**RNZFB Chair’s Report November 2017**

Hello All

Here is my Chair’s report for the months of September and October 2017.

This report provides some detail of the matters that the Board has been involved with over the last two months. It also contains information about the items discussed at the recent November meetings. As always I remind people that if you want a full account of what occurred at the Board meeting, then the draft minutes of that meeting held on 10 November will be available through the telephone information service, on library CD, e-mail on request, or by contacting the Board Secretary on 09 355 6894. Please ask for a copy of these minutes and keep up-to-date with the matters that we are looking at on your behalf.

This time the headings are

1. A new constitution
2. Annual General Meeting
3. Results of the election for Board directors
4. Highlights from the Board Meetings in November
5. Property Update
6. Submissions Update
7. **A new constitution**

At a Special Meeting of Members held on Saturday 11 November, the Members of the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind adopted a new constitution. It includes the principles of self-determination and creates avenues for much greater member participation in the direction the RNZFB takes. It is considerably shorter and easier to understand. If you are interested, soon it will be posted on the Telephone Information Service and on the Foundation’s website. It will also be made available in Members’ preferred formats and these can be obtained by calling the National Contact Centre on **0800 24 33 33**. If you would like to know more about the meeting, you can also obtain the minutes through the Contact Centre.

1. **Annual General Meeting**

The Annual General Meeting also took place on Saturday 11 November at 11am. The business of this meeting is to announce the results of the election for board directors; present the annual report; appoint the auditor, provide the opportunity for Members to ask questions and to present the Chairman’s Award. This year there were two runners-up being Maria Stevens and Eilish Wilkes. The Chairman’s Award went to Ming Ming Edgar from Dargaville. Here is what we said about them.

“Choosing one person from so many that do so much good is not easy and this year has proved no exception, so before announcing this year’s recipient, I would like to acknowledge two other very worthy candidates.

The first is **Maria Stevens**. Educated through Homai and Manurewa High School, Maria is passionate about Braille literacy and numeracy. Throughout her 30-year career with the Foundation, Maria has assisted members and youth to become braille literate, advocated for Braille standards, engaged with teachers and users to monitor braille production and given talks about braille in the sighted community.

Maria has led policy development in Te Reo Māori, has served on the BLENNZ Board and chaired BANZAT.

Maria’s interests are wider than braille. She has held positions with Association of Blind Citizens, Blind Fishing Club, Blind Hockey & Goalball groups.

If this isn’t enough, Maria became a Celebrant in 2016 and has taken a number of members’ funerals as well as her niece’s wedding.

My second acknowledgement is to **Eilish Wilkes**. Eilish Wilkes is 21 years old. She is a cancer sufferer and is legally blind from a brain tumor discovered when she was two years old. As a student, she was on the Foundation’s library role and used our library services. She published a book last year called ‘Hospital Happenings’ which we have produced in our studios and in braille. Eilish narrated the audio for us. This book tells her story, walking children through the steps of a hospital visit and encouraging them not to be afraid.

Eilish won the ‘Youth Spirit Award’ on 29 November last year at the 2016 Attitude Awards.  She also received the Minister of Health Youth Volunteer Award for ‘Outstanding Achievement’ in June this year. She has spent the last 12 years volunteering for the Child Cancer Foundation and eight years delivering food to parents of kids at Starship Hospital.

Her book ‘Hospital Happenings’ was requested by staff and students at BLENNZ as Eilish is a young blind woman that the children at the school look up to. She is a source of pride for the children and an inspiration to them.

The Chair’s Award for 2017 goes to someone who has always looked for challenges and over the years has participated in every sporting event that has come his way. . He is 27 years old and has been involved in power lifting for the past 10 years. His achievements in this field are numerous, to mention but a few – 1st place at this year’s Northland Power Lifting Championships. He also came 1st in the Men’s Open under 74kg Northland Bench Press Championships in May this year. He trains 1.5 hours twice weekly for power lifting. He also swims four times a week and attends aerobic gym activities four times per week.

His sporting prowess goes on and on. He was selected for the Blind Caps, the NZ Blind cricket team and played in Adelaide in October 2016 and in India in the Blind Cricket World Cup at the beginning of this year. He travelled with the team to compete in Adelaide this October to play Australia again and is hoping he will be selected to compete in South Africa next year.

As if that wasn’t enough, he also trains for an hour’s session twice a week at Aikido. In May 2017, he achieved the level of 5th Kyu. He usually arrives to his session early to cheer on the younger group as he believes that this is helping to encourage the younger children to achieve their goals.

He is a member of a local men’s choir called The Rivertown Singers, performing at local functions. He plays the piano at the Whangarei Blind Community Committee socials and in six rest homes entertaining the elderly. He also plays the drums in his church music group which congregates on Sundays.

He has participated in blind sailing which he became involved in when he lived in Auckland but when he moved to Dargaville, he found that he missed the sailing so he later became involved with Sailability Northland and played an active part in setting it up in Whangarei. He is still an active Trust member and helps the group to manage the two boats they sail in. He has always loved art. He took art at secondary school and has never lost interest in it. He attends Stepping Stones, an art group for people with disabilities at The Quarry in Whangarei weekly and produces a great quantity of paintings and varied art works. He is also a member of the Dargaville Arts Society and takes his turn monthly to open the gallery where he exhibits and sells his work.

In the summer months, he gets involved in gardening at a community garden on a local Marae in Whangarei. The group he works with run gardening activities where people with disabilities learn to care for gardens. This has enabled him to establish raised garden beds at home which makes caring for the gardens easier for him.

I hope you will agree that he is an example of someone who has grasped many opportunities and challenges and made the most out of them. His go and get it attitude towards life exemplifies the great ambassador that he is, not only for other blind and visually-impaired people but for the Blind Foundation itself.

Please join me in congratulating this year’s Chair’s Award recipient, **Ming Ming Edgar** from Dargaville.”

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting are available in your preferred format by calling the National Contact Centre.

1. **Results of the election for Board directors**

This year three positions on the Board became available due to normal cyclical rotation. Keith Appleton and Nicola Owen were returned, Keith already having served seven years and Nicola three. The other successful candidate is Fraser Alexander who is new to the Board. Amongst his many talents, previously he was President of Retina New Zealand and is currently leading arrangements for the International Retinal Conference to be held in Auckland in February next year.

The rules in the new constitution disband the Associate Director seat. Paul Sullivan falls victim to this change and, therefore, retires from the Board having completed one year of his three year term. This created what is termed a Casual Vacancy and Deborah Boyd, the candidate who polled fourth in the election will fill the two remaining years. Deborah is new to the Board and currently holds the position of Chief Executive at Auckland Eye. Julie Bartlett has left the Board having not sought nomination. This means that your full Board is Fraser Alexander, Keith Appleton, Deborah Boyd, Peter Hoskin, Rick Hoskin, Clive Lansink, Nicola Owen, Judy Small and Carolyn Weston.

1. **Highlights from the Board Meetings in November**

The highlights from the November Board Meetings were: a report on the progress being made to upgrade our computer and software systems; the progress being made in creating a client service experience that will enable clients to receive improved services more promptly; the work that is being carried out around our government funded contracts; a road map or plan that will lead the Foundation to becoming an exemplar employer; a report showing how we hope to better support our clients who are looking for work; a report showing our good record in health and safety and how we can compare it with others in similar industries; a discussion about ensuring those who were Associate Members can continue to be fully included and involved in Foundation affairs and, lastly, choosing Nelson as the venue for next year’s Annual General Meeting.

1. **Property Update**

After many years of to-ing and fro-ing, the RNZFB and the Ministry of Education have signed an Agreement to Lease the land at Homai where we currently house our Guide Dog Service and our South Auckland service centre. Many of the facilities are shared between RNZFB and the Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand and, therefore, a Shared Services Agreement is also required to enable smooth running of the site. This is a big move forward after almost a decade of negotiation. The next step is for the land to be surveyed and a land title provided. Following this, Land Information New Zealand, better known as LINZ, will consider the lease and either approve it or suggest changes.

The Board has also approved that its property subsidiary, Foundation Properties Limited, can go ahead and carry out feasibility studies and due diligence to consenting stage on two potential projects on the Parnell site. The ultimate intention of this work, should it progress, is to, over the next ten years, double the income that the Foundation receives from property and its assets.

1. **Submission Update**

*Blind Foundation submission to Wellington Regional Council on its policy in setting regional transport fares.*

The initial proposal was that a flat 25% discount would be available for people with disabilities. This proposal was made in the knowledge that some existing blind travellers were already getting a 50% discount.

The Blind Foundation's submission pointed out that the withdrawal of the current 50% discounts would be a backward step for Council compliance with UNCRPD.

In the last year, we have noticed a significant reduction in the total number of submissions, particularly those to central government that typically amount to about 80% of the submissions workload. We believe this has been due to the electoral cycle and that government was less active on new policy as they faced the September 2017 election. Now given the beginning of a new and very likely a reformist government we expect the situation to reverse and expect there will many opportunities for submissions.

In addition to consultation and submission processes, we have also noticed a trend for government to use disability agencies to input to design processes for new or changed services. This is happening with the Disability Support System Transformation. This gives organisations an opportunity to influence programme design to benefit their clients.

Rick Hoskin