*CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY (CBS)*

*September 2018 Newsletter* 399

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If you receive this newsletter by CD please return the package and plastic box in which this CD has come – you do not need to return the CD itself. Please remember that when you return the package to us just reverse the address card in the outside pocket so we can send the next edition to you.

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| **Southern Cross Club Community Rewards Program**If you are a member of the Southern Cross Club you can help us raise funds by taking part in the Southern Cross Club’s Community Rewards program. All you need to do is to nominate the Canberra Blind Society as your organisation to benefit under the rewards program. Ten percent of your purchases made on food and beverages in the public restaurants, bars and grills at the Woden, Tuggeranong, Jamison and Yacht Club venues are included.  |

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# Notice Board

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| **September** |
| 5 Sept | First Wednesday | 10:00 | Audio Book Group |
| 6 Sept 13 Sept20 Sept27 Sept | Every Thursday | 9:30 | Yoga followed by Braille Group |
| 21 Sept | Third Friday | 10:00 | Sense-able Cooking |
| 25 Sept  | Last Tuesday | 12:30 | Music Group |
| 28 Sept | Friday | 10:00 | Floriade Excursion |
| **October** |
| 3 Oct | First Wednesday | 10:00 | Audio Book Group |
| 5 and 6 Oct | Friday and Saturday |  | Overview |
| 13 Oct | Saturday | 6:30 | CBS 60th Anniversary Rydges Capital Hill |
| 4 Oct11 Oct18 Oct25 Oct | Every Thursday | 9:30 | Yoga followed by Braille Group |
| 19 Oct | Third Friday | 10:00 | Sense-able Cooking |
| 30 Oct | Last Tuesday | 12:30 | Music Group |
| **November** |
| 6 Nov | Tuesday | 12:30 | Melbourne Cup Lunch |
| 7 Nov | First Wednesday | 10:00 | Audio Book Club |
| 1 Nov8 Nov15 Nov22 Nov29 Nov | Every Thursday | 9:30 | Yoga followed by Braille Group |
| 16 Nov | Third Friday | 10:00 | Sense-able Cooking |
| 27 Nov  | Last Tuesday | 12:30 | Music Group |

# From the President’s Chair – Peter Granleese

Welcome once again to the September edition of the CBS Newsletter.

In the early 2000s Deb Quinnell, former Manager of Can-Braille and Executive Officer of the Society, proposed writing a Society history to the then President June Ashmore. The CBS Board agreed to this proposal and it was included in the Society action plan. While priorities that were more urgent got in the way, Deb started to research, collect and collate information, newspaper clippings and photographs. She continued this work and by 2016 had collected enough printed material and photographs to begin the process of writing the history.With the introduction of The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the signing of the agreement with RSB to provide joint services and Debs departure from CBS, further thoughts about writing a history had passed into deep hibernation if not disappearing entirely from the CBS agenda. In 2017, Deb was appointed to the CBS Board to fill a temporary vacancy and subsequently elected as the Society’s Treasurer at the 2017 AGM. Deb convinced Board Members that it was now time to produce the history that could be launched at a celebratory dinner marking 60 years since the Society’s establishment in the ACT in 1958. A working party was established to write and publish the history, chaired by June Ashmore and with editing help from David Ashmore, collated material, revised drafts and, using her vast knowledge of the Society, wrote several chapters.June was ably assisted by Debra who helped sort through the large amount of source material and for her intimate knowledge on the day to day workings of The Society spanning 25 years.

Being part of the Working Party I was called on to write chapters on governance and the future. Heather Fitzpatrick, Board Vice President and Secretary to the working party, assisted me in research and collection of management data, sought relevant costs associated with the book and contributed her own special knowledge of the written word and print publications.Other contributors included Michael Heal OAM, Jenny Findlay, the first employee who worked and volunteered with the Society for some 50 years, former Secretary to the Board, Cheryl Johnston and Warren College past Board member.Dr Ann Villiers, friend and sometime program leader for the Society, led the working party in understanding issues about the structure and type of content needed in a history. She also provided advice regarding editing, design and printing, and the rules relating to the use of photographs.Photographer James Ashmore provided the cover photograph and collated and digitised photographs and newspaper articles for inclusion in the book.CBS is celebrating its 60th anniversary, providing the opportunity to acknowledge the Society’s rich history. The History captures the essential changes that reflect this vibrant community organisation and its contribution to Canberra and the ACT. While not seeking to be exhaustive in scope, it provides readers with a window into how CBS as a small community organisation has had a big impact in serving the needs of people who are blind or have low vision, outlines how the Society has readily adapted to changing circumstances, describes some of the ground-breaking programs that have had a huge impact on the skills, confidence and social life of participants and highlights how understanding of the needs of people who are blind has deepened as a result of the Society’s work. It also seeks to acknowledge contributions of patrons, donors, supporters, governments, staff, volunteers, and members past and present. Briefly stated, the History tells the story of CBS over the last 60 years and what a story it is to tell. The book which entitled “Enlightening Years A History of the Canberra Blind Society1958 to 2018”, will be on sale at the book launch which will take place at our celebrations on 13 October, an excellent value at just twenty dollars. It is not that often that the CBS family has the opportunity to celebrate such an important occasion so we encourage all our friends to come along and be part of the celebrations. For details on how to purchase your ticket refer to “What’s on at CBS”.

It seems like yesterday that we gathered together to celebrate our 50th anniversary. A lot has happened over the last 10 years, most notably, the introduction of the NDIS, and the impact that this has had on the way services are provided. This has caused the Society to refocus towards a more community-based organisation. No doubt this new direction will be something to look back on when we celebrate our 70th anniversary.

# Let’s Talk Technology

“HaptiComm”, a Tactile Stimulation Device for Deafblind Communication

Deafblindness is a combined impairment of audition and vision with a population incidence of 1:250. Among the many consequences of having Deafblindness, the most notable is the challenge of everyday communication.

Barriers to communication leads to isolation resulting in social and community exclusion and mental health challenges.

The HaptiComm project introduces a paradigm shift in haptic communication technology.  Rather than approaching the Deafblind community with “Here’s a device that uses a code which you can learn” we proceeded with “Here’s a device that lets you communicate in your own natural language”.

To achieve this goal, HaptiComm employs specifically designed tactile transducers that provide sensations that closely resemble those elicited by real fingers tapping and sliding on the skin of the palm and fingers.

These sensations, which must felt with clarity and speed, are the fundamental elements on which tactile codes for communication are built.

They differ dramatically from the diffuse sensations experienced when vibrations motors are stitched to gloves and convert informative signals that have a high degree of intensity contrast and temporal resolution.

As further recognition, in July 2018, the HaptiComm project won the University of Sydney’s Student Innovation Challenge Research Innovation Prize ($10,000) “for research which has been translated into a practical application”. For more information please see their website: <http://hapticomm.tech/>

# What’s on at CBS

## Canberra Blind Society 60th Birthday and Book Launch

Members and friends of the Society please be advised that tickets are available for purchase. Please join us and be a part of the celebrations for the 60th Birthday and book launch on **Saturday 13 October 2018** atRydges Capital Hill, Forrest at 6:30 for 7:00 pm. The book celebrates 60 years of service to the Canberra community and honours those people whose hard work and dedication has contributed to CBS’s success.

Cost: $75.00 per ticket for a 3 course meal and drinks package. The meal includes alternate dishes. Please let us know of any dietary requirements when you purchase your tickets.

Tables of 8 will be available – to book please contact the office on 02 6247 4580 or email canblind@tpg.com.au. Otherwise you can deposit ticket money to the CBS bank account with a notation in the Notes of the surname of the purchaser and the number of tickets – ie Smith x3. The tickets will then be available to pick up from the office before the event or at the door. The bank account details are:

Canberra Blind Society

Commonwealth Bank 062919

Account number 00920493

# The Way I see It – Graham Downie

Anticipated increased travel times and more inconvenience to Canberra’s bus users is directly attributable to the ACT government’s light rail folly.

To spend about $1 billion on the infrastructure alone of a 12km tramway, which will provide slower and less frequent service than the existing bus service, has never been justified economically or from a public transport perspective. Rather, the decision was based on attracting development along the light rail corridor with increased rates for the government’s coffers.

My reasons for opposing the Gungahlin tram were published in The Canberra Times about five years ago and nothing which has happened since has changed this reasoning. Indeed, the proposed changes to Canberra’s entire bus network is predicated on ensuring the same inconvenience and delayed travel for those forced on to the tram will be spread across most Canberra bus users.

To its credit, Transport Canberra arranged a meeting for people who are blind or vision impaired to outline the changes proposed for the bus service from early next year. Held on July 31, the meeting was respectful and clearly more civilised than other consultations which reportedly have had more than a few raised voices. Nevertheless, and despite a sympathetic hearing, there was no indication there would be any significant change to the proposed new network.

It will be based on 10 rapid routes, one of which will be the Gungahlin to Civic tram. We were told about 55 per cent of Canberrans will live within 800m of a stop for at least one of these routes. Services on most of these routes would operate about every 15 minutes between 7am and 7pm.

This type of service in Canberra is long overdue. Indeed, something similar was recommended to the Government about eight years ago. But to offset this benefit, far more people, including many on the rapid routes, will have to change at least once, some twice, to complete their journeys. Having to break one’s journey is a well-known disincentive to using public transport, yet the proposed new network is largely predicated on passengers having to change at least once, even between rapid routes.

Then there are the 45 per cent of people who do not live close to a rapid route. Some of their services will operate only hourly except at peak times. Making quick connections with a service on even a 30-minute frequency is problematic.

In Canberra, where travel by private vehicle is relatively easy, many people faced with longer and less convenient travel will eschew public transport. But that choice is not available to people who, for whatever reason, are unable to drive. Hence my raising this matter in this newsletter.

For far too long, people who depend on Canberra’s public transport have had an inadequate service. Less than 75 per cent of current bus services run on time and there is no systematic plan for connecting services. The increased reliance on connections under next year’s proposed changes gives little confidence the promised integrated benefits will be delivered.

Transport Canberra says there will be more transport officers to help the increased number of passengers having to change in Civic. At the July meeting, we were told to expect to have five minutes to change. Yet no timetables have been produced to verify this.

Blind and vision impaired passengers were excluded from the MyWay ticketing system when it was introduced in March 2011. Only after persistence, which began in 2013, by the Canberra Blind Society and a further about three-year delay, were blind and vision impaired people given the option of using MyWay cards.

At the meeting on July 31, Director Transport Canberra Operations Ian McGlinn encouraged blind and vision impaired passengers to use these cards to provide data on where and when they travelled. This was one of the arguments we put when presenting the case for inclusion on the MyWay system.

Though this ticketing system is likely to be replaced next year, Mr McGlinn said he would willingly arrange training for anyone needing help to tag on and off. Anyone needing this help is welcome to phone me for initial advice and if necessary to arrange help by Transport Canberra staff.

# Keeping Track of Time – Graham Downie

Some people will not wear watches because, in busy areas they rely on the ubiquitous clocks on display, and in quiet areas they insist there is no need to know the time.

But for people who are blind or vision impaired, having access to an accurate time piece can make the difference between missing appointments and public transport. Hence the number of regular inquiries to the Canberra Blind Society by people seeking reliable watches.

Naively, I assured a meeting of the CBS Board some months ago there should be little difficulty finding a reliable source of watches. In one sense, this proved true enough, but without a physical shop where one can lay hands on the products, it is difficult to judge the likely quality of the goods.

So what follows is a summary of a few options, including one which has largely been unavailable to Australians for many years.

Unavailable because major blindness agencies ceased importing Seiko tactile watches. I bought one in the early 1980s and still use it. It has been with me through heat and rain, snow and dust, and maintains almost perfect time.

Recently I telephoned Seiko Australia to ask why this excellent product is denied the good folk of our fair land. Within a day I received advice that four models are in stock overseas and could be shipped to Australia in about a month.

The most obliging Merchandising Manager for SEIKO Australia, Michael Hassell, said very occasional inquiries were received and Seiko would be happy to provide its watches to Australians upon request to Seiko.

Special Markets Manager Emma Biviano is the person to contact – telephone 02 9805 4777. The cost of the watches, including gents and ladies models, ranges from $210 to $310.

By comparison, the Queensland Blind association sells gents and ladies Braille watches from $130 to $180. Whether they are the same or similar quality to the Seiko models is not known.

Vision Australia’s website has a chrome tactile gents watch for $58. Its other tactile offerings, include a ladies tactile watch with diamante bezel for $97.

For people who cannot see a watch face, even one with large digits, tactile, sometimes called Braille watches, allow more discreet checking of time when in meetings, movies and so on, than talking watches. Yet the talking variety can include functions such as alarms and calendars.

The Queensland Blind Association has talking watches from about $50 and Vision Australia a gent's single button talking watch for $80.Its ladies talking watch with pink leather strap costs $97. Vision Australia also has a ladies talking calendar alarm wristwatch for $180.

Both sites also have a range of watches with large print. Beginning at about $35 on the Queensland site and about $50 on Vision Australia’s. Both also have a range of clocks – talking and with large print.

The products mentioned here are only a sample and some prices might no longer be current. Out of interest, I notice the Royal National Institute for the Blind, in the UK, offers a Bradley tactile stainless steel watch with brown leather strap for £299, which roughly converts to more than $465. At that price, you could be looking at a smart watch by Apple or Samsung.

# Email address update

CBS will be transitioning from our current email address of canblind@tpg.com.au to canblind@canberrablindsociety.org.au starting from the beginning of September. Please update your email contact lists but be assured that the TPG email address will forward emails to the new address during the transition period.

# Monthly Programs

## Audio Book group

This group meets monthly on the first Wednesday of each month to discuss the audio book of the month. RSVP to Len Hogg on 6258 2510 or 0414 808 137. Please note that there are no vacancies at present, please make contact to join the waiting list if you are interested in becoming a member.

## Braille group

If you would like to learn Braille or you would like support to continue your practice, we host a peer-supported Braille group for all levels of ability. For more information about Braille group contact Sharon Sobey on 6254 7326.

**When**: every Thursday, 9.30 am – 11.30am

**Where**: Room 6, Griffin Centre, 20 Genge Street

**Sense-Able Cooking**

Sense-Able Cooking group is held on the third Friday of each month. The group aims to practise cooking skills, learn handy tips for cooking with vision impairment, and share favourite recipes. And eat delicious food, of course!

**When**: third Friday of the month

**Where**: Room 6, Griffin Centre, 20 Genge Street

**Cost:** $5 (for ingredients)

Please call CBS on 6247 4580 to reserve your place in this group.

## Music Group

Please come and join our music group for a sing-along of well-known and favourite songs on the last Tuesday of the month. No experience is necessary although experienced musicians are most welcome. Prepare to sing and have some fun. Bring an instrument if you are keen. Georgia Pike from the ANU’s Music Engagement Program will join us and we will have fun learning some new songs. If you are interested in joining the music group, contact the office on 6247 4580. Volunteer drivers will be available if required.

**When**: Last Tuesday of the month, 12.30–1.30pm

Where: Room 6, Griffin Centre, 20 Genge Street