

Focus



Vision
Australia

Blindness. Low Vision. Opportunity.

150+

years of vision

Issue 1, 2024

Lucy has hope
for a brighter
future!

(See page 2.)



Thank you!

Your support is
making a difference
to kids like Lucy.



Thank you



What a wonderful gift you are to the people we support at Vision Australia. It is so heart-warming to know that you are always ready to stand beside all Australians who are blind or have low vision, every step of the way, no matter what point of their journey they find themselves.

In this issue of your newsletter, I'm delighted to share the real impact of your generosity.

I'm sure you'll remember determined three-year-old Lucy, who was the star of our Christmas Appeal, and you'll meet little Harlow, whose low vision is not slowing her down one bit! With your support, and Vision Australia's expertise, she is loving childcare, trips to the beach and of course, dancing!

On behalf of everyone who benefits from your kind support – thank you. We could not do what we do without you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Hooton". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Ron Hooton
Chief Executive Officer

'Thank you' from Lucy

Do you remember little Lucy, the star of our Christmas Appeal? This happy three-year-old is taking on the world thanks to kind people like you!

Lucy was born at just 34 weeks, and her vision was the last thing on her parents' radar. But after she finally went home, her dad Aaron and mum Denise, realised there might be something wrong with her vision.

When Lucy was diagnosed with congenital glaucoma, an extremely rare condition in children, Aaron and Denise were in shock. They really needed advice and support.

Thanks to the kindness of people like you, Aaron, Denise and Lucy were connected with Vision Australia, and occupational therapist Kristie, who gave them a road map to ensure she didn't fall behind in her development. They feel empowered to help Lucy achieve different goals through play, environment, and day to day activities.

The generous response of supporters like you to our Christmas Appeal means more families like Lucy's will receive the gift of confidence and hope for a brighter future. Thank you so much!



Alan's journey to new friendships

A life-long car enthusiast, Alan was a prominent member of his local car club, and his Hot Rod was his pride and joy. 'Car shows, long weekend drives with club members... I loved all of that.'

So, when Alan's vision began to deteriorate about five years ago, it hit him quite hard.

'It was gradual at first, but signs became harder to read and my judgement of distance was a bit off. I had a feeling I wouldn't be driving for much longer.'

Alan was diagnosed with macular dystrophy as a result of Granulomatosis with polyangiitis, a rare autoimmune condition.

He sought out Vision Australia for extra help and joined our Home Care Package program, receiving help with maintenance in the home and garden and meal plans. He also discovered the Men's Recreational Group and made wonderful new friends.

Although Alan had to sell his car, he kept his club connections and recently arranged a special Hot Rod visit for his Men's group. They were excited to get up close and personal with the cars!

'I love what Vision Australia has done for me. The staff are great people, always happy to help in any way they can.'



Your impact has been amazing!

Every day, we are there to support people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose and achieve their goals, at home, in school and in their community.

Every year, we provide this support all over Australia – and we cannot do it without you.

Here are some of the extraordinary outcomes supporters like you helped us achieve.



We provided specialised support to **37,341 people** who are blind or have low vision, enabling a staggering **236,707 hours of service!**



We were able to provide **18,030 hours of orientation and mobility training**, giving more people freedom and confidence so they can travel independently.



Children and adults received an incredible **52,474 hours of occupational therapy**, a vital means of support to people who are blind or have low vision.



Our team delivered **27,916 hours of assistive technology support**, so more people who are blind or have low vision were able to pursue their passion for reading, listening and learning.

You're giving children like Harlow all the help they need!

Little Harlow was just eight weeks old when her parents, Amana and Nick, began to suspect something was wrong with her eyesight.

They noticed her eyes moving around the room, but she wasn't looking at anything. While they raised concerns with a maternal health nurse, nothing was diagnosed. It was not until she was three months old that she was diagnosed with nystagmus by an optometrist.

A month later, Amana and Nick also noticed Harlow was not hitting her developmental milestones, and they decided it was time for further investigation. At an appointment with the Royal Children's Hospital, a further diagnosis of glaucoma was made – and Harlow was in surgery the very next morning.



It was a difficult and uncertain time for the family as they understood what this meant for Harlow. They were grateful to be connected with Vision Australia and get the vital early intervention therapy that Harlow needed.

Today Harlow is making amazing progress! She receives support from our speech therapist and orthoptist and has received lots of orientation and mobility support. Harlow has even had specific support with accommodations at childcare to be more inclusive to Harlow's needs.

Harlow is a bundle of energy, and loves singing, dancing, running around and climbing! Her sensitivity to light means her mum and dad need to make some changes, but it doesn't stop Harlow. She loves going to the beach with her mum and a great big umbrella. 'We just want her to be happy,' Amana said.

Your generous support means that kids like Harlow can look forward to a bright future!



A glimpse into the world of low vision

Vision Australia recently partnered with the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) to share two unique experiences to educate visitors and build a more inclusive society.

Pop-up events, Dark Memory Lane and Game on Grandparents provided an opportunity to gain greater insights into what low vision is and how Vision Australia helps people thrive.

In Dark Memory Lane, visitors were invited to walk in the shoes of three people with varying levels of vision loss' using simulation glasses that enabled participants to experience what it's like to interact with the world. Game on Grandparents invited parents, grandparents and kids to play classic family games like Uno, Snakes and Ladders and Connect Four without relying on full eyesight.

'We really wanted people to come away from the experience with a new perspective on the implications of a vision loss diagnosis,' said Ron Hooton, CEO Vision Australia.



'There are so many ways Vision Australia can show, teach and share how people with low vision can continue doing the things they love with just a few life hacks, tech and expert advice.

'It was also an opportunity to build empathy, understanding and check negative bias towards people with low vision and blindness,' he said.

'With support, expert advice and technology, and the kindness of our donors, we help clients come to terms with their vision loss, then journey towards understanding, not just how they can live, but thrive.'

Every day, you are helping Vision Australia support and educate people who are blind or have low vision on how they can live their lives to the full, with greater confidence and independence. Thank you for everything you do to help!



Big Visions: Changing Mindsets

Many young people limit their dreams due to blindness or have low vision. That's why the Vision Australia's Library team has introduced the Big Visions children's book series to educate and build confidence, not only for the children we work with every day, but children all over Australia!

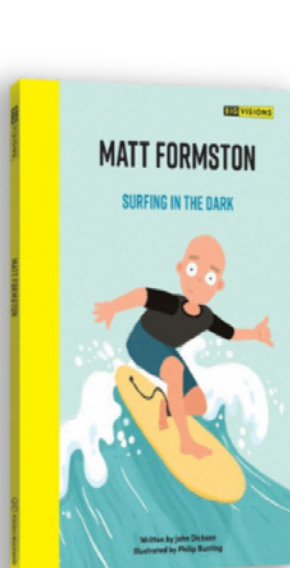
Books are vital in developing reading and language skills and cognitive development, but they also help build empathy, helping to navigate challenging feelings and influence future social behaviours. When children with low vision can see a representation of themselves, and sighted children can see a person who is different to themselves, the possibilities are endless!

Vision Australia's Big Visions books feature role models who are blind or have low vision, telling stories that challenge stereotypes, champion inclusion with the ambition of changing mindsets. The books aim to inspire a child to live the life they choose, by dispelling the misconceptions and expectation placed on them by society.

In our series of three books, we introduce a blind chef, a blind surfer and a blind fashion designer, who have all chased their dreams.

In **Dressed for Success**, the latest in the series, we meet Nikki Hind, who always dreamed of being a fashion designer. As a shy child with low vision, clothes made her feel glamorous and special, and through her talent, resilience, and sheer grit she achieved success. Nikki is now the world's first blind fashion designer with her own label, Blind Grit!

Every Big Visions book purchase supports the Vision Australia Library and helps children with vision loss learn and develop in unique, sensory ways. Buy your copy online at www.visionaustralia.org/bigvisions



A gift in gratitude

Long-term, generous supporters Fred and Meron are very community minded. We are immensely grateful Vision Australia's mission – to support people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose – resonates with their ethos of helping and giving back. In Fred's words, they kindly shared with us their reason for leaving a Gift in Will to Vision Australia:

'Our third child, Mel, while having good vision, was a very slow developer, who did not begin to speak until she was six – we had many tests done, but no actual diagnosis. In due course, she attended sessions with a speech therapist who suggested that she access the Braille Library, as the speech was read more slowly and so was easier to follow. We received a 'Daisy Reader' from the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and started many years of books and tapes, returning via the Post Office at no cost.

'Mel is 46 now and is 'special needs'. She can read everyday signs – enough to be mostly independent, but not enough to read a book. She loves to come to the Iris Circle gatherings and hear all that Vision Australia is doing for others.



Fred and Meron at an Iris Circle event

'We support Vision Australia because of the many years of help we received, and would encourage others to do the same, especially via a bequest.'

Thank you so much Fred and Meron, we are hugely grateful for your kind gesture and love hosting Mel and yourselves at our Iris Circle events!

We're hugely grateful for every Gift in Will.

If you'd like to know more about how you too could include a gift to Vision Australia in your Will, please contact our Gifts in Will team on **1800 422 077** or you can email **giw@visionaustralia.org**



Fred and Meron with their family

Celebrating 20 years of library services from Vision Australia

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Felix Library, much-loved by adults and children alike, who eagerly look forward to the arrival of a book in the post.

Lorna Allingham and her husband ran a remote cattle station, a long way from a local library, but Lorna loved to read, especially crime and detective stories. In her later years, like many Australians, Lorna had age related macular degeneration and her sight deteriorated. She used many Vision Australia services and products, the Vision Store, our large print books, and audio books in the Vision Australia Library.



Lorna loved receiving new books in the post and the sound of the narrator's voice gave her comfort especially after the passing of her husband. Her family still support the Vision Australia adult library and Felix Children's Library today and are grateful for the library that enhanced Lorna's life: 'We so appreciated the care and great support from Vision Australia.'

If you'd like to make a difference just like Lorna's family, we would love to speak with you! Find out how you can contribute to the library at Vision Australia by getting in touch at philanthropy@visionaustralia.org

Christmas Joy for all



Our first-ever Santa Fun Run, a family-friendly event raising funds for children's services was a huge success!

It was wonderful to see so many people running, walking, or rolling around the iconic Tan Track, dedicated to making an impact for kids who are blind or have low vision.

And on Christmas Eve, countless supporters like you joined us to light up Melbourne's Sidney Myer Music Bowl with your favourite carols, to wrap up the achievements of 2023.

It was the 86th year of Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight, presented by



AAMI, our largest annual fundraiser for children's services.

From captivating performances and exceptional musical talents to the sheer joy on the faces of both young and old, Carols has solidified its place as a beloved tradition. Christmas wouldn't be the same without it, and we have already begun plans for Christmas 2024!

For more information call **1800 42 20 77**

or visit www.visionaustralia.org/get-involved/ways-to-help