**Chief Executive’s Board Report September - October 2017**

Hello everyone this is Sandra Budd, Chief Executive, with highlights from my Board Report for September – October 2017**.**

It is exciting to commence my report with the news that after just 9 months of campaigning the Access Alliance received confirmation the Labour Government will honour its pre-election commitment to accessibility legislation. Equally important is their intent to engage with the Access Alliance to co-create the legislation. This is a tremendous step forward for all New Zealanders especially those with disability and evidence of the success of a pan disability approach to advocacy. We look forward to continuing to play a key role in this work.

I was pleased to inform the Board that we have continued to have a positive start to our financial year due to higher than budgeted legacies and a positive upward trend of donations. One area of growth is mass participation events and it is incredibly encouraging to see increasing support for our cause among our own clients. I was privileged to be at the Auckland marathon finish line to award medals to those who took part in the event as Team Guide Dogs. Two clients, Ocean and Craig with their guide dog JJ, together fundraised an incredible $12,000.

I also informed the Board that in 2018 and we will move Blind Week from the beginning of October, back to its usual timing at the end of October so as not to clash with the Blind Citizens AGM.

We also provided an update on progress of the Business plan initiatives for the first quarter. I reported that we have secured a place on the Disability Support System Transformation (DSST) work stream on service provider and funding issues and have been invited to contribute to the Social Investment work stream, and the Marketing and Scope of Funding virtual testing groups. The 23 work streams will inform the Cabinet Paper that will go to Cabinet by year-end.

It is exciting to have open the door of our first new office in Auckland in twenty years and officially opened it on the 23 November. And I’ll tell you about an excitingly new initiative that promotes blind and low vision people and the Blind Foundation through our own podcast that is being launched s before the end of 2017.

I am pleased to report on some of the highlights from my Board report:

**Financial Performance**

During this period our results showed a surplus of $3.6m compared to a budgeted surplus of $0.2m. Total income for the three-month period was $12.3m, was above budget by $2.9m. Total expenses were $8.7m compared to a budget of $9.2m due to timing differences.

We have continued to have a strong start to the year in Fundraising with income $2.7m above budget above budget driven by legacies and donations while investments performed slightly better than expected with total returns of $650k compared to the budget of $526k.

Management updated the Board on the “Future Funding and Delivery of Vision Rehabilitation” project that I talked to you about in my last report. We are assessing our initial thoughts on vision rehabilitation funding models and contract related issues and analysing the draft final material we have collected on quantitative trends and treatments. The report on international examination of vision rehabilitation will be completed in late November. A paper was also provided to the Board on a proposed client engagement plan to support this work.

**Blind Foundation as an Exemplar Organisation**

I told you in my last report that our planning has commenced and is a part of our wider Transformation program. An Exemplar Employer Roadmap is being finalised to provide a strategic level overview of the Blind Foundation’s approach to Diversity and Equal Employment Opportunity to guide our work programs.

Following survey feedback from blind and low vision staff relating to how we are currently meet their needs in terms of accessibility, four separate co-design project teams, with blind and sighted staff, have been established to scope ongoing work programs designed to improve employment accessibility and will be embedded into our wider Transformation plans, culture and decision-making.

**Client Satisfaction and Engagement**.

The overall client satisfaction rate against our MOH contract for rehabilitation services for this period was **97.58%,** up from 96.06% was the highest rating we have achieved. Pacific Service, Independent Living Services and Maori had a 100% overall satisfaction with other services ranged from 95.7% to 98.7%.

You’ll recall I’ve told you that to assist us to hear more feedback from you we are developing a **Voice of the Customer Program** to measure your level of satisfaction as you receive services from us across all our services. We a recently appointed a Research and Insights Manager Jo Secher, will oversee our marketing research projects that includes Voice of the Customer.

**Brand and Awareness**

**Website Visits**

While the number of visits to the website decreased this period but people are searching for information about us, which include guide dogs, the library, the contact centre and the online shop.

New for us is our involvement with other elements of social media and our impressions increased by 57% with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram postings. Twiiter’s top tweet for the month was about the new Access Alliance and Instagrams top post was a photo from the Youth SEED weekend in Christchurch (with a Throwback Thursday photo of Chris Orr and Clive Lansink water-skiing coming in second).

The next step will be increasing the number of posts that drive traffic to the Blind Foundation website, as well as setting up Ad Words for the site beyond a fundraising focus.

**Media Coverage Value.**

This is wherethe Blind Foundation is specifically mentioned. For August and September the value of our media coverage was estimated to be $3,133,521 including TV, radio, print and online. Topics covered included Guide Dogs, Blind Week and volunteers, Accessibility and elections.

**Increasing Public Awareness and the understanding of blindness**

In recognising our widening role as advocates for the disability sector through Access Matters and other initiatives, we have refreshed our media-monitoring brief to help us be aware of conversations in the media space that may be relevant to us, that may not obviously link to the Blind Foundation.

Following these trends will better equip us to add value to these types of conversations to raise public awareness around blindness. For example, accessibility issues that may come out of transport and environmental regulation changes and other activity in the broader disability sector.

We have also begun to develop a strategy for understanding and driving the role we want the Blind Foundation to play in the media, to best elevate public awareness of blindness.

**Future Digital Solutions.**

I provided the Board with an update on progress of the digital work plan and roadmap from our Acting Chief Digital Information Officer, Jith DR that outlines the timelines for updating our technology. A specific focus has been to define a CRM, data integration, as well as accessibility and usability for our staff.

A decision has been made that Salesforce is the preferred software that will best meet our future CRM requirements based on significant desktop research and information gathered from Vision Australia. Salesforce rates the highest for accessibility and usability, provides an integrated platform without the need for extensive customization and has a not for profit service pack that provides the functionality we need to create one view of our customer.

We are trailing the use of this software using an agile approach, commencing with volunteer management.

**Blind Foundation Podcasts** - a new initiative

I am excited to share with you a new initiative that promotes blind and low vision people and the Blind Foundation through our own podcast that is soon to be launched. Titled, ‘Perspectives: Stories from New Zealand’s blind and low vision community’ the podcast will be by and for the BLV community with clients involved in production and storytelling. It will share stories and news of interest to both clients/members and their friends and family, and the wider public/donors and supporters

The **first episode**, about audio-described theatre/ballet performances interviews Nicola Owen from Audio-Described Aotearoa (and RNZFB Board member) and watch out for Bernie Haldane of Auckland Live (the producer responsible for bringing ‘Matilda: The Musical’ to New Zealand). Segments in the works involve the Equipment Services team (discussing new technology and demonstrating different equipment available), Julie Woods (that Blind woman), Karen Plimmer from CLE, and interviews with the participants in the 7 Day Challenge. We have reached out across the country to find people with stories to tell via EPIC Youth and Blind Foundation volunteers, and have more people interested in participating.

The podcast will be hosted on Libsyn, allowing us to sync with the Blind Foundation website, and allowing people to subscribe. We will also be publishing the podcast on Itunes, Podbay and Youtube, and of course promoting it on social media.

**Improving Client Services**

**Integrated Client Pathway project** (a new way to provide our services to you)

You will recall I spoke to you in my last report about how this was a critical component of our transformation work that is focused on establishing a customer centred experience to deliver services that adapt to your needs now and in the future across all of our service offerings. We are using a co-design approach utilising a group of equal numbers of clients and staff to ensure a true sense of co-design from the outset. The aim of co-design is to empower people who use our services to identify what is valuable for them that leads to user-led recommendations. We aim to build this capability throughout the organisation.

The initial focus of the IC program is to gain a deeper understanding of the service experience of our newer clients (up to 15 months) with clients from a broad range of demographics being interviewed to gain insights. These insights are being overlaid with other insights from service observations, engagement roadshows, previous client surveys, KPI analysis, appreciative inquiry sessions with staff, and learnings from the Vision Australia model.

By the end of this year, we expect to have a significant number of insights to enable us to commence prototyping, in the new year, some options to learn from and modify to assist us with the development of a model that provides an integrated experience across all of our services. This will be supported by our digital platform that will assist us to have one view of your experience in one place.

**Guide Dog Services**

We have completed an extensive external review of our Guide Dog Services, to provide insights into how we can reduce wait times and increase the number of guide dogs we can provide. Some of you were involved in this review and I thank you for your input. The review has provided in-depth information that has informed us on how we move forward with a well-developed operational strategy for our Guide Dog Services that are aligned and integrated with the wider Blind Foundation. We have now put an action plan together to help us improve the service to you.

**Access for All**

**Advocacy Training**

I reported to the Board that the Steering Group reviewed outcomes of the first year of this 2-year pilot after the fourth advocacy-training workshop and reported:

* Forty-eight people who have completed the training;
* North Island and South Island Network have been formed
* Thirty-six people signed on as Blind Foundation (BF) volunteer advocates;
* Fifteen people are actively involved advocates and campaigners, e.g. active means that they met with their MP, organized a Candidates Forum, and contributed to the advocacy conference and other campaign activities.
* A new advocate following completing the Christchurch advocacy training will coordinate the South Island Network.
* All of the BF volunteer advocates and the Access Alliance campaigners found the combined Access Matters conference and Candidates’ Forum very beneficial

Next month Áine Kelly-Costello, a client and member, will meet with BF volunteer advocates to organise the national Access for All Advocacy network.

## Access Alliance’s ‘Access Matters’ Campaign

As I told you in my introduction following the General Election leaders of the National, Labour, New Zealand First and Green Parties were asked to keep their pledges for accessibility legislation and/or accessibility standards ‘top-of-mind’, in negotiating to form the new Government. We reminded newly elected electorate MPs to urge their leaders and colleagues to keep their promises.

On 26 October Poto Williams, Christchurch East Labour MP confirmed the Labour Government’s commitment to accessibility legislation. She said the Government would be engaging the Access Alliance to co-create accessibility legislation and would work with Carmel Sepuloni, the incoming Minister for Disability Issues Minister on the approach to achieve the objectives the Labour Party committed pre-election. Since then we have further confirmation this legislation ranks high on the new governments agenda.

The BF has provided a briefing to Minister Sepuloni and have asked to meet to discuss our advocacy priorities. The Access Alliance will also seek a meeting to discuss next steps towards working with the Government to co-create accessibility legislation.

Over 1700 people to date signed the Open Letter (OP) and the Alliance plans to present the OP to Minister Sepuloni and the Cross Party Spokespersons for Disability Issues at a media event at Parliament House, on International Day of Disabled Persons, on the 3 December 2017.

**Eye Health Coalition (EHC)**

I have previously spoken to you about the work this group are progressing. Two initiatives are showing real promise. One is establishing an eye health continuum that identifies gaps or overlaps in services, and what can be done to resolve them. The second - a research project is close to release that identifies the problems for diabetic Maori in accessing eye health services. This evidence will be used to inform the continuum work as well as provide a basis for advocacy work in the future. They are also looking at how to extend membership to include input other stakeholders, including GP’s.

The **Access Economics 2009** cost of vison loss data has recently been updated by our Research Director, Dr. Keith Gordon. It found that from 2009 to 2017 the cost of vision loss has increased from $4 billion to $5 billion.  We have highlighted this increase in cost in our 2017 Briefing to Incoming Ministers.

**Employment**

Two programs of work the international Employment Forum I told you about in my last TIS are progressing:

* Research into Employment Rates, Occupations and Barriers to develop a common research tool that accurately identifies the level of employment, areas where people are employed, and barriers to employment for people who are blind or have low vision in our countries. The survey tool has been developed by CNIB and will be undertaken in early 2018.
* Sharing of Adaptive Technology Insight to bring together the leading minds in the adaptive technology arena in an international forum to share their knowledge. Neil Jarvis is leading this work on our behalf.

**Increase access to services**

**Awhina House** – The reconfiguration of the ground floor has been completed and this change puts our client facing services within easy access of the main door and reception, and will also make it easier for staff to work more collaboratively to deliver services to clients

The Fundraising team, which used to be next to reception, have moved up to the first floor, and Independent Living, ACATS and Employment staff have relocated to the ground floor in their place.

We have relocated the functional low vision assessment room to the ground floor, which is now adjacent to the adaptive technology training room. An accessible equipment display has been implemented enabling clients to touch, try and buy equipment. The reconfigured space also includes two new meeting rooms; the Helen Keller Room has softer furnishing’s creating a more relaxed environment, making it more suitable for counselling meetings and the Louis Braille Room has been furnished with traditional table and chairs.

**Albany –** With a growing population in north-east Auckland we are now able to offer them an office on their side of the bridge bringing us closer to you. The Albany Office officially opened its doors on Monday 16 October and is now open five days a week 9am to 4pm. This is the first new office in Auckland in 20 years many years.

The office includes a functional low vision assessment room, adaptive technology training room, meeting rooms and an equipment display in the reception waiting area.

An official opening of the Albany Office was held on the 23 November.

**Kapiti Coast –** As previously advised an opportunity arose to take space in a new Community Centre in Paraparaumu. The space available now enables us to conduct services from the office, and includes a functional low vision assessment room, a multipurpose meeting room and an equipment display. Initially an Independent Living Instructor together with Administration Support will be based here on a permanent basis, and staff from Wellington or Palmerston North will work from this office when delivering service to clients. This has been a great opportunity to extend our presence in the community and increase awareness of the Blind Foundation. An official opening of the office will be held on the 31st January, 2018.

**Expand life enrichment opportunities**

**7 Day Challenge - 1st - 7th November 2017.**

This is the second year we offered this event which has proven very popular with clients. A high profile event it aims to increase our profile across our clients, staff and the public. Last year the Community and Life Enrichment team reach over 65% more participants in life enrichment activities and we credit this in part to the increased profile as a result of the 7 Day Challenge.

The challenges gaol is to promote the Life Enrichment agenda and inspire more clients to consider involvement in recreation and sport. With this is mind we promoted the concept of #whatsyourchallange to encourage all our clients, their families and our staff to consider their own challenge, at whatever level is appropriate for them. One example is the Rotorua Community Support Group challenging their members to knit several blankets for children in care. Their story reached local media again promoting the Blind Foundations work.

For the main event, the Community and Life Enrichment team selected 7 clients from those that applied, along with 7 volunteer sighted guides. This year’s 7 Day Challenge began on the summit of Mount Maunganui, Bay of Plenty, on the 1st November. The team ran, walked, paddled, cycled and climbed their way over 7 days to the finish point on the summit of Mt Victoria, Wellington where they were presented with their medals of achievement.

**Engagement with Youth**

The Youth Engagement Strategy is in place and progressing well with a number of key initiatives underway that include:

* A successful Youth Seed Leadership programme delivered in Christchurch in September 2017 with the participants receiving support from CLE staff to undertake a leadership project in their local community.
* Establishment of a Youth Council is progressing with nominations open until 6 November followed by voting from 13 November until 10 December. The Youth Council will be formed following the elections.
* Planning for the 2nd EPIC youth gathering will begin after the Youth Council has been established. Young members will take the lead in co-designing the event, with support from the CLE team.

As this is my last report before the Xmas and New Year festivities and I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy and contented festive break. I will have my Singapore family with me that will bring the joy of sharing this time with my two little granddaughters and I am very excited to be playing grandma with them again.

This now concludes my Board report for September- October 2017. I look forward to talking to you all again in the New Year.