*CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY (CBS)*

*April 2018 Newsletter* 394

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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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| **Save the Date**  60th Birthday – a dinner celebration & the official book launch of a History of the Society  On the evening of Saturday 13 October, 2018  Rydges Capital Hill, Canberra  Tickets available soon |

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# Notice Board

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| **April** | | | | | |
| 2 April | Easter Monday |  | | |  |
| 4 April | First Wednesday | 10:00 | | | Audio Book Group |
| 5 April  12 April  19 April  26 April | Every Thursday | 9:30 | | | Braille Group |
| 17 April | Easter Parade Lunch | 12:30 to 2:30 | | | Griffin Centre |
| 25 April | ANZAC Day – office closed |  | | |  |
| 20 April | Third Friday | 10:00 | | | Sense-able Cooking |
| 24 April | Last Tuesday | | 12:30 | Music Group | |

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| **May** | | | | | |
| 2 May | First Wednesday | 10:00 | | | Audio Book Group |
| 4 & 5 May | Street Appeal |  | | |  |
| 3 May  10 May  17 May  24 May  31 May | Every Thursday | 9:30 | | | Braille Group |
| 18 May | Third Friday | 10:00 | | | Sense-able Cooking |
| 29 May | Last Tuesday | 12:30 | | | Music Group |
| **June** | | | | | |
| 6 June | First Wednesday | 10:00 | | | Audio Book Group |
| 7 June  14 June  21 June  28 June | Every Thursday | 9:30 | | | Braille Group |
| 22 June | Third Friday | 10:00 | | | Sense-able Cooking |
| 26 June | Last Tuesday | | 12:30 | Music Group | |

# From the President’s Chair – Peter Granleese

For this Newsletter, I thought I would visit one of my pet subjects now that the year is well advanced and everything at CBS is up and running. In past issues I have written about the importance of information to people who are blind or have low vision and the equipment now available to access that information.As a baby boomer growing up in the 1950s, access to information of all types was very limited if you could not read printed material. Being born legally blind myself I felt cut off from many aspects of community life due to poor access to information. Not much had changed by the time I went to university in 1974. Everything had to be read to me either aloud or recorded on tape. As a consequence, I was always behind in my assignments, unlike other students who were not so encumbered. Things began to change in 1992 with the introduction of desk top computers into the Public Service and the development of voice activated screen reading software. It was the beginning of the information age which has powered on at an ever-increasing pace Just about everything is now on line and easily accessible (if you know how). In the May 2012 issue of the Newsletter, I shared some of the frustrations I experienced learning the ins and outs of my latest piece of sophisticated communications equipment, otherwise known as an iPhone. I had not long purchased the phone after my previous mobile phone which had served me for many a day, finally gave up the ghost. Being dropped one too many times on hard surfaces probably did it.My first inclination was to purchase a replacement mobile phone of the push button type with a few speed buttons to make emergency calls, and a telephone index with voice over. It was still the early days of touch screen iPhones which seemed a little too complicated for my liking, given that I could not see the screen anyway.I was greatly impressed with the iPhone as a concept, because of the huge number of apps, that allow the user to do many things besides making phone calls. The fact that it could be used to access the huge amount of information available online, was particularly impressive.My logical mind kept telling me however, that any phone without buttons or other tactile indicators, would not be user friendly to a person with little or no vision, despite its many possibilities.I was warned by a seasoned iPhone user that it wouldn’t be easy and would take a lot of practice before I became a reasonably efficient user. He also warned me that there would be times when I would feel like throwing it against the wall in frustration. This did not happen although there were times when I felt like doing so.Since then, most vision impaired people I know use smart phones of the touch screen variety and do very well when accessing information. The problem with me is that I am not really a techno geek. Like older people of my age, I grew up in the pre-information age where communications were very basic. There were no computers, no mobile phones and certainly no smart phones. Growing up in a country town in the 50s I lived an isolated life by today’s standards, although I did not know it at the time. There were three lines of communications that connected us to the outside world. The first one and an institution in its own right, was the Temora Mail train which left the station at 610 pm each evening on its overnight journey to Sydney. This odd collection of carriages and goods vans was hauled by a steam locomotive that took 10 hours to puff its way to Sydney before depositing us at Central Station at 5.30 in the morning. Everyone travelled by train, the roads being so poor that a road journey was unthinkable.Times have changed and The Temora Mail is no more, better roads having reduced the journey to Sydney to an easy six hours.

The second important line of communications to our town was the wireless or as we now call it, the radio. In our house it was a handsome piece of furniture standing four-square in the corner of the living room in the same position that the TV was to occupy in later years. It stood about a metre tall with a huge speaker and a semi-circular dial that lit up at night, a bit like the rising sun. As a small boy, I often wondered at the dozens of stations on the dial that you could listen to if you turned the big wooden knob. In reality we were too far away to receive more than a couple of local stations and when there were storms about, we could hear nothing because of the static. Still it kept us in contact with the outside world with its regular news and weather bulletins not to mention the daily market prices for sheep, cattle wool and wheat, very important information for a farming community.It was the heyday for radio so there were all those soap operas, radio plays and quiz shows to keep us entertained during many a cold winter evening.The third line of communications was the telephone. This important piece of communication equipment took the form of a wooden box with a receiver atop attached to the wall. Making a phone call was easy. You lifted the receiver from its cradle on top of the box and crank the handle to connect with the local exchange. Eventually, someone took down the number and connected your call. Calling long distance was very expensive and much more complicated. Calling Sydney meant passing through a number of exchanges and could take up to an hour for the call to be put through, if the lines were busy.That was 60 years ago now and we have since passed through a number of telecommunication and information revolutions.Fast forwarding to the present, I am able to report that my iPhone has exceeded my expectations. I still get frustrated from time to time and occasionally feel like throwing it against the wall, but this is bound to happen when trying new apps. I have long since conquered the basic skills involved in making phone calls, texting, responding to emails, compiling telephone and email lists, as well as a number of apps providing day to day information.A few years ago I upgraded to a new 5s iPhone with a greatly increased memory. This has allowed me to download the daily newspapers and DAISY books from the Vision Australia library, as well as many more information based apps that help me in my daily life. Most recently, I am looking at a GPS based app used for cycling that tells me how far I have ridden, time taken, average speed, maximum speed and climbing elevation.Like computers, the bigger the memory, the more things you can use your iPhone for. The most important development in my view has been the advent of the mobile phone and now the smart phone. Smart phones are mini computers when coupled with an external key board with a blue tooth connection. They have a huge range of applications and functions of which making and receiving phone calls are but one. The good thing about iPhones, is that they are the same conceptually as that other very popular must have item of daily communications, I refer to the apple iPad.This means that once you have learned to use your iPhone, you should not have any difficulties using an iPad. You cannot make phone calls from an iPad but the larger touch screen makes it much more accessible and easier to use, apart from that, they have the same functions as iPhones. Both appliances do the same thing.iPads are more user friendly however, because of their larger screen for older people with still some vision which makes them much more accessible and easier to use. They are a good alternative to the much bulkier personal computer when it comes to accessing everyday information. Living as we do, in the information age, where access to information is crucial to just about all aspects of our daily lives, iPads and iPhones are a great option.

# Let’s Talk Technology

Here are two technologies that help blind or low vision users – not yet available in Australia but hopefully available soon.

**Microsoft Soundscape**

Microsoft Soundscape is a research project that explores the use of innovative audio-based technology to enable people, particularly those with blindness or low vision, to build a richer awareness of their surroundings, thus becoming more confident and empowered to get around. Unlike step-by-step navigation apps, Soundscape uses 3D audio cues to enrich ambient awareness and provide a new way to relate to the environment. It allows you to build a mental map and make personal route choices while being more comfortable within unfamiliar spaces.

Soundscape provides information about your surroundings with synthesized binaural audio, creating the effect of 3D sound. It can run in the background in conjunction with navigation or other applications to provide you with additional context about the environment. Your phone, in hand or in pocket, tracks movement using location and activity sensors, and lets you move toward a self-set audio beacon. Soundscape runs on iPhone 5S or later and is compatible with most wired or Bluetooth stereo headsets.

**Aira uses Smart Glasses to help Blind People Navigate the World.**

Aira is designed to make life a little easier for blind and vision impaired people. Using a pair of smart glasses or a phone camera, the system allows an Aira agent to see what the blind person sees in real-time, and then talk them through whatever situation they’re in. [Aira](https://aira.io/) promises to make everything from grocery shopping, calling an Uber or world travel more accessible for blind people across the globe.  
  
Aira doesn’t replace existing assistance systems. Instead, it’s designed to enhance them. A blind person navigates the world using whatever tools they normally do, such as a cane or guide dog, and only calls the Aira agent when needed. When the agent picks up, he or she sees a live video feed and the location of the person calling on Google Maps, alongside general biographical information.

Apparently, the video feed is crisp enough that the Aira agent can read items off a menu and catch other small details. Aira is marketed with a subscription service – similar to a mobile phone contract. You purchase a number of minutes of time.

# National Gallery of Australia – Cartier the exhibition 30 March-22 July 2018

**Descriptive art- making workshop, for people who are blind or with low vision Wednesday 18 April 1:30pm – 3:30pm**

Be inspired by *Cartier: the exhibition* to create bejewelled sculptureswith support and instruction by trained educator/artists. All materials supplied. Carers welcome.

**Price**: Free, bookings essential [www.nga.gov.au/whatson](http://www.nga.gov.au/whatson) call (02) 6240 6701 (Mon- Fri) or email [access@nga.gov.au](mailto:access@nga.gov.au)

**Descriptive tour of *Cartier: The Exhibition* for people who are blind or with low vision. Saturday 9 June** 2.30pm – 3.30pm

**Price**: Free, bookings essential [www.nga.gov.au/whatson](http://www.nga.gov.au/whatson) call (02) 6240 6701 (Mon- Fri) or email [access@nga.gov.au](mailto:access@nga.gov.au)

# What’s on at CBS

## Cooking Class recipes

**Tuna Bake**

**INGREDIENTS**

1 can Tuna in water (not oil)

1 can cream of chicken soup

1 cup chopped onion

1 cup grated cheese plus extra for topping

1 cup mixed vegetables finely chopped into small pieces

2 cups of cooked pasta

METHOD

Combine all ingredients into a large bowl and mixed well until well combined

Spray a large ceramic baking dish with cooking spray and pour mixture into this and spread evenly.

Sprinkle with grated cheese and bake in 180 degree oven for 45 minutes.

**MICROWAVE CHOCOLATE BROWNIE IN A CUP**

**INGREDIENTS**

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 tablespoons sugar

3 tablespoons water\ milk/ coffee or chocolate milk

1 tablespoon cocoa powder

1\4 teaspoon vanilla

2 tablespoons plain flour

1 tablespoon self-raising flour

2 to 3 tablespoons choc chips

**METHOD**

Mix all ingredients in a mug and microwave on high for 60 to 90 seconds depending on the wattage of your microwave.

# The Way I see It – Graham Downie

Disclosing the PIN on credit, debit and EFTPOS cards breaches their conditions of use and potentially leaves people unprotected against unauthorised use of their cards.

This unambiguous consumer advice has, according to recent reports of complaints against the Commonwealth Bank’s Albert EFTPOS terminal, been disregarded by some people who are blind or vision impaired. The complaint is that these people cannot use the touch-screen terminal so have to ask shop assistants to enter their PINs. Not only does this risk misuse of cards by shop assistants, but by breaching the conditions of use, people could find subsequent claims for unauthorised use denied.

More about the Albert terminal shortly, but first, to avoid any doubt, the Banking Ombudsman gives the following advice on protecting your PIN.

Commit it to memory and never write it down. Don’t tell anyone your PIN, including family members, police or bank staff. Banks will never ask for your PIN. Never reply to any email asking for your PIN or asking you to update your PIN. It is bound to be fraudulent.

Never store your PIN, even in disguised form, on any device, including mobile phones, computers, tablets or other electronic devices. If you have done so, delete it and get a new PIN.

You should take reasonable care when entering your PIN at an ATM or EFTPOS machine to prevent anyone seeing it. If you think someone may know your PIN, contact your bank immediately and get a new one.

Blind Citizens Australia says the lack of a tactile, physical keypad on Albert terminals, which have inadequate and inaccessible speech output, means that a person who cannot see the screen cannot independently complete their transaction. This is disputed by the Commonwealth Bank and is the subject of a legal challenge against the bank in the Federal Court. Hence the bank would not discuss the matter for this report.

Having not encountered Albert, and with limited time – anyway the bank declined to tell me any Canberra merchant with one - I cannot say from personal experience whether Albert’s accessibility provisions are adequate. However, I understand that having learned appropriate gestures and by using the device regularly with headphones, blind people might be able to complete transactions independently. The question, and presumably that is what the Federal Court will determine, is whether Albert can reasonably be described as accessible to people who cannot see the screen.

Millions of blind people use smart devices without the use of tactile buttons. Quite reasonably, this requires some learning and practice. That is quite different to encountering an unfamiliar terminal in a busy shop at the head of an impatient queue of shoppers. Further, the accessible gestures are different to those used on Apple or Android devices, though Albert is on an Android platform.

On its website, the CBA says Albert now has the capability to be accessible to the 350, 000 Australians who are Blind or vision impaired. But to achieve this, the accessibility mode must be selected by a shop assistant. Even then, there are reports by experienced users of smart devices having considerable difficulty entering their PINs on Albert terminals.

The following may be useful should you have to use Albert. First, be sure to carry headphones, otherwise your PIN will be announced through a speaker.

When prompted to enter a pin, the cursor is set to 5. The cursor is moved by swiping up, down, left, right and diagonally. A double tap on the screen enters a number and a long press with two fingers will submit the PIN. To cancel a transaction, long press with 3 fingers.

Meanwhile, Blind Citizens Australia has produced post cards which they encourage people to give to merchants who have Albert terminals, encouraging them to request their bank to stop rolling out inaccessible terminals. Canberra Blind Society has, or will shortly have, a stock of these cards.

Perhaps the most effective way of discouraging merchants from using Albert or any other difficult device is to say you will shop where making payment independently is possible.

# Personal Glimpses

Hi my name is Heather Fitzpatrick and I am Vice President on the CBS Board. I am the Canadian (never to be confused with an American accent!)  on the end of the phone on Tuesday and if you call the CBS office and get the answering machine that also is my voice.  I became aware of sight difficulties about 20 years ago – RP was diagnosed shortly thereafter.  I was unaware until then that you should be able to see curbs, obstacles and stars at night until an observant optometrist said that I should get my eyes looked at since he saw changes to the back of my eyes. Since then I have given up my driving license (not a good day) and learned how to use a long cane. I became an active member of the Society once I retired from the Public Service in June 2013 after 25 years of service. The majority of my public service was at the Department of Finance where I administered the superannuation scheme for members of Parliament. I am interested in making sure that Canberra is as accessible and user friendly for blind members of the community as possible – I know it’s a big task but you just have to start. Members of the CBS Board have had interesting meetings with ACT Government officials about footpaths and road crossings, Transport Canberra and the light rail project.  I have also been involved in the new CBS website that was launched recently – it is accessible and simple to navigate ([www.canberrablindsociety.org.au](http://www.canberrablindsociety.org.au)).

# Medical News

**Gold and Titanium Restore Vision to Blind Mice**

For years, scientists have sought to restore vision to those with poor eyesight or who suffer from eye diseases. Last year, several developments brought us closer to this goal — researchers[reversed retinal degeneration](https://futurism.com/researchers-may-have-discovered-a-way-to-reverse-blindness/?src=featured) and [created bionic eyes](https://futurism.com/a-stanford-neuroscientist-is-working-to-create-wireless-cyborg-eyes-for-the-blind/?src=featured). The FDA even approved a [form of gene therapy](https://futurism.com/fda-approves-gene-therapy-treatment-rare-form-blindness/) to treat patients. The latest research attempt takes a metallic approach: researchers from Fudan University and the University of Science and Technology of China tried curing blindness using gold and titanium.

The team’s research, [published in the journal *Nature Communications*](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-03212-0#Sec1)*,* show this method can successfully restore eyesight in mice. Specifically, the scientists replaced the mice’s deteriorated photoreceptors — sensory structures in eyes that respond to light — with artificial photoreceptors, made using titanium dioxide and gold nano-wires.

To test their artificial receptors, the team first altered the mice’s genes so that their natural receptors degraded. The researchers implanted the metallic receptors in a few mice at a time, and watched as their subjects began responding to green, blue, and ultraviolet light. The mice’s pupils dilated, confirming the new photoreceptors were working and that the mice were responsive to light. The photoreceptors were left in for eight weeks, during which none of the mice displayed any negative side effects or injury.

The results were interesting, but they didn’t tell the researchers everything they needed to know. It was difficult to determine what the mice were seeing, and how clear their vision was. Furthermore, the replacement photoreceptors could not restore full colour vision. While this probably wouldn’t be a huge concern for some people suffering from blindness, it’s still a sign that the team has more work to do.

Their work leaves open the possibility for further development, and a technique that could potentially address many medical issues. This method could used as a form of treatment for retinal degenerative diseases such as retinitis pigmentosa (RP) and macular degeneration. According to the National Eye Institute, [roughly 1 in 4,000 people worldwide](https://nei.nih.gov/health/pigmentosa/pigmentosa_facts) are affected by RP, while [many over the age of 60 are at risk](https://nei.nih.gov/health/maculardegen/armd_facts) of developing macular degeneration; their chances are doubled if they smoke regularly.

From: <https://futurism.com/blindness-mice-gold-titanium/>

# 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 to transport to and from the group.

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

Where: Room 6, Griffin Centre, 20 Genge Street