

**vision
australia**

blindness and low vision services



2011/12
annual report



Our Vision

Vision Australia is a partnership between people who are blind, sighted or have low vision. We are united by our passion that people who are blind or have low vision will have access to and fully participate in every part of life they choose.

Our Mission

Vision Australia will achieve this through creating a community partnership of knowledge, skills and expertise to enrich the participation in life of people who are blind or have low vision and their families. We will ensure that the community recognises their capabilities and contributions.

Contents

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PHOTO: DAVE TEASE, ILLAWARRA MERCURY

Vision Australia volunteer Dianne Arnold (seated right) is one of 50 volunteers who work at the Wollongong office. Pictured with Hayden and his sister Lily, Dianne loves assisting children who are blind or have low vision on excursions.

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Making this report accessible

This spiral-bound format can be spread flat, assisting people using magnifiers. This report is also available in large print, braille and audio formats. It can be downloaded at www.visionaustralia.org to read using speech output software.

Future focus

While documenting the challenges and achievements of the past year, this report also highlights our strategic direction in preparation for the increasing challenges ahead.

Cover image: James and Riley, both 12, have been best friends since kindergarten. James is learning to read braille but Riley, who has low sensitivity in his fingers which makes learning braille impossible, loves audiobooks from Vision Australia's library service.

Heidi Clarke, who lost her sight suddenly at 22 years of age, says orientation and mobility training changed her life. “I used to have panic attacks if I left the house but now I can catch a bus into town, meet my friends

for a coffee and go shopping by myself.” Orientation and mobility specialists assess each client to provide the best mobility training for their individual needs.

PHOTO: MICHELLE DUNN.



about vision australia

◀ We are the largest and only national provider of
blindness and low vision services in Australia ▶

Vision Australia works in partnership with Australians who are blind or have low vision to help them achieve whatever they choose in life.

Our services follow every stage of life, from families with infants and small children to preparing for the transition to school and higher education to employment and training. Recreation and peer support services assist both children and adults and there are specialist services for vision loss in senior Australians, which is mostly acquired through the aging process.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with a proud history stretching back almost one and a half centuries through the eight heritage organisations* which now form Vision Australia. We are also a major innovator and partner in the international blindness community as information access is no longer bound by geographic borders.

We offer a broad range of services from 27 sites in Victoria, New South Wales, the ACT, Queensland and the Northern Territory; operate 29 outreach

clinics and provide a range of outreach services throughout Australia. Services range from Seeing Eye Dogs to library and accessible information, low vision clinics and children's services.

Most of our services are delivered free of charge and that requires us to raise nearly \$100 million each year to offer these services.

Advocacy for equality of opportunity is another important area for Vision Australia. We are currently strongly advocating for all who are blind or have low vision to be considered within the framework of the new National Disability Insurance Scheme.

For further information, go to our website at www.visionaustralia.org

*Royal Blind Society, Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, Vision Australia Foundation, National Information Library Services, Royal Blind Foundation Queensland, Hear a Book, Seeing Eye Dogs Australia and 5RPH.

Chair and CEO message

Government funding reforms bring challenges and exciting new opportunities

Whatever role each member of staff plays in our organisation, we work with one goal in mind – that our clients can achieve independence and not be constrained by barriers in the environment. Our clients inspire us every day as they meet the goals they choose and we work to support them in their choices. Whether our client is a new infant with a family wondering how their child will meet each developmental milestone or an elderly person wanting to be able to remain in their home, we aim to support their choices with practical solutions.

One of the new opportunities which highlights the way technology can transform service delivery and potentially bring services to a much wider group is the VidKids Alliance funded by the NBN Co through the Australian Government.

This project will use the National Broadband Network to deliver services remotely to children who are either vision or hearing impaired, using video

technology. More about this exciting project is on page 11. This project highlights the great benefits to families in regional areas and we believe it is the first of many where technology will be a key to future improvements in services.

This year has been a very important one for organisations in the disability sector with many government reforms to funding underway. The most prominent is the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) which will bring much-needed certainty to the lives of all those Australians under 65 who have severe or profound disabilities.

We embrace the positive changes which these reforms bring to the lives of Australians with disability. The 'self-directed' funding model gives choice and independence to the individual in choosing the services they want and is absolutely in line with our belief that everyone is entitled to choose how they live their life.

As there is less certainty around eligibility and age cut-off, we are also advocating strongly to ensure that no one misses out on services because of these funding reforms.

We have spent considerable time during the past year planning, researching and working to understand the potential impact of these reforms and creating new strategic directions. Sustainability is the bedrock of any organisation and we are ensuring that we're ready to make the most of the exciting opportunities these reforms offer our clients.

Vision Australia is happy to report that our client satisfaction rate averaged 91% this year, above our target, as was the rate for 'impact of service on client's life', which is very encouraging. Our clients are also a very important source of advice and feedback on our services, with our Client Representative Council heading up the formal consultative framework.

Our financial position, while still having an operating deficit of \$1,126,000, is ahead of target to reach breakeven by 2015. This has been achieved through a significant increase in fundraising revenue and active management of costs through productivity improvements.

To all Vision Australia stakeholders – our vigilant members, our generous donors, our wonderful volunteers and amazing staff – please accept our thanks for the valuable job you do for our community.

Finally, it is important to recognise the contribution our recently departed CEO, Gerard Menses, made to Vision Australia. Gerard steered us through the consolidation of the merging process from four organisations in 2004 to eight organisations in 2012, servicing approximately 50,000 clients. We thank him very much for his contribution.



Kevin Murfitt
Chair



David Speyer
Acting Chief Executive Officer



Above: David Speyer and Kevin Murfitt.



Aviva Mushin has a health condition which caused the loss of her eyesight quite suddenly. However the arrival of Warwick, her Seeing Eye Dog, has restored her confidence and independence. “It was love

at first sight,” says Aviva. “Warwick was brought to my house around midday and by 8pm that night he wouldn’t leave my side. I’m told it’s rare that bonding happens so quickly, so I felt very special.”

client outcomes

◀ Vision Australia's many clients have a diverse range of support needs ▶

Independence is the ultimate aim of all our services; we want our clients to be able to live their lives as independently as their sighted peers. But independence covers a huge range of options. For a young child with blindness or low vision, developing independence through achieving confidence in mobility and personal skills and meeting age-appropriate benchmarks will allow that child to attend school and make choices about his or her future as an adult.

For an adult in education or employment faced with vision loss – and this can occur at any age whether through accident or illness – independence is something to be regained through orientation and mobility training and assistive technology for continued learning or working possibilities.

For an elderly person facing declining vision through age-related issues, independence might be about feeling confident about continuing to live in their own home, being able to safely make a cup of tea or walk to the local shops.

Client representation

Consultation and feedback from our clients is essential to ensure we are providing services which meet our clients' individual needs and assist them in reaching personal goals, whatever their age.

Vision Australia has 60 local client groups, with 18 new groups established this year.

36 forums/workshops were held for clients this year. 113 client representatives were involved in committees, working groups and consultative activities and 76 client representatives were involved in our consultative framework.

Our services

A combination of new technology, improvements in staff productivity and client consultation in service redesign has been the key to improving outcomes for our clients this year.

Tyson enjoys swimming in the pool during a Safety in the Water program run earlier this year in Bendigo as part of Vision Australia's school holiday program. Instructor Emily White worked with nine children in the program to give them safety

and water awareness skills as well as having some fun with games. The program aims to increase confidence and awareness in the water for children who are blind or have low vision.

PHOTO: BRENDAN MCCARTHY, BENDIGO ADVERTISER.



New service for children

Vision Australia is the lead agency in a consortium of expert organisations called the VidKids Alliance. Together we have secured \$4.1 million over two years from the Australian Government to provide video-conferenced services to children with a vision and/or hearing impairment in regional and remote areas. The other members of the Alliance are Deaf Children Australia and the members of the First Voice national service network – The Shepherd Centre, Hear and Say, Cora Barclay Centre, Taralye and Telethon Speech and Hearing.

Using iPads and laptops, services will be delivered by therapists from locations that have a connection to broadband.

The Alliance will use their own centres and connect to children in their homes as well as using videoconferencing facilities in schools, Telehealth centres, and other community centres. The options will increase as the Australian Government's National Broadband Network is rolled out across Australia.

Early intervention is critical for children who have vision or hearing loss to reach their full potential in life. The flexibility of service location means that children can receive services when and where required.

It also means that service providers can offer video conferenced therapy and support sessions at times that suit the children's needs. This service can be equally important to families who may live within travelling distance to a centre but find it less disruptive to stay at home to access a service.

This type of service will become increasingly important as technological access improves. It has the potential to provide professional services to very isolated locations across Australia and to people who may have difficulties in leaving their homes to access services.

Services for adults

During the year, we consulted with clients and staff about a number of proposed changes to the way that we provide services to adults. We then tested and refined these proposed changes until we were satisfied that the changes would produce good service outcomes for clients. We are now implementing the following changes across all of our sites.

- 1.** We will offer a streamlined intake and assessment process for the 60% of adult clients who attend a Low Vision Clinic appointment.

We will introduce a more comprehensive needs assessment process for those who don't attend a Low Vision Clinic appointment.

2. At the Low Vision Clinic appointment, we will offer a consistent range of services from either an orthoptist or an optometrist. This will ensure that clients receive a similar clinic experience regardless of the eye health practitioner they see. For optometrists, this will involve demonstrating and recommending a broader range of low vision equipment and, for orthoptists, refracting and prescribing spectacles.

Clients will also receive services from an occupational therapist on the day of the Low Vision Clinic appointment, ensuring consistent standards.

3. We will provide a telephone follow-up service that contacts clients by phone approximately one month after services have ceased. This will help to identify clients who have unresolved or additional service needs so further assistance can be provided. The service will be monitored and a second call at six months may be introduced.

**Riley
enjoys being
able to access
reading material
from Library
Services.**

Mobility services

Mobility is essential for independence and Vision Australia's Seeing Eye Dogs Orientation and Mobility (SEDOM) division works to achieve this both by training clients to achieve their mobility goals and also graduating staff in specialist skills. We supported 4,962 active clients this year.

Seeing Eye Dogs

This year there were a total of 238 Seeing Eye Dog clients and 191 working Seeing Eye Dog partnerships around Australia.

We are very pleased to have appointed a veterinary surgeon which enables us to manage all of our routine cases in house at a reduced cost. This also means that our clients will be able to contact our own vet to discuss any health related issues they may be concerned about with their Seeing Eye Dogs.

We now have a permanent site in Western Australia for our Seeing Eye Dog operations, with an instructor and Puppy Development staff joining last October. The first pups for housing in voluntary carer homes arrived last November. This will provide a much more

responsive and accessible service for our Western Australian clients, who previously relied on our visiting services.

A trainee has successfully completed the International Guide Dog Federation Trainer Diploma course and is now a qualified Seeing Eye Dog trainer, while another trainee will complete the Trainer Diploma course in August.

We anticipate two trainee instructors will achieve International Guide Dog Federation instructor qualifications in September this year. There are also two trainee Puppy Field Officers undertaking a puppy development course.

Orientation and mobility

This year our 2,191 clients attended 13,119 appointments and we provided 1,235 canes and 798 tips.

Six orientation and mobility specialists in Vision Australia who completed studies at the Certificate IV level have upgraded their qualifications to the Graduate Certificate level via the Recognition of Prior Learning process.

Seven students successfully completed the 2011 Graduate Certificate in Vision Impairment.



Karen and daughter Ebony enjoy a tandem bike ride. Karen, who has been legally blind since she was 19, lost her sight slowly to Stargardt's Disease, a hereditary and degenerative condition.

Karen uses assistive technology at work, including a CCTV camera on her desk which magnifies text and a computer program which 'reads' emails. At night, Karen studies using braille.

Employment

Employment opportunities are a critical factor in independence but people who are blind or have low vision are still four times more likely to be unemployed compared to the general population. One third of those who are employed would like to work more hours (Vision Australia's June 2012 Employment Survey). This is unacceptable to us and we are working to obtain jobs for people who are vision impaired.

Our nine Employment Services sites achieved great employment outcomes for clients this year, with a 55.4% improvement in job placements from last year and a 21.4% increase in clients.

We are very pleased to see these increases which help more employers to realise the benefits of employing competent and motivated staff who also happen to be blind or have low vision.

We assist many clients to obtain new employment or to retain their job if vision loss has occurred. We also advise on workplace modifications and types of assistive technology to support our clients in working safely and efficiently.

We conduct specialist training and assessment prior to job placement to ensure each candidate is suitably skilled and matched to a role. We also supply workplace adaptive equipment, technology and training at no cost.

Our highest performing sites – Caringbah, Enfield and Gosford – were rated as four or five star sites in March 2012 by the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations. This means they have been offered automatic contract extensions from March 2013 until March 2018.

The strong performances from our Employment Services were assisted by:

- Job Blitz workshops for the most work-ready clients
- Port Waratah Coal Services, Newcastle, a long term supporter, which launched an innovative work experience program to help people with blindness or low vision gain skills and improve employment prospects. Two Vision Australia clients were hosted for six weeks and were offered six month employment contracts

- Our corporate partner, Academy Training, generously delivered free training in a Statement of Attainment - Certificate III in Customer Contact to eight of our employment services clients. The course involves two weeks of

work experience, with a direct impact on client job placements

- Other key partnerships include the ANZ Bank, BoysTown and Salmat

employment improvements

	2012	2011	2010
New employment services clients	295	243	257
Job placements	129	83	67
Workplace modifications	340	274	216



Malek Chamoun is visually impaired yet competes against sighted weightlifters in international events.

PHOTO: CRAIG WILSON, INNER WEST COURIER.

Library services

Vision Australia's Information Library Service is a key service for our clients who range in age from babies, whose families introduce their children to books through the Felix service for young children, right through every age and stage of life.

Access to information is critical in ensuring that people who are blind or have low vision can enjoy a book or magazine, access education or continue in employment. Only around five per cent of information available to sighted people is available to those who are blind or have low vision. We are advocating and working to change this.

Our library is particularly important to our senior clients who rely on our services to continue access to the reading, entertainment and information they have enjoyed all their lives.

Online technology, continues to facilitate access to a growing collection of titles. It ensures ease of borrowing 24 hours a day and every year more elderly people are becoming familiar and comfortable with online technology, which in turn provides them with much more choice.

There was also a small increase in library membership from 19,979 last year to 20,198.

Members borrowed 693,513 titles over the year. Of these, 42,208 were downloaded and library staff received 73,673 enquiries from members and prospective members.

Online engagement

Library continues to grow in popularity in terms of an online social network, with a rating of 40 on the Klout scale of online social influence (a social media analytics measure). This is a great beginning as we learn to explore new ways of keeping our members up to date with library events. Members continue to provide very positive feedback about the topical email information provided to subscribers.

Online catalogue

Everything listed in the new online catalogue can be searched and downloaded, including more than 25,000 DAISY audio books, 2,000 electronic braille titles, 4,000 electronic braille music files, over 300 newspapers and magazines and a selection of podcasts. 1,713 members access this service.

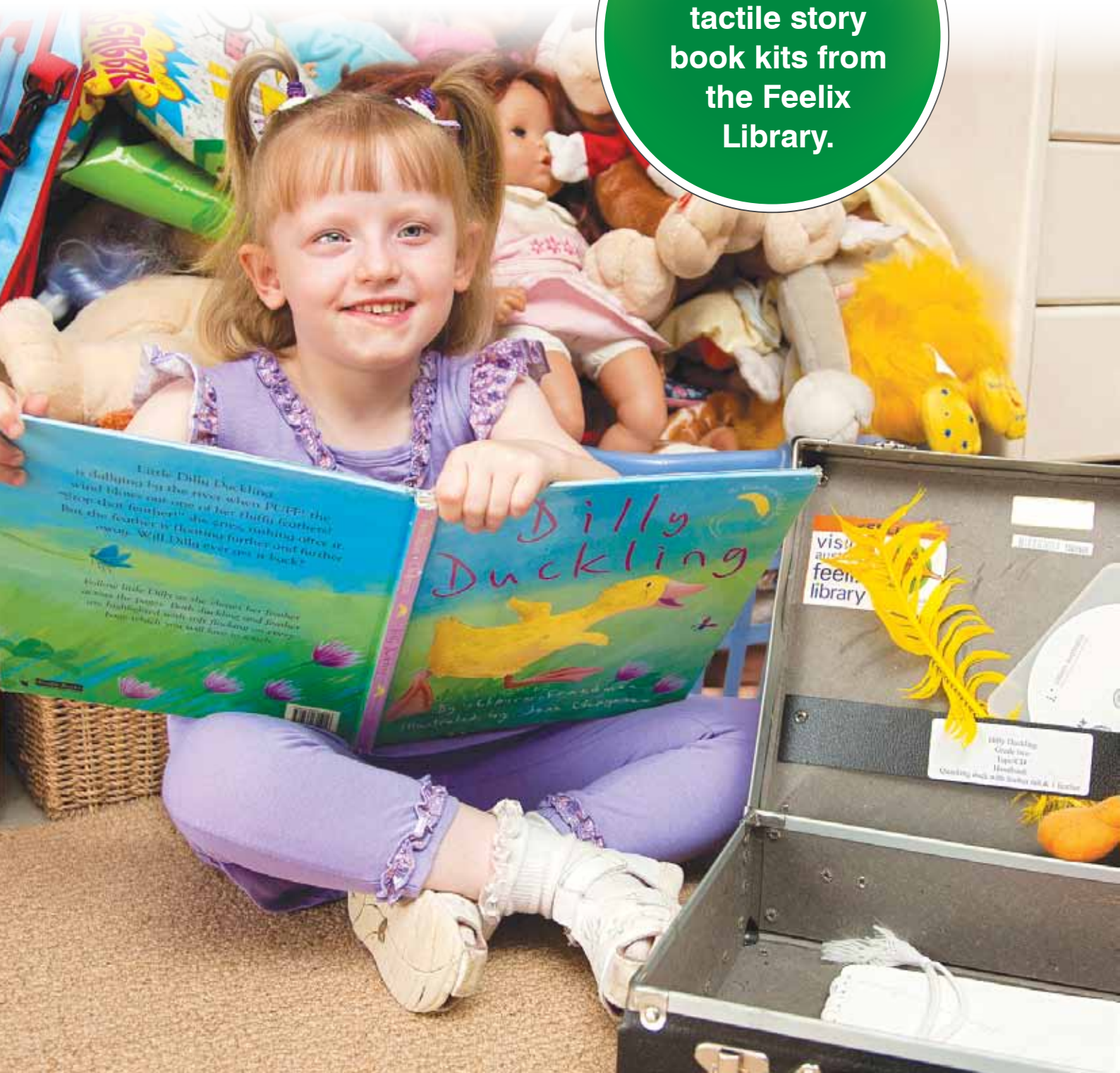
Feedback has been extremely positive from the hundreds who participated in the development of the catalogue.

Users of our online services reflect a different age group profile to our traditional library member. Online users are more likely to be in the mid 30s to mid 60s age range while

our traditional members are predominantly over 70 years of age.

Members receiving email information from the library have grown from 3,600 to 4,300.

**Natalie
enjoys receiving
tactile story
book kits from
the Felix
Library.**



Playback options

In February we introduced the DAISY Player Supply Option, a rental system with a small rental charge for members wishing to use DAISY players borrowed from the library to listen to audio books. Only 48% of members are now using DAISY players as technological developments have meant that our clients now have a range of options including their home entertainment systems, DVD players or computers.

Radio news

The biggest news for Vision Australia Radio this past year was the inclusion of Adelaide's 5RPH into the network last December.

The Adelaide station merged with our existing network of eight stations throughout Victoria and has added a further 30,000 listeners.

Our network total is now around 230,000 people each week who are tuning in for their daily newspaper readings and programs.

Showcasing technologies

Texpo was held in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney during September last year. For its second year as a national event, Vision Australia's Texpo again proved to be a popular place for clients, their families and community service providers to experience the latest developments in assistive technology and our services. This year the 2,200 visitors to Texpo included clients from as far as Mildura, Cootamundra and Cairns who received the Vision Australia Texpo Travel and Accommodation Grants, designed to bring people from remote areas to enjoy the event. Further key highlights were:

- The standing-room-only presentations about the ground breaking accessibility of the ever-popular Apple products
- The latest products from 20 local and international technology suppliers
- An array of interactive exhibits showcasing all the Vision Australia services
- The audio-described cinema lounge allowing people to enjoy the screening of Mao's Last Dancer
- A feature story by the children's television program, Totally Wild



Chuelsu hopes that the National Disability Insurance Scheme will help them with some of the additional expenses they incur while trying to give daughter Chaeyon the extra support she needs. Chaeyon has very low

vision and muscle tone and regularly attends different therapy sessions. While she receives free therapy from Vision Australia, the family pay for hydrotherapy and speech therapy.

Responding to change

◀ Funding reforms which give clients choice in service providers create both opportunities and challenges ▶

Vision Australia welcomes the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). We see this shift toward self-directed funding as an important step forward in creating choice and independence for our clients.

We are already running some services based on similar funding models, such as Employment Services, Equipment Solutions and Better Start. These programs have given the organisation important experience in this new and exciting era.

Currently we are concerned that our clients, particularly those over 65 or with low vision, could miss out on important services.

Opportunities

Changes to funding will mean changes in how we offer our services.

Our planning involves extensive engagement and consultation with our clients and staff and looking at further partnerships within the sector to support

service choice as well as continued advocacy with key decision makers. This will be completed by December 2012 in readiness for the introduction of the NDIS at test sites in 2013.

During the past six months a team of 10 senior staff along with seven specialist sub-committees from across the organisation have been investigating the opportunities and challenges arising from these government reforms.

Challenges

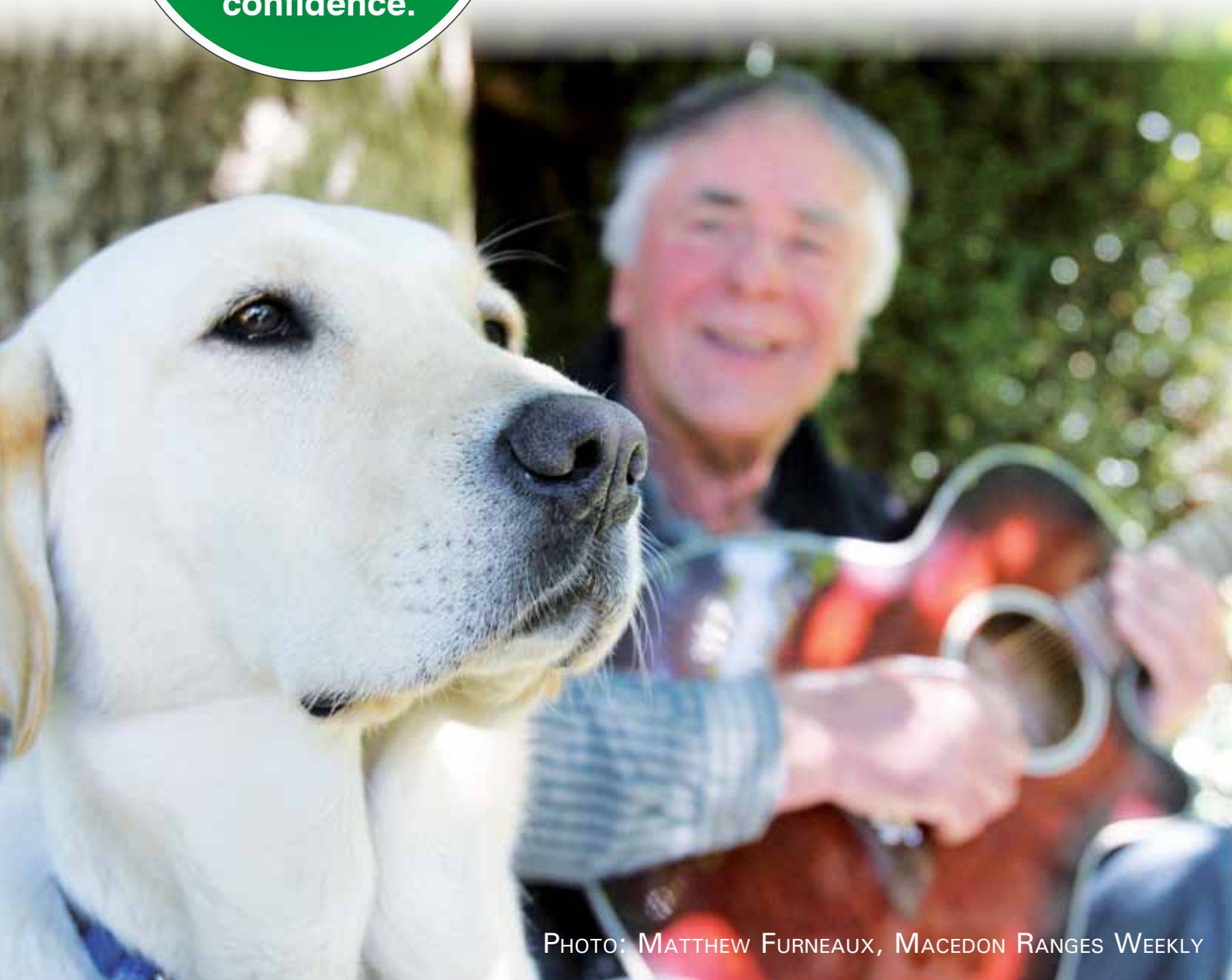
Senior Australians are the age group most likely to be affected by vision loss due to the ageing process, and it is not clear if this group will be covered by the NDIS. With proper support this group can remain independent in the community, so we are working to ensure that senior Australians will not miss out on essential support.

There are also a range of services we currently provide such as specialist library services, adaptive technology, telephone help desk services, crisis help lines etc that cannot be provided under individualised funding models.

Alan Roberts says his Seeing Eye Dog Nikki has given him much more confidence.

These services are critical to our clients in ensuring they can access information for entertainment or education, use specialist technology, obtain or retain employment and receive peer support or phone assistance when required and they must be maintained.

We want people to be independent, whether that is being able to get to work, go to university or just continue to live at home rather than have to move to a nursing home because



of failing eyesight due to age-related issues. Whatever their choices are, we are ready for the changes and here to help them with our services.

Engaging our community

While these funding changes are completely in line with our belief in independence of client choice, our concern is to ensure that funding for certain conditions and services is not lost through these reforms and that our organisation remains sustainable.

We have engaged with clients, expert staff and colleagues in the disability sector over many months about the NDIS and other similar reforms in disability and aged care. We have talked with policy makers, expert advisers and other relevant people and have a clear view of what our clients need to remain independent.

In order to ensure that the NDIS truly provides better and fairer access to disability services and support, Vision Australia strongly advocates that no person who is blind or has low vision, or who acquires vision loss, should be left without access to government funded service support.

We have produced a short animation to illustrate the issues that a person with low vision

may face through funding changes. This has been sent out to key decision makers and distributed widely through the community through social media and on our website (www.visionaustralia.org).

Ultimately, we want to be sure that all our clients can continue to make choices about how they want to live their lives, whatever the funding system.

The future

The past year has focussed strongly on both facets of change – opportunity and challenge – and we will ensure that we continue to be proactive in both areas so that our clients can continue to receive the wide range of life-changing services they need from us.

advocacy for equality

◀ Advocating for policy change helps create equality of opportunity ▶

While providing services to people who are blind or have low vision is essential for independence and choice on a personal level, advocating for changes at an individual, community or government level can also

bring about greater equality of opportunity. We have various sections within Vision Australia that work towards bringing about essential changes to make life safer, easier and more equitable for the blindness community.

Audible menus help with dinner choices at the Illawarra Leagues Club.



PHOTO: ILLAWARRA MERCURY.

Advocacy

During the past year our advocacy team worked directly with over 300 clients and their families to address discrimination and inequality issues.

Highlights achieved through advocacy included:

- Ensuring that talking set-top boxes were included in the Australian Government's scheme to assist households around Australia to switch to digital television
- A trial of audio-described television in conjunction with the ABC
- Advocating for legislative change in the migration act so that applicants who are legally blind or have a family member who is legally blind can more readily apply for permanent residency
- Advocating for legislation protecting the right to access accommodation for people with dog guides
- Working with transport bodies in Queensland Rail, Translink and Transport and Main Roads to improve accessibility on buses, trains and water transport for people who are blind or have low vision in Queensland

Individual advocacy support and advice covered issues including employment, education, access to transport, inaccessible internet banking services and pedestrian obstacles. We have also dealt with refusal to accommodate Seeing Eye Dogs in taxis and restaurants, failure by utility providers to provide statements in an accessible format and many other aspects of daily life. While most issues were resolved, several clients were assisted to pursue issues through Federal and State anti-discrimination processes.

Vision Australia has continued to influence through systemic advocacy, with several local governments adopting footpath dining and trading policies so that people who are blind will not have to negotiate obstacles on the footpath. Electoral bodies around Australia are adopting more accessible voting and electoral processes, more banks are rolling out audio-enabled ATMs, there is an increasing number of accessible websites and traffic authorities are installing more audio/tactile traffic and pedestrian signal crossings.

Oscar, now two, was just a few months old when his mother, Melissa, realised there was something different about his left eye.

“I was devastated to discover he had glaucoma,” explains Melissa. But with a number of operations and regular treatments, Oscar’s eyesight is stabilising.

“Vision Australia is providing great support,” says Melissa.

“A paediatric occupational therapist is providing early intervention programs to prepare him for school.”



Policy issues

Our activities focus directly on influencing government and this year put in 28 submissions and developed Vision Australia's policy position on the NDIS. We also developed and revised other policies.

External committees also worked with Victorian public transport on better accessibility and safety and on legislation, regulations, industry standards and better safety with users of motorised scooters.

Work with the Victorian Taxi Industry Review resulted in a recommendation for talking taxi meters as a standard for taxi meters and is the most significant movement in accessible fare meters in Australia to date.

We continue to strongly lobby the Government for recognition of blindness in the Ageing portfolio, securing meetings with ministers and providing briefings on issues important to senior Australians living with blindness or losing their sight.

We have provided briefings to key ministers and influencers, urging them to ensure Australians who are blind or have low vision continue to have access to services and support.

Queensland election

With input from clients we developed a 'Politician's Pledge' and asked candidates in the Queensland state election to commit themselves to action on important issues such as accessible voting and independent travel. During the campaign we secured pledges from 106 candidates, of whom 17 are now Members of Parliament.

Travelling exhibition

The Living in a Sensory World exhibition showcasing Vision Australia's heritage and raising awareness of blindness and low vision in the community is touring regionally and was visited by over 100,000 people while in Newcastle. It has since opened in Melbourne.

Large print and braille captioned displays offered insights into technological advancements, political and social changes.

Social media

Social media is an increasingly important area of communication, engagement and feedback for all organisations, including not-for-profits.

Vision Australia continued to develop an online presence using Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and was ranked eleventh against other not-for-profits in Australia in our use of social media (The State of Social Media Use in Australian Non Profit Organisations by Wirth Consulting).

We conducted a review of our external website and began a website redevelopment project (due for completion in October) to:

- Establish Vision Australia as an authoritative resource and source of reference in relation to blindness and low vision issues
- Demonstrate our capability to create an innovative, accessible and sustainable website – an industry benchmark and exemplar of accessible design



Crossings without audio-tactile devices are dangerous. Pictured is Gaynor Marsh.

Reconciliation plan

We are very pleased to announce that our first Reconciliation Action Plan, launched in May this year, will address the under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among our clients, which is at odds with the higher incidence of blindness and low vision in these communities. We aim to assist all Australians who need our services and this plan will help us reach more people who have previously not been properly assisted.

International advocacy

We are fortunate that our General Manager International and Stakeholder Relations, Maryanne Diamond, is also president of the World Blind Union (WBU).

Another significant appointment is that of our Deputy Chair, Professor Ron McCallum AO, who is the Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2011-2012 Chair of meetings of chairs of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies.

These key appointments allow Vision Australia to have considerable input into key global campaigns with a direct impact on Australians who are blind or have low vision.

Our influence is particularly important in areas involving access to information and books in alternate formats. With the ever-increasing importance of the internet creating globally available information, it is critical that all Australians should be able to have the same access to information, whether for study, work or relaxation.

One major campaign involved the establishment of Right to Read coalitions in a number of countries and good progress at the World Intellectual Property Organisation towards a treaty allowing cross-border sharing of books produced in alternate formats.

We continue our participation in Digital Accessible Information System Standards (DAISY), International Federation of Library Associations and other international committees.

partnerships

◀ Our partnerships with volunteers, staff, organisations and businesses all benefit our clients ▶

Vision Australia is based on partnership and we depend on everyone who works with us in the many ways which create the services and opportunities our clients need. Whether you're a member of our organisation bringing your vigilance to our governance, a volunteer donating their time to help others, a hard-working staff member, a donor ensuring we can continue programs or a business or organisation sharing

your experience and skills, you are an important part of the organisation. Vision Australia needs this broad support to help facilitate independence for people who are blind or have low vision and we thank everyone for their efforts.

Andrew Rochford from Channel 10's The Project discusses vision loss with Kathy Fela.



Volunteers

We couldn't continue all of our services without the generous help of our volunteers and we recognise their work through our Volunteer Charter and Mornings of Celebration events each year.

The highest number of registered volunteers this year was 4,283, with an average of 2,294 working each month (and up to 2,800 in the busy month of December).

The total volunteer hours worked this year is an incredible 803,633 which shows just how important our volunteers' time is to our services and clients.

A survey of volunteers, national audit of volunteer management and a volunteer services review was conducted by volunteers from the Melbourne Business School. Actions have commenced to focus volunteer leadership in the National Volunteer Program Office and develop Vision Australia's first Volunteer Strategy.

Staff

We are pleased that participation in Vision Australia's workforce by people who are blind or have low vision has remained high (at 19%) throughout the year,

at all levels of the organisation and across the breadth of Vision Australia activities.

Our performance in safety issues has been strong with an innovative approach to safety training through short, online, and accessible programs that are produced in-house.

A safe work environment for our staff and volunteers is very important to us and we are working to decrease injuries at work. Measures of Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate has remained stable and Lost Time Injury Severity has improved.

Staff have made a number of important presentations to conferences during the year, including to 200 ophthalmologists at their annual meeting. Orthoptists from our Sydney office also developed and presented a semester-long course in Visual Rehabilitation to 39 Masters students completing a degree in Vision Sciences at Sydney University. Staff also presented 13 papers at the International Mobility Conference.

Barry Johnston from Vision Australia and Rolf Geerlings on an audio-described tour of the Gosford Regional Gallery and Japanese Gardens for White Cane Day last year. Rolf has Stargardt's Disease, a

macular dystrophy which affects central and peripheral vision. Audio description is very important to Rolf's enjoyment. "I can hear the water and feel the rocky paths but I can't see the gardens or paintings," he says.



PHOTO: PETER CLARK, CENTRAL COAST EXPRESS ADVOCATE.

Library partnerships

- Vision Australia participated in an Australian Library and Information Association initiative whereby the Federal Government purchased digital playback devices for interested public libraries across the country.

Equipment Solutions supplied 85% of devices and our library staff trained all 73 participating library services so that many more Australians with blindness or low vision will have access to reading again.

The project was a great opportunity to build relationships with the community across Australia while engaging the local library network.

- Our partnership with National Year of Reading (NYOR) has provided significant promotion for Vision Australia, with coverage on the NYOR website and in social media communications. The presentation at the Federal Government launch supported awareness of literacy issues in the community. It was also an opportunity to raise awareness of braille as a key foundation of literacy development, particularly for children.

Our Carols partners

A number of important partnerships ensure that our premier fund-raising event, Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight®, continues to be both an iconic celebration across Australia and an important source of funding for our programs.

For the fifth year, Myer was the principal presenting partner. Telecast partner was the Nine Network and other media partners were the Fairfax Radio Network and Woman's Day. For the third time Health Super was the official sponsor of the Live Site Federation Square. Event media partner 3AW was the leading supplier of radio coverage accounting for 51 reports.

- Overall exposure was valued at \$2,656,201, an increase of 11%
- Two million people watched the program on television
- The campaign generated 33% increase in website visits
- \$1.2 million (gross) was raised to support our services

Other partnerships

- Our partnerships with our dedicated fundraising committees continue to bring wonderful benefits to the organisation.

**Volunteer puppy carer
Steph McCorkell
with her trainee
Seeing Eye Dog
Buddy.**

Many have been supporting us for a long time including the Double Bay Black and White Committee, which fundraises for our Children's Services and celebrated 75 years of fundraising last October. The Barwon Heads Auxiliary celebrated its 70th Anniversary in May this year. This Vision Australia Auxiliary fundraises to cover the ongoing maintenance costs of our Barwon Heads Holiday Home, Lorna Lodge.

- A senior Adaptive Technology consultant was beta tester for Apple's latest operating system, Lion. Through this four month process, David Woodbridge provided bug and enhancement feedback, continuing Vision Australia's commitment to universal access/design.
- The Sydney service delivery teams hosted a space-themed evening for families with the highlight being a communication with NASA astronaut, Michael E Fossum, from the International Space Station.

The Amateur Radio on International Space Station program is an educational tool designed to stimulate the minds of young people in the fields of Science and Technology and to promote the hobby of amateur radio.



- In February 2012, Vision Australia commenced a new joint project with the Centre for Eye Research Australia, Beyond Blue, Deakin University, Thomas Jefferson University, Dartmouth College and the University of Singapore. The research project, funded by the Australian Research Council and the research partners, builds on previous research to integrate depression management into Vision Australia's services. The project involves an eight week program of Problem Solving Therapy for clients who are assessed as being at risk of depression.

This will improve client outcomes in a cost effective manner. This project will place Australia at the forefront of low vision care and will provide an innovative service delivery model.

- Our new partnership with the Australian College of Optometry has resulted in the development of a new low vision centre at the college in Carlton, providing a streamlined client referral pathway and access to research, incorporating the latest in low vision services.
- In conjunction with The Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, the Australian College of Optometry and Vision 2020, we have established the Victorian Vision Collaborative. Together we will work towards leveraging our core strengths to improve the client experience and outcomes and to more effectively deliver our services.



Myles Tankle is a volunteer book narrator who has completed six novels and 10 children's books.

PHOTO: STEVEN CRABTREE, WAVERLEY LEADER.

Donors

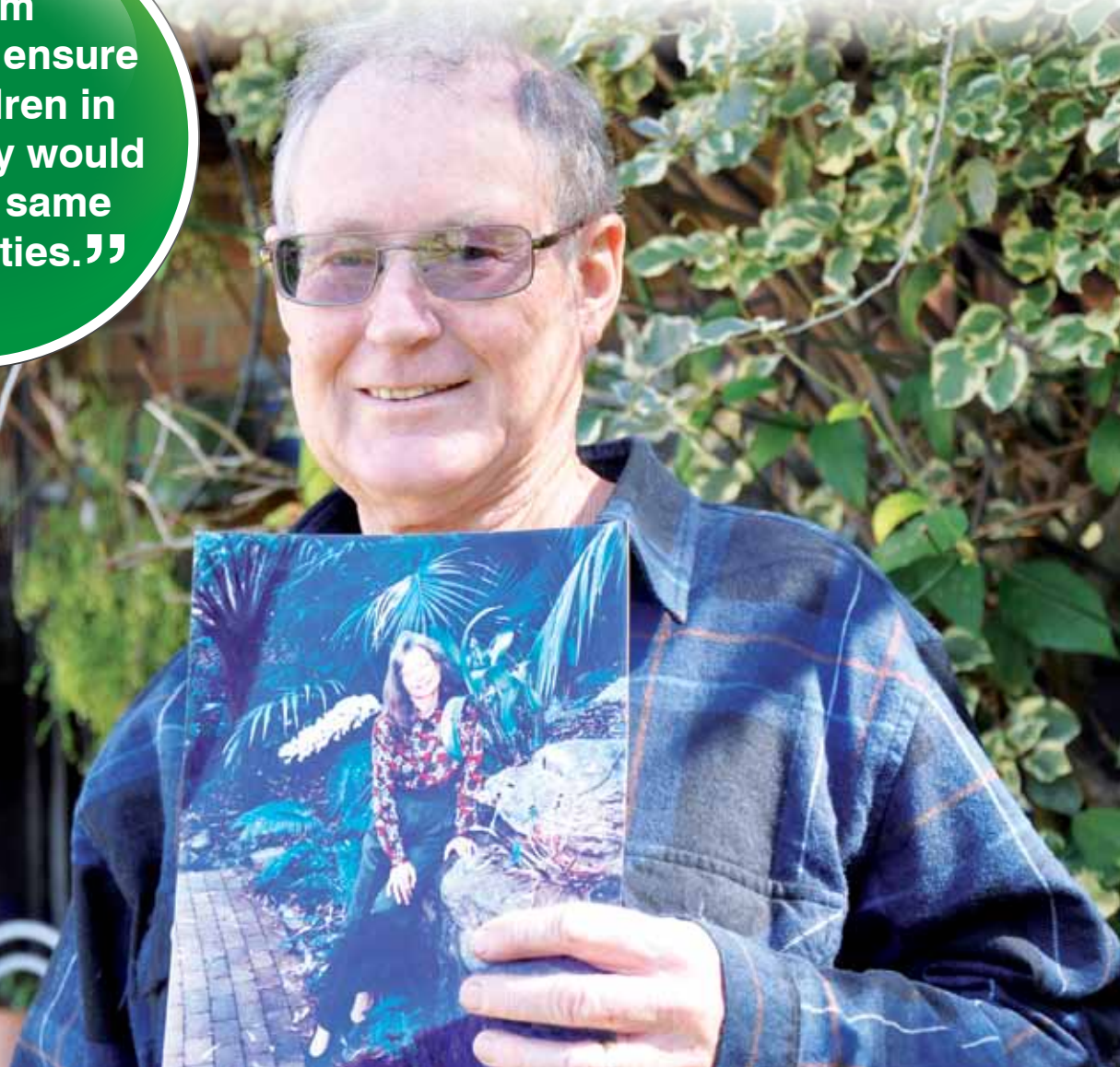
The support of members of the public, valued regular donors, charitable foundations and corporations is crucial to our ability to deliver services for our clients. Income from fundraising activity accounted for 44% of our total income this year. To all our donors we say a heartfelt thank you.

We would particularly like to thank the following trusts, funds and foundations listed for their generosity over many years:

- Collier Charitable Fund – granted \$29,000 this year for our Seeing Eye Dog Breeding and Training Program; making \$395,000 granted to our services since 1982.
- Bell Charitable Fund – granted \$20,000 this year for our day program in Geelong and the Felix Children's Library Service; making \$390,400 donated since 1981.

Pictured below: Bill Mudford with a photo of his late wife, Pamela.

“Pam wanted to ensure that children in the country would have the same opportunities.”



- Eric Crawford Memorial Fund and The Sally Sinisoff Trust Fund of the GreaterGood Foundation – this year granted \$24,000 and \$11,504 respectively for our Quality Living Groups in the ACT, bringing total support since 2005 and 2009 (when these trusts were established) to \$195,596.81 and \$35,004 respectively.

Non-discretionary trust grants received this year included:

- Russell Vontom Charitable Trust (managed by Perpetual) – \$171,028.73 this year and \$352,650.80 since 2009.
- The Hardie Family Bequest (managed by Equity Trustees) – \$543,505.64 this year and \$5,117,811.16 since 1993.
- Amy Irene Christina Ostberg Estate, managed by ANZ Trustees – \$157,290.50 this year and \$1,579,008.49 since 1987.

A special bequest

Last year Vision Australia received an inspiring bequest from a former volunteer who wished it to be used to provide services for young people who are blind or have low vision and who, for geographic or financial reasons, cannot readily access our services.

The Mudford Fund for Young People who are Vision Impaired honours Pamela Mudford, one of Vision Australia’s longest serving volunteers. Pamela, a retired school teacher, brought her many skills to the braille team which produces a wide range of transcriptions.

For 15 years she ensured that the material produced in braille matched the print from which it was produced.

“Pam had made a number of donations to Vision Australia over the years as well as other charities,” explains her husband, Bill Mudford. “We’ve both always been involved with education and helping young kids get a start so when she became ill she talked about making a bequest to Vision Australia.

“Although both well paid, we didn’t splurge and we wanted to do some good with our funds. I was happy for her to do it. Pam had lived all over Australia, from Perth to South Australia to Manly and Taree and she knew what the country could be like. She wanted to ensure that children in the country would have the same opportunities. It fitted in with what she’d been doing for most of her life.”

The young clients of Vision Australia are very grateful to Pam and Bill for their generosity.

financial summary

63.7% of the total revenue of \$84.062 million was generated from non-government sources.

	2011-12		2010-11		2009-10	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
Legacies, bequests and donations	37,091	44.1%	29,819	29.3%	30,544	31.8%
Government grants	30,475	36.3%	30,584	30.1%	37,817	39.4%
Investment and other income	7,967	9.5%	16,577	16.3%	8,289	8.6%
Revenue from the sales of goods and services	8,529	10.1%	9,067	8.9%	8,015	8.4%
Gain on disposal of investments and property	-	0.0%	15,563	15.3%	11,254	11.7%
	84,062	100.0%	101,610	100.0%	95,919	100.0%

Total expenditure and losses for the period totalled \$90.904m (2010-11 \$89.706m).

Expenditure was incurred as follows:

Client Services and Information Library Service	66,371	73.0%	65,603	73.1%	60,098	73.0%
Marketing and Fundraising	13,164	14.5%	13,469	15.0%	11,185	13.6%
Corporate Services	5,652	6.2%	6,952	7.7%	9,486	11.5%
Other expenses	5,386	5.9%	3,682	4.1%	1,526	1.9%
Loss on disposal of investments and property	331	0.4%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%
	90,904	100.0%	89,706	100.0%	82,295	100.0%
Net surplus/(deficit)	(6,842)		11,904		13,624	

NB: All numbers are in \$1,000's.



three-year financial position

	2011-12	2010-11	2009-10
Assets			
Cash, debtors and inventories	26,540	16,110	14,227
Investments	69,118	81,895	67,720
Property, plant and equipment	101,254	105,624	118,829
	196,912	203,629	200,776
Liabilities			
Payables and provisions	16,596	15,783	22,339
Other (including income in advance and deposits on property sales)	1,969	842	3,269
	18,565	16,625	25,608
Net Assets	178,347	187,004	175,168
NB: All numbers are in \$1,000's.			

our governance

Seven divisions oversee service delivery, fundraising and all organisational business requirements

The organisational chart at right describes the structure and service divisions of Vision Australia, along with the general managers of each division. With 146 years of service to the blindness community, Vision Australia has built a substantial reputation and assets base and is very cognisant of the responsibilities that go with managing and safeguarding our heritage.

Board of Vision Australia

The board of directors (see page 50) is responsible for corporate governance of Vision Australia.

Chief Executive

David Speyer, Acting CEO

The CEO and executive are responsible for the overall strategic direction and management of Vision Australia. Vision Australia Radio reports to the CEO.

Independent Living Services

Glenda Alexander GM

This division offers a range of client services including specialist children's services, low vision clinics, employment services, independent living training, peer support groups, technology assessment and training and specialist equipment sales.

Seeing Eye Dogs Orientation and Mobility

Leigh Garwood GM

SEDOM enhances independence through mobility training and the supply of canes, Seeing Eye Dogs and technological devices. Seeing Eye Dogs are also bred and trained. SEDOM also provides international dog guide instructor and O&M qualifications.

Community Information Access

Michael Simpson GM

The AIS library and information service provides books, magazines and newspapers in accessible formats. It includes the i-access® online catalogue, Alternate Format Production, the Audio Description service and DAISY/ Technical support.



The executive, from left: Glenda Alexander, Stephen Crook, Michael Hansen, Maryanne Diamond, David Speyer, Michael Simpson, Leigh Garwood, Jan Chisholm.

International and Stakeholder Relations

**Maryanne Diamond
GM**

This division includes: communications, government relations, advocacy (both individual and systemic), policy development, international relations and consultation and engagement with clients.

Corporate Services

**Stephen Crook
Acting GM**

This division has nine business units: Finance and Administration, National Contact Centre, Company Secretary, Compliance, Property and Facilities, Accessibility and Training Services, Enterprises, Project Office and Information Systems Group.

Organisational Development

**Michael Hansen
GM**

This division includes Human Resources, OH&S, Payroll, Registered Training Organisation and the National Office Volunteer Program; and fosters organisational culture, learning and development.

Fundraising

**Jan Chisholm
GM**

Income from fundraising is essential to the provision of Vision Australia's services. This division oversees a diverse range of income-generating strategies and is responsible for relationships with our donors.

Strategic and financial planning

Vision Australia undertakes continual reviews to deploy assets to best provide services to the blindness community. Our strategic plan is subject to annual review and amendment. We are committed to transparency of our processes and a copy of our strategic plan is available on our website (www.visionaustralia.org).

Vision Australia supports government moves to reduce unnecessary complexity and cost in meeting various reporting, review, audit and compliance requirements. Currently there are 15 pieces

of Commonwealth legislation and 163 pieces of state/territory legislation we are required to deal with and this costs us more than \$1.2 million a year.

Property and facilities

Vision Australia currently has 27 offices in Australia from which services are provided. A specific Board committee assists in the planning, assessment and utilisation of buildings. Currently we have \$84.689m invested in owned properties and approximately \$2m per year in leased properties to ensure an appropriate geographical spread. Highlights include:



**Vision
Australia's
Carols by
Candlelight® has
been a Christmas
Eve tradition for
74 years.**

- Relocation of the Southport facility to larger premises in Robina, Queensland
- Relocation of the Maroochydore facility from leased premises into an owned site
- Finalisation of designs and tendering of the SEDA Barrett Street redevelopment to provide new breeding centre and kennels

Investments

Vision Australia has \$69.1m in assets under management to generate investment income that contributes to the funding for the provision of services. This important income stream is subject to variations that occur due to changes in global economic conditions. Vision Australia utilises the services of an investment advisor, Strategic Capital Management, to provide investment advice on the underlying investments which are predominantly managed by Hyperion Asset Management and DMP Asset Management Ltd with Sandhurst Trustees as the custodian.

Risk management

Vision Australia is a large and complex organisation that delivers a wide range of services and requires processes to manage the inherent risk.

As detailed in the financial report, a specific Board committee assists with the identification and management of risk. Additional safeguards are:

- External audits of the financial statements and result
- External audits of grant and lottery income
- Internal audits reporting to the board
- Risk register maintained, reviewed and reported on at every board meeting. Revisions to risk matrix part of organisation-wide reassessment of risk
- Maintenance of a Code of Professional Conduct policy
- Maintenance of employee and workplace policies and procedures
- Maintenance and review of all software licences
- Review and compliance with relevant legislation

Sustainability and environmental impact

Vision Australia encourages and implements environmentally sustainable practices and has implemented measures to better manage and measure its impact on the environment. Our goal to reduce electricity consumption by 5% during 2011/2012 has been surpassed with a reduction of 9.3% achieved. 2011/12 CO2 emissions were:

- Power, heating and lighting – 6,802 tonnes
- Fleet – 1,255 tonnes
- Flights – 641 tonnes

We recycle CDs, paper, computer equipment, have default double-sided printing on all printers, have reduced excess lighting and are replacing bulbs with energy-saving fittings. At Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight® we currently recycle 72% of waste and are working to improve this result.

Maintaining standards

The following successful external audits underline the high quality of Vision Australia's services:

- Vision Australia was audited against the Victorian Disability Service Standards at five service sites last

October and was certified against these standards. This audit was critical because we receive in excess of \$13m annually through the Victorian Disability Services Program, our largest recurrent government grant.

- Vision Australia receives recurrent funding from the Queensland Department of Communities under the Queensland Disability Services Program. Certification is a contractual requirement for ongoing funding. The first external surveillance audit was conducted at Coorparoo and Maroochydore and the auditors provided positive feedback in the following areas:
 - Positive client feedback
 - High quality services
 - Committed staff
 - Solid management systems and processes

The Department of Health and Ageing conducted a quality review of the National Respite for Carers Program, Maryborough. A successful audit outcome was achieved against the new National Community Care Common Standards. This achievement was particularly significant as these new standards covered a number of Federally-funded programs delivered across Vision Australia centres including:

- Home and Community Care Program services in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland
- Community Aged Care programs in Victoria
- National Respite for Carers Program in Queensland and Victoria

Process improvement

In September we launched VAPOS, Vision Australia's point of sale and inventory system for Equipment Solutions. This has removed inefficiencies associated with the previous manual processing of sales and has improved customer service by:

- Real time stock adjustments at the time of the sale transaction

- Improved stock order turnaround times
- Visibility of stock across all sales outlets
- Customer order tracking so staff can immediately inform customers of the status of their orders
- Purchase history collection so that refunds and exchanges can be processed easily and immediately
- Customer information captured to deliver targeted promotional campaigns
- Improved reporting of sales, stock and order fulfillment performance

the board

◀ We are grateful for the wide-ranging experience
our board shares with us. ▶



Kevin Murfitt
PhD, BA (Hons)
Chair
Appointed 2004
Lecturer



Professor Ron McCallum AO
BJuris LLB (Hons) LLM Qu
Deputy Chair; appointed 2006
Professor of Law, Chair United
Nations Committee on the
Right of Persons with Disabilities,
Senior Australian of the Year 2011



Owen van der Wall
Deputy Chair
Appointed 2004
Retired banker



Lyn Allison
BEd, AAICD
Appointed 2008
Former senator



**(Ronald) Keith
Barton**
PhD, BSc, FTSE
Appointed 2004
Non-executive
director



Nick Carter
FRICS,
FAPI, FAICD
Appointed 2006
Business owner

Full details of the board are
available in the Financial Report.



Donald Fraser
PhD, BSc (Hons),
Dip Ed, MBA, M
Comm Law, DBA,
FACS, FAICD
Appointed 2008
Business manager



Paul Gleeson
BSc, LLB, LLM
Appointed 2004
Solicitor



Ross McColl
BEcon (Monash)
FCA
Appointed 2006
Chartered
accountant (retired)



Andrew Moffat
BCom, LLB
Appointed 2011
Accredited
mediator



Professor Jan Lovie-Kitchin
MSc (Optom) (Melb),
Grad Dip (Rehab Stud)
(LaTrobe), FAAO
Appointed 2007
Adjunct Professor and Chair
of the University of Human
Research Ethics Committee



Theresa Smith-Ruig
PhD, BCom (Hons)
Appointed 2007
Lecturer



blindness and low vision services

Call **1300 84 74 66** or visit
www.visionaustralia.org

ACN 108 391 831

ABN 67 108 391 831

Combining the skills and resources of several blindness organisations to create one national voice, Vision Australia is committed to delivering exceptional and efficient services that open up exciting possibilities for our community.