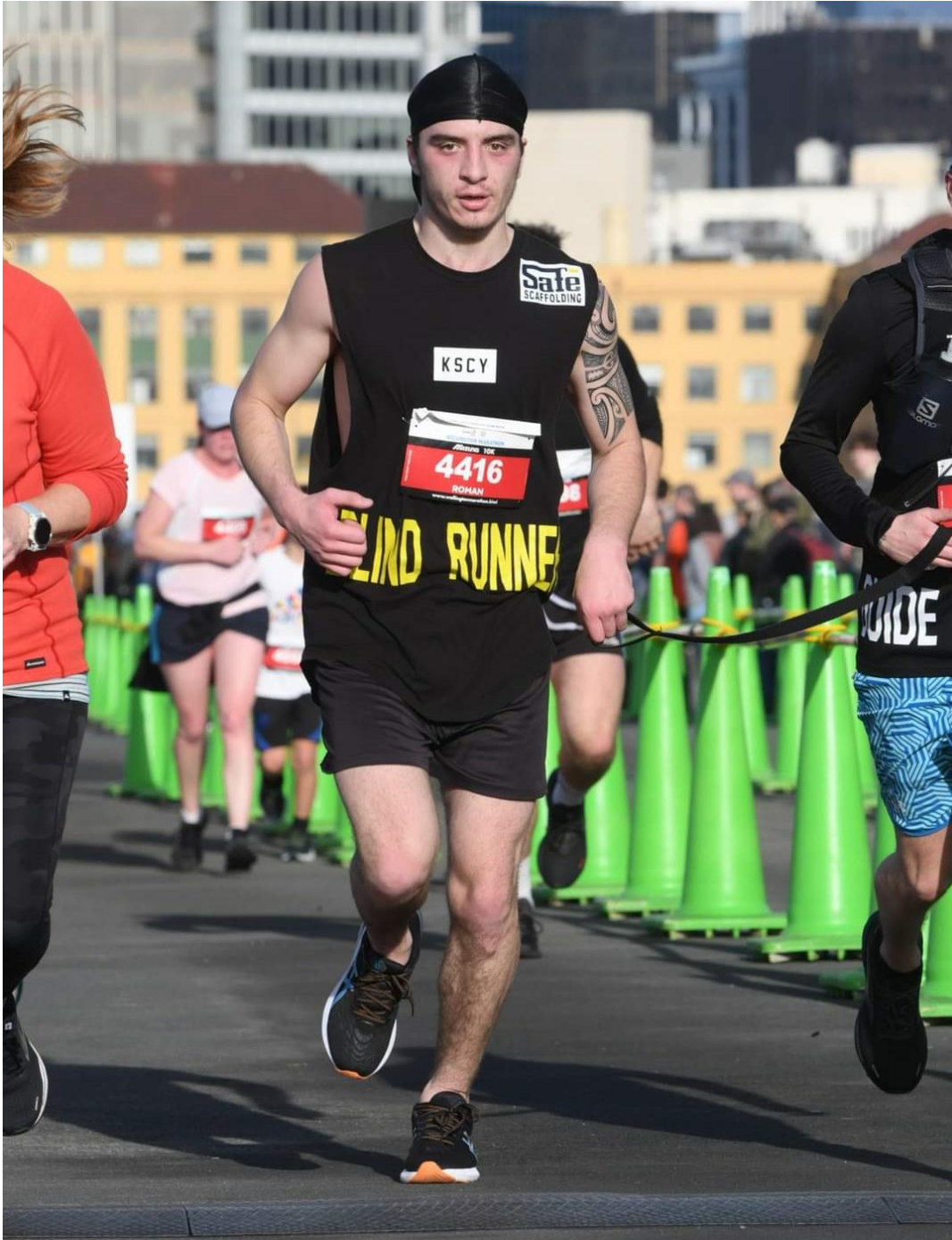
Now, Chandni is using her life's lesson to help others. Through the Youth Mentoring Pilot Programme, she connects with young clients navigating their transition to adulthood with low vision. Her interactions with her mentee, Bri, include empowering self-advocacy and the significance of being heard.

Sharing her story with others hasn't been easy for Chandni, but she's discovered that her experiences have the potential to educate and inspire others. Her message

resonates: embrace challenges, advocate for yourself, and keep moving forward.

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Roman



Roman's journey started in Wellington, and these days he splits his time between Homai, where he is now a

residential student, coming back home to Stokes Valley during school holidays. With two brothers and a young niece in his close-knit family, he treasures their bond. In his leisure hours, he finds joy in shopping for clothes and shoes, and cruising in cars with his buddies.

Roman is proud of his first tattoo, a Tā moko.

Keeping active is Roman's mantra—hitting the gym, running races, and recently achieving his first quarter marathon. Reflecting on this accomplishment, Roman said, "It required effort, but it was enjoyable. The race day excitement and the consistent training kept me motivated."

At the age of 17, Roman's life took an unexpected turn. His vision began fading rapidly, which caught him off guard. He used to work as a scaffolder, but one day he couldn't see the equipment being lowered down the scaffold. Even reading the Burger King menu became a challenge, and he had to squint to see it. So, at the start of 2022, he underwent an eye test and learned about his diagnosis—Leber's hereditary optic neuropathy (LHON). Roman is the first in his maternal blood line with LHON and the disease is extremely rare, so it was particularly difficult for him and his family. Now, Roman can no longer see others' faces.

Roman describes his journey with vision loss in stages. "At first, I thought it would be easy. Then came the hardest part when I realised, I'd have to live like this. But now, I know I have to move on, and life will get better."

His family, friends, and the shift to Auckland for the BLENNZ transition programme helped him cope. Meeting

others with varying degrees of sight loss made him appreciate the vision he still has. Roman's eyesight is around 20% in both eyes. He can see shadows of people close by and large structures like buildings.

After learning about his condition, Roman connected with Blind Low Vision NZ. He used our library services, embraced orientation and mobility training, learned to navigate technology, and honed daily living skills.

Recently, he joined the Youth Peer Mentoring Program; his teachers handpicked him for this opportunity. Roman's motivation was simple: saying yes to things that would benefit him in the future. This led him to Milton, his mentor.

Through this program, Roman aspires to gain insight from Milton's life experiences and advice. Forming connections and friendships is high on his agenda. He's eager to join the youth group that Milton invited him to. Reflecting on his relationship with Milton, Roman said, "Milton checks in on me often. He's like a big brother. Our bond is easy-going and comfortable."

As for his future, Roman's plans are still unfolding, but he's optimistic that with growing maturity, clarity will emerge. Milton's guidance has broadened his perspective, and Roman encourages other BLENNZ students to embrace the Youth Mentoring Program. He said, "It's an opportunity to learn and make friends. Thank you for including me; I'm truly grateful."

Genevieve



Genevieve, a 55-year-old woman from Invercargill, is a shining example of independent living. With three children—two daughters and a son—and two

grandchildren, her family is close to her heart. Embracing her creative side, Genevieve finds delight in painting, restoring furniture, and nurturing her garden, where lemon and lime trees thrive.

Her latest passion, archery, discovered through a Blind Low Vision NZ supported group, has transformed her Thursday nights. "I should've done this ages ago," she said.

Genevieve's journey took an unexpected turn eight years ago when she was diagnosed with cataracts. The prediction was that it would be two decades before her vision began to fade. However, in February 2022, her sight began deteriorating rapidly. By August of the same year, her right eye was almost blind, and the left eye was following suit. Losing the ability to drive was a significant blow. "My life was turned upside down, and I felt sorry for myself," she recalls. (Genevieve has since undergone cataract surgery on her right eye, regaining some sight, but she requires glasses for close vision. Low vision persists in her left eye.)

After a few stumbles while walking her granddaughter to school, Genevieve realised the necessity of the white cane. One day, a fall while walking with her granddaughter highlighted this need. "That was awful. I thought I'd be okay without the cane, but it wasn't fair on [my granddaughter]."

Genevieve's connection with Blind Low Vision NZ began in 2022 when one of our team members conducted a needs

assessment. Counselling was suggested, which Genevieve initially hesitated about, but later embraced.

"Jenni [my counsellor] came into my life and gave me tools to function. It wasn't easy at first, but she was amazing," she reflects.

The loss of sight triggered feelings of dependence and vulnerability for Genevieve. "Independence flew out the window. You start thinking you'll have to rely on others, and I didn't want that. But sometimes you have to."

Genevieve appreciates the support from everyone, using our Library Services with Alexa's help and receiving guidance from the Orientation and Mobility Team for white cane usage. "Team members Robyn, Rachael, and Jenni have been amazing. They believe in you; helped me through stuff. It truly changes lives."

Genevieve has an administration role at Blind Low Vision NZ's Invercargill office, and the work resonates deeply with her.

"[This organisation] has turned my life around 180 degrees. When I could see, I lacked the confidence that I gained when I couldn't. I've grown in confidence. I've done more as a non-sighted person than before. I learned to have the confidence to do anything and know I can accomplish whatever I set my mind to."

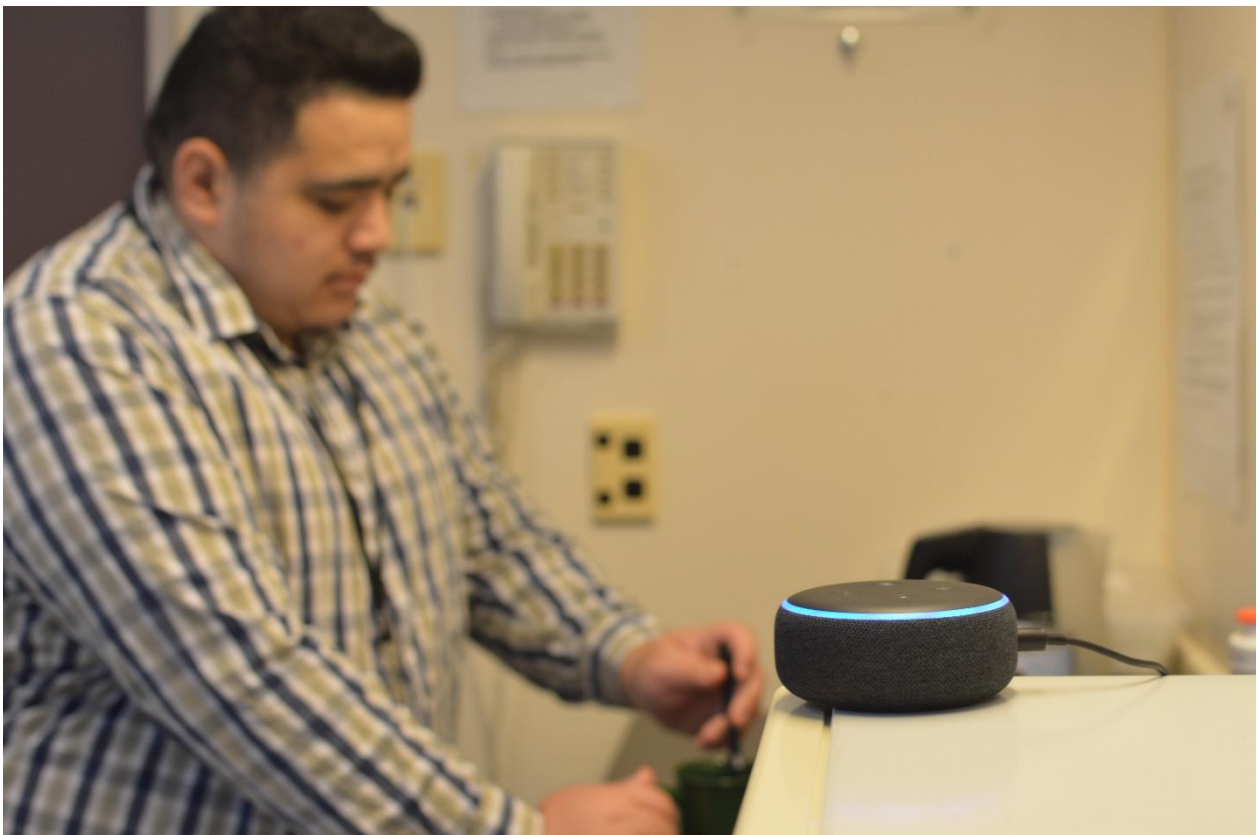
Library Highlights

Hiranga Pātaka Pukapuka

This year has seen another big step forward with the library's digital transformation, as our services continue to grow and mature. Our Alexa Skill and the EasyReader app have had significant developments that directly improve the reading experience for our clients.

Below are some of the highlights of the library service this year:

Alexa



Blind Low Vision NZ's Alexa Skill, our flagship library service, continues to develop and improve. Each month on average 70 new Alexa devices are shipped to clients, Alexa can open up new ways of accessing information and assisting with daily living, an example is the use of Alexa to access newspapers at Blind Low Vision NZ saw a significant increase in 2023, with the number of **newspapers read rising from 1,856 in 2022 to 4,093.**

This indicates that our members are actively leveraging the power of Alexa to stay informed about current events, underscoring the technology's role in promoting easy and convenient access to news. This year the release of new features has been helping clients discover new books to read.

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AI recommendations

Feedback from our clients has indicated they struggle to find new books to read. The introduction of the AI book recommendations feature has had a remarkable impact on the reading habits of Blind Low Vision NZ library members. The number of books borrowed based on these recommendations skyrocketed from **1,426 in 2022 to 6,945 in 2023.** This significant increase demonstrates how AI technology is effectively guiding our members to discover new books tailored to their interests, greatly enriching their reading experience.

Newly added

In conjunction with the AI recommendations feature, the "Newly added" option on the Alexa skill can help clients discover books recently added to the catalogue, providing them with a seamless way to explore the latest literature and stay up-to-date with new additions to our diverse collection. This integration of technology empowers our members to maintain a fresh and dynamic reading journey by listing and reading the synopsis for titles added to the collection in the last 30 days. On average about 50 new books are added to the collection each month, these are by way of request from members or are selected by the "Book Selection Committee" comprising of client and library staff suggestions.

EasyReader Project

For those of you who are new to Blind Low Vision NZ, Dolphin EasyReader, a leading accessible reading app, has been adopted at Blind Low Vision NZ for mobile iOS and Android users, it has proven to be an invaluable tool for the visually impaired community. Its innovative accessibility features, such as customizable text size, colour and contrast settings, and integrated voice-over capabilities, allow users to adjust their reading experience to their personal needs. Furthermore, its compatibility with a broad range of accessible digital formats and direct integration with assistive libraries worldwide ensures that a

vast array of reading materials is always within reach for our users.

The use of Dolphin EasyReader at Blind Low Vision NZ saw significant growth from 2022 to 2023, with the number of **books borrowed increasing from 2,439 to 9,619**, magazines borrowed rising from 175 to 740, and **unique users nearly tripling from 142 to 378**. These substantial improvements highlight the growing appreciation for EasyReader's accessibility features among our community, and underscore our commitment to fostering an inclusive reading environment.

Public Libraries

Blind Low Vision NZ continues to deepen its collaboration with Public Libraries across the country, fostering an environment of shared learning and mutual growth. This year we have consistently held accessibility and awareness workshops with LIANZA (New Zealand Library Association Inc.), enhancing the understanding and application of accessibility in public library services. This year marked the implementation of a significant feature in our book request process: we can now cross-reference requests with public libraries to see if an accessible copy is available. This advancement, facilitating the sharing of resources, ensures a more efficient system and broadens the reach of accessible content.

Further strengthening our partnership, our Engagement Advisor is set to present at the LIANZA national conference in November. This will be an opportunity to build greater awareness of not only the BLVNZ Library services but also the accessibility offerings of public libraries.

We are also excited to commence case studies with clients who are frequent public library users this year. The insights garnered from these studies will allow us to further enhance our collaborations with public libraries, enriching our collective efforts to improve accessibility in library services across New Zealand.

BookDrive and Envoy Connect

For our clients who are unable to access the internet or are unable to utilise Alexa, we continue to deliver books via USB with the BookDrive service. This service is similar to the retired CD service, however more books can be sent at once. This makes up a smaller proportion of our membership and is decreasing as internet access becomes more widespread.

While our clients using the Bookdrive service have been reliant on traditional DAISY players, the truth is that these machines are reaching the end of their lifespan.

Recognising the need to evolve with technology, our dedicated Library team has initiated the testing process for a promising replacement device called the Envoy Connect.

This modern and user-friendly device offers new features and is expected to provide a new reading experience for our members. As we transition towards the Envoy Connect, our aim is to ensure seamless adaptation for our clients, reaffirming our commitment to providing them with the best accessible reading tools available.

With the Library service now very much a digital service, it faces the challenge of rapid technological change. Regular updates, improvements and enhancements will be ongoing in the key library service. However, we do not forget that the library is a person-centred service and are excited about maintaining and improving the accessible library experience.

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Comprehensive health and wellness through the Sport and Leisure team

With Enabling Good Lives Principles as our playbook, the Sport and Leisure team's goal is to support our members to live independent lives with access to a variety of inclusive, and sustainable leisure activities.

FY23 was a fabulous inning for us in terms of delivering on our mission.

We partnered with Recreate NZ to deliver a Kids Camp, where 13 young members knocked their personal goals

out of the park by challenging themselves with exciting activities like caving, high ropes, and river rafting. They also got to enjoy a few other less physical activities, developing new skills that will serve them for years to come.

Participants came away with some major self-improvement wins. Confidence levels and skillsets were boosted with bonus points scored as lasting friendships were made.

Getting our clients involved in activities they love requires good teamwork. This year, we successfully got one member involved in both a tramping club and a local walking group. We achieved this by targeting and recruiting an amazing volunteer, whom we trained up to deliver first class white cane training and assistance.

Client and volunteer were then teamed up. The result was a perfect match! Our member is now skilled a skilled user of the white cane, an experienced tramper, and on track to be matched with a Guide Dog.

That same tactic paid off when another member approached us, keen to play lawn bowls but requiring the assistance of a director.

Our Sport and Leisure team reached out to Blind Lawn Bowls NZ. Both teams then worked out a game plan with our member to get her out on the green. Fortunately, they didn't have to look far to find an appropriate candidate for the role of director. The ideal person attends the same church as our member! With a little training and support

from our end, our member can now enjoy the thrill of lawn bowls, with a director at her side.

Sports and Leisure has also continued to light up the scoreboard with our support of existing Member Groups across the nation. We have even

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managed to establish new groups in locations that have not had them before.

We look forward to setting new records for FY24 as we continue to be there to assist our members as they do for gold with their sports and leisure pursuits.

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In Gratitude

We want to extend our heartfelt appreciation to every supporter who has stood by us. Your generosity continues to transform the lives of individuals in New Zealand facing challenges with blindness, deaf-blindness, or low vision. Your compassion empowers them to live the life they choose, and we can't thank you enough for the profound impact you've had.

Major Donors

Acorn Foundation

Alpheus Capital Ltd

Andrew & Adrienne Hopkins

Anne Duncan
Aotearoa Gaming Trust
Central Lakes Trust
Claire Fisher
Community Trust South
Dannevirke Host Lions Club
Dauntsey Teagle
Dorothy Cutts
E M Pharazyn Charitable Trust
Eastern and Central Community Trust
Elaine Hutchinson
Emeric Erdei Trust Fund
Estate of Ernest Hyam Davis and Ted & Mollie Carr
Endowment Trust
Four Winds Foundation Ltd
Frances Skeet Charitable Trust
Fred Ruddenklau Charitable Trust
Freemasons New Zealand
Glyn Harvard Evans Charitable Trust
Gooduck Trust

Grassroots Trust
Grumitt Sisters Charitable Trust

Hugh Green Foundation
Jack Emms Trust
JBS Dudding Charitable Trust
John Cawood
Kiwi Gaming Foundation
Lady Lyn Robertson
Legacy for Rebecca Chalmers
Leonie Cameron
Lindsay Foundation
Mac and Tui Chapman Charitable Trust
Mainland Foundation
Marion and Neville Handcock
Marriott Trust
Michael Roger Mountcastle in memory of Hilary Joan Garbut
N H Taylor Charitable Trust
Nanette K White
Nikau Foundation
Otago Community Trust
Oxford Sports Trust
Peak Safety Training
Percy Wheatley Trust
Perpetual Guardian

Philippa Horn

Public Trust

Roger Young Sun Kan

Roland Stead Charitable Trust

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Room-Simmonds Charitable Trust

Royston Health Trust

Ruth Petty Trust

Silk Route Limited

Stanley V Ratley Trust & Estate

Sylvia Burberry

T M Hosking Charitable Trust

Taumarunui Opportunity Shop

The Claire Simpson Charitable Trust

The Masfen Foundation

The Parnell Hotel and Conference Centre

The Reed Charitable Trust

The Trustees of the Ray Watts Charitable Trust

The Trusts Community Foundation Ltd

Timaru Construction

Trillian Trust Ltd

Trust Waikato

W A & E M Anderson Memorial Trust

Gifts in Wills

Gifts in Wills support 1 in 3 services at Blind Low Vision NZ. A gift in a Will of as little as 5% makes a tremendous difference. Last year, many of our services would not have been possible without the kind support of the following people who left a gift in their Will.

Legacies

Estate of Alan David Anderson

Estate of Alice May Macdonald

Estate of Arthur Henry Wall

Estate of B Stephens

Estate of Barta Patricia Ethel Davis

Estate of Catherine Whitbread-Edwards

Estate of Craig Chumun

Estate of Donald James Duke

Estate of Donald James Pollock
Estate of Doreen Anne Quinn
Estate of Doreen Margaret Hall
Estate of Edmund Alfred Bonner
Estate of Elaine Maureen Smyth
Estate of Esma Mary King
Estate of F H G Watt
Estate of Garry Frederick Bell
Estate of George Mana Todd
Estate of Gwendolen Nellie Hamilton
Estate of Harry Widmer
Estate of Ivy Mearle Shaw
Estate of James Holmes

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Estate of Jocelyn Ann Stephenson
Estate of Johannes van Harskamp
Estate of John Stanley Roberts
Estate of Joy Willena Miller
Estate of Joyce Evelyn Jarvis
Estate of Joyce Frances Blair
Estate of June Frances Maxwell
Estate of Keith David Allen
Estate of Kenneth Holmes

Estate of Kevin Alexander Turner
Estate of Lawrence Mervyn Wilkins
Estate of Leonard Frontin-Rollet
Estate of Lily Rollings Williamson
Estate of Louis James Butler
Estate of Lynette Ruth Manning
Estate of Mary Elizabeth Brown
Estate of Mary Lilian Matthews
Estate of Michael Hardy Harris
Estate of Michael John Hughes
Estate of Murray Stoughton Rider
Estate of Neville Leonard Shea
Estate of Norah Hamblin Memorial Trust
Estate of Olive Lucinda Stoddard
Estate of Peter Ireland
Estate of Phyllis Elizabeth Andrews
Estate of Rhona Marion Howie
Estate of Stuart Alan Bruce
Estate of Titia Gretha Praamstra

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Estate of Virginia Luck Gini
Estate of Wendy Lynette Inwood
Estate of Wendy Remnant

Estate of William Ronald Brown

Estate of W J & C E Friar

Financials

Pūrongo Pūtea

Where our income comes from:

Gifts in Wills (44%)

Charitable Gifts (34%)

Government (20%)

Property & rental income 1% (1%)

Other (1%)

Where our income goes:

Personalised rehabilitation and support services (54%)

Awareness raising and advocacy (17%)

Innovation and adaptation for client services (15%)

Fundraising (14%)

Grants to client peer support groups (2%)

Governance (1%)

The Board

Te Poari Kaitiaki



Clive Lansink (Chair)



Fraser Alexander



Richard Patete



Martine Abel-Williamson



John Billings



Anne-Marie Taggart



Judy Small



Donna McCaskill



Ronald (Ron) Scott

Clive Lansink—Chair

Blind since birth, Clive has spent much of his personal life working on behalf of people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision and was President of Blind Citizens New Zealand for a total of thirteen years. He has an engineering degree as well as a law degree.

Fraser Alexander—Deputy Chair

Fraser holds an Undergraduate degree in biosciences and a Postgraduate honours degree in business. He has spent 22 years in not-for-profit marketing including nine years with Blind Low Vision NZ. Fraser is a past President of Retina NZ.

Judy Small

Judy has been a client of Blind Low Vision NZ since she was four years old. Judy graduated in 1999 with a Master of Social Science (Hons). While studying Judy served on the Blind Citizens New Zealand National Executive. She worked as a Policy Analyst for 11½ years in social policy in the Office for Disability Issues. She has worked for nine years at Hamilton City Council, as Disability Advisor. All her roles have focused on policy and strategy development and leading community-based projects.

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Richard Patete

Richard has been involved with Blind Low Vision NZ for over 20 years. His eldest daughter, Renee, was born blind. Raising Renee has given him a strong understanding of the needs and challenges of the blind and low vision community. He brings with him an extensive range of experience working in the not-for-profit sector.

Martine Abel-Williamson

Martine has been living in New Zealand for the past 27 years since emigrating from South Africa. Her qualifications are in the areas of vision rehabilitation, education and social policy and previously worked at Blind Low Vision NZ in the fields of blindness awareness training

and service co-ordination. Martine is also the President of the World Blind Union.

John Billings

John has been practising his profession as a Dispensing Optician for 39 years. He has always had a strong interest in providing Low Vision Aids and services to the partially sighted in order to help them continue with as good a quality of life as possible. To this end he is involved in puppy raising for Guide Dog Services. As well as the Low Vision community, he also has experience with the Deaf community.

Anne-Marie Taggart

Anne-Marie is an experienced senior leader within the NZ public sector. She began her career as an HR professional but in recent years has branched out and has led both corporate and operational functions. Recently Anne-Marie has joined Te Kawa Mataaho (Public Service Commission) as the Executive Coach in the Leadership Development Centre.

Donna McCaskill

Donna worked for almost 20 years with Blind Low Vision NZ before standing for the Board. She currently works within the disability sector for a pan disability social enterprise as a direct line manager and advocate for a team of people with sensory, physical, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities.

Ronald (Ron) Scott

Ron lives in Tauranga where he is an elected member of the Bay of Plenty Regional Council and Chairs the SILC Charitable Trust. He has degrees in Economics, History and Geography and founded Stellaris Ltd which specialises in strategy and governance training for boards and senior executives.

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Executive Leadership Team Te Ranga Manahautū



John Mulka
(Outgoing CE)



Greg Hurn
(Acting CE)



Liz Ansell



Mark Dickinson



Gwen Green



Marjorie Hawkings

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John Mulka, Outgoing Chief Executive

Before joining Blind Low Vision NZ in September 2019, John spent his then 28-year professional working career in the not-for-profit and charitable sector with national organisations in his native country of Canada. Over his 11-year career with the CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind), his responsibilities grew progressively, culminating with him being appointed as the Vice President, Western Canada in 2015 which he held

until accepting the Chief Executive role with Blind Low Vision NZ until September 2023

Greg Hurn, Acting Chief Executive

In his role as Acting Chief Executive, Greg Hurn brings over 13 years of experience at Blind Low Vision NZ, previously serving as Chief Financial Officer. With a strong history of delivering results, Greg's seasoned perspective will guide the organisation through this interim period. His expertise spans financial management, strategic planning, business/property development, and customer service. Greg prioritizes team cohesion, upholding core values, and fostering open communication.

Liz Ansell, General Manager Client Services

Liz is a seasoned leader with experience across both public and private sectors including FMCG, banking, media and security. Following extensive experience in HR and managing change, she is thrilled to bring her skills into managing and growing a team of people passionate about providing first-class service in the not-for-profit sector.

Mark Dickinson,

General Manager Business Services

Joining Blind Low Vision NZ in 2018, Mark has extensive New Zealand and International operational and senior leadership experience.

Mark's focus in leading the Business Services portfolio is to enable the development and implementation of creative business solutions to support our entire organisation as we strive to achieve best in class performance, delivering superior service outcomes for our members and clients.

Gwen Green,

GM Engagement and Marketing

Gwen has over 25 years' fundraising, marketing, and communications experience both in New Zealand and the UK.

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Gwen has a passion for developing donor-focused fundraising, creating new income opportunities, and re-visioning existing fundraising strategies to maximise income generation in ways that are flexible to our ever-changing world.

Marjorie Hawkings, Executive Assistant to Chief Executive

Marjorie has recently celebrated her 13-year anniversary with Blind Low Vision NZ. She has held several different positions during her tenure, with the last four years in her current role. Marjorie has been involved in numerous projects and events and consistently demonstrates exceptional organisational skills, attention to detail, and a deep understanding of the organisation. Marjorie is also the Compliments and Complaints Officer and manages the internal Travel Centre Team. Prior to her employment at Blind Low Vision NZ, Marjorie spent many years overseas and has extensive experience as an accomplished and dedicated Executive Assistant with a proven track record of providing high-level support to executive management teams.

Amsler Grid

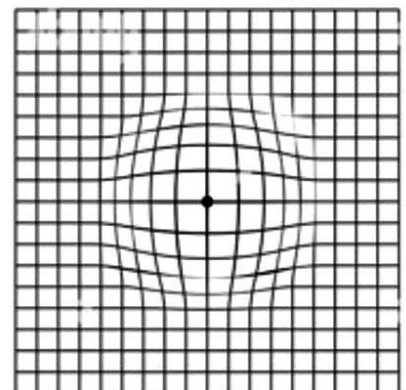
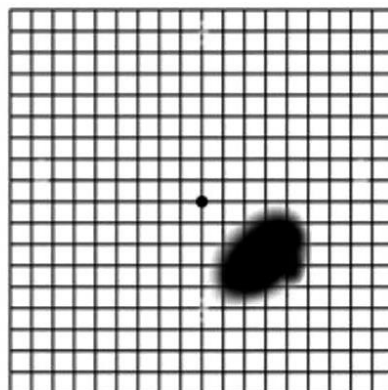
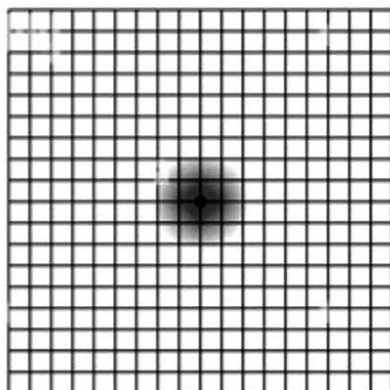
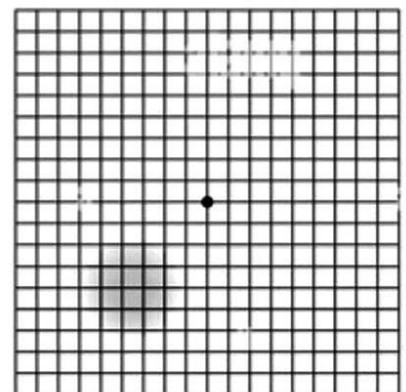
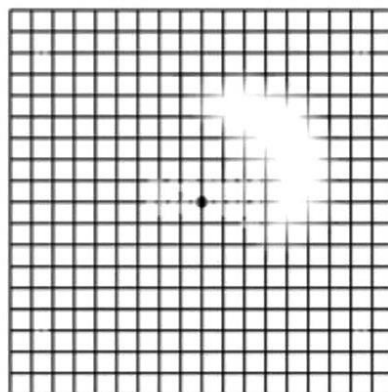
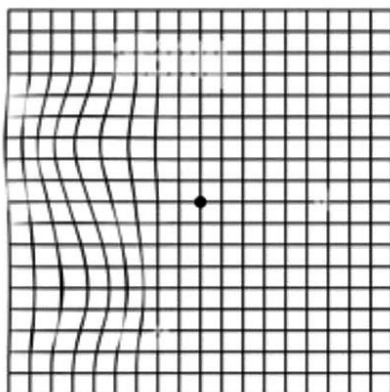
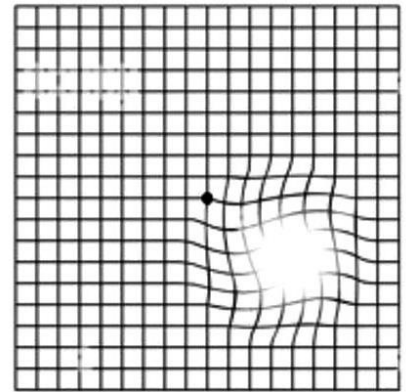
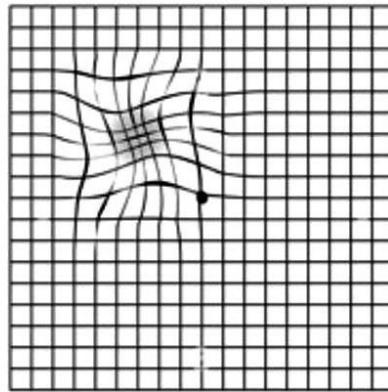
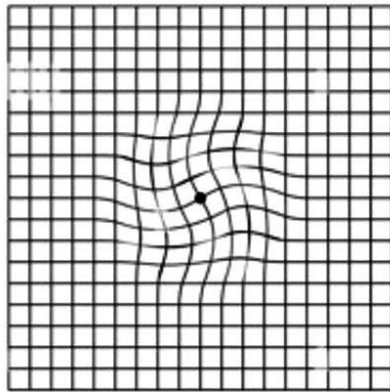
How to test your eyes with the Amsler Grid

Tear this page out and keep it somewhere you will remember so that you can test your eyes regularly.

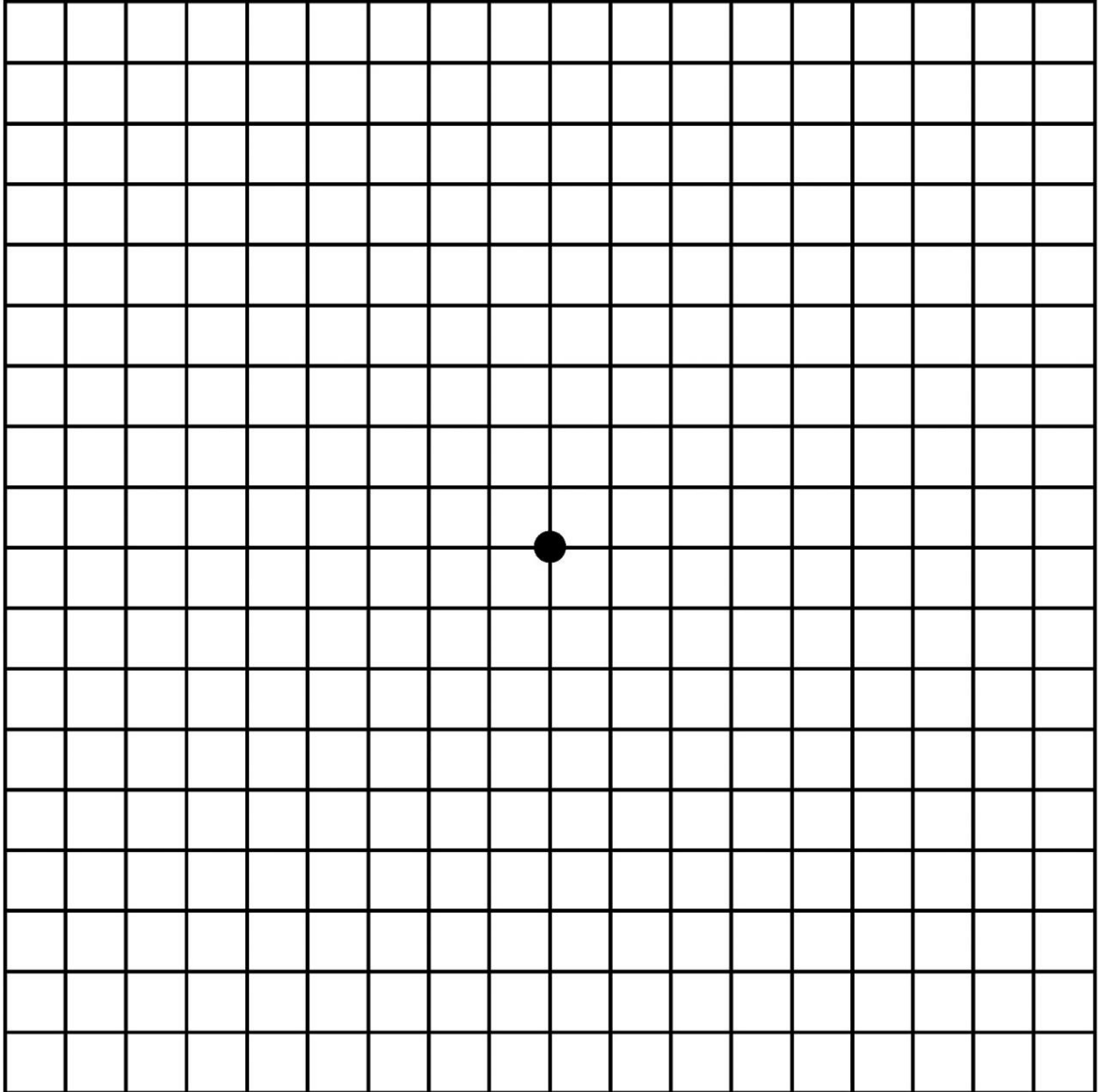
- Wear glasses that you normally wear for reading

- Hold the grid about 35–40cm away from your face
- Cover one eye at a time
- Stare at the dot in the middle
- Contact your eye care doctor immediately if any of the straight lines appear wavy or bent, any of the boxes differ in size or shape from the others, or any of the lines are missing, blurry or discoloured

Here is what an abnormal reaction to the Amsler grid might look like. If you start to notice this, please consult your doctor.



Eye Test



Blind Low Vision NZ around the country—Kāpō Matarehu

Aotearoa puta noa i te motu

TN: Key to map of NZ that follows the next two pages:

A: Whangarei 277 Kamo Road, Kamo, Whangarei 0112	E: South Auckland 20 McVilly Road, Manurewa, Auckland 2102
B: Smales Farm, North Shore Shop 1, Ground Floor Q4 On the Boulevard Smales Farm, Takapuna 0622	F: Fale Kotuku 20 McVilly Road, Manurewa, Auckland 2102
C: West Auckland Unit C (upper level), 197 Universal Drive, Henderson, Auckland 0610	G: Guide Dog Services 30 McVilly Road, Manurewa, Auckland 2102
D: Parnell, Auckland 539 Parnell Road, Parnell, Auckland 1052	H: Hamilton 15 Liverpool Street, Hamilton 3204

I: Tauranga 160 Seventeenth Avenue, Tauranga South, Tauranga 3112	O: Kāpiti Coast 6 Tongariro Street, Paraparaumu 5032
J: Gisborne 39 Grey Street, Gisborne 4010	P: Wellington 121 Adelaide Road, Newtown, Wellington 6021
K: New Plymouth 129–131 Vivian Street, New Plymouth 4310	Q: Nelson and Marlborough 530 Main Road, Stoke, Nelson 7011
L: Napier 65 Thackeray Street, Napier 4110	R: Christchurch 96 Bristol Street, St. Albans, Christchurch 8014
M: Wanganui 102 Peat Street, Wanganui 4500	S: Dunedin Corner of Hillside Road & Law Street, Dunedin 9012
N: Palmerston North 49 Walding Street, Palmerston North 4410	T: Invercargill 172 Queens Drive, Richmond, Invercargill 9810



For more information and
opening hours scan the QR code
or visit our website.





Ngā mihi nui for your support!

From the team at

Blind Low Vision NZ

<https://blindlowvision.org.nz/>

0800 24 33 33

PO Box: Private Bag 99910, Newmarket, Auckland 1149

Facebook: [@BlindLowVisionNZ](#)

Instagram: [@blindlowVisionnz](#)

Twitter: [@blindlowvision](#)

End of Community Impact Report 2023