# Blind Citizens Australia Election of NSW/ACT State Division Committee Members 2019

# Candidates Statements

## Stephen Belbin

I would like to gain your support to be elected to the NSW/ACT BCA Division. Firstly, a little about myself. For those members who don’t already know me, my name is Stephen Belbin, and I was born in Sydney. At age 18 I became blind through Leber’s Hereditary Optic Neuropathy. I consider myself fortunate as prior to losing my vision, I was able to drive a car and this fostered a spirit of determination and refusal to let vision impairment limit my participation in society and let me to travel around Australia many times as an entertainer.

I am married and have two wonderful sons. I work part time as a Consultant for Accessible Teaching and Learning for TAFE NSW and provide support, training and advice on access technology for students and staff with vision impairments. I am the current Branch President and founding member of the Newcastle Hunter BCA branch, and, for the last 2 years an active member of the NSW/ACT State Division committee.

In these roles I have contributed to the Division’s purpose and objectives which are outlined in the State Division’s plan designed to increase opportunities and engagement, whilst advocating with and for, current and future NSW and ACT members.

During my current term on the Division I have strived to increase engagement and feedback from members throughout NSW and the ACT particularly regarding services and advocacy. My vision for the NSW/ACT State Division of Blind Citizens Australia if I’m elected would include, but not be limited to:

* Growing its membership and promoting it on a national scale.
* Raising awareness of the value of the NSW/ACT State Division.
* Building member confidence and encouraging a collective voice which reflects the wishes of the members.
* Progressively addressing and removing barriers to transport, employment, recreation, education and to the built environment for people with vision impairment throughout NSW and the ACT.
* Whenever possible, raise awareness to the blindness community of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and My Aged Care and, when necessary advocate for their entitlements.

I wish to remain an active NSW/ACT Division member so that I can continue to build confidence, seek feedback and increase participation of all our members in NSW and the ACT.

I possess the capacity to work collegially and make valued contributions to address issues, make informed decisions and enhance membership growth in NSW and the ACT. Most importantly, being part of the Division means I am able to act as a foundation to enact and build upon BCA’s equity achievements and foster the growth and strength of positive community attitude

## Joana de’Orey Novo

My name is Joana d’Orey Novo and I have been a member of BCA since around 1992. I am vision impaired and a cane user. I am 43 years of age. I was born in Angola, a former Portuguese colony in Africa, spent most of my childhood in Portugal and migrated to Australia at the age of 11.

I have a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Psychology and Philosophy, with 1st class Honours in Philosophy and a Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology. I worked as an individual advocate for people with disability at People with Disability Australia from 2001 to 2005 and have been employed at the Australian Human Rights Commission since then. Currently I occupy the roles of Senior Investigator and Conciliator and Policy and Education Officer.

I have been actively involved in the disability community for many years, including the following roles:

* President of the Macquarie University Association of Students with Disabilities
* Secretary of PWDA
* Chair of the Blind Citizens Australia NSW/ACT Coordinating Committee
* Deputy Chair of Blind Citizens NSW
* Chair of the Blind Citizens Australia NSW/ACT State Division.

As some of you may know, I have been chairing the State Division for its first two years. Along with the rest of the Committee, we have worked towards finding our place within the organization and developing initiatives that support the work already being done by others. I am very proud of the work the Committee has done to date, especially the Legacy Project and the Spring Into Action initiative. The Legacy Project, which was led by Graeme Innes, created a podcast which collected the stories of those involved in advocating for the rights of blind and vision impaired people in NSW. Spring Into Action offers an opportunity for Branches and interested members to hold events that bring people who are blind and vision impaired together and project BCA into the community. I would like to support the next State Division Chair to continue the work of the State Division.

## Kristy Fitzgerald

As a new member of BCA, i am excited to work towards achieving equity and equality for people with vision impairment and vision loss and learning more about the organisation and its projects. Since joining BCA in June 2019, I have attended two Sydney branch functions and expressed my interest in participating in the Employment Short Films project.

As an Australian Public Servant of 13 years, i have the relevant skills in electronic communication and the ability to attend meetings via teleconference or face to face. I currently travel independently from the outer Sydney suburbs to the city for work each day and am able to utilise various forms of public transport with confidence. My roles within the Public Service have included working as part of a team, as well as management positions. Most recently, I have been responsible for managing a team of 8 Passport Case Officers, providing them with feedback, coaching and mentoring and ensuring deadlines and performance indicators are met.  Most of my Policy experience comes from following and interpreting and I am interested in building my skills in policy development.

While this would be my first committee position, I have previously been part of a team organising an international conference.  In 2018, as part of the International Skills and Development program at Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, I worked with the Disability Section to attend and co-chair the Global Action on Disability in Helsinki, Finland.  My time with this team showed me the level of Australia’s involvement in disability advocacy on an international platform and help me realise my interest in becoming involved on a more national level.

A role on the NSW/ACT Division Committee would be a great way for me to learn about and contribute to the mission of BCA, and build a support network of like-minded people.

## Suzanne Hudson

My name is Suzanne Hudson, friends call me Suzy. I have been a passionate active member of Blind Citizens for approximately ten years. I have had a vision impairment all my life, I have a Social Science degree from University with a major in welfare and community services. I am currently employed as a support worker. I also am on the equal access advisory committee for the Tweed Shire Council, this has been for the past 6 years. I am the coordinator for the Tweed Valley blind citizens group. I have participated in the organisation of the last 2 state conventions for New South Wales. In 2018 I was presented with the Faye Drawet advocacy award by the Tweed Shire Council this was very humbling as Faye was a foundation member of PWDA.

Thanks to my impairment I am a good communicator, my eyes might not work very well however my ears work a treat as does my tongue. I have a large network of people who are involved with the disability community, both as service providers and people with lived experiences of disabilities.

I’m wishing for the opportunity to place myself forward for the position on the NSW/ACT State Division Committee and hope to talk further with you in the future, thanks for taking the time to read this brief summary of what I have too offer.

## Graeme Innes

Having worked towards the merger of BCNSW and BCA, and served on the first State Division Committee, I seek re-election to that committee. I do so to ensure that the committee, and BCA, are sustainable into the future, and to build skills and knowledge amongst younger BCA members to serve on this committee and in other leadership roles in the organisation.

As a former Commissioner with the Australian Human Rights Commission, an experienced non-executive director, and having been blind all of my life, I have the necessary skills and experience to deliver on my promise to the State Division Committee and BCA.

I stand on my record, and seek your support to do so for the next two years.

## Marie Shang

I wish to nominate for election to the BCA NSW/ACT State Division Committee.

I was previously a member of the inaugural State Division Committee, and before that, a member of the Management Committee of Blind Citizens NSW. I have been a member of BCA since its inception and served as President of the Sydney Branch under its former committee structure.

Under the current Sydney Branch structure, I am actively involved in its activities, serving on working groups and acting as a signatory to the Branch bank account.

In the positions stated above, I have served as delegate to a number of disability and community organisations and gained a wide knowledge of issues relating to blindness and the wider disability field. These include:

* The Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities;
* Radio for the Print Handicapped of NSW;
* People with Disabilities Australia;
* the Disability Network Forum;
* NSW Council of Social Services.

I also served on access committees for both Ashfield and Burwood Councils. I have served on the governing bodies of community transport for several years, firstly with Inner-West Community Transport and more recently with Access Sydney Community Transport.

I believe that my involvement in these external organisations gives me an understanding of disability issues in addition to those relating to the blindness sector.

My overall experience equips me to play an active role in the committee’s work in representing the concerns of people who are blind or vision impaired, in particular, the older members of our community.

## Susan Thompson

I have been a member of BCA since 1979, and active since the early 80’s in a number of capacities. These include: Secretary and later President of the Sydney Branch; Member of both the National Council and Board of Directors (serving for a time as Vice-President). In addition I have served as NSW representative on the National Policy Development Council; member and chair of the NSW/ACT Coordinating Committee; and been a member of the NSW/ACT State Division Committee since its establishment.

I work as an advocacy advisor with Vision Australia both providing individual advocacy and working on systemic advocacy for the blind and vision impaired community. In this role I am pleased to be able to be part of collaborative work with BCA and other blindness sector organisations on issues such as accessible voting and accessible transport.

Over my years with BCA I have written many submissions, represented the organisation at many consultations and meetings with government representatives, presided over state conventions and other forums, and collaborated with other members to put forward policy proposals for the organisations work.

BCA’s recent merger with the Association of Blind Citizens of NSW has been a great opportunity to see BCA’s voice in NSW increased.

As a member of the State Division Committee, I’ve very much supported the organisation’s commitment to providing growth opportunities for people who are blind or vision impaired in sending people annually to the Enchanted Hills camps in California; with the view to replicating similar opportunities in Australia.

I was also very proud to have been part of a series of Podcasts on Advocacy in NSW to help ensure a record of the long history of advocacy by and for people who are blind or vision impaired.