*CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY (CBS)*

*April 2020 Newsletter* 416

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| **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. Nominate the Canberra Blind Society as your organisation to benefit under the rewards program and five percent of your purchases made on food and beverages in the public restaurants, bars and grills are included. |

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**Contents**

From the President’s Chair – Peter Granleese 3

New typeface trial for the Newsletter 4

Canberra Blind Society merchandise 4

Braille Transcription 4

Cooking Class Recipes 5

The Way I see It – Graham Downie 6

New ACT Animal Assistance Standards - Scott Grimley 7

Medical News – Optic Neuropathy 8

Achilles Canberra - Peter Ralstan 10

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# From the President’s Chair – Peter Granleese

In the past, I have often struggled to come up with a suitable topic for my monthly column that is both interesting and informative. This was particularly so during the period between 2015 and the beginning of 2019 when it was difficult to determine what the future of CBS might be, or if it had any future at all. As a consequence, it was difficult to be enthusiastic about the Society’s prospects and I think that this was sometimes reflected in the Newsletter.

Quite often the subjects I write about originate as a germ of an idea that come to me during my weekly bike ride with my long term riding partner, referred to in the business as the pilot. The pilot is the sighted person who sits on the front seat of a tandem bike and is responsible for steering the bike. The stoker, my job, occupies the back seat and provides the power.

These weekly rides encompass many hours in the saddle, resulting in prolonged periods of silence, giving me plenty of time to think of things CBS. Our latest funding applications were drafted and re drafted from the back seat of a bike while riding the highways and byways of Canberra.

Following the turnaround in the Society’s fortunes now that we have secured Government funding until the middle of 2023, I find that there is much to write about. In the March issue of the Newsletter, I mentioned that 2020 was turning out to be a big year for CBS with the introduction of new services, including a retail outlet and the appointment of an Outreach Officer and the range of services and social activities this would provide. Fast forward four weeks and everything has changed thanks to the Corona Virus (Covid-19) virus and the current restrictions imposed by Government as a consequence.

As we come to terms with the challenges of the Corona Virus over the coming months, our focus is clear, to continue to assist our members in any way we can. The welfare and safety of our members and volunteers are our priority. With this in mind, we are following the advice of the Federal, State and Territory Governments by suspending all face to face activities until further notice.

CBS will remain open for business as a virtual rather than a physical presence. This means that the CBS office in The Griffin Centre will be closed until further notice although we will still be contactable by phone or email if you require information or assistance. We at CBS understand the need to provide information and assistance to our community in these difficult times, so do not hesitate to call us during the lock down period. Our telephone number and operating hours remain the same. You can contact us on 6247 4580 between the hours of 10.00 am and 4.00 pm Tuesday to Friday if you need our help and we will see what we can do. You can also email us on [canblind@canberrablindsociety.org.au](mailto:canblind@canberrablindsociety.org.au)

CBS will continue to work on its organisational capacity building during the lock down period, so that we are well positioned to resume our normal activities as soon as the current restrictions are lifted. For example, CBS volunteers will be contacting the 378 people listed on our data base to see if they are still interested in receiving CBS services and also obtain input on the kind of services they would like CBS to provide.

The data base has been poorly maintained in recent years and many people listed may have left the region or no longer require our services. The information gathered, will help determine the kind of services CBS should be providing in the future.

CBS has been providing services in the Canberra region for 63 years and will emerge from this current crisis stronger than ever. In the meantime, we urge everyone to stay well, stay safe and continue to look out for each other. Remember, we may be isolated physically but we are only a telephone call away from each other…

# New typeface trial for the Newsletter

A new typeface – greater legibility and readability for low vision readers

Atkinson Hyperlegible font is named after Braille Institute founder, Robert J. Atkinson. What makes it different from traditional typography design is that it focuses on letterform distinction to increase character recognition, ultimately improving readability. The Braille Institute are making the typeface free for all to use. You can download the typeface to your computers here: <https://www.brailleinstitute.org/freefont>. Please let us know what you think of the new typeface – previously we used Arial

# Canberra Blind Society merchandise

The Canberra Blind Society is selling merchandise with our name and logo. There are Notebooks ($20) with a debossed image of our logo and name on the cover, Keep Cups (for your coffee) ($15) with our name and logo on the silicon ring, Pens ($5) and Sunglasses ($10). The sunglasses offer UV protection for your eyes. Everything is available at our office in the Griffin Centre.

# Braille Transcription

Sharon Sobey who helps the facilitate the weekly braille class is offering a braille transcription service for anyone wanting documents transcribed into braille. She can transcribe any electronic document of any size into braille. The service consists of the creation of documents into UEB or old Australian grade one or two and includes proofreading of documents. Sharon will charge for the cost of braille paper and an hourly rate which is negotiable. For more information, please contact Sharon on 0419 263 413 or 6254 7326.

# Cooking Class Recipes

MINI QUICHE (12)

**INGREDIENTS**

1 cup milk

5 eggs

Small bunch shallots chopped

1 cup grated cheese

Puff pastry

**CHOICE OF FILLINGS**

1/2 cup chopped chicken/ham/bacon/ salmon/ spinach/ mushroom

**METHOD**

Preheat oven 210 degrees C  (hot oven)

Grease muffin tray

Line each muffin hole with pastry.

Mix milk and eggs together in jug.

Divide your choice of filling into each muffin case.

Pour egg and milk mixture on top.

Bake hot oven 25 to 30 min.

EASTER BUN BAKED CUSTARD  (4)

**INGREDIENTS**

4 Easter buns

2 eggs

1 tin carnation evaporated milk

1 cup milk

Butter for spreading

Apricot jam or marmalade

**METHOD**

Moderate Oven 180 degrees Celsius

Cut Easter buns into 3 and spread butter and jam onto pieces.

Layer into oven proof bowl.

Mix eggs, evaporative milk and milk together and pour over layered buns.

Bake 35-40 mins until custard is set.

**Enjoy**

# The Way I see It – Graham Downie

As if the social distancing to limit the spread of COVID-19 were not bad enough, everyday life for many people with disabilities has been made more difficult by the selfish, greedy, irrational and herd mentality of those who have pillaged supermarkets of goods which otherwise would have remained in plentiful supply.

Someone, somewhere, using social media, circulated the thought that the rapidly spreading virus would result in a shortage of goods such as toilet paper. Though this thought had no basis of truth, or indeed any rational thinking behind it, it was accepted as gospel by enough idiots to create the very shortages the perpetrators of this nonsense had predicted.

The large supermarkets, obviously glad of the increased turnover, were far too slow to prevent the purchase of unreasonable quantities of certain goods. Then, apparently believing online shopping sent goods from well-stocked warehouses, this service was rendered unworkable by people who ordered goods in bulk. Again, by supplying such large quantities, Coles and Woolworths were in part responsible for making online shopping from their supermarkets unworkable. So they suspended online shopping.

While ordering goods online and having them delivered is simply a convenience for many people, it has become an important service to folk who do not have private transport and particularly to those for whom shopping in a supermarket is impractical.

People with various disabilities, not least those who are blind, were, by the unprincipled actions of others, denied this method of shopping independently. Though Coles and Woolworths recently offered home shopping to priority customers, which includes people with disabilities, there is, at time of writing, still a marked shortage of some goods in these supermarkets.

Coles advises it is experiencing high demand for all products. “As a result, we are unable to guarantee that you will receive all items in your order,” it says in an email.

My saved list with Coles, for example, has only 34 items available of the more than 70 on the list. Perhaps ironically, this includes the much sought-after toilet paper and paper towel.

Woolworths also offers home delivery to priority online shoppers. At time of writing, people wanting this service have to complete a form on Woolworths’ webpage.

Though I have benefited for many years from online shopping for bulky groceries every six to eight weeks, I depend for my weekly provisions on the neighbourhood IGA. I print a list and the helpful staff collect the goods and I carry them home in a backpack. Most, if not all IGAs, deliver goods to people who are unable to manage themselves. For many people, this is a vital service. Unfortunately, IGA supermarkets have also been victims of the crazed shopping, with people otherwise not seen in these shops, stripping shelves. So it gladdened my heart to learn my IGA had reserved some goods for sale only to its regular customers. I was also glad to learn this had greatly upset some who had already done their worst at larger supermarkets.

It seems likely many more of the services to which we are accustomed will become unavailable, or at least be restricted, before the virus crisis is over. Positively, there are already some businesses adjusting to the changed circumstances by offering home delivery of their products. Meanwhile, governments should impose strong penalties against unreasonable stockpiling of goods.

# New ACT Assistance Animal Standards – Scott Grimley

The ACT Government passed the Animal Welfare Amendment Bill in September last year. Changes included –

* Accreditation for assistance animals, trainers and assessors
* Access rights for trainee assistance animals with trainers
* Substantially Increased fines for denying access to assistance animals of up to $7,500 for a person and up to $37,500 for a business
* A new fine for handlers of fake assistance animals of up to $3,750
* Legal protection for handlers exercising their access rights
* Standards and a public access test for all assistance animals

CBS joined Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, the RSPCA and other assistance animal groups, Veterinary boards and interested groups to develop the Assistance Animal Standards over the past 6 months.

Assistance Animal organisations that are members of Assistance Dogs International or the International Guide Dog Federation will be automatically accredited as trainers and assessors in the ACT.

Accredited organisations in the ACT include – Guide Dogs for each state and territory, Seeing Eye Dogs Australia, Royal Society for the Blind, LEADA, Lions Hearing Dogs and Assistance Dogs Australia.

The standards will also require all assistance animal teams to pass a Public Access Test, or PAT. This is to ensure the animal is appropriate and safe for public places, is trained in tasks to assist their handler with their disability and the handler can manage their animal in a positive way.

The ACT PAT is based around those already in place in Queensland, Western and South Australia. New South Wales and Victoria have a similar system for Assistance Animal Permits for public transport, however, exemptions exist for Guide and Seeing Eye Dogs.

Only accredited assessors or organisations can supervise and approve a PAT for an assistance animal team in the ACT. The ACT City Services will be working with the ACT Business Council to promote the ACT PAT system and how to identify it and identification cards of accredited organisations

The PAT will be issued by the ACT Domestic Animal Services, as a card, medallion and/or cloth badge, once a successful application has been made by an individual handler. Those with an assistance animal organisation identification or passport need only provide a scanned copy to DAS through the online portal.

Although accreditation and PAT of an assistance animal may not be mandatory, CBS members who are part of a Guide Dog or Seeing Eye Dog team are encouraged to apply for the ACT PAT certification as government evidence supporting your access rights to goods, services and facilities.

CBS hope to bring you more details on the Assistance Animal Standards and the processes for getting the PAT certification after the standards are finalised and released on April 10th 2020.

# Medical News

**Investigating the mysteries of Leber’s hereditary Optic Neuropathy**

*Source: Centre for Eye Research Australia*

**Dr Isabel Lopez Sanchez has dedicated much of her career to trying to solve the puzzle of a devastating disease that rapidly robs young people of their sight.**

Mitochondria are the tiny powerpacks that provide energy to our cells. Leber’s Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON) is a genetic disease that affects the mitochondria of the retinal ganglion cells – specialised cells at the back of the eye.

LHON causes these cells to lose energy and stop working, leading to vision loss. The onset can be dramatic, with some people affected losing their sight in a matter of days.

It’s is an extremely rare disease, affecting only about 60 families in Australia. Although it can affect anyone, vision loss from LHON predominantly occurs in men in their late teens or early 20s.

**Mitochondrial research at CERA**

Dr Isabel Lopez Sanchez, CERA’s newest Principal Investigator, is devoted to unravelling some of the puzzles of this devastating condition.

By studying the minute cellular and molecular changes that occur in LHON, she hopes to make discoveries that will lead to treatments to prevent or reverse the disease.

“I want to understand the small, detailed steps which occur between what is happening in the genes and the disease,’’ she says.

“Genetic causes of diseases can be similar but manifest in different ways. Why, for example, does one sibling with a mutation will develop the disease, while another will not?

“There is so little we know about LHON and studying it will help us understand more about all mitochondrial diseases, and also potentially much more common eye diseases such as glaucoma.’’

For the past five years, since she completed her PhD at the University of Western Australia, Isabel has been a key member of CERA’s [Mitochondria and Neurodegeneration](https://www.cera.org.au/research/mitochondria-and-neurodegeneration/) team.

Working closely with Associate Professor Ian Trounce, who is investigating the impacts of changes to mitochondria in glaucoma, her research has continued to gather momentum.

In her new appointment as Principal Investigator Isabel intends to intensify her research efforts.

In November, she returned from a five-month stint as a Wenner-Gren visiting fellow at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, working in the lab of Assistant Professor Joanna Rorbach.

The time in Sweden enabled Isabel to add to her molecular biology skills and she will now steward some international collaborations that emerged from her time there.

She will also continue to forge strong relationships within the community of people affected by mitochondrial diseases.

**Bringing new hope for families**

Dr Lopez Sanchez says it’s the families affected by mitochondrial diseases that keep her motivated to find treatments and cures.

“My focus is not just in the lab. It is important to keep engaging with people so I don’t forget why I am doing this,’’ she says.

“Finding cures and treatments will be a team effort between scientists, clinicians and patient advocacy.’’

# Achilles Canberra – Peter Ralston

The pandemic situation has caused Achilles Canberra to change from their outdoors walks at 8:00 am on Sundays, to an exercise session at your home, via teleconference in front of a computer with internet access.  Members of the Canberra Blind Society are cordially invited to join the Achilles exercise sessions, which are run by Coach Stu Munro.   If this all sounds too complicated, it isn’t.  Lindy Hou and Liz McLarnen each logged-in to the Zoom teleconference last Sunday and thoroughly enjoyed our first ever, gentle exercise with Coach Stu Munro and several volunteers.

To join a session, send your name, email address, phone number and a bit about your current fitness level, by email to :  [achillescanberra@gmail.com](mailto:achillescanberra@gmail.com) We will then send you a link to click on, and the Zoom software will enable you to participate in the  gentle exercise session by teleconference.

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