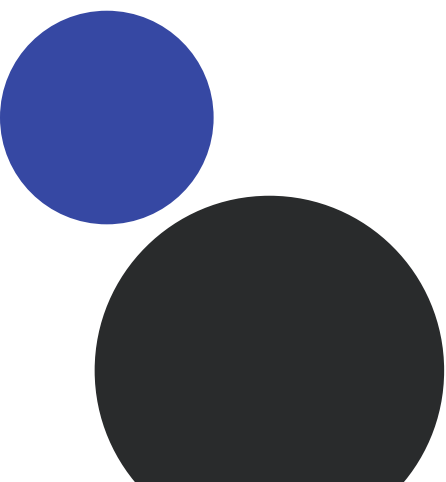


**Canberra  
Blind  
Society.**



# **Annual Report**

**2023 - 2024**





## **President report Annual General Meeting 14 November 2024**

It is my pleasure to present the President's report to the AGM. I would like to thank all the Board members, staff and volunteers who have helped us to navigate 2023/2024. I believe we have progressed in our aim to provide services and support to our members and clients.

CBS commenced radio advertising on 2CA and 2CC – we've had a very good response both for new clients seeking support and people looking for items from our online store.

Our regular Peer Support programs have continued – Book Group, Sense Able Cooking, Exercise Program, Arts and Crafts, Men's Group and Friends of Braille.

The Women's Safety Program has been continuing its very successful series of workshops – the staff and presenters have honed and refined the selection process for attendees which means the groups get a lot out of the program.

Our Creative Marketing Officer has kept the websites, Facebook and LinkedIn going with interesting information and notices of events.

I'm pleased to say that the Outreach program has been ramping up - more and more people are getting assessed by the Outreach officer and then accessing the services we provide and getting help and support. In concert with outreach, our events have been organised and run efficiently and successfully.

The Mentoring program wrapped up in May 2024. Although successful, it was disappointing that more organisations did not avail themselves to the wealth of knowledge available to them and their employees.

### **Donors and Supporters**

Our donors have ranged from one off donations to corporate donors such as the Southern Cross Club (through the Community Rewards Program), Specsavers Woden and the Grill'd Local Matters program. Overall, we received over \$105,000 in donations with a very generous donation of \$20,000 and a bequest donation of \$28,000. I would like to acknowledge and thank all our supporters. Additionally, we received support from companies and agencies who charge a reduced rate for their services. A list of our supporters is published at the end of each newsletter and their support is greatly appreciated as it helps to defray our costs.

## **Volunteers**

The role of volunteers continued to be crucial for the running of CBS. Without their assistance, CBS would not be able to provide the services it intends to deliver. In May we held an afternoon tea at Old Parliament House to thank all our volunteers for their help and support.

## **Staff and Administration**

I want to sincerely thank all our staff for their hard work and commitment to CBS and EFLC. Without you we would struggle to keep the doors open.

Glenn Doney continued as the Society's Executive Officer managing CBS on a day-to-day basis, ensuring that all the organisational and individual capacity building deliverables were completed on time and in accordance with the conditions of our grants.

Debra Quinnell continued in her roles as the Outreach Officer and Events Coordinator. I really appreciate her in-depth knowledge and history with CBS.

Akita Hodgson continued her role as Project Officer for the Women's Safety Program (WSP).

Alex Parnell continued juggling University studies and her role as Visual Communications Officer. Bianca David was engaged as Social Media Coordinator, managing the social media calendar for CBS and EFLC and finished up at the end of June.

Stef Berta-McGhie continued as Bookkeeper and accounting guru.

Hayley Moeller continued as the Administration & Volunteer Coordinator.

Claire Manning continued in her role as Project Officer coordinating and managing the Mentoring Program along with the Mentor Team of Peter Granleese, Lindy Hou, Robert Altamore, and Roslyn Sackley.

Prudence Mayhew was the Community Engagement Officer during the year but finished up in December 2023.

**End of Year Audit**

The end of year audit and preparations for the AGM were completed by Scott Ellis. With the addition of some supplementary information by Stef Berta-McGhie and Glenn Doney as well as stock on hand for the online store, the report was completed well in advance of the AGM.

In conclusion, I would like to personally thank the staff and Board members for their work and help this year. It has been a difficult year for my family, and I appreciate how the staff and Board members made sure everything ran smoothly and well during my absences.

Heather Fitzpatrick

President CBS



## **Canberra Blind Society Inc.**

### **Treasurer's Report for the Annual General Meeting 2024 for Financial Year July 2023 to June 2024**

It is my pleasure to present the Canberra Blind Society's (CBS) Treasurer's Report for the 2023/24 financial year.

I would like to thank Scott Ellis from Les Ellis and Associates who performed our annual audit. I would like to thank Executive Officer Glenn Doney and Bookkeeper Stef Berta-McGhie for their work in keeping the details of the CBS accounts and response to my questions through the year. They have attended to the budget and maintained details to comply with grant and CBS operational requirements.

I would also like to thank all the CBS staff for keeping all grant expenses within budgets and provided timely information to our bookkeeper.

The comprehensive audited Financial Report has been presented to the AGM.

On the Financial report, the profit of the organisation after providing for income tax amounted to \$146,743.00.

CBS had three commonwealth grants that concluded up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024. They were Community Engagement, Events / Outreach, and Mentoring programs. A fourth grant, the Women Safety Program received an extension to June 2025.

These grants supported CBS to carry out our mission through care, communication and support to those affected by blindness and low vision.

In the last few years, CBS and Eyes for Life Canberra grant programs have enabled CBS to service more of the vision impaired community. We were able to save a small amount of funds raised outside of the grants programs to help CBS continue the work after the grants have finished.

At the conclusion of the three grants in June 2024, there is sufficient grant funds left to complete those programs until February 2025.

From March 2025, CBS will have to draw on our reserve to continue the current level of services. The CBS Board is working hard at increasing options to maintain the same level of support to our members. As we transit from being funded by grants, we need the support of all our members to source alternative revenue to continue our work. We welcome ideas and help from all our members and supporters. We believe with all your support; we can be self-sufficient to serve our members and those affected by low vision.

CBS would like to thank the following organisations and their supporters for their generous donations over the past financial year:

- Canberra Southern Cross Club,
- Hands Across Canberra,
- Chief Ministers Charitable Fund,
- Canberra Theatre -The Royal Military College Band,
- Specsavers,
- Money spinner at Calwell Shops,
- Open Garden hosted by Teresa Zarlenga

Thank you also to all our members who donate funds to help the charity continue its valued work in the vision impaired community.

We would also like to express our thanks for all our volunteers who have donated their time and money to support the work of CBS.

Let's all work together to ensure our great works over the last 65 years will continue.

Lindy Hou

CBS Treasurer



**CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY INCORPORATED**  
**23 708 616 327**

**FINANCIAL REPORT**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED**  
**30 JUNE 2024**

**Liability limited by a scheme approved under  
Professional Standards Legislation**

**CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY INCORPORATED**  
23 708 616 327

**INCOME STATEMENT  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024**

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>INCOME</b>			
Interest Received		12,820	-
Grant Income		928,072	508,976
		<u>940,892</u>	<u>508,976</u>
<b>OTHER INCOME</b>			
Miscellaneous Income		-	11,344
Donations Received		105,795	51,379
Gross profit (loss) from trading		44,739	(5,742)
		<u>150,534</u>	<u>56,981</u>
		<u>1,091,426</u>	<u>565,957</u>

**CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY INCORPORATED**  
**23 708 616 327**

**INCOME STATEMENT**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024**

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>Profit (Loss) for the year</b>		146,743	(156,881)
Retained earnings at the beginning of the financial year		771,137	928,018
<b>Retained earnings at the end of the financial year</b>		917,880	771,137

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

**CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY INCORPORATED**  
**23 708 616 327**

**INCOME STATEMENT**  
**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024**

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			
Accountancy		800	750
Advertising & Promotion		38,449	19,706
Bank Charges		244	185
Bank Card Charges		386	335
Catering		4,646	1,817
Cleaning		-	704
Consultants Fees		49,802	27,796
Computer Consumables/Internet		150	-
Depreciation		3,992	7,100
Donations		934	-
Electricity & Gas		893	1,173
Entertainment		1,349	244
Event Expenses		39,995	18,938
Freight & Cartage		38	16
General Expenses		2,603	2,029
Hire of Rooms		8,201	3,863
Insurance		14,414	7,877
Portable Long Service Leave		9,030	6,894
Resources & Program Delivery		18,033	8,081
Motor Vehicle Expenses		6,896	3,087
Office Expenses		7,000	8,693
Secure Parking		16,377	16,607
Printing & Stationery		555	2,606
Provision for Annual Leave		23,333	-
Rent		17,781	21,295
Staff Amenities		-	194
Staff Training		480	3,957
Subscriptions		2,634	2,065
Superannuation		68,351	55,226
Telephone		11,863	8,279
Travelling		1,349	9
Wages		594,105	493,312
		<u>944,683</u>	<u>722,838</u>
Profit (Loss) before income tax		146,743	(156,881)

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.



**CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY INCORPORATED**  
23 708 616 327

**BALANCE SHEET**  
**AS AT 30 JUNE 2024**

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>			
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents	3	997,806	833,987
Trade and other receivables	4	763	1,649
Inventories	5	18,070	-
Prepayments		136	-
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>		<u>1,016,775</u>	<u>835,636</u>
<b>NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Property, plant and equipment	6	6,958	10,950
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>		<u>6,958</u>	<u>10,950</u>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<u>1,023,733</u>	<u>846,586</u>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>			
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>			
Trade and Other Payables	7	105,853	75,449
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		<u>105,853</u>	<u>75,449</u>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>		<u>105,853</u>	<u>75,449</u>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		<u>917,880</u>	<u>771,137</u>
<b>MEMBERS' FUNDS</b>			
Retained earnings	8	917,880	771,137
<b>TOTAL MEMBERS' FUNDS</b>		<u>917,880</u>	<u>771,137</u>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.



# **Canberra Blind Society Inc.**

## **Executive Officer Report**

### **Annual General Meeting 2023-24**

The past 12 months have certainly been both exciting and challenging in the same instance. We have continued to employ staff, conduct monthly events, continue our outreach, mentoring and community engagement services as well as the Women's Safety Program. Below are some highlights from each month.

#### **July 2023**

The new financial year commenced with some staff changes. Alexandra Parnell commenced a new position as Creative Marketing Officer, Roslyn Sackley resigned from the Mentoring team, and we went to market for a new social media coordinator position. We submitted Activity Work Plans for all four grants as well as completing financial acquittals in relation to each grant. Debra Quinell continued to provide Outreach services to several new clients with a range of vision impairments, as well as continuing to support current clients. Our peer support programs were very popular with regular Friends of Braille, Audio Book Club, Art n Craft, and Sense-Able Cooking all well supported from members. Our websites, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts all attracted over 380 people. The Mentoring Program coordinated by Claire Manning, conducted over 36 mentoring discussions both with individual and small group national and state government organisations. Our Administration & Volunteer Coordinator, Hayley Moeller was busy planning events for the future months, updating hospital kits and updating the Cliniko database with client details. The Women's Safety Program managed by Akita Hodgson continued to be a success with feedback from graduating participants being overwhelmingly positive, with one vision-impaired participant commenting:

“This program had much to offer, and I am confident it has made a big difference to the way I will navigate the rest of my life! Please keep doing what you do and keep this initiative going.”

#### **August**

Our staff grew by one in August with Bianca David being offered the part time role as Social Media Coordinator after applicants were culled and interviewed for the position. Parking for staff commenced using their car rego rather than swipe card access to undercover parking near Griffin Centre. I applied to Xero which handles all our business accounting for a reduction in their monthly costs considering our status

as a not-for-profit charity; with resounding success. Outreach Services continued to be sought out with over 20 different interactions in the month ranging from one off questions and referrals to continued servicing of clients. Activities in the Women's Safety Program were primarily focused on delivery of Groups 3 and 4. As per previous Groups, there were a small number of drop-outs due to life changes, such as moving interstate, serious family illnesses, or taking up fulltime employment. A train trip to Bungendore became a bus trip due to difficulties booking train, however everyone had a great time exploring the multitude of shops as well as enjoying a hardy lunch with almost too many options. Our Facebook adverts continued to reach many people with over 37,000 people reached over the last month from Eyes for Life Canberra (EFLC). Both websites continued to have constant traffic with Canberra Blind Society (CBS) and EFLC all receiving over 10 clicks every day which was an increase from the previous month; overall, over 374 clicks per website. Claire and her Mentoring team had several meetings with government departments including ACT Government E-Learning Director, ACT Government – Age-Friendly City Plan Governance Plan, ANU Innovation Network, Canberra Business Chamber - *Harnessing the untapped potential of employing people with disability*. Lindy Hou, Peter Granleese and Robert Altamore attended. 38 attendees at the event and Justice and Community Safety Directorate.

## September

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September staff attended the Disability Expo to represent EFLC. The event enabled us to interact with other agencies as well as community members. Our stall was well received, and we estimated that we spoke with around 100 people during the day. We distributed pamphlets and information flyers, discussed our products and services, with our range of portable magnification devices and lamps proving very popular. Once again, we received lovely community feedback regarding the one-on-one client centred care our organisation provides. We continued our usual focus of supporting members to attend regular core programs (Art & Craft; Sense-Able Cooking; Audio Book Group; and the Friends of Braille. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of September we attended the Council on the Aging Expo providing information, advice and several referrals to other like-minded organisations. We took several lamps and vision related magnifiers and talking devices to showcase our online shop, as well as letting people know that we had a Walkin Centre that allowed you to try before you buy. We lost count of the number of people that attended our Expo table as we were continually inundated with people requiring information about low vision and the aging process. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of September we visited North Canberra Hospital to provide training to medical staff on the use of our vision impaired persons Hospital Kit. There were 15 staff in attendance and the 40-minute training session ended some 90 minutes later given the enthusiasm and range of



questions from the medical staff who attended. All reports to the Department of Social Services for the Mentoring and Events grants were submitted and approved as per required time frames.

## **October**

I met with our grant funding arrangement manager and the departmental Assistant Director, about our progress with the Mentoring Project and possible traction in the next few months. Both were satisfied with the conversation, and we were given the green light to continue. As a result, funds held back since the end of August were released in early November. Meetings with Mix 106 to re-negotiate next 3-month advertising of EFLC campaign by radio was attended by Alex and I, with a positive response received. Our Creative Marketing Officer confirmed that most people were looking at our website from direct searches of our name, which meant we needed to ensure our search engine optimization was kept up to date. Aussie Broadband informed us that our NBN plan would increase from \$79.00 to \$85.00 per month from November. I applied for a reduction as a Charity and was received the following reply. "There is no need to use the promo code, we have made your sponsorship on going with no expiry date. You will continue to receive a \$24 discount on your NBN plan." The Department of Social Services wrote to us about three grants and how they were increasing income support for each grant to allow for staff indexing costs. Incomes ranged from 8 to 18K depending on the overall grant. As a result of extra income, I had to partially rewrite grant budgets and submit them for data entry in XERO. The Outreach Officer had 8 new clients make contact regarding information and advice as well as another 11 making enquiries regarding Magnifier/daily living aids, peer support and referrals to other blindness agencies. There was further VIP Hospital Kit training for medical staff from both Bega Southeast Regional Hospital and Queanbeyan Hospital. The Women's Safety Program considered whether to persist with running Group 5 and Group 6 concurrently next year or pitch an idea to the Department of Social Services that we run a Workshop Series in lieu of Group 6. The Workshop Series would be an ad-hoc opt-in, opt-out series of lunchtime workshops that cover similar content to the 12-week Program but includes new content that would also appeal to 12-week Program participants. The Department of Social Services was agreeable, as this strategy would open the Women's Safety Program to a wider audience. The specific feedback from interested parties on why they were not enrolling into the Program was that 12 weeks is too great a commitment. It excludes a lot of working women from attending the workshops as they feel they cannot reasonably ask their employers to release them for 3 hours per week for 12 weeks. In a Workshop Series, women can enrol into one or more of the workshops on offer. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of October we conducted the optometrist breakfast event delivering presentations

about EFLC as well as hearing from some other presenters. The breakfast event was attended by over 6 optometrists in person and 40 optometrists attended online, Feedback from the event was people would love to attend similar events again run by EFLC on different topics. The CBS website had 4,100 total impressions (total impressions is how many times a user saw a link to your site in search results). This was a large increase from last month and up 105%. Our EFLC websites had 3,800 total impressions, which was a big increase of 40%. Our total sales this month from the shop was \$897.56. We continued to engage volunteers regularly to assist with driving clients to and from our outings.

## **November**

Early in November, we reviewed the new rules for fixed term contracts as per Fair Work agreement. The auditor's report was finalised and sent to Scott Ellis our Auditor with all CBS signatures. We attended and coordinated the Garden Event in mid-November on 18th & 19<sup>th</sup> of November which raised well over \$2,000.00. The Profit and Loss statements for all 4 grants was discussed with Project Officers with tracking of budgets all meeting projected targets. The ACT Volunteer grant was written to help offset travel and fuel bills for our volunteers with results to be communicated in February 2024. Another 7 new clients were seen by our Outreach Officer with a further 23 client contacts for Outreach Services. Presentation to University of Canberra Optometry students took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, to enhance and upskill their knowledge of working with clients who are vision impaired. One of our members Stefanie Creaser volunteered her time to talk to the students about her experiences of working and then becoming vision impaired later in her working life and the implications and adjustments that she had to make to transition her life. The students very much enjoyed the discussion lead by Stefanie, considering the number of questions that were raised. We gratefully thank Stefanie for her time. In relation to the Women's Safety Program Groups 3 and 4 concluded in November, wrapping up the last of the 12-week Programs for 2023. Graduating participants all expressed enthusiastic, positive feedback for the Women's Safety Program. Some of the comments included:

- "This has been one of the best programs I have ever attended. I'm 48. The self-learning, skills, connections made have had for such a long time. I'm starting to feel normal."
- "Wonderful community and safe space. Worth its weight in gold. Thank you."
- "I absolutely love the course; all the topic surprised me in a nice way. Learning tools gives me strategies that I can use but also teach friends and family. I appreciate the safe space to talk and connect with the other women."

We continued to engage volunteers regularly to assist with driving clients to and from our outings, including the visit to the ANU Classic Museum on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November. Debra & Hayley held a lunch at the Botanic Gardens for the Volunteers on 16<sup>th</sup> November to thank them for all that they did for CBS. Some CBS clients volunteered their time on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November for final year Optometry Students to come and have their eyes looked at by the students. The Creative Marketing Officer designed promotional vouchers for graduates of the Women's Safety Program, developed Facebook marketing for the Garden Party and edited short videos to use for the marketing, and designed a media wall for upcoming events and expos in 2024. There was further VIP Hospital Kit training for the district nurses from each hospital in the Illawarra region.

## **December & January 2024**

Prudence Mayhew went on extended leave for over 2 months commencing January 2024. We employed a new contractor for a 12-week period to cover Wellbeing Facilitator for the Women's Safety Program. Katie Godfrey is a qualified Psychologist & Counsellor with a large amount of experience in the field of Informed Trauma which was the specialisation we required. A grant application was submitted to ACT Government to increase resources for the Women's Safety Program. We were successful with our ACT Volunteer grant to help with travel and fuel bills for our volunteers. Staff met with newly appointed Board members Amelia and Gareth on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Dec for afternoon tea. It provided an opportunity for staff to meet them and discuss each staff member's role in EFLC / CBS, but also to ask questions about future directions of the Charity moving forward. A direct result of the above meeting was signing of an Employee Assistance Program for all EFLC / CBS staff, board, and volunteers. Graham Downie's nomination was accepted to be part of the ACT Electoral Commission Disability Advisory Committee. Based on profit and loss statement for November, all 4 projects budgets updated to ensure all funds spent by 30th June 2024. Outreach services slowed down considerably with only 8 new clients who made contact. However, Debra saw 20 clients for a range of Outreach Services. On Monday 4<sup>th</sup> of December, our members visited the Canberra Zoo and Aquarium as part of International Day for People with Disability with 18 members enjoying a great day out at the Canberra Zoo. On Saturday the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, we celebrated Christmas lunch in the Botanic Gardens.

The Creative Marketing Officer was busy with meeting with Beam Scooters to develop a partnership and in turn an education campaign about scooters and people who are blind or have low vision. We held a pop up at Communities at work Tuggeranong (29th Jan - 2 Feb). Access Canberra's Business Team sent us 'Assistance Animal Access Rights cards and trifold to give to our members. The

radio adverts with 106.3 finished in December but were still running with 2CC/2CA where most of our new clients are coming in from hearing the advert. We actively recruited more volunteers, as we did not have many to draw from for assistance. An advertisement was placed on ACT Volunteering site, SEEK Volunteer and on our Facebook page. The recruitment drive yielded another 5 new volunteers, with a small induction and training with the new Volunteers concluding on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January. The Mentoring Team continued to work hard with Claire and Peter attending an Intro to Podcasting Workshops run by University of Canberra and Art Sound Community Radio team. Ongoing discussions to work together to create quality audio files for CBS website and other platforms and assist radio team to build understanding working with people with a vision impairment. In early December the team attended the Canberra Major Projects International Day of People with Disability Event with all the mentoring team presenting. They also presented to Sport Integrity Australia as part of International Day of People with Disability Event where 89 people were present. The team then attended the ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards representing Canberra Blind Society. Our nomination Justice and Community Safety Directorate made the finalists however sadly did not win the overall award for Innovation in Business. The Mentoring team continued their great work with a support session with Lindy and Claire discussing ways to build confidence and more skills with screen reader technology to help build study and employment opportunities. Finally, Lindy, Peter and Robert participated in an on-line community consultation for accessibility for early design of the new Canberra Theatre Centre Redevelopment. Graham Downie also participated so there was a strong representation by Canberra Blind Society.

Below is an email we received in early January from a previous Women Safety Program participant.

"I wanted to say a big thank you for the amazing support I got at the Women Safety Program. For the 12 weeks I knew no matter that at least one day a week I was in a safe space will have where I will be respected. Where I can breathe. Where I can cry without needing to explain or apologize. It felt like a safety shore. Also, the program helped me building my confidence around big range of things like running my own financial situation, having a good idea how to help in a first aid situation, what healthy relationship looks like, how it feels to be respected. When I was bullied at work, I had someone to talk to and help me understand again that standing up for myself is not wrong.

I thank you so much, from the bottom of my heart, and behalf of my kids as well."

With comments like this, that make the Program all that more important.

## February

February kicked off with a meeting with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Occupational Therapist and Mobility staff about how we could support each other and provide value add to each organisation's programs. Akita and I submitted a grant application to the Department of Social Services regarding an Upscaling Initiative Proposal for extending the Women's Safety Program for another 12 months and to commence as of July 2024. We had Leanne from Magnifiers Australia come up for a day to work with staff to demonstrate new products and how sell products to people who are vision impaired. We contacted City News and Heather our President did a piece about EFLC and our Giant Easter Egg raffle which was a great awareness article and drove traffic through our social networks. I contacted suitable people to cover both external consultants to provide Counselling and Occupational Therapy services to our members. Deb and I attended an "in house" fire and emergency warden training meeting with all other Griffin Centre contacts and then conducted some ad hoc emergency mock sessions to test our processes. With the increase in the number of cyber-crimes and risk around cyber security we engaged with our website hosting company to set up cyber security around all office email addresses. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, Debra conducted an Age Care Information Session titled "Right at Home" for our members, however, outreach services in February declined due to us stopping radio adverts in the January period. February was another busy time for the Women's Safety Program with commencement of the final 12-week group grant round and launch of the new Workshop Series. This was the first Group that we trialled a new triage method of exclusively liaising with and relying on the referring agent's assessment of participant fit for program. Under this new method, significant time was spent with each case manager, support, coordinator or other referral source to determine their client's suitability for this program. The new Women's Safety Program Workshop Series held its first workshop on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February, with a workshop entitled The Arts of Saying No and Setting Boundaries Respectfully. Approximately 30% of attendees were industry professionals there to gain understanding of issues so they can better advise and support their vulnerable clients. These new lunchtime workshops gained a lot of interest amongst the ACT community services and health organisations, with a lot of positive feedback indicating our activities are filling an important gap in the preventative and post-crisis space. The Mentoring Team had lengthy discussions late February and early March with two organisations that provide digital accessibility audits. I am pleased to report that both organisations had experience in disability sector and contacts with lived experience as an important foundation for the services they provide. They confirmed similar findings to us that accessibility is mostly an afterthought rather than discussions being included in the early stages.

## March

In March we conducted two interviews for Counsellors who could work as external contractors and provide support for our members. At the conclusion of the interviews, we contracted Hilary Berthon and Jon Neilsen to provide counselling services. There were also continued discussion with Guide Dogs NSW / ACT about a reciprocal arrangement of EFLC providing Counselling services for their clients and Guide Dogs provide Occupational Therapy services for our members. Our final report and financial acquittal were sent to the IMB to finalise the hospital kits grant. I contacted Emily Heath from ACT Government about CBS members getting to be part of a guided tour of Garema Place and Dickson Shops prior to upgrades. Working models were delivered to CBS in the middle of March. The ever-popular exercise program commenced on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March and was scheduled to run for 14 weeks until the end of June. We conducted several events in March, including the Birrigai Outdoor School camp, Easter lunch with raffle of the giant 5kg easter egg and Dancing Queen Evening. The Easter Raffle raised \$720.00 with many tickets sold online through the retail outlet (265 raffle tickets sold). The Community Engagement team attended the Canberra Girls Grammar – Junior School to discuss vision impairment and how people adapted to the changes in their vision. March was a challenging month for the Women's Safety Program with a tough call made regarding the viability of continuing with Group 5 of the 12-week Program. Given the new nature of the pilot Workshop Series, additional workload and activities resulted in each session delivering new, untested content with printed workbooks for participants. We conducted an Optometrist professional development workshop on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March with over 35 people attending online/ watching the recording. We had Jessica Zuzic from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and Stephanie Creaser present to the group. The following week we presented accessibility training workshop for Volunteer Hub Staff. The Canberra Day appeal confirmed the amount raised \$6,258.00 which will help pay for Counselling services for members who cannot afford to pay for the whole session. All EFLC online shop products were added to google shop, meaning they appear at the top of google pages when specific terms are searched. The Mentoring team led by Claire Manning was busy with final preparation and rehearsal for successful lecture at the Australian National University. There were 155 students present to listen to the team present on inclusion and accessibility for Technology and Society students. Claire and Peter recorded two podcasts turning Mentoring Program Checklists. Discussions talked about Inclusive Leadership and Recruitment. Two more podcast recording sessions were planned before finalising the program. Our Facebook Analytics demonstrated that CBS reached over the last month 1,100 people, which was a positive increase of 36%. EFLC reached over the last month 22,300 people, again a positive increase of 35.8%.

## April

In April Prudence Mayhew, our Community Engagement Officer, resigned from her position. We would like to thank Prue for all her hard work and commitment to EFLC. We received a letter from Minister Berry from the ACT Government on our successful grant application to help reimburse volunteers for parking and fuel costs when helping transport our members to events. We also received an email to confirm that the Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth MP, had agreed to our proposal submitted under the Upscaling Initiative for Women's Safety Program to continue in the next financial year. A Memoranda of Understanding between EFLC and Guide Dogs NSW/ACT to offer counselling services for their clients in the Albury, Dubbo, South Coast and Canberra region was finalised. We would refer any of our clients to them for Occupational Therapy and in return we would offer Counselling services via Telehealth offered by Hilary and Jon. An advert was placed on SEEK to attract potential new CBS Board members. Several applications were received, but only one from ACT as the others were interstate. The tactile models/Workshop organised for new additions to Garema Place and Dickson shops was delivered and ACT Government visited our CBS to discuss in depth to several of our peer support groups about the practical changes that were planned. The Mentoring grant variation was signed off by the Department of Social Services to conclude the grant on Friday 10th May. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of April we conducted our second optometrist professional development workshop with around 55 people attending online/ watching the recording. Associate Professor Michele Madigan came from Sydney to present to the group. The Music at Midday concert allowed us to collect donations to the amount of \$2000.00. We also had a stand at the 100 Voices Concert where donations totaled over \$700.00. Due to the work by Alex, we have been able to maximise the search engine optimisation so that EFLC online shop products appear on the first page of any Google search, which meant an increase in products being sold. The radio adverts finished with 2CC and 2CA in late April. Our exercise program continued throughout April and our Events team planned a successful outing to the Babylon Goat Farm. Volunteers assisted with Music at Midday, the Goat Farm, and a few have been assisting each week with exercise class for both transport and helping in the class with guiding clients with their exercise routines. The Women's Safety Program Workshop Series has been an interesting pilot program in exploring delivery of core components of the classes to the wider public. Of those who attended, approximately 40% were industry professionals there to "know what to tell their clients". Other attendees were individuals that were there for personal interest or because the program had been recommended to them by someone they know, such as a previous participant or a community services professional. Discussions with Mentor team about finalising Mentoring Program to finish at the end of April/early May. Claire our Project Officer

worked through a list of contacts to provide updates and book phone calls and meetings to share end of program details. While not a requirement we also made an offer to the Department of Social Services to conduct a live presentation by the full Mentor Team. This presentation and Q&A session was designed to provide extra information alongside the required reporting to share experiences and insights from the program to inform future grant funding decisions. We got to talk to the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Policy and Funding Arrangement Management Teams. Lindy, Comet, Robert, Peter, and Claire travelled to Greenway to present, with many Sydney based managers attending, with the presentation being well received. The Canberra Blind Society Website Mentoring Program page has been updated and includes podcasts, checklists and resources.

Feedback from the Department:

*“It was excellent, really enjoyed it and provides great insight into some of the issues that vision impaired people are faced with. It is disappointing to hear how there\* has been no improvement in employment rates for people with a disability in Australia during the last two decades. Let’s hope we can turn that around little by little. Well done on all your good work and I look forward to the final report.”*

## May

The exercise program continued with over 30 participants who all remarked how much fun they had every week with challenging and yet achievable exercise routines. We conducted three events in the month of May, they being the World of Musicals, the Ngala Tour at the Arboretum and the Bird Aviary. We also presented the VIP Hospital Kit to John James Hospital medical and administration staff. We had a significant increase in donations with over \$27,000.00 being donated to the organization in the month of May. Volunteers assisted with all three May events, with several assisting each week with exercise class for both transport and helping in the class with guiding clients with their exercise. A thank you lunch was held for our Volunteers as part of National Volunteer Week on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May at Old Parliament House Café. The Women’s Safety Program continued delivery of the Workshop Series, with a last-minute change in the Online Safety session due for delivery 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2024. The Online Safety workshop was delayed until 8<sup>th</sup> of May due to operational challenges related to staff illness and the eSafety Commission withdrawing delivery of the workshop with little notice. Some preliminary planning took place for the proposed Online Course, mainly to ensure facilitator availability and discussions around the type and format of content to be delivered. The Mentoring Grant concluded in early May with all final reports and financial acquittals sent to the Department of Social Services by specified deadlines. The outcome was acceptance of the final report with us returning \$15,000.00 in funds that would have



been spent on staff wages and oncosts. The Department signed off on all mechanisms for feedback. A job well done by Claire, Peter, Lindy, Robert and Roslyn.

## **June**

June was a busy month with updated staff contracts sent to all staff. New prices were received from Magnifiers Australia for purchase of both lamps and magnifiers. New EFLC prices confirmed and updated in both Square and on our online shop website. AON insurance forms completed to cover volunteer workers comp and public liability insurance. Access codes to CBS offices updated with Security One, with the duress button under the front desk fixed and now will be tested quarterly. ActewAGL energy plan and information about changes received and our preference to pay for actual usage each month was communicated. Canberra Southern Cross Club FY2023-2024 Acquittal Form submitted, and a new proposal written for the FY2024-2025 and submitted for consideration. Bianca David our Social Media Coordinator finished up with us at the end of June as we were not able to renew her contract due to limited finances. Alex Parnell will take over the role as of July 2024. Outreach services continued to be sought after with 5 new clients and 19 clients contacted EFLC for Outreach Services occurring in the month of June. Events continued with High Tea at the Hyatt Hotel and the ever-popular Wine tour in Murrumbateman very well supported by our members. Donations totaled over \$6,000.00 in the month of June. Consultation with City Renewal Authority, ACT Government, to test the layout and features of the proposed upgrades to Garema Place, Canberra City took place. The walk-about included many CBS members, staff and representatives from the Authority. The Department of Social Services approved another three face-to-face Women's Safety Program groups to run between July 2024 and June 2025. Program facilitators who deliver content were as excited by the news as we were and have agreed to continue working with us on the Program.

The last year was a major challenge around how to increase awareness of our services whilst harnessing the infectious enthusiasm that our Board, staff and volunteers possess in carrying out their regular duties. As such, I want to thank all staff and volunteers for their work which is often above and beyond the call of duty, together with all CBS Board members for their support and encouragement to me in my position as Executive Officer and for their continued commitment to the vision impaired community.

Glenn Doney  
Executive Officer



## Our Major Sponsors

Canberra Blind Society is extremely grateful for the ongoing support of the Southern Cross Club Canberra and Specsavers.



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