

CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY (CBS)

4th Quarterly Newsletter – December 2025 - Edition 452

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Canberra Blind Society



@BlindCanberra



Canberra Blind Society

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Core Programs

Friends of Braille
Audio Book Group
Art & Craft Group
Sense-Able Cooking
Men's Peer Support
Ladies Chat Circle
Exercise Group

Every Thursday
1st Wednesday of each month
2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month
3rd Friday of each month
3rd Tuesday of the Month
1st Friday of the month
Every Thursday

End of Year Message from the President

As this is the last Newsletter for 2025, I wanted to take this time to thank everyone involved in making the Canberra Blind Society and Eyes for Life Canberra as welcoming and helpful as it is.

The staff have been dedicated to helping our clients and friends to have as full and independent life as possible. I want to thank Aalo at the front desk, Saskia in charge of all things digital, Deb for her vast knowledge and compassion, Stef the bookkeeper extraordinaire and Glenn who keeps the whole shebang going. Deb is transitioning to a virtual one day a week model as she moves to a warmer retirement friendly environment and Aalo is moving on to university and a brilliant career.

Our volunteers are the backbone of our programs, whether it is transport to events, helping during our peer support programs or guiding clients during excursions. Thank you for your time and support.

I want to thank the CBS Board for their insights and support to help run the Canberra Blind Society. I want to thank Damien Wright who resigned after many years as a Board member; to focus on his family. I appreciated his thoughtful comments and ideas to make CBS better.

I would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy and fulfilling New Year.

Heather Fitzpatrick
President CBS

Upcoming Dates for your diary

- CBS Christmas Lunch

Canberra Blind Society would like to invite all members, clients and their family and friends to our Annual Christmas Lunch. Come along and meet other members and enjoy a festive lunch.

Where: Room 6, Level 1 - Griffin Centre, 20 Genge Street Canberra City

Time: 12.30pm - 2.30pm

RSVP – As this is a catered event, please RSVP by Thursday 28th November and advise any dietary requirements to Aalo at the office on 6247 4580 or admin@canberrablindsociety.org.au. Donations are not necessary; but greatly appreciated

- CBS and EFLC Shut Down

The office will be closed from 1:00pm on Friday the 19th of December and will reopen at 9:00am on Tuesday the 6th of January. Peer Support will not run during the shutdown period and recommence in early February 2026.

All orders on our online shop will need to be placed by 9:00am on Friday the 19th of December, or they will not be posted until we reopen in early January 2026.

- Last Dates of peer support Groups in December

Exercise – 18th of December

Ladies Chat Circle – 5th of December

Friends of Braille – 18th of December

Audio Book Group – 3rd of December

End of 2025 Message from the Executive Officer

Our staff have shown remarkable dedication in helping our clients and friends live as full and independent lives as possible. I would especially like to acknowledge:

- Aalo, whose warmth at the front desk has been a daily gift.
- Saskia, who has guided all things digital with skill and creativity.
- Deb, whose deep knowledge, and compassion have enriched our work.
- Stef, our bookkeeper extraordinaire, who keeps our financials on track.

I would like to share some upcoming changes within our team as we move into the next chapter together.

Debra Quinnell

Debra will be easing into semi-retirement, continuing her valued Outreach support from home on alternating Tuesdays and Thursdays. She will remain available to both new and existing clients via phone and online, ensuring her wisdom and care continue to guide our community. Deb will join us in the office on Thursday 27th November and Thursday 4th December, and we are delighted she will also be at the CBS Christmas Party on Saturday 6th December before relocating to the sunshine of northern NSW. Deb will continue providing Outreach services until June 2026, when she will fully retire. We are deeply grateful for her dedication and look forward to celebrating her contributions over the coming months.

Aalo Green

At the end of this year, Aalo will be departing EFLC/CBS to begin an exciting new chapter—moving interstate to commence university studies. Aalo's last day with us will

be Thursday 18th December. While we are not yet certain about the timing of a replacement, we know Aalo's warmth and energy will be missed by colleagues and clients alike. We wish Aalo every success in this next stage of life and thank them sincerely for their commitment to our community.

Mary Ivec

We are delighted to welcome Mary Ivec, who will commence with us on Thursday 27th November in the role of Social Worker/Outreach Officer. Mary will bring Outreach services back into a face-to-face setting, working with clients every Friday from 5th December onwards. With her strong qualifications and extensive experience as a hospital-based Social Worker, Mary brings both professional expertise and heartfelt compassion to the role. We are excited to have her join our team and know she will make a meaningful difference.

Our volunteers remain the backbone of our programs—whether providing transport to events, assisting with peer support activities, or guiding clients during excursions. Your generosity of time and spirit is invaluable, and we are deeply grateful.

I also extend my thanks to the CBS Board for their insights and guidance in helping us grow stronger.

As we look ahead, I wish each of you a joyful Christmas and a New Year filled with happiness, health, and fulfillment. Thank you for being part of our journey and for helping us build a community where inclusion and independence thrive.

Glenn

VIP DRIVE DAY – Fifth Gear Vision Impaired Drive Day

In February 2026, Fifth Gear Motoring is excited to be hosting a **Vision Impaired Drive Day**. They have invited all EFLC and CBS clients to come along and participate, donating all proceeds from the day to CBS. The Drive Day will be located in Braidwood; approximately an hour out of Canberra. Due to the organisation of this event, we require an early expression of interest and confirmation of numbers. The event details are:

Location: One Raceway, 4770 Braidwood Rd, Tirrannaville NSW (approx. 1 hr 15 min from Canberra). Please note we have chosen this location as it provides the safest driving environment for both the participants and instructors in comparison to potential venues located closer to Canberra.

Date: One day in the first week of February 2026 (exact date confirmed once participant numbers are known)

Eligibility: Participants must be 16 years or older and unable to obtain a driver's licence due to a visual impairment.

Cost: 80\$ per person (which will be donated back to CBS)

The Drive Day will provide individuals with low vision the chance to get behind the wheel of a car in a safe and supportive environment. Each vehicle has been equipped with dual controls, and participants drive alongside a fully accredited instructor. It is a fun and confidence-building experience, with family, friends and carers all welcome to attend.

Express your interest as soon as possible to secure your spot.

Free Tactile Maps for Art/Education

CBS has accumulated many tactile maps over the years through commissions and projects. Unfortunately, many are now redundant, and do not feature relevant or correct information. Due to this, CBS would like to invite our members to take some maps off our hands.

They would make beautiful hung artwork or a tactile experience. Also perfect for education and anyone practising their tactile reading abilities. If you're interested having a look at what's available, please get in touch via admin@canberrablindsociety.org.au or call 6247 4580.

Audio Book Group

The last meeting of the book club will be on Wednesday 3rd December at 10:00 for our final meeting of the year. Our novel is "The Axeman's Carnival" by New Zealand author Catherine Chidgey.

A recent novel of the Otago High Country, a thriller narrated by a Magpie! Our discussion will conclude with lunch and a little celebration of the good time we have had this year and the eleven brilliant books we have read.

Griffin Centre Lift Upgrade

Lift 1 is approaching completion and is expected to be commissioned and handed over on the 28 November 2025.

Once lift 1 is complete there will be a grace period of 5 days to the 4 December 2025 where both lifts will be operational to ensure a smooth transition between works on each lift.

On 4 December 2025, the demolition for lift 2 will commence, and where possible the team will work outside of normal working hours and over the weekends.

The Way I See It - By Graham Downie

With more than 2200 petitions against the removal of a gazebo in Garema Place, the Canberra Blind Society, and presumably many other organisations, were asked for its opinion on the value of high-quality outdoor dining in activating public spaces.

As CBS has no formal policy on this or several other questions raised by the City Renewal Authority, I have reflected on the pros and cons, from the perspective of people who are blind or vision impaired, of Canberra's ubiquitous outdoor dining arrangements.

In principle, it is recognised many people enjoy sitting by noisy roadsides, blending the fragrance of a cheeky chardonnay with petrol and diesel fumes. Not wanting to be a killjoy, and recognising it would be a waste of time anyway, I am prepared to live and let live. But when that pleasure makes the ease of travel for many pedestrians hazardous, I am not very forgiving. Indeed, I am not forgiving at all.

To this extent, I and others from CBS have made formal representations to our territory's government, albeit with very limited success, to ensure a clear path of travel on all footpaths and walkways.

Canberra's guidelines on the placement of tables and chairs on footpaths are quite ineffective. Instead of the recommended clear path of travel along shopfronts, people sit their lattes and nibble their camembert, regardless of anyone having to navigate a slalom through the lunch crowd. So, it was with some indifference I approached the questions posed by the City Renewal Authority on outdoor dining. Probably to the authority's disappointment, I am more inclined to support outdoor dining where it is confined within balustrades or even a gazebo which prevent, or at least limit, the movement of furniture by diners to benefit from or avoid the sun, according to the season.

It was this sort of arrangement required of Gus Petersilka, not before a fight with the city's authorities, when he established outdoor dining at Gus's Café in Bunda Street in 1974. Some attributed this development to Gus's passion to improve Canberra's social fabric. Others, less generously, to Gus wanting to expand his business at minimal cost. I knew him reasonably well and believe it was both.

Certainly, the former is a strong motivation of many of today's café and restaurant proprietors. They pay effectively a pittance for the right to expand their businesses on to footpaths adjoining their premises. Few observe the guidelines requiring balustrades and clear path of travel.

I am agnostic about whether the Garema Place gazebo should be returned to its former glory. The petition against its removal, sponsored by now Opposition Leader Mark Parton, calls for the government to change the guidelines for outdoor dining in Garema Place to allow shelters more suitable to Canberra's climate. The Authority's new Outdoor Dining Toolkit allows only for umbrellas and awnings for protection against the weather.

"Winters in Canberra are inhospitable to unprotected outdoor dining, even with heaters," the petitioners argue. The obvious solution is to dine indoors, but this restricts the number of guests and therefore proprietor's earnings.

Nevertheless, it is the moveable tables, chairs and umbrellas which frequently create difficulties, if not hazards, to people with various disabilities. There is also a potential risk to public safety, particularly at night, when gazebos and other more formal structures block sight lines in otherwise open spaces, such as Garema Place.

Clearly there is a need to balance people's enjoyment of outdoor dining with the hazards this causes to others. Perhaps the final judgement should be based on the primary purpose of the public area, with outdoor dining permitted only when it does not detract from that primary purpose.

Meanwhile, Garema Place and City Walk present real challenges to all pedestrians with numerous fences guarding work by the City Renewal Authority as it, well, renews the area. Combined with restricted pedestrian access in other areas of the city associated with the light rail project, Civic generally is currently far from a welcoming place for pedestrians.

Carpet Bowls - Free to a Good Home!

Canberra Blind Society currently has equipment for Indoor Carpet Bowls. This game is like lawn bowls but indoors, using biased bowls that curve as they travel down the mat. The objective is to get your bowls closer to the jack (a smaller white ball) than your opponent.

Equipment includes

- Carpet (roll)
- Assorted balls
- Jack

If you are interested to come and take the equipment away please contact Aalo or Deb on 6247 54580 or email admin@canberrablindsociety.org.au

FOR SALE

CBS has a surplus of brand-new **Yoga mats for sale**. Purchased new at \$42.00, now selling for \$20.00.

If you are interested, please call the office on 6247 4580 or email admin@canberrablindsociety.org.au

National Museum of Australia Tour

The National Museum of Australia will be running a free audio described tour of our wonderful Great Southern Land gallery on International Day of People with Disability – **Wednesday 3 December** at 10am – 11.30.

All details of our swag of programs in support of IDPwD are here - <https://www.nma.gov.au/whats-on/international-day-of-people-with-disability>

Recipe from November Sens-able Cooking

Chicken Satay

Ingredients:

- 500g chicken thigh fillets
- 1 tablespoon of grated garlic and ginger and lemon grass
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- 1/4 cup coconut cream

Method:

1. Cut chicken thighs into small pieces.
2. Add all spices and coconut cream to the chicken.
3. Refrigerate in a sealed container for 1 hour or overnight.
4. Soak wooden skewers in water for 10 minutes before threading marinaded chicken.
5. Cook on a BBQ or grill or frypan. Time will vary due to the method of cooking.
6. Brush with oil and flip over halfway. Cooking time is between 8 and 12 minutes.

Peanut sauce

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons of peanut butter
- 1 chopped chilli (optional)
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- 1/4 cup coconut cream
- Water for desired thickness.

Method

1. Place all ingredients into a small saucepan on low heat.
2. Stir and add water to achieve the consistency you want.
3. Drizzle on top on chicken skewer once cooked

Southern Cross Club Community Rewards Program

Members of the Southern Cross Club can help us raise funds by taking part in the Southern Cross Club's Community Rewards program. The Community Rewards Program allows Canberra Southern Cross Club members to give back to the group most important to them.

By nominating Eyes for Life Canberra / Canberra Blind Society - 7.5% of your spend on food and beverages at the Southern Cross Club is donated to your chosen group

Thanks to our Sponsors

Canberra Blind Society thanks all our sponsors for supporting us

Southern Cross Club Canberra; Magnifiers Australia; Specsavers; AU-IT; Cliniko; GO Hosting; XERO; Aussie Broadband; Jingl – voice in the cloud; Heidi Health; Australia Post; Plastic Creations; Officeworks Braddon.