# Kōrero – August 2025

**I orea te tuatara ka patu ki waho.**

**A problem is solved by continuing to find solutions.**

This whakataukī refers to the need for creative thinking, adaptability and perseverance. In order to solve a problem, you need to have all of these.

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# Formats

Kōrero is available in the following formats:

* HTML webpage: Read the Kōrero newsletter as a webpage on the Blind Low Vision NZ website.
* Alexa: Say “Alexa, open Blind Low Vision”. Alexa will then guide you through the main menu. Then, at any point, say “Alexa, magazines” and then “Alexa, BLVNZ Kōrero”.
* TIS (Telephone Information Service): Call TIS m341. Find your local TIS number on [our Library Services webpage](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/our-services/accessible-library/library-services/).
* Braille: Call our Contact Centre on 0800 24 33 33 if you would like to receive Kōrero in braille.

# Message from Andrea

I want to share an update on the government’s review of the Total Mobility scheme. This review has raised real concern for many people in our community, and I know some of you may be wondering what it could mean for you.

[Total Mobility](https://nzta.govt.nz/resources/total-mobility-scheme/total-mobility?utm_source=chatgpt.com) is a government scheme that helps people who have difficulty using regular public transport. It gives you a discount on taxi fares, so you can get to work, medical appointments, buy groceries, and stay connected. For people who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision, this is more than a subsidy. It is a lifeline.Since 2023, the Total Mobility scheme has been under review, which is causing concern across our community.

**At Blind Low Vision NZ**, we advocate for protecting this vital support. [I recently shared a statement on LinkedIn about the importance of the Total Mobility Card,](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/blvnz-ce-andrea_as-chief-executive-of-blind-low-vision-nz-activity-7362956662476820480-b4mN?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAAPjq5EBhRqVEkUH5s6-xEP4x0QDM-3yrbs) highlighting how it helps people maintain everyday independence.

Even while under review, the Total Mobility Card continues to provide up to 75 percent off taxi fares (set by the relevant regional council, or Auckland Transport), helping people stay connected and independent. We are closely monitoring any changes and taking action to ensure our community always knows what support is available.

If you don’t yet have a Total Mobility Card or would like help understanding your options, you can reach out to your local council or Blind Low Vision NZ for guidance. If you are in the Auckland region, please contact CCS Disability on **09 625 9378**. For all other regions, you can call our Contact Centre on **0800 24 33 33** for support.

A client interview was recently shared in which Harry spoke about his experience with the Total Mobility Card:

“It's not me squealing for more. There's great advantage to this card, it gives us a little bit of choice, it gives us a freedom that we wouldn't have otherwise.”

[You can read the full article on the Post website: Taxi subsidy review worries people with disabilities.](https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/360790756/taxi-subsidy-review-worries-people-disabilities)

[Listen to RNZ interview with Dr Sally, one of our clients, about fears that a vital travel subsidy could be capped.](a)

# Tell me about it

This is your space to share bite-sized learnings from your experiences as someone who is blind, deafblind, or has low vision. Maybe you’ve got a new gadget you’re loving, or you’re an Excel expert with great tips on accessibility features. Whatever it is, your knowledge could help someone else. Whether it’s a tech trick, a daily living hack, or anything in between, we want to hear from you! Your insights could make a big difference to others in the community.

If you’d like to submit an idea, please email communications@blindlowvision.org.nz.

## Finding your feet with change

In this month’s reflection, Trevor shared what it was like facing the reality of vision loss over many years and how some of the hardest shifts weren’t about the eyes, but about identity and independence.

He spoke honestly about resisting cane training at first, not because it wasn’t helpful, but because it felt like giving in. “The thought of trundling around behind a white stick didn’t do much for my vanity,” he wrote, “but I soon realised how important it was.” With patience from others and perseverance on his part, that cane became a vital tool for freedom, not a symbol of loss.

He also touched on what many of you have told us before: that learning to accept help, and asking for it, can feel even harder than the physical changes. It’s a journey full of emotion, not just for you, but for your whānau and friends too.

His story reminds us that there’s no set way to ‘do’ vision loss. No perfect response. No single timeline. What matters is finding what works for you and knowing there’s no shame in taking your time. You’re not behind. You’re growing.

# Thumbs Up

## Consultation on refreshed Disability Strategy

The Government is refreshing the New Zealand Disability Strategy, and now is the time to share your voice.

The NZ Disability Strategy sets out the vision and goals that guide how government agencies support disabled people across areas like education, employment, health, housing and justice. The current 10-year strategy ends in 2026, and the refreshed version will cover 2026 to 2030.

Minister for Disability Issues, [Hon Louise Upston, announced via the Beehive website](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/consultation-refreshed-disability-strategy) that the purpose of the strategy is to improve lives and uphold rights. Disabled people still face many barriers in areas such as employment and housing. For example, three-quarters of unemployed disabled people want to work, but often lack opportunities. The refreshed strategy aims to change this by shaping policies and actions that allow disabled people to thrive, lead and make decisions about their own lives.

The Ministry of Disabled People Whaikaha has already spoken with many disabled people and organisations, and now the public consultation is open to everyone.

You can have your say online in accessible formats, or by joining an in-person or online meeting.

Consultation closes on **28 September 2025.** Visit the following link on the Whaikaha website to know more: [Refresh of the New Zealand Disability Strategy | Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People](https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/about-us/our-work/new-zealand-disability-strategy-refresh).

## Funding support to help you reach your goals

If you or someone you know has a goal to get into work or study but needs a little extra help to get started, there are some great funding options available.

### The Pearson Fund could help brighten up your Winter

Even small tools like magnifiers or better lighting can make a big difference. If cost is a concern, the Pearson Fund may be able to help. The good news is that we’ve added a new Pearson code Blind Low Vision NZ clients can use at The Vision Store checkout.

Now, using the code **50PEARSON** will get you **50% off your basket total to $500.**

The code **PEARSON** will still give you a standard **25% off all purchases over $500.**

The Pearson Fund is more than just a discount code. It also offers funding to help with equipment costs. Check if you’re eligible today. If you have any questions, please call our Contact Centre **on 0800 24 33 33.**

[Learn more about the Pearson Fund and how to apply on the Blind Low Vision NZ website.](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/our-services/support-grants/?utm_source=Korero+Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Support+Grants&utm_id=Korero+Click-thrus)

### Oppenheim Tertiary Fund applications open soon

Thinking about study next year? The Oppenheim Tertiary Education Trust Fund can help cover course fees for recognised degrees and vocational training.

Whether you're just finishing school or ready for your next step, it’s worth checking your eligibility.

Applications open **1 September**. Start preparing your documents now so you’re ready to apply.

[Learn more about the Oppenheim Fund on our website.](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/our-services/support-grants/)

### Got a big idea that could help you get into work?

The Workbridge Foundation has launched a new grant called **Hand Up, Not Hand Out.** It's for disabled people who have a clear idea that would support their journey toward employment but need a bit of funding to get started.

This could be anything from training, equipment, setting up a small business, or something unique to your needs. If you’ve got a plan that could help you take that next step toward work, this grant might be for you.

You don’t need to be working with Workbridge to apply. Applications are open now.

[Find out more and apply via the Workbridge Foundation website.](https://workbridgefoundation.org.nz/Grants/)

### MSD Training and Support Funds Programme

The Ministry of Social Development offers Support Funds to help people with disabilities or health conditions get either Job Support or Training Support, depending on what you need help with. Support Funds can help with the additional costs incurred as a direct consequence of disability or health condition, when undertaking the same employment or training as a person without a disability or health condition.

There are two types of Support Funds:

* Job Support helps meet disability costs when in employment or self-employment.
* Training Support helps meet disability costs when participating in work-related training, or tertiary education.

To be eligible for Support Funds, you must meet MSD’s eligibility criteria (outlined on the Support Funds web page and application forms linked below), plus have a disability or health condition that has lasted or is likely to last longer than six months.

To apply for Support Funds, you need to complete either a [Training Support Application (PDF)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/documents/forms/support-funds-training-support-application-form.pdf) or [Job Support Application (PDF)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/documents/forms/support-funds-job-support-application-form.pdf) and send it, with supporting documentation, to Support\_Funds@msd.govt.nz. If the PDF forms are troublesome to fill out on your own, please call the MSD Job and Training Support Fund number 0800 551 001 so they can help you out.

## What’s New in Adaptive Technology?

**By Israel Coello, Head of Innovation and Insights, Blind Low Vision NZ**

In March, I travelled to California for the CSUN Assistive Technology Conference – one of the world’s biggest events focused on adaptive tech. It’s where innovators, users, and organisations like ours come together to explore what’s next in accessibility.

Here are some of the standout trends, tools, and takeaways from CSUN 2025.

AI-powered tools took centre stage, from navigation aids that adapt in real time to hands-free guidance apps like Navis. These tools prioritise autonomy and reflect how AI is reshaping mobility for blind and low vision users. Still, presenters reminded us: AI must be used wisely, with humans firmly in control.

The **WeWALK Smart Cane 2** is a white cane that tracks your walking style (pitch, swipe width, etc.) and can offer feedback to an instructor remotely. In some areas, it also provides real-time public transport and navigation info through the user's phone. We’re actively staying in the loop with like-minded overseas partners as they test this tech, so we can assess its fit for New Zealand clients too.

There was also buzz around **Glidance**, an AI-powered mobility aid designed to support independent travel through obstacle avoidance and environmental awareness. Still in the early stages of development, the prototype hints at how AI may complement traditional mobility tools in the future.

Braille lovers, take note: **Paige Connect** transforms a standard Perkins Brailler into a Bluetooth-enabled device that transmits Braille input to a connected device. It’s about bringing modern tech into traditionally low-tech spaces, helping bridge the gap between tactile literacy and digital learning.

Another demo showed **SignGlasses**, wearable glasses offering live captioning and even sign language interpretation (for now in American Sign Language only). The captioning could be a game-changer for some deafblind clients once we explore contrast and font size customisation options. Beyond the tech, CSUN was also about people. We connected with international experts whose support could lead to new training, webinars, and access to emerging tools. CSUN 2025 gave us a glimpse of what’s next: smarter tools, global collaboration, and a shared push for more inclusive tech.

These tools aren’t mainstream yet, but that’s what makes them exciting. We’re staying connected, asking the right questions, and bringing the best of what we find back home. As we roll out these ideas and technologies, we’ll keep you informed and involved.

Stay tuned: when the next Adaptive Tech webinar invite comes through, we’d love to see you there. Until then, stay curious! The future of accessibility is bright.

## Your space, your voice – be part of Wellington’s new youth group

The Wellington office has launched a new Youth Group this month for clients and members **aged 13 to 30** in the **Wellington region**. This group offers a safe, inclusive space where young people who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision can connect, share experiences, and make friends.

The first discussion session was held on 23 August. The next meet-up will be:

**Date:** Saturday 27 September.

**Time:** 10am to 11am.

**Location:** Blind Low Vision NZ Wellington Office, 121 Adelaide Road, Newtown.

Join us for a fun, accessible space to meet new people, share your stories, and help shape the future of this group.

Please RSVP by call or text Jeremy by 22 September on 022 014 7094. Transport options may be available.

## Create your lasting legacy with Safewill — free from 1 to 22 September 2025

Having a Will means your wishes are followed and helps avoid stress or confusion for your loved ones when the time comes. Without a Will, the court may decide who gets what, even your pets.

This September, Blind Low Vision NZ has partnered with **Safewill** to offer a free online Will service to clients and their families aged 18 or over. We chose Safewill because it is the most accessible online Will platform we’ve found, tested by our staff using the JAWS screen reader.

If you need help, Safewill offers a live chat box for typing questions, and you can call them on 0061 1800 10 33 10 during business hours (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm Sydney time). **Please note, standard calling fees apply**.

**Key details:**

* Free from **1 to 22 September 2025.**
* Simple and secure: Safewill is one of New Zealand’s highest-rated Will platforms.
* Reviewed by legal experts.
* Update your Will anytime.
* Print and sign at home.

While your loved ones come first, please consider leaving a gift to Blind Low Vision NZ in your Will. Even 1% of your estate can make a big difference.

[Visit the Safewill website](https://apc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsafewill.com%2Fnz%2Fblindlowvisionnz%3Futm_content%3Dptnr%26utm_source%3DKorero%26utm_medium%3Demail%26utm_campaign%3Dblindlowvisionnz_sep_Free_Will&data=05%7C02%7CJSeo%40blindlowvision.org.nz%7C51523ecfd783481eefb008ddda1c91c9%7C19efb84dcb0248bfa899e37c9124e110%7C0%7C0%7C638906538419539622%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=%2FSDiKKzLRB5z4lRuS%2BtMokzY08TJfFqBTjHQtfDQ91o%3D&reserved=0) to get started. For more information, contact **Jo Eve**, Relationships Manager Legacies, at legacies@blindlowvision.org.nz or call **022 015 9216.**

## Telefriend: Here to Support You

Telefriend offers empathetic, non-judgmental, and confidential peer support for people who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision, as well as their caregivers, family, and friends. Whether you need guidance or just want a friendly chat, we're here to help.

Call us at **0800 100 051**, from **1 pm to 4 pm, Monday through Friday**. If you call outside these hours, leave a message—we will return your call. Connect with a Telefriend today by dialling 0800 100 051.

# Noticeboard

## A tribute to Craig Charles Jessop 1967-2025

Last month, we lost one of the great servants of the blind community. He was both an outstanding employee and a dedicated volunteer. A tribute to Craig, written by [Fraser Alexander - The University of Auckland](https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/giving/contact-us/fraser-alexander.html), is shared below.

Craig Jessop of Whangārei was a singular figure – a man of profound selflessness, tenacity, and pragmatic generosity. In spite of grave personal challenges, including a double transplant, Craig dedicated himself with unwavering resolve to lifting others. When he joined the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind’s Whangārei office, he brought not just lived experience but an instinctive drive to make meaningful, lasting change. For over a quarter of a century, he served as an Adaptive Communication and Adaptive Technology Services (ACATS) Program Support Assistant, volunteer services liaison, and locality coordinator with the community committee.

Craig lost his sight in 1989, and in 1998 underwent a lifesaving kidney-pancreas transplant.

An exceptional adaptive technology trainer, what set him apart wasn’t just technical knowledge – it was his innate ability to understand how technology intersected with the lives of individuals. He had a unique capacity to assess new software or hardware not just for its functions, but for its fit: who it could serve, when it would be of most use, and why it would matter. He matched innovation with intuition, always grounded in the context of someone’s actual needs and aspirations.

He instinctively tailored his approach to each learner – speaking the language that made sense to them, choosing the most direct and accessible teaching methodology, and always staying attuned to their goals. Craig’s sessions were never one-size-fits-all. His patience, attentiveness, and ability to demystify even the most complex tech created a space of confidence and discovery for the people he trained.

Beyond his role with Blind Low Vision NZ, his life was one of relentless service and adventure. He was instrumental in establishing Achilles New Zealand, helping athletes with sensory or physical disabilities take part in mainstream road events. He mentored many within the transplant, diabetes, and disability communities, and poured his energy into volunteerism, consumer advocacy, and fundraising for causes close to his heart.

Peter Loft, Craig’s early coach with Achilles, recalls a moment that captures Craig’s spirit. When doctors warned Craig that running the New York City Marathon could kill him, he responded:

“Well, at least I will die doing something.”

It was never easy. Craig began training in 1994, only to end up in intensive care with kidney failure. But even as dialysis became a daily routine, he adapted – shifting to a mobile CAPD system so he could continue training. When joint issues ruled out running, he defied medical advice and took up water training instead. Two months later, he completed a 21km walk. Later that year, he completed the NYC Marathon in 7 hours and 20 minutes. He would go on to do it again – multiple times – including once as a blind, double-transplant athlete.

Always with a natural humility, Craig’s feats were numerous. He rode tandem from Brisbane to Sydney for diabetes research, cycled from Bluff to Cape Reinga to raise money for disabled athletes, and ran the New York Marathon four times – once after his transplants. He drove a manual MX5 on winding Northland roads – —despite blindness. If it had wheels and an engine, Craig could fix it.

He never stopped. He never complained. He never sought accolades. He simply kept moving forward – living fully, serving others, and inspiring everyone he met.

Craig Jessop’s legacy marries extraordinary personal courage with a deep and consistent commitment to equity, empowerment, and community. He lived not for recognition, but for real-world impact. His influence endures in the lives he touched and the inclusive world he helped to build.

May Blind Low Vision NZ honour him as he honoured others – through shared stories, enduring programmes, and a relentless commitment to the kind of inclusive, compassionate service that Craig exemplified.

Rest in peace Craig, you served us well, we will never forget.

## Shaping the Future of RNZFB Governance

The RNZFB Board is moving forward with their review of the RNZFB Constitution. Simpson Grierson, an independent law firm, has been commissioned to carry out the review. Their role is to assess whether RNZFB’s current governance model, including how decisions are made and who has a voice, truly reflects the diversity, needs, and aspirations of the community today.

Simpson Grierson will carry out both targeted and broad research, surveying clients and members. They will also explore ways to clearly distinguish service users from voting members, which is important for understanding representation.

A Board Steering Group made up of three Directors has been formed to support the process. They will work closely with Simpson Grierson to make sure the approach and language are appropriate and accessible. The full Board will also engage with the review and will receive a draft of the final report to provide feedback and ensure it reflects community context.

To learn more about what the review will cover, how it will be done, and what it aims to produce, please [download the Terms of Reference for the Independent Governance Review of the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind](https://media.blindlowvision.org.nz/uploads/2025/08/20250801-Terms-of-Reference-for-the-Independent-Governance-Review-of-The-Royal-New-Zealand-Foundation-of-The-Blind.docx).

### Feedback

If you are interested, Simpson Grierson would like to hear your views. There are several ways you can feed back. They are:

* Email your views to governancereviewRNZFB@simpsongrierson.com.
* Record your submission on the Telephone Information Service, menu option **3, 1, 5, 3, 2***.*
* Post your submission in your preferred format to Board Secretary, RNZFB, Private Bag 99941, Newmarket, Auckland 1149.

Please share any comments no later than **1 September 2025.**

For more information, or if you would prefer to receive these reports in a different format, please email the Board Secretary boardsecretary@blindlowvision.org.nz or phone the Contact Centre on 0800 24 33 33.

# Upcoming events

## Work Ready Webinar: MSD Support and Benefits Tuesday 9 September, 10 am

Receiving a Supported Living Payment, or thinking about applying? Join our next Work Ready Webinar to learn more about MSD’s disability support options and how to access them with confidence.

We’ll be joined by a representative from the MSD Health and Disability team, who will guide us through:

* The role of MSD Health Advisors**.**
* Eligibility criteria for the Supported Living Payment**.**
* The application and review process**.**
* Blind Person’s Benefit exemptions**.**

There will also be time for general questions at the end of the session. While we won’t be able to address individual cases during the webinar, we’ll share how you can follow up afterwards.

**When**: Tuesday, 9 September 2025.

**Time**: 10am to 11am.

**Where**: [Join our live work ready webinar on Zoom – 9 September](https://blindlowvision.zoom.us/j/86790621483).

### Work Ready Webinar Recordings & Resources

Explore a series of standout webinars covering topics from cutting-edge accessible technology to vital support funds. [Listen to Work Ready Webinar Recordings at your leisure on the Blind Low Vision NZ website.](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/our-services/employment-and-youth-transition/work-ready-webinar-recordings/?utm_source=Korero&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=June24)

## Te Wiki o te Reo Māori – Māori Language Week 14-20 September

### Celebrating 50 Years of Te Wiki o te Reo Māori with the Blind Low Vision NZ Library

Te Wiki o te Reo Māori (Māori Language Week) is a chance to celebrate and grow te reo Māori across Aotearoa. This year we are proud to support 50 years of Te Wiki o te Reo Māori, celebrating with the theme of Ake Ake Ake, a Forever Language. To learn more about Māori Language Week, which runs from 14 – 20 September this year, [check out reomaori.co.nz.](https://www.reomaori.co.nz/)

Finding the right reo resources can be tough, that’s where we come in.

The Blind Low Vision NZ Library offers accessible books, health information, and learning materials in te reo Māori. From children’s stories to books of whakataukī (proverbs), our whare pukapuka (Library) is here to support your reo journey. It includes work from Scotty Morrison, Hēmi Kelly, and Shilo Kino, as well as Māori/English vocabulary books like Donovan Bixley’s board books for tamariki (children) with Braille overlay and tactile illustrations.

Our resources are available year-round, not just during Te Wiki o te Reo Māori. To access our fantastic materials, sign up to the Blind Low Vision NZ Library by calling our friendly Contact Centre on **0800 24 33 33** or by emailing the Library at library@blindlowvision.org.nz. For more information, visit the [Accessible Library page](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/our-services/accessible-library/) of the Blind Low Vision NZ website, or call **0800 24 33 33**.

### Revisiting our Waiata

In celebration of Te Wiki o te Reo Māori, we’d also like to return to our organisation’s waiata, a song that encompasses Blind Low Vision NZ’s mission of empowering Kiwis who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision to live the life they choose.

**Te Waiata o Blind Low Vision NZ**

E ora i tō koiora

I tohua e koe.

Ō whakaaro,

Tō tuhono

Tō mana

Ō hiahia e

I tū atu i te

Kanohi kitea

Koiora taparere kore.

Koiora taparere kore

**E ora i tō koiora i tohua e koe, Hi!**

**English**

Live the life you choose

Optimistic, connecting, empowering, aspiring

Beyond vision loss

Life without limits.

# Community Bulletin

## Join Retina NZ’s AGM in Wellington

Retina NZ’s 2025 Annual General Meeting will be held on **Saturday 6 September**, 10 am – 4 pm, at the Blind Low Vision NZ offices, 121 Adelaide Road, Wellington.

Enjoy a catered lunch, connect with others, and hear from guest speakers including **Prof. Jean Bennett** on vision restoration science, **our very own Dr Alix Coysh** with the latest research, Blind Low Vision NZ Board members **Clive Lansink** and **Richard Patete**, and more.

The day will also feature a vote on a new Constitution, committee nominations, a Ray-Ban glasses demonstration, and a friendly game of indoor bowls.

RSVP to **admin@retina.org.nz** or call **0800 569 849**. [Visit the Retina NZ website for more details.](https://retina.org.nz/)

## Electoral roll webinar and election info

Election season is back! We recently ran a webinar about enrolling on the electoral roll and the upcoming Auckland Council elections. [You can watch the video and read the transcript on our website by scrolling down to the Know Your Rights Webinar Series section.](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/resources/self-advocacy) You can also watch [the Electoral roll webinar video directly on YouTube.](https://apc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DuUtQa7DELmI&data=05%7C02%7Ccommunications%40blindlowvision.org.nz%7C33ce724800b54ba0262c08ddcd7e3f01%7C19efb84dcb0248bfa899e37c9124e110%7C0%7C0%7C638892664293535917%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Iku2mO7UXWYL%2Fn2smbdzJlXJshe5Y0RYqkzgLTkd5FM%3D&reserved=0)

The audio has been added to the Telephone Information Service (TIS).

To listen, clients can call 04 389 3858 and press 73 for Local Body Election information, then:

* Press 1 for Auckland.
* Press 2 for Masterton.

More election info will be added to TIS as it comes in.

[TIS phone numbers for other regions are listed on our website.](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/our-services/accessible-library/library-services)

## Accessible voting support for Auckland’s local elections

Local elections are coming up, and Auckland Council is offering a range of accessible services to support disabled communities across the region. To help make voting easier and more inclusive, there are services in place including a screen reader–friendly website, NZSL videos, audio recordings of candidate statements, and, for the first time in a local election, **phone voting** for people who are blind, have low vision, or are physically unable to mark their voting paper.

Voting opens on 9 September. The TellMe phone service will be available from 1 September. Below is a summary of the key information. Feel free to use or share it when supporting clients or also keep it handy for yourself!

**Accessing Election Information:**

**A screen reader compatible website**

[The Vote Auckland website](https://voteauckland.co.nz/) is Auckland Council’s central hub for information about elections, candidates, and how to vote. It is fully compatible with NVDA screen readers and meets the AA standard under the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 making it easier to navigate and find what you need.

**Elections 101 videos in NZSL**

Introductory videos, 'Elections 101', are available in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and provide an overview of how local elections work. [You can watch the full YouTube playlist on the Vote Auckland website.](https://apc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fvoteauckland.co.nz%2Fen%2Fnz-sign-language-information-about-local-elections.html&data=05%7C02%7Ccommunications%40blindlowvision.org.nz%7Ccfeacc3f1c3c4acabf6808ddd52b588b%7C19efb84dcb0248bfa899e37c9124e110%7C0%7C0%7C638901104322309190%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=f0XdGOaKAXowizCNXUBEuNuUdHX5CMhkgFaOWKQIvMU%3D&reserved=0)

**Learning About Candidates**

**From 1 September,** candidate statements will be available to help you decide who you want to vote for in your area. You can access candidate information in a few different ways:

* [Visit the candidate page on the Vote Auckland website](https://voteauckland.co.nz/en/information-for-voters/candidates-2025-local-elections.html?utm_source=red&utm_medium=browser&utm_campaign=candidatelist&utm_id=va25) for candidate statements and accessible formats.
* Scan the QR code in the guidebook: Your voting pack will include a candidate guidebook. On the contents page, you’ll find a QR code that links directly to the candidate statements, including accessible formats.
* Watch NZSL translations: Candidate statements will be translated into New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and available on the [Infowave website.](https://infowave.nz/)
* Listen to audio recordings: Call the TellMe phone service on **09 283 0044** to hear the candidate statements.

**How to vote by phone:**

* Call the Electoral Office on **0800 922 822** to request phone voting. You can request this service anytime. If you make a request before voting opens on 9 September, an electoral official will call you back to record your vote during the voting period.
* The Electoral Office will confirm your eligibility.
* A trained electoral official will complete the special voting process with you over the phone. The voting process needs to be completed during the voting period, from 9 September to midday on Saturday 11 October.
* Your vote will be submitted securely through a phone dictation process.

## Promoting Literacy in the Digital Era This International Literacy Day

**On 8 September 2025**, we celebrate International Literacy Day. This year’s theme, **promoting literacy in the digital era**, reminds us not only how important it is for people to have access to reading and learning tools through technology, but also to ensure these tools are accessible, so no one is left behind in our increasingly digital world.

At the Blind Low Vision NZ Library, literacy is not one-size-fits-all. From Braille and audio to large print and e-text, we support thousands of New Zealanders who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision to learn, explore, and connect through reading in a way that works for them. With a total of 68,932 Library loans last year, it’s clear that accessible literacy makes a real impact on blind, deafblind, and low vision communities. In 2025, the Blind Low Vision NZ Library also partnered with the Accessible Books Consortium allowing Library members access to an additional 99,500 DAISY books, a fantastic step forward in promoting literacy.

Blind Low Vision NZ’s Accessible Format Services (AFS) turns digital content into touch, sound, and meaning. AFS runs a digital first system where files are taken in, structured for accessibility, translated with professional Braille software, and quality checked. The results include electronic Braille for refreshable displays, embossed copies on demand, accessible audio, and PDFs. New technology is speeding up tactile literacy. A UV print process produces long-lasting Braille signage, labels, and maps from digital designs, making Braille practical on almost anything for homes, workplaces, and public spaces. Digital thermoform masters improve production quality and speed. In 2024, AFS completed over 200 transcription jobs for about 180 clients across Aotearoa.
In the digital era, technology does not replace Braille. It powers it.

This International Literacy Day, we celebrate the progress made, the stories shared, and the tools that open up the world to every reader.

## Tune into this week’s accessible TV programmes

How to access audio descriptions: In general, audio description (AD) can be switched on or off by pressing the AD button on a TV Remote Control. However, some TVs have a different label on the remote button, and others require AD to be switched on or off via the menu.

[Listings of audio described programmes for this week on the Able website](https://able.co.nz/audio-description/audio-described-listings/).

## The Blind History Lady: Zorah the Telephone Man

The Blind History Lady shares the inspiring and often surprising stories of blind people throughout history. For over three decades, Peggy Chong, a US-based historian, has been collecting stories, articles, books, and more about the lives of blind individuals. Over the past ten years, she has carefully analysed and re-researched these stories, uncovering rich, often forgotten histories. These stories are eye-opening and inspiring for everyone, revealing the incredible impact people who have low or no vision have had in shaping the world around them without most people ever realising it.

Peggy introduces you to the story [– Zorah the Telephone Man (Word Doc)](https://media.blindlowvision.org.nz/uploads/2025/01/Zorah-the-Telephone-Man.docx). From chickens to switchboards, this is the story of how one blind man in 1920s Oklahoma built a rural phone network from the ground up. Zorah Tinsley worked quietly but relentlessly to make his vision real. His story is a reminder that progress often starts with a simple idea and the will to see it through.

To learn more about Peggy’s work or to sign up for her email list, contact her at theblindhistorylady@gmail.com.

# Ask Me Anything

You’ve told us that better communication matters – and we’ve heard you. This is your direct line to our Chief Executive, Andrea Midgen, and [the RNZFB Board (blindlowvision.org.nz)](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/about-us/board-of-directors/).

Whether it is about the services we provide, the direction of the organisation, or ideas for the future, we want to hear from you. Your voice helps us grow and improve.

Submit your question **anonymously** or include your details for a direct response. It’s quick and easy! [Access the Ask Me Anything form via Microsoft Forms.](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=TbjvGQLLv0iomeN8kSThEKl7LrYI6LZKoKMLMnThMz5UMEJRR1dXU05ISk81UUxSQkdBNFQyUDU2SS4u) Alternatively, you can call our friendly Contact Centre team on **0800 24 33 33** to submit your question.

# News from the Royal New Zealand Foundation of The Blind (RNZFB) Board

## Update from the Board Chair

### Apology Hui

The Board will host a formal public apology event for known survivors who experienced abuse while in our care in September at the Parnell, Auckland site. This event underscores our sincere regret and commitment to addressing the historical harm we caused to some members of the blind, deafblind, and low vision community between 1950 and 1999.

### Support for Survivors of Abuse in Care

If you are a survivor of abuse in care and have not yet come forward, contact the Survivor Experiences Service. This service provides a safe, supportive, and confidential space where survivors and their whānau (families) can share their experiences.

You can get in touch with Survivor Experiences Service by phone: 0800 456 090 Text: 8328 Website: survivorexperiences.govt.nz.

You can talk directly with the team or relay to a support person. Their website also lists free helplines and services offering information and help.

### Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind Apology Hui

If you are a survivor of abuse that took place between 1950 and 1999 and while in the care of RNZFB, and you have not yet come forward, please contact the Survivor Experiences Service described above. The RNZFB Apology Hui will be made to survivors known to us after the procedure described above has been followed.

For more information, please call 0800 24 33 33 or email info@rnzfb.org.nz

### New Client Space at Parnell

Work is underway to create a space for consumers on the Parnell site, recognising that the previous space at Awhina House was lost following its demolition and the construction of the new facilities. This involves leasing more space from Foundation Properties Limited (FPL) which is currently empty on the ground floor of the new facility. The Chief Executive is working with consumer representatives to develop the space, in line with the Board's property principles.

### Client Reference Group

We are continuing our work to establish a Client Reference Group. This will represent a diverse range of clients and provide strategic advice to the Board on Blind Low Vision NZ (BLVNZ) services from the client perspective. Thank you to those who responded to the recent survey to gather feedback from clients and consumer organisations. We are now making our final plans based on what you told us.

### RNZFB Board of Directors Meeting

The next RNZFB Board of Directors Meeting is scheduled for Saturday 20 September 2025 in Auckland. This meeting will be held at the Blind Low Vision NZ Parnell office. If you would like to attend this meeting as an observer, please contact the Board Secretary boardsecretary@blindlowvision.org.nz or phone the Blind Low Vision NZ Contact Centre on 0800 24 33 33.

* In accordance with the RNZFB Constitution, members and members of the public are welcome to observe at RNZFB Board Meetings in person, via teleconference or online, with the permission of the Chair.

The draft meeting minutes of the 5 July 2025 full Board meeting are available. If you require a copy, please email the Board Secretary boardsecretary@blindlowvision.org.nz or phone our Contact Centre on 0800 24 33 33. The Board meeting minutes are also available on the Telephone Information Service menu 3, 1, 3.

### Meet and Greet Event

The next RNZFB Board Meet and Greet event is set to take place in Auckland on Saturday 20 September from 1pm to 3pm at the Blind Low Vision NZ Parnell office, where you will be introduced to the Board Members of the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind and find out more about the Board’s key priorities. You will also have an opportunity to raise any concerns or ask any questions you may have. And you will get to meet Blind Low Vision NZ Chief Executive Andrea Midgen. We hope the Saturday afternoon time will suit some of you who can’t make it during the week. If you would like to attend, please email the Board Secretary boardsecretary@blindlowvision.org.nz or phone the Contact Centre on 0800 24 33 33.

### RNZFB Board Elections 2025

Key dates to pencil in your diaries:

* 29 August – Call for nominations to stand as a Director.
* 26 September – Last day for nominations.
* 17 October – Voting packs circulated.
* 14 November – Last day to vote.

For more information visit the [Blind Low Vision NZ Governance website](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/about-us/governance/rnzfb-board-elections/).

If you would like more information about Board elections, becoming a director, the Constitution or the voting process or timeline, please contact the Returning Officer boardsecretary@blindlowvision.org.nz or phone the Contact Centre on 0800 24 33 33.

### Chair’s Award

The Chair’s Award is presented each year at the AGM. The award is for a blind, deafblind, or low vision client who has demonstrated an outstanding level of achievement in any field of endeavours. The award comprises a trophy to be held for one year, a framed certificate, and $1,000.

Now is the time to start thinking if you have someone in mind who would be a worthy recipient, please provide your nomination with supporting information to the Board Secretary at boardsecretary@blindlowvision.org.nz or by phoning 0800 24 33 33.

### Report on recent RNZFB Board Review of Mandatory Policies

As you may be aware, the Board has recently reviewed ten mandatory policies, which were circulated to clients and stakeholders for feedback. The Board must have policies in place on specific matters as listed in the Constitution, these policies are referred to by the Board as mandatory policies. In accordance with the RNZFB Constitution, the Board is required to consult with members when updating these policies. The Board completed this review at its meeting on 5 July, taking into account the feedback received.

The Board thanks everyone who took the time to participate in this process and share their comments.

A full report is now available showing the feedback we received on all ten policies, the final changes and decisions we made as a result, and the policies that have now been adopted. If you would like to receive a copy of the full report, please phone the Contact Centre on 0800 24 33 33, or contact the Board Secretary at boardsecretary@blindlowvision.org.nz

### Chair’s Newsletter

The latest Chair's newsletter is now available, with a lot more detail on Board decisions and activities from our most recent meetings. You can check it out at the [Blind Low Vision NZ Governance webpage](https://blindlowvision.org.nz/about-us/governance/#meeting), and on the Telephone Information Service at option 3, 1, 1.

**Clive Lansink**

**RNZFB Board Chair**

# In the News

## International:

### Telstra technology opens up sport for all

[Read the article on the AFL website about how Telstra Touch and Track technology is making sports more accessible for blind and low-vision fans in Australia.](https://www.afl.com.au/news/1346638/a-first-for-australian-sport-telstra-touch-and-track-technology-launches-at-marvel-stadium)

# Job Opportunities at Blind Low Vision NZ

The latest job opportunities at Blind Low Vision NZ are listed below. For the complete list, visit the [Blind Low Vision NZ Careers website](https://blindlowvision.my.site.com/s/).

# Ka kite anō

Please let us know what you think of Kōrero. We welcome suggestions for what you would like us to include and any tips or stories you would like to share with the community. Get in touch on 0800 24 33 33 or via communications@blindlowvision.org.nz.

Did you know that you can request Kōrero in Braille? Call our contact centre on 0800 24 33 33 if you would like to receive Kōrero in this format.