

**vision
australia**

blindness and low vision services

2010/11

annual report





Our Vision

Vision Australia is a partnership between people who are blind, sighted or have low vision. We are united by our passion that people who are blind or have low vision will have access to and fully participate in every part of life they choose.

Our Mission

Vision Australia will achieve this through creating a community partnership of knowledge, skills and expertise to enrich the participation in life of people who are blind or have low vision and their families. We will ensure that the community recognises their capabilities and contributions.

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Vision
Australia
Deputy
Chair

Professor Ron McCallum was named Senior Australian of the Year 2011 in January. Ron was the first person who is blind to be appointed to a full professorship at an Australian university and has had a distinguished career.

PricewaterhouseCoopers
Transparency
awards

Top 10 Finalist 2010

Making this report accessible

This spiral-bound format can be spread flat, assisting people using magnifiers. This report is also available in large print, braille and audio formats. It can be downloaded at www.visionaustralia.org to read using speech output software.

Future focus

While documenting the achievements of the past year, this report also highlights our strategic direction to prepare for the increasing challenges ahead.

Cover image: Isabella Stanfield, aged three and a half, with her mother Rachel Layt at Vision Australia in Coorparoo, Brisbane. Isabella, who was born very prematurely, is blind and also has lower limb cerebral palsy.

Courtney Harbeck was born with rod monochromatism, which means she has reduced depth perception, cannot see colours and is very sensitive to glare. Recently Courtney, who is 22, teamed up with Seeing Eye Dog Jinx to help her increase her level of independence and confidence.

“Jinx makes it easier for me to visit my local shops and the gym independently,”

says Courtney, who is seeking work after completing a diploma in remedial massage.



About us

We are the largest and only national provider of blindness and low vision services in Australia

Vision Australia works in partnership with Australians who are blind or have low vision to help them achieve the possibilities they choose in life. We are a not-for-profit organisation with client numbers of 50,000. We are also a major innovator and partner in the international blindness community.

We offer 15 core services through 28 Vision Australia centres in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and Victoria. While most of our services are delivered in metropolitan areas, satellite clinics are also held in 29 other locations and there are outreach services to the Northern Territory and Tasmania.

Most of our services are offered free of charge and that requires us to raise nearly \$100 million each year to deliver our services. We assist clients of every age, as blindness or low vision can occur at any time from birth through to old age.

Vision Australia has a proud history of 145 years of consecutive service through the seven

heritage organisations which now form Vision Australia – Royal Blind Society, Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, Vision Australia Foundation, National Information Library Services, Royal Blind Foundation Queensland, Hear a Book and Seeing Eye Dogs Australia.

We are pleased to announce that the Federal Government recognises the importance of our history and has approved funding towards touring costs of Vision Australia's heritage exhibition, *Living in a Sensory World: Stories from People with Blindness or Low Vision* (see historic badge below). This exhibition, which appeared at the Powerhouse in 2008, will open in Newcastle in October this year and then tour regionally over the next three years. The exhibition is important in showcasing the history and striving towards equality of opportunity for the blindness community in Australia.





Enjoying the atmosphere while promoting Seeing Eye Dogs at Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight® at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Melbourne last Christmas Eve are volunteer puppy carers, from left, Elin McPadden with her charge, Ember, and Kylie Morris, with Tawny.

At a glance

An overview of key figures across Vision Australia's services and organisation

	2011	2010	2009
Clients (active)	49,046	47,011	46,200
Client satisfaction (annual %)	86%	88%	90%
Submissions to government	35	25	34
New employment services clients	243	257	289
Workplace modifications	274	216	193
Tele-Groups	43	42	25
Orientation and mobility services	12,230	7,200	1,681
Free canes	1,000*	2,000*	2,057
Feelix titles available for loan	431	367	300*
Total loan items	759,274	801,346	759,700
Total downloads: i-access® online	62,187	48,069 †	45,348 †
Seeing Eye Dog clients	204	192	163
Graduate dogs	30	42	30
Total working dogs	172	163	133
Bursary recipients	28	24	22
National Contact Centre calls	214,975	150,000*	108,000*
Total employees (FTE)	744.75	721	743
Staff turnover rate per month	1.1%	0.93%	1.68%
Staff with blindness or low vision	19%	22%	18%
Lost time injury frequency rate	10.4	9.8	5.4
Lost time injury severity rate	393	416	411
Total revenue	101,610,000	95,919,000	79,523,000
Total expenses	89,706,000	82,295,000	106,786,000
Total government grants	30,584,000	37,817,000	29,786,000
Total fundraising	29,819,000	30,544,000	32,564,000
Total investment income	16,577,000	8,289,000	8,920,000
* = approximate numbers			
† = correction			

Message from Chair & CEO

Proactive measures and forward planning position Vision Australia for continued growth in services

This year has been a challenging one for many organisations, with a series of natural disasters and continuing global financial insecurity. Vision Australia has responded proactively with changes to ensure we continue to operate within our means while meeting the needs of our increasing number of clients.

This year's strong involvement on the international stage is particularly important to our clients. Information is now a global resource and cross-boundary accessibility is vital for those who are blind or have low vision to achieve equality of access.

This year we met goals one, four and five of our strategic plan. The increase in clients – in some services by up to 10% – meets goal one, to provide services to more people who are blind or have low vision. Goal four – that nine out of 10 clients are satisfied with our services – was achieved in the last quarter and goal five (to improve awareness of Vision Australia by becoming an authoritative voice) is much closer as a result of our national and international advocacy work.

Due to economic circumstances we have not met goal two (to increase income to better meet the growing need), nor made enough progress with goal three (finding more efficient ways to use our resources), to offset these compounding difficulties.

Our commitment to the needs and views of our clients continues through the Client Consultative Framework which advises Vision Australia through Local Client Groups, Regional Client Committees and the Client Representative Council.

Following staff and client surveys and discussion with overseas organisations we are planning new ways to deliver services to our adult clients to cope with increased demand while reducing costs and ensuring a greater consistency of services. Benefits to clients should include reduced waiting times, increased peer support and a new follow-up service.

Because of a worldwide shortage of qualified dog guide instructors which has reduced our Seeing Eye Dog graduation numbers this year, we have invested in instructor training and expect record

numbers of Seeing Eye Dogs in 2011/2012 and the years ahead.

While we are finishing the year with a \$12m surplus, Vision Australia will report an operating deficit of \$11m which is \$6.3m worse than expected, predominantly a result of income shortfalls in fundraising and bequest income rather than cost overruns. The budget for 2011/2012 will recover much of the ground lost in FY11 with a budget operating deficit of \$4.5m, \$2.4m behind our target of \$2.1m forecast for FY12 in the strategic plan. We now project that breakeven will be achieved in FY15, two years behind schedule.

To continue to operate within our means and preserve our reserves, we have made significant decisions to improve efficiency and rein in costs. We have ended two leases in Victoria to concentrate on delivering services from buildings we own and through outreach centres; saving more than \$500,000 each year.

Approximately \$480,000 per year will be saved through closing Audio Publishing (running at a significant loss in the past two years) and relocating the library's Burn on Demand services.

The Federal Government's planned National Disability Insurance Scheme will also require continuing advocacy as many of our clients would be exempt due to age.

It is with pleasure that we congratulate our Deputy Chair, Professor Ron McCallum, who was

named Senior Australian of the Year on 25 January, 2011.

We are also pleased to announce that Vision Australia has strong representation on the National Roundtable of Nonprofit Organisations (NRNO), the peak body representing over 30,000 not-for-profit organisations through Vision Australia's CEO Gerard Menses' recent election as Chair. The NRNO is working closely with the Federal Government in the establishment of a single regulator for the charitable sector.

To everyone in the Vision Australia family, a sincere thank you for your passion and contribution.



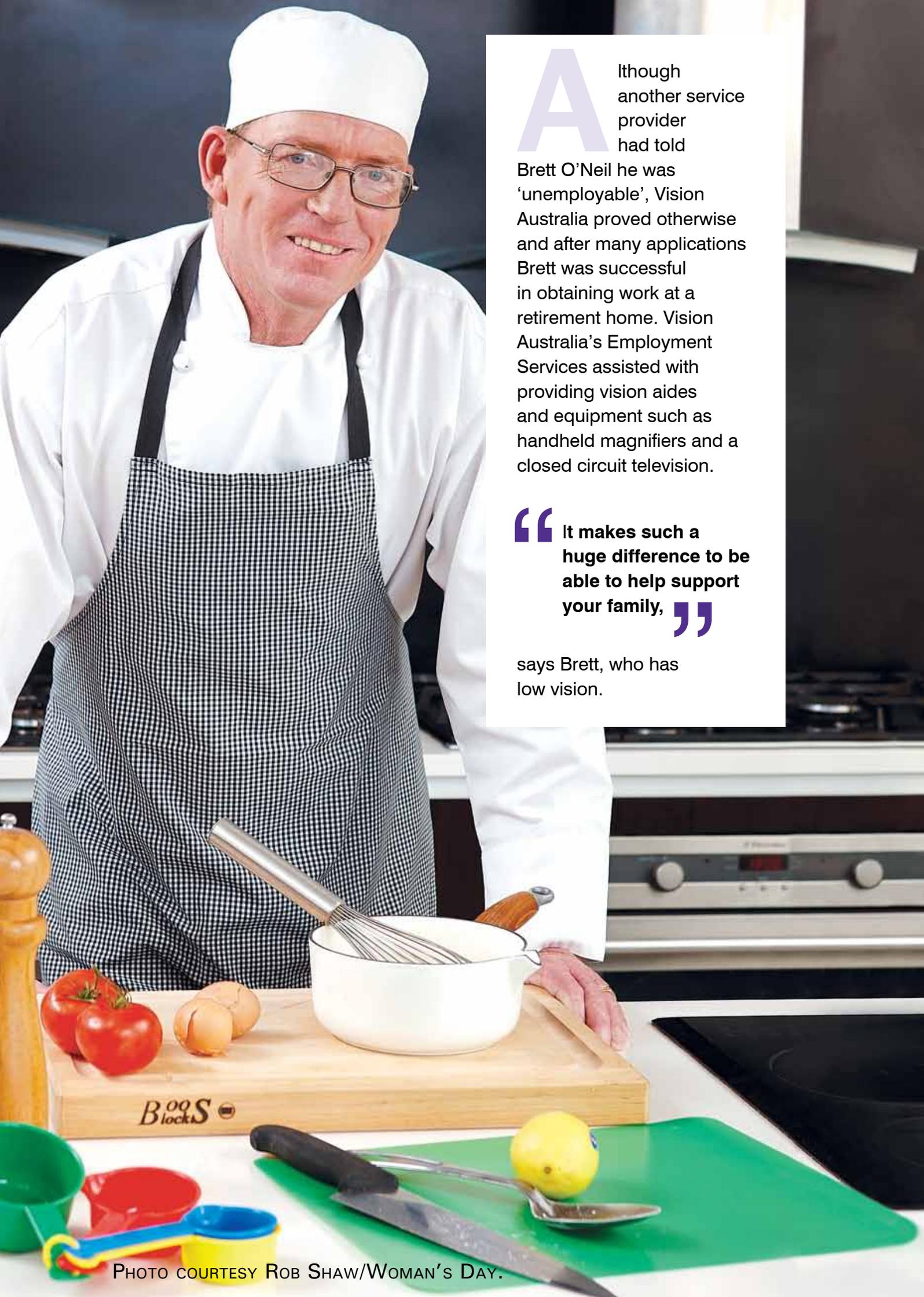
Kevin Murfitt
Chair



Gerard Menses
Chief Executive Officer

From left: Gerard Menses, Chief Executive Officer; Kevin Murfitt, Chair.





Although another service provider had told

Brett O'Neil he was 'unemployable', Vision Australia proved otherwise and after many applications Brett was successful in obtaining work at a retirement home. Vision Australia's Employment Services assisted with providing vision aides and equipment such as handheld magnifiers and a closed circuit television.

“ It makes such a huge difference to be able to help support your family, ”

says Brett, who has low vision.

Our services

Most Vision Australia services are offered free of charge to clients of all ages

Our services offer assistance and support to clients to enable them to achieve the possibilities they choose in life. Blindness or low vision can occur **at any stage of life** and our services are designed to provide individual support and assistance, whether it be for a young child and their family, a teenager seeking to continue their education, an adult needing support to find or continue to work or an older person wishing to keep their independence.

We have **15 core services** which enable life change by enhancing access to information, making the most of technology and creating community inclusion through mobility and independence.

Vision Australia has **28 offices** which include clinics in New South Wales, ACT, Victoria and Queensland and **29 satellite clinics** in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

Highlights and developments in our service areas over the past year are outlined over the following pages.

Telephone services

Telelink's regular telephone groups offer **social and peer support**, special interest groups and recreational activities to people who are socially isolated or live some distance from a Vision Australia centre. Our expanded Telelink program covers Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory, ACT and Tasmania.

It is facilitated by **trained volunteers** who are skilled to meet the needs of clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

National Texpo

Vision Australia's inaugural national Texpo, which showcased the **latest technologies** and services available to assist people who are blind or have low vision, was held across Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney in late August and early September. Close to **2,500 visitors attended** while over 100 staff and 50 volunteers contributed to Texpo's success. Feedback was very positive.

Seeing Eye Dogs need to be trained from an early age not to react to loud noises and other distractions, so volunteer carers take their charges out to a variety of different places, including fire stations.

Earlier this year Brisbane volunteer carers met at the Roma Street fire station to do group training with their puppies.

One of the puppies is pictured getting to know firefighter Ellie Sponza.



Seeing Eye Dogs Orientation and Mobility

Vision Australia's recent merger with Seeing Eye Dogs Australia has provided an opportunity to enhance the way we provide Orientation and Mobility services in order to continue to **efficiently and effectively** meet the needs of our client groups.

Five **Orientation and Mobility** graduates completed their in-house nationally accredited Graduate Certificate in Vision Impairment (Orientation and Mobility). Three graduates commenced employment at our facility in Coorparoo, Brisbane, and two in our offices in Canberra.



**The Orientation and
Mobility team provided
12,230 individual
services to clients
around Australia, up
from 7,200 last year.**

Vision Australia issued approximately **1000 canes and 650 cane tips free** of charge to assist with mobility for people who are blind and have low vision.

30 Seeing Eye Dogs graduated, with **21 provided to new clients** and nine replacing retired dogs. (There is a chronic worldwide shortage of International Guide Dog Federation instructors so our graduations were down from 42 last year due to a staff shortage.) Vision Australia was successful in filling vacancies towards the end of the financial year and has **invested in recruiting and training** its own students for the four-year instructor qualification and is now well placed to produce record numbers of Seeing Eye Dogs in the 2011-2012 year and the years ahead. There are **204 Seeing Eye Dog clients** with a working dog population of 172.

Accessible Information Solutions (AIS)

This Vision Australia service allows people who are blind, have low vision or are otherwise print-disabled to have **access to any information**, anytime, anywhere.

Information Library Service (ILS) offered 33,000 titles for 19,979 members mainly delivered via our automated CD-burning process. The i-access® online statistics show **60,000 titles downloaded**, reflecting the growing popularity of the service. Over the past year 759,274 titles were borrowed.

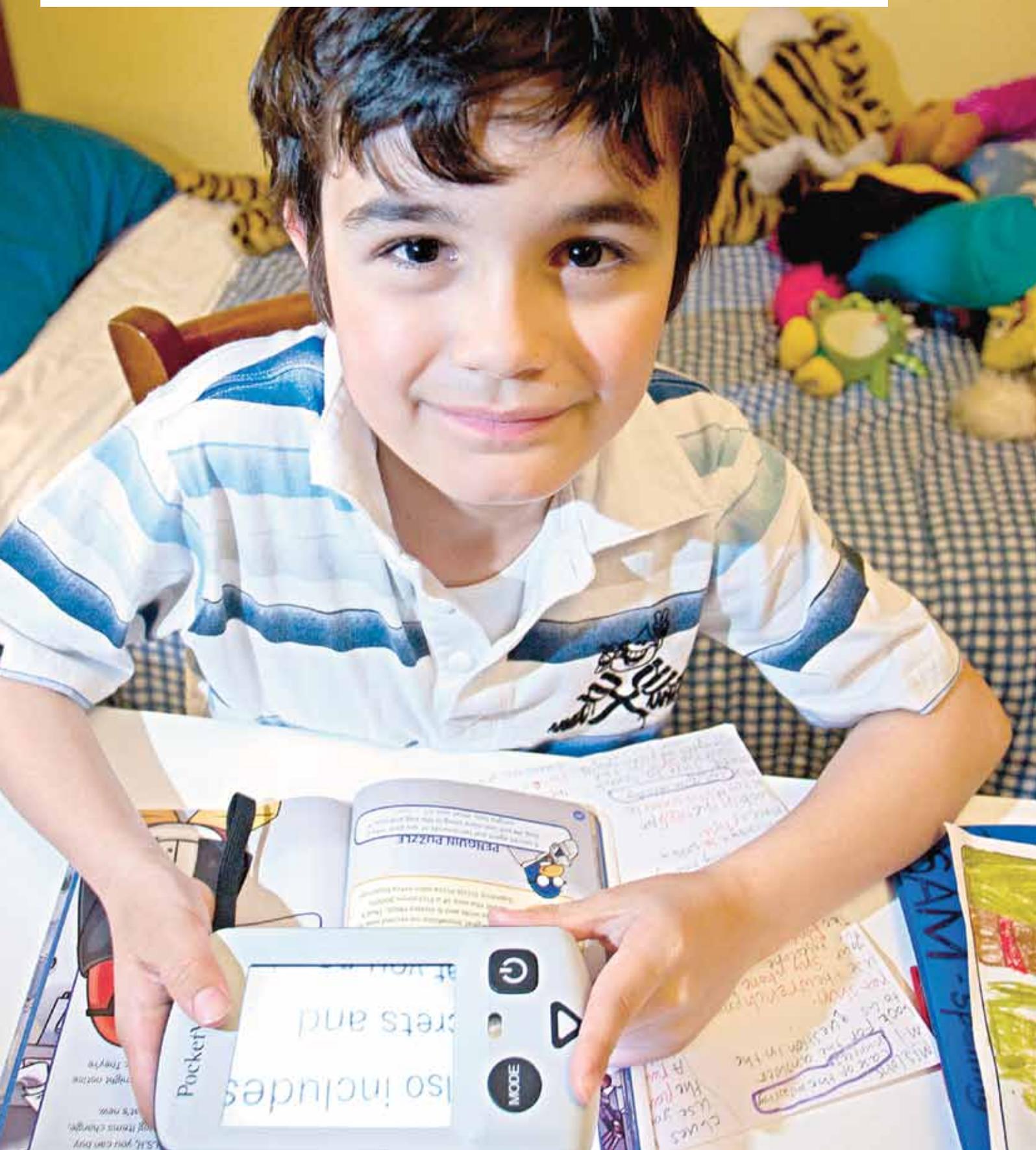
The online collection now includes braille music, Vision Australia Radio podcasts and **124 regional newspapers** from around Australia.

Sam loves to read and his parents purchased a pocket viewer magnifier from Vision Australia to enlarge small print, otherwise too difficult to see.

Sam's parents were devastated when he developed cataracts shortly after

birth and these had to be operated on when he was only eight weeks old.

Vision Australia has worked with the family to develop Sam's vision and to assist him to achieve childhood milestones. Sam now attends a mainstream school.



As more newspapers become available from Fairfax Media this number will increase.

Negotiations with the Ulverscroft Group in the UK have enabled us to supply our library members with DAISY versions of **unabridged audio books** published by Ulverscroft.

A social engagement strategy was undertaken to seek **greater feedback and engagement** with the community. This was implemented through a blog, Twitter, user-group email lists, the library's weekly VA Radio show, Hear This, and through client newsletters and the Library News.

Further **feedback was sought** from the i-access Advisory Committee, which facilitates communication between Vision Australia information access services and the service recipients and provides advice to management on AIS and radio broadcasting services.

Vision Australia continued to **expand the partnership program** with more public libraries across Australia so that material, DAISY players and support can be provided through public libraries.

The technical and conversion staff of the production unit achieved the transfer of 3,000 titles into DAISY format in just six months by achieving **efficiencies through automation** which would otherwise have required 15 years

to complete. This has expanded the digital collection for members.

Selection and production processes were developed, trialled and implemented to allow for a **rapid text-to-DAISY conversion** service to be introduced for the library. These conversions added approximately 1,500 synthetic voice books into the library in FY11.



Incremental efficiencies increased the number of print pages translated by the production unit into accessible format by 33% to 43,347,685 pages, creating more titles for service users.

The Information Technology Review team is creating a strategy to transition our **information services online** and the first initiative will see the creation of a new online catalogue to Vision Australia's content that is an exemplar of accessibility and ease of use for people who are blind or have low vision. The team is also looking at how we can then **deliver this content to people online** using a variety of mainstream and specialist devices.

Vision Australia Radio

Vision Australia Radio operates eight Victorian community-licensed radio stations for the **information needs** of people with a print disability. Programming is predominantly readings from newspapers, magazines and books and relevant information from government, disability and other community organisations not available through alternate electronic outlets.

Vision Australia Radio's audience is growing with **150,000 listeners in Melbourne** plus another 50,000 listeners regionally. The majority are male in the 25-54 age demographic; 70% of the audience has a university education, 44% earns more than \$60,000 per annum and 16% have a print disability.

Two studios at Kooyong have been upgraded with digital on-air panels, improved sound-proofing and new reading desks. The **new digital radio service, IRIS**, was launched in April, providing a more youthful approach with more entertainment while retaining core elements of Vision Australia Radio.

Highlights include the live coverage of the 2010 Federal election vote count and the launch of **Facebook and Twitter services**.

A new sponsorship sales team is gradually **building sponsorship**, enhancing the stations' revenue base. An intensive program of maintenance and upgrades has **improved reliability and output** for regional stations and allows better share programming between Vision Australia stations.

CEO Gerard Menses on Vision Australia Radio with Vision Australia Ambassador for Independent Living

Services, Maggie Beer. Their monthly program, For the Love of Food, focuses on the cooking with fresh, seasonal produce.



Employment Services

As people who are blind or have low vision are **four and a half times** as likely to be unable to obtain work when they wish to, Vision Australia's Employment Services are vital for assisting clients who wish to find or retain work.

From April 2011, all our Employment Services' sites currently eligible for a star rating are **now at or above three stars**, considered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations as satisfactory performance. Two of our sites are now at five stars, the highest possible rating (40% above the national average).

In late 2010, 10 Vision Australia clients completed their Certificate II in Customer Contact. Academy Training provided the course free of charge. A highlight was the **workplace training placements** with IAG Group, 3M, ATEL Employment, and Australian Gas and Power. The program aims to create pathways to open employment for our clients, especially through the work-experience component.

Vision Australia has been working **collaboratively with the ANZ Bank** for over five years. In addition to employing a number of people who are blind or have low vision, ANZ also played a key role in the development and production of Vision Australia's Employment



Homer gives me the ability to get around in the community,” says financial planner Robert Klauke.



Stephanie Bradury, 20, who has albinism, received support from Vision Australia with assistive technology to help her with a traineeship at a swimming complex. She is also studying at university.

Services website and the marketing brochures that link to the site and also hosted the formal launch in 2011.

ANZ has also worked with Vision Australia's Accessibility Team to make product disclosure [information accessible](#) in all alternate formats and to bring anz.com into line with accessibility standards.

The Newcastle office of Vision Australia maintained its ongoing [partnership with Port Waratah Coal Services](#) with two clients involved in Vision Australia and Port Waratah Coal Services' first work experience program.

In August 2010, Port Waratah Coal Services provided the Newcastle centre with a cheque for \$38,000 to [support local programs](#) in the Hunter for children who are blind or have low vision.

In 2010 a new Stepping Forward program for six participants on

the Gold Coast included a [10-week in-house training](#) program comprising units towards the Certificate II in Business Administration as well as non-accredited training in work preparation skills. They then undertook a work placement of 18 weeks duration with government and not-for-profit agencies.

Vision Australia's Social Enterprise Strategy secures work opportunities to provide training and work experience for staff who are blind or vision-impaired to enable them to move into mainstream employment. The [Pathways to Employment Strategy](#) has been implemented in both Victoria and Queensland and currently has 10 interns across both sites. Interns are guided through a training program which leads to a Certificate III qualification in a variety of areas and [two successful graduates](#) have already moved to open employment.

clients employed more than 26 weeks

	FY 11	FY 11	FY 11	FY 11
Quarter 1	7	4	+3	+75%
Quarter 2	8	16	-8	-50%
Quarter 3	20	9	+11	+122.2%
Quarter 4	14	11	+3	+27%
Year to date	49	39	+9	+23%



PHOTO: BRAD HUNTER/DAILY TELEGRAPH.

Twins Matthew and Annabelle Zhou, aged eight, love playing on the beach. But Matthew, who was born with albinism and is legally blind, cannot stay in the sun for more than a few minutes at a time and must take great care with glare.

Earlier this year Matthew and his sister asked guests to their birthday party to donate money to Vision Australia instead of bringing presents as Vision Australia has been part of their lives since they were born.

Assistive Technology

New IT environments have been put in place to allow assistive technology consultants to demonstrate products and services to clients and to conduct evaluation of new technologies.

The rate of change in computer and adaptive technology has resulted in the need to completely rewrite our computer/adaptive technology training material – during FY11, 10 new computer training courses were developed for face-to-face and self-paced training including distance learning; and are available in a range of formats.

Due to international exposure of Vision Australia's podcasts on assistive technology, Apple invited us to promote our services on iTunes U Beyond Campus, an information portal traditionally used by education institutions. During FY12, Vision Australia will upload contents including our podcasts, factsheets on eye conditions and informative promotional videos. We will explore using the site to offer training to other service providers to the blindness community. This opportunity places Vision Australia firmly on the international stage.

Special recreational and holiday opportunities

Vision Australia's Lorna Lodge, a small beach property at Barwon

Heads, has been refitted to provide inexpensive holiday accommodation to people who are blind or have low vision and their families and friends. Demand has been strong and the house is supported by the Barwon Heads Friends of Vision Australia.

Vision Australia has an agreement with the Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort and people who are blind or have low vision and up to three of their family or friends, can access free accommodation, gate entry and lift tickets for up to four nights per year.

Queensland floods

Thankfully, no Queensland office was damaged by the devastating floods, although there were long power cuts. Acting Regional Manager, Garry Darmanin, kept staff updated and provided support to staff and clients.



Key learnings were the importance of up-to-date contact details for staff and the value of a disaster recovery plan regarding rebooking of client services.

Libby Dickeson, a volunteer with Vision Australia, has been instrumental in bringing audio description services to the theatre in Newcastle. Volunteers describe the action on stage to a person who is vision-impaired via an earpiece.

Vision Australia works with theatre companies in Sydney, Melbourne, Geelong and Canberra to make audio-description available to people who are blind or have low vision. Libby is pictured in a Newcastle theatre.



Advocacy & equality

A proactive, policy-based approach drives our work towards equality of opportunity

Over the past 12 months Vision Australia has taken a focussed and proactive approach in its relationships with the government sector in advocating for **equality of opportunity**. Through our robust public policies, we have participated in more national and local debates and boosted our authoritative position and recognition factor, particularly within the not-for-profit sector and among politicians.

Our rights and **evidence-based** policy approach underpins all our services, showing need, rationale and consistency to government and the wider community.

Access to information is a **fundamental right** which links directly to how people who are blind, have low vision or a print disability live their lives. This policy theme also underpins education and employment policies.

Our **access to information policy** applies to all our efforts at an international, national and state level, with a consistency of message becoming synonymous with Vision Australia's activities and campaigns.

National advocacy

Vision Australia has been actively engaged in the Productivity Commission process on the proposed **National Disability Insurance Scheme**. Its direct impact on our sector and organisation will be a transition from block funding from government to individualised packaging that doesn't address the episodic nature of client service need. The age of eligibility cut-off is potentially problematic given the age profile of our clients but these challenges are not insurmountable.

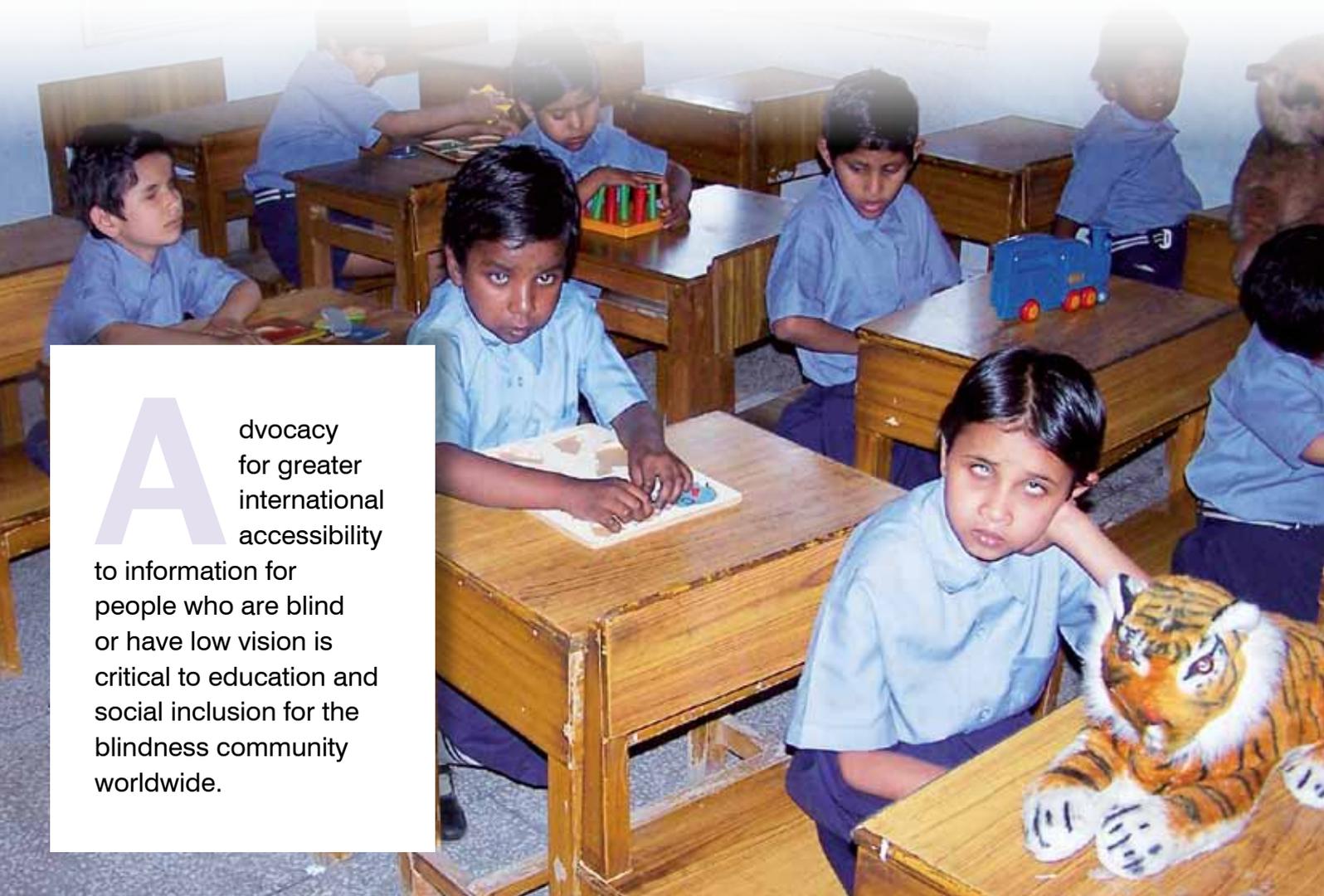
Our involvement in the Federal, Victorian and New South Wales election campaigns all had a **policy focus**, laying the ground for continued lobbying and campaigning on rights and strategic policy, particularly on issues such as access to information.

- Political parties, including government, involved in the three elections, all supported policy reforms articulated by Vision Australia
- Over 300 clients were provided with individual advocacy support

- Client advocacy forums were conducted in Victoria, New South Wales, ACT and Queensland
- Accessible voting in the Victorian and New South Wales elections was promoted
- The Department of Broadband project to enrol Vision Australia clients to trial talking set top boxes was undertaken, with a report to government
- A self-advocacy training course for clients was piloted
- The National Library Initiative was influenced to support a successful proposal to supply playback devices to participating libraries nationally
- Vision Australia was registered as a Community Road Safety Partner with VicRoads, securing funding from multiple road safety agencies to conduct research on the safety issues of pedestrians who are blind or have low vision
- Media outlets, commentators and advisors were engaged in relation to government policy and initiatives that affect Vision Australia, resulting in television, print and online stories
- Various premiers, ministers, parliamentary secretaries and local Members of Parliament attended Vision Australia events and radio interviews

Advocacy for greater international accessibility

to information for people who are blind or have low vision is critical to education and social inclusion for the blindness community worldwide.

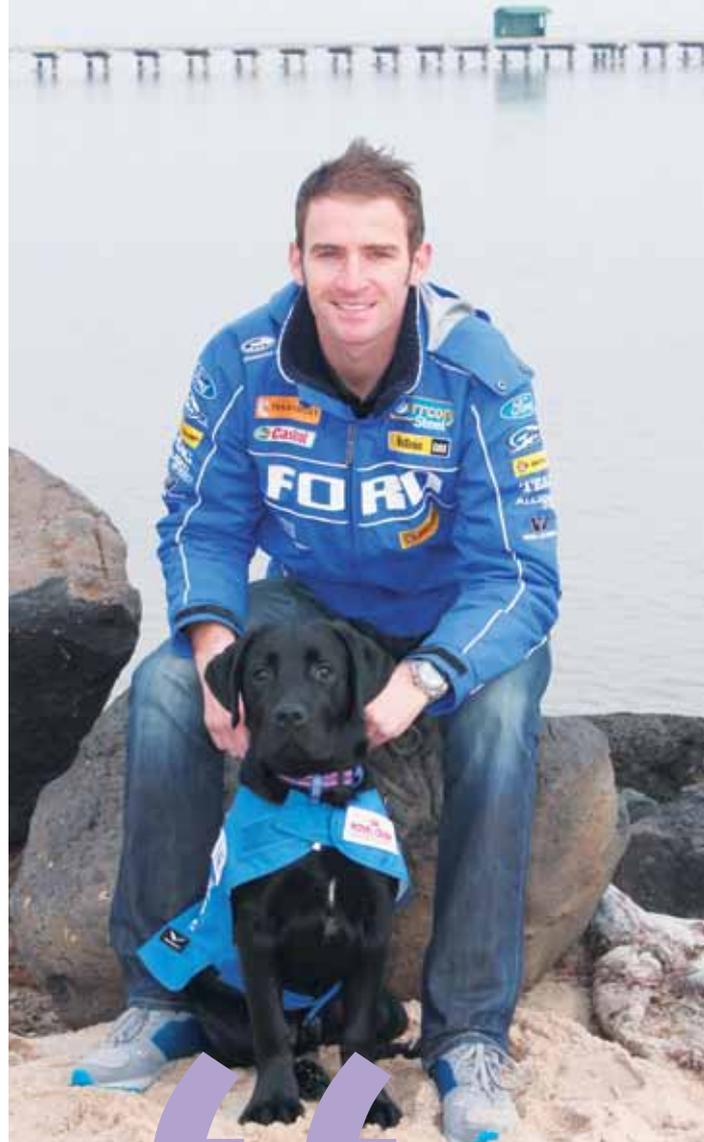


- New public policy for voting, currency, shared paths and education was developed
- 35 responses to government were submitted
- Appeared before four public hearings related to government inquiries
- Developed policy asks for the New South Wales and Victorian election campaigns
- Represented Vision Australia on government bodies including the Digital TV Switchover Customer Expert Group and the Australian Electoral Commission Accessible Voting Reference Group

International advocacy

Maryanne Diamond, General Manager International and Stakeholder Relations, is also the president of the World Blind Union. Key areas of her advocacy work have included:

- Employment strategy developed
- Work with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)
- Development of the tool kit for World Blind Union members on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Planning for the Braille21 Conference
- Launch of the new World Blind Union website



SEDA Ambassador Will Davison with Wilbo

- Vision Australia hosted the World Blind Union Executive Committee Meeting in November 2010 with around 100 participants

Maryanne, Graeme Innes and Ron McCallum gained the support of the Federal Government for the WIPO treaty on cross-border sharing of alternate-format works which will greatly increase publications available to the blindness community worldwide.

Community engagement

Vision Australia Ambassadors help promote our work in the community. Ambassador activities this year have included:

- SEDA Ambassador, Will Davison's first pup, Davo, graduated in 2010 and is now supporting his second, Wilbo
- Maggie Beer, Ambassador for Independent Living Services, together with CEO Gerard Menses, launched a new monthly Vision Australia radio program, For the Love of Food which focuses on the delights of fresh seasonal produce in response to requests for more information on cooking
- Sigrid Thornton continues her longtime support of the Vision Australia Felix Library,

in a feature article in the June Australian Women's Weekly

- Dr Jessica Gallagher, the only Australian athlete to have won medals at a Summer and Winter Paralympics and World Championships, has been appointed Recreation Ambassador

Communications

The team handles major internal and external communications and manages fundraising events such as Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight® which promote our services to the community.

Last year's Carols by Candlelight raised \$1,127,000, an increase of 9% on the previous year. A peak viewing audience of 1.88 million viewer watched the telecast and live audience surveys revealed that

media hits each month

Month	hits 2007	hits 2008	hits 2009	hits 2010	hits 2011
January	65	62	67	165	190
February	80	87	122	91	87
March	129	102	137	248	149
April	132	163	102	195	140
May	143	137	243	256	179
June	103	90	135	161	194
July	100	96	156	137	
August	129	85	154	177	
September	109	129	181	109	
October	114	238	137	149	
November	139	166	156	161	
December	160	222	250	360	
TOTAL	1403	1577	1840	2209	



Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight® is broadcast nationally on the Nine Network and is our main fund-raising event.

Special guest Natalija Lambert, aged seven, is pictured with Lisa Wilkinson and Karl Stefanovic.

89% correctly identified (without prompting) what Vision Australia does, up from 82% in 2009.

Additionally, \$2,873,765 worth of branded media exposure by this event, an increase of 131% on 2009, was generated through our public relations activity as a result of 2,263 media articles, an increase of 18.5% on 2009.

Other events included Vision Australia's Braille Book of the Year, which promotes the importance of **braille in developing literacy** and has become a part of the prestigious Miles Franklin awards night and Vision Australia's Dickinson Literary Awards which highlight the creativity of people who are blind or have low vision.

Heather
and Nick
Gleeson,
with their

Seeing Eye Dogs
Zeppelin and Unity.
Heather and Nick,
who have two sighted
teenage children,
have been longterm
clients and Nick has
worked at Vision
Australia for 20 years.
Nick is also an athlete,
accessibility advocate
and global adventurer
whose public speaking
engagements bring
our work to the wider
community.



Partnerships

We are a partnership between clients, staff, donors, volunteers and the wider community

People are at the heart of everything Vision Australia does. With current numbers of clients at 50,000 and continuing to rise each year, our focus is to **increase our services** to meet increasing needs each year.

But there are no clearcut divisions within our **partnership of stakeholders**. Our clients may also volunteer or work for us, our staff may also volunteer their time or donate money, volunteers may also donate or leave bequests as do some clients and we all interact with the wider community.

Clients

Vision Australia's clients are aged from **newborns through to old age**, with the majority past retirement age, although blindness or low vision can occur at any stage of life. Blindness and low vision impacts one in 16 Australians between 70 and 79 years old and rises to more than one in seven Australians by the time they reach 90 years of age.

Australians who are blind or have low vision are expected to exceed 600,000 by 2020 as the population

ages and is affected by increasing levels of diabetes.

Because blindness rates in Indigenous adults are six times the rate in the wider community and low vision rates are twice the rate, Vision Australia is working on a **Reconciliation Action Plan** to better understand and meet the needs of Indigenous clients.

We assist our clients to participate in any part of life they choose in a number of important ways:

- Through our services which are mainly offered free and aim to assist the client to achieve the greatest possible independence and mobility. Our services also include library and information access, employment services and Telelink for isolated clients
- Through training in any suitable assistive technology – from household items such as talking barcode scanners to help differentiate between a can of beans and a can of corn to specialised computer programs to make information accessible and even GPS services for mobility



Dorothy Riddel, 85, took one year to complete this cat painting using two magnifiers as she has very low vision.

- By ensuring we are meeting our clients' and expectations through undertaking quarterly client research
- Through client representation from Local Client Groups, Regional Client Committees and the Client Representative Council which also conducted

six leadership development workshops for clients and fostered a further four new Local Client Groups. Your Vision Australia, a new communiqué, was implemented to inform clients about the consultative framework

- Through information provided by reviews and committees – eight reviews were conducted last year including work on general policy, low vision clinics and a peer support model
- Through research conducted in two parts by Colmar Brunton to better understand the information needs of our clients. Around 500 interviews are now being conducted with current and potential clients to help plan for future services strategies
- Through a high standard of compliance with privacy principles, with zero complaints in the past financial year
- Through use of Social Return on Investment as a tool to understand service efficiency and impact – for example, every dollar spent on Seeing Eye Dogs services returned \$1.33 in social value. Statistics also show that 81% of clients increased their independence, 100% of clients' families reduced their anxiety/worry levels and 85% of puppy carers achieved their objectives

Staff

Vision Australia employs over 900 people across Victoria, New South Wales, ACT and Queensland, with 19% being blind or having low vision. As part of our Reconciliation Action Plan, we are also committed to increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our employ to a minimum of 3%.

Vision Australia staff fall into two major categories, with the service providers being by far the largest. Our service providers assist our clients with their needs, from low vision clinics to orientation and mobility services, accessibility technology, library and information services, employment support, international and government relations and advocacy.

The smaller category, the service supporters, includes the management sectors of the board

and executive, the human resources team, administration staff and the communications and fundraising teams.

Without both these categories working together, we could not provide the wide range of services for our many clients.

Organisational Development leads the development and support of Vision Australia staff and volunteers to nurture an empowering culture through:

- Development of a three-year Organisational Development strategic plan to determine business plan priorities
- Through working to development improvements in attracting and selecting appropriate staff



Dragonboat racing is a team sport where people who are blind or have low vision can compete on equal terms. Here, Vision Australia's team of staff, clients and volunteers competes in their first race.

- Building the people management skills of managers to improve engagement and retention of staff
- Fostering quality Human Resource practises in planning and implementation of change management processes
- Streamlining and simplifying bureaucracy
- Developing leadership potential through skill development and team building
- Improving our Occupational Health and Safety performance which will result in a moderate reduction of workers compensation premiums
- Re-engineering the structure of the HR/Payroll/OHS team with a focus on business partnerships

to enhance organisational development

- Successfully outsourcing the provision of salary packaging services resulting in improved expertise, increased employee participation (up 17%) and increased average net benefit to staff (up 14%)
- Reducing annual leave liability resulting in a \$480,000 reduction

Microsoft's ongoing partnership with Vision Australia has given us significant licence grants enabling us to **modernise our IT systems** and Microsoft to leverage our position in the not-for-profit sector. Microsoft also awarded Vision Australia with a Microsoft Accessibility Champion acknowledging the work we did in relation to accessibility and training.



Longtime Vision Australia volunteer Hazel McKenzie-

Kay (far left) of Cooma North, New South Wales, was selected by Sensis to appear on the cover of this year's Cooma phone books to recognise the contribution of local residents to the community.

To encourage a more agile workforce, Vision Australia is working towards having [wireless internet access](#) at all sites with a secure wireless network for staff and a guest network for clients and students.

Major achievements by Online Accessibility staff included an investigation into the accessibility of the Portable Document Format (pdf) for people with disabilities. The study was the most [comprehensive international assessment](#) in this area to date and highlighted the current limitations. Clear, actionable recommendations were presented to the Australian Government and Australian Human Rights Commission.

Online Accessibility also worked closely with the Australian Government in the development and public rollout of the Website Accessibility National Transition Strategy. A white paper on the [accessibility of SharePoint 2010](#), (commonly used by government and commercial organisations) was completed and the Web Accessibility team worked on over 60 web-based services for over 50 clients, including VicRoads, the Australian Electoral Commission and ABC websites.

Adaptive technology consultant David Woodbridge, who works with Equipment Solutions Specialist Support team, featured in a [series of interviews](#) with the



“ “

Chelsea Nagel, eight, loves to read a braille book to her little brother Jack.

American Council of the Blind's Radio's Main Menu technology program which aired on 25 Apple Mac-related podcasts.

David, who is blind, also [conducted accessibility training](#) for educators, teachers and support staff in NSW as well as presenting a professional development session via teleconference for assistive technology staff at the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind.

Volunteers

Without the support of our valued volunteers, many activities would not happen. Volunteers supported a **broad range of services** including day programs, library, radio, audio description, braille production, transport, administration, computer classes and recreation programs such as bowling, walking, water therapy, pottery, art, tandem bike riding and dining groups and with fundraising events.

We have 4,600 volunteers registered, 664 of whom joined us in the past year. These volunteers **worked 236,725 hours** and drove 260,540 kilometres. This is a decrease 6.76% or 19,154 hours donated on the previous year but still equates to \$5,918,125 worth of work at \$25 per hour.

While there were 1606 retirements and resignations, this higher number was partially the result of a **cleanup of the database**.

Vision Australia is seeking to improve the recruitment, induction and training of volunteers and to **standardise practises** across the whole organisation.

To take advantage of **emerging trends** within the volunteer sector, there is a need to expand on the roles, including increasing short and long duration assignments.

Volunteers were **recognised and thanked** during the annual Mornings and Afternoons of Celebration. Over 776 service pins and 17 Certificates of Appreciation were awarded.

Longtime puppy sponsor, Cheryl Kortlang, holding photos of the three puppies she has sponsored.

As each Seeing Eye Dog costs more than \$30,000 to train, sponsors help us train more dogs.



Donors

Vision Australia is **very grateful** to all of our donors, without whose support we could not operate.



We would particularly like to thank the, trusts, funds and foundations listed below for their generosity.

Discretionary grants included:

- The Profield Foundation – granted \$50,000 last FY11 and \$699,595 since 1994
- Marian and EH Flack Trust – granted \$32,000 for bursaries in FY11, in total have granted us \$159,178 since 1995
- Cecilia Kilkeary Foundation – granted \$61,760 in FY11 for two projects

Non-discretionary included:

- The Kemvan Trust (administered by ANZ Trustees) – This is a trust set up in perpetuity and in FY11 disbursed \$1,237,468 to Vision Australia. Since 2006 we have received \$5,506,905 in disbursements. Mr Sidney

Treva and Mrs Maria Rosa Treva created this trust, from which Royal Blind Society (now Vision Australia) receives half of all profits of the trust

- Lady Proud Foundation – Received \$80,000 in FY11 and \$585,000 since 2002. Lady Proud was a NSW donor and the trust will make disbursements for eight to 10 years and then be wound up, at which time Vision Australia should receive \$500,000 to \$1 million
- Allen and Cecilia Tye Fund (administered by Trust Company) – \$60,648 in FY11 and \$597,200 since 1999 supporting Children’s Services
- David Allen Trust (administered by Trust Company) – received \$119,283 in FY11 and \$1,804,097 since 1990

The Black and White Committee, which fundraises for our Children’s Services is now in its **75th year of fundraising** and will celebrate this occasion in October 2011. The Committee raised \$67,548 net this financial year.

All community fundraising committees nationally collectively **raised \$180,000** towards Vision Australia’s services.

Campbell Ball received a Vision Australia

bursary to assist him with his studies at the Conservatorium of Music at Sydney University. Since our Further Bursary program began in 1996, 220 bursaries have been awarded and, of recipients able to be contacted, 92% have successfully completed their course (compared to 72% of general university population).



Stewardship

Our management of resources will ensure we can continue to provide services

With 145 years of service, Vision Australia has built a substantial reputation and an equally impressive asset base from which to assist the blindness community in Australia. Vision Australia is very cognisant of the responsibilities that go with managing and safeguarding such significant assets.

Corporate governance

The Board of Vision Australia is responsible for directing the activities of Vision Australia and operates under a charter to ensure it achieves its vision, mission and objectives. The Board has developed several Board committees to assist with this process (see Director's Report in the Financial Report).

Strategic and financial planning

Vision Australia undertakes continual reviews to deploy its significant assets to best provide resources to the blindness community. Our strategic plan is subject to annual review and amendment. Vision Australia is

committed to transparency of its processes and a copy its strategic plan is available on its web site at www.visionaustralia.org

Property and facilities

Vision Australia currently has 28 offices in Australia from which services are provided. A specific Board committee assists in the planning, assessment and utilisation of buildings. Currently we have \$85.167m invested in owned properties and approximately \$2m per year in leased properties to ensure an appropriate geographical spread. Highlights include:

- Completion of building works and opening of the Queensland Coorparoo office, which has a five-star environmental rating
- Relocation of Gosford facility into a larger premises to enable the new service delivery model
- Development approval for the SEDA Barrett Street premises in Melbourne. Redevelopment includes design and construction of a new breeding centre, kennels, rehabilitation pool and client training accommodation

Investments

Vision Australia has \$81.9m in assets under management to generate investment income for providing services. This is an important income stream but is subject to fluctuation depending on global financial conditions. A review during the year resulted in the change of investment advisors from Macquarie Private Portfolio Management to Strategic Capital Management Ltd. Underlying investments are predominantly managed by Hyperion Asset Management and DMP Asset Management.

Risk management

Vision Australia is a large and complex organisation that delivers a wide range of services which need processes to manage the incumbent risk. As detailed in the financial report there is a specific Board committee established to assist with the identification and management of risk. Additional safeguards are:

- External audit of the financial statements and result
- External audit of grant and lottery income
- Internal audit reporting to the board
- Risk register maintained, reviewed and reported at every board meeting. Revisions to risk matrix part of organisation-wide reassessment of risk

- Maintenance of a Code of Professional Conduct policy
- Maintenance of employee and workplace policies and procedures
- Maintenance and review of all software licences
- Review and compliance with relevant legislation

Sustainability and environmental impact

Vision Australia encourages and implements environmentally sustainability practices and has implemented measures to better manage and measure its impact on the environment.

CO2 emissions have been targeted and a goal of 5% per year reduction established. 2010/11 CO2 emissions were:

Power, heating
and lighting 7,461 tonnes

Fleet..... 1,407 tonnes

Flights..... 761 tonnes

Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight®, our biggest event, is powered totally by renewable energy.

We recycle CDs, paper, computer equipment, have default double-sided printing on all printers, have reduced over-lighting and are replacing bulbs with energy-saving fittings.

We are phasing out six-cylinder vehicles in favour of four-cylinder vehicles and increasing telephone and video conferencing to reduce the travel footprint.

Transparency awards

Vision Australia was a top 10 finalist in the PricewaterhouseCoopers Transparency awards for the third year in a row. The PricewaterhouseCoopers Transparency Awards, in collaboration with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia and Centre for Social Impact are designed to recognise the quality and transparency of reporting in the not-for-profit sector.

Business development

Vision Australia continues to look for new ways to develop income streams. Initiatives have included securing distributorship for Plextor products which has significantly boosted sales through two new contracts and developing commercial opportunities with Australia Post which will provide both internal development opportunities and surplus revenue.

Research

Vision Australia works in partnership with other major organisations to enhance knowledge around vision loss including a partnership with University of Sydney, Macquarie University and Audiological Society



Longterm client and Vision Australia volunteer Jenny Abela, 70, lives independently and enjoys gardening and blind golf.

of Australia in a National Health and Medical Research Council Partnership project focusing on combined hearing and vision loss in older Australians and a joint research project with the Centre for Eye Research and Beyond Blue using a depression screening tool developed in the United States.

The executive

The Vision Australia executive bring diverse skills to management

Gerard Menses, BA (Hons), MA, MAICD, FAIM

Chief Executive Officer

Gerard joined Vision Australia in 2004, having led some of Australia's largest not-for-profit organisations and served on many government and industry advisory bodies. He was the Australian Institute of Management's (Queensland) 2001 Professional Manager of the Year. He currently serves on the Board of Vision 2020 and is Chair of their Corporate and Governance Committee. Gerard is also the Chair of the National Roundtable of Non-profit Organisations, an independent organisation.

Glenda Alexander, BSocWk, Grad Dip Comm, Grad Dip Man, Cert IV Training and Assessment

General Manager Independent Living Services

Glenda has many years of experience working in the disability sector with senior management roles in government and the not-for-profit sector, presiding on tribunal panels and as chair of Queensland's Child Care Forum, providing strategic advice to the Minister for Communities. Joined 2008.

Maryanne Diamond, BSc, Grad Dip IT

General Manager International and Stakeholder Relations

Maryanne is the current president of the World Blind Union. She was the executive officer of Blind Citizens Australia and was the inaugural CEO of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations. Maryanne is on the boards of ACOSS, the Global Partnership on Disability and Development and the AMD Alliance International. She is a member of Australia's National People with Disability and Carer Advisory Council and a member of the National Compact Sector Advisory Group. Joined 2008.

Leigh Garwood, MA (Comm) AIMM, MFIA

General Manager Seeing Eye Dogs, Orientation and Mobility Acting General Manager Fundraising

Leigh has run several not-for-profit health organisations, including Seeing Eye Dogs Australia, prior to joining Vision Australia in 2008. He also has considerable marketing and advertising experience, having been publisher and general manager of a newspaper group.

**Michael Hansen B Econ
(Monash), MBA (Monash), FAIM
General Manager Organisational
Development**

Michael has experience as a human resources consultant and senior executive in a diverse range of large organisations in retail, manufacturing, health, tertiary education, church, charitable and not-for-profit sectors. Michael focuses on organisational development to build employee engagement and organisation effectiveness. Joined 2010.

**David Speyer, ACA
General Manager Corporate
Services**

David joined Vision Australia in 2006, working on the Royal Blind Foundation Queensland and Seeing Eye Dogs Australia mergers, assuming his current role in 2009. As a chartered

accountant he has considerable high profile audit and finance experience and as vice president for a US conglomerate overseeing operations across 12 Asian countries, he has extensive operational management experience.

**Robert Middendorp BEc,
CPA, GAICD
Acting General Manager
Accessible Solutions**

Robert's career began in finance roles with companies such as NAB, ACI, Fluor, Pirelli, Faulding and Repco, before senior planning and line management roles. Since 2001, Robert has been facilitating innovation strategy development on a freelance basis for small, medium and top 50 Australian companies. More recently he has been working with Vision Australia.

Back row from left: David Speyer, Robert Middendorp, Michael Hansen, Leigh Garwood. Front row: Maryanne Diamond, Gerard Menses, Glenda Alexander.



Financial summary

Total revenue for the period 2010-11 was \$101.610m (2009-10 \$95.919m). The major sources of income were:

	2010-11		2009-10		2008-09	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
Legacies, bequests and donations	29,819	29.3%	30,544	31.8%	32,564	40.9%
Government Grants	30,584	30.1%	37,817	39.4%	29,786	37.5%
Investment and other income	16,577	16.3%	8,289	8.6%	8,920	11.2%
Revenue from the sales of goods and services	9,067	8.9%	8,015	8.4%	8,253	10.4%
Gain on disposal of investments and property	15,563	15.3%	11,254	11.7%	-	0.0%
	101,610	100.0%	95,919	100.0%	79,523	100.0%

Total expenditure and losses for the period totalled \$89.706m (2008-09 \$82.295m).

Expenditure was applied as follows:

Client Services and Information Library Service	65,603	73.1%	60,098	73.0%	67,155	62.9%
Marketing and Fundraising	13,469	15.0%	11,185	13.6%	11,229	10.5%
Corporate Services	6,952	7.7%	9,486	11.5%	8,158	7.6%
Other expenses	3,682	4.1%	1,526	1.9%	17,798	16.7%
Loss on disposal of investments and property	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	2,446	2.3%
	89,706	100.0%	82,295	100.0%	106,786	100.0%
Net result	11,904		13,624		(27,263)	



three-year financial position

	2010-11	2009-10	2008-09
Assets			
Cash, debtors and inventories	16,110	14,227	10,512
Investments	81,895	67,720	67,872
Property, plant and equipment	105,624	118,829	126,561
	203,629	200,776	204,945
Liabilities			
Payables and provisions	15,783	22,339	26,240
Interest bearing loans	-	-	12,310
Other (including income in advance and deposits on property sales)	842	3,269	8,875
	16,625	25,608	47,425
Net Assets	187,004	175,168	157,520

The board

We are grateful for the wide-ranging experience our board shares with us



Kevin Murfitt, PhD, BA (Hons), Chair

Kevin lectures at Deakin University and coordinates the Willing and Able Mentoring Program. Kevin was vice president of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and received a 2002 HREOC Human Rights Award for his work on the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) Accessable Public Transport Standards. Appointed 2004.



Professor Ron McCallum, AO, BJuris LLB (Hons), LLM Qu, 2011 Senior Australian of the Year, Deputy Chair

Ron is Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and also 2011-2012 Chair of meetings of chairs of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies. Appointed 2006.



Owen van der Wall, Deputy Chair

Owen worked for 37 years for Westpac Banking Corporation in senior management roles and was also a former president of the Australian Foreign Exchange Association and a director of Mastercard International. He is currently chairman of Aragon Consultants Pty Limited. Appointed 2004.



Lyn Allison, BEd, AAICD

Senator for Victoria 1996-08, Parliamentary Leader of the Australian Democrats 2004-08, Lyn also serves on boards of Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria, Orygen Youth Health, Women's Health Council of Victoria, Family Planning Victoria, Berry Street, Alzheimers Australia Victoria and chairs a nursing home management committee. Appointed 2008.



(Ronald) Keith Barton, PhD, BSc, FTSE

Keith retired in 1999 after a career in manufacturing in Australia and the USA, working for companies such as BHP, CSR and James Hardie. He is a non-executive director of Air Liquide (Australasia) Ltd. Appointed May 2004.



Nick Carter, FRICS, FAPI, FAICD

Nick has been active in blindness organisations since 1992. In Brisbane he was chair of Royal Blind Foundation of Queensland at the time of amalgamation with Vision Australia. Nick heads his own commercial, industrial and retail property company. Appointed 2006.



Donald Fraser, PhD, BSc (Hons), Dip Ed, MBA, M Comm Law, DBA, FACS, FAICD

Donald has been involved in information technology for more than 30 years and has leadership roles in an Australian multinational technology company. He joined the board of Seeing Eye Dogs Australia in 2007 and serves on several not-for-profit boards. Appointed 2004.



Paul Gleeson, BSc, LLB, LLM

Paul is a solicitor practising in intellectual property, information technology and corporate and commercial law; a principal and managing director of law firm Russell Kennedy and serves on several not-for-profit boards. Appointed 2004.



Ross McColl, BEcon (Monash) FCA

Ross recently retired as a partner of PricewaterhouseCoopers and specialises in the areas of corporate governance, risk management, regulatory compliance and internal audit. Ross is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia and lost his sight eight years ago.



**Professor Jan Lovie-Kitchin, MSc (Optom) (Melb),
Grad Dip (Rehab Stud) (LaTrobe), FAAO**

Jan is an adjunct professor at Queensland University of Technology's School of Optometry and Chair of the University Human Research Ethics Committee. She is a regular consultant to the Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand and frequent speaker at national and international optometry and low vision conferences. Appointed 2007.



Theresa Smith-Ruig, PhD, BCom (Hons)

Theresa is a lecturer in the School of Business, Economics and Public Policy at the University of New England. Research interests include disability and employment. Vision-impaired since she was 10, Theresa was vice-president of Blind Citizens Australia and in 2004-05 was a delegate to the World Blind Union. Appointed 2007.



blindness and low vision services

Call **1300 84 74 66** or visit
www.visionaustralia.org

ACN 108 391 831

ABN 67 108 391 831

Combining the skills and resources of several blindness organisations to create one national voice, Vision Australia is committed to delivering exceptional and efficient services that open up exciting possibilities for our community.