Greetings everyone, from Dharug and Gundungurra lands. I pay my respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present and emerging. If you had told me when I first joined BCA and attended the 1993 Convention in Canberra that I would one day be President, I would have said: no way. I would not have believed it possible for me to gain the necessary knowledge, skills or confidence. I would have thought the role was too big, but here I am! I will be leading an organisation rich in talented and committed members, staff and volunteers. My role as President will be to enable each of you to do your best work and to have your greatest impact. Together, we will continue to build a culture of acknowledging and recognizing each other's contributions to changing the lives of Australians who are blind or vision impaired. Aall those years ago, I would have been intimidated: so many people I respect and admire have held this position before me, including some impressive women. I would have thought I could never be as confident, apparently omniscient or powerful as them. Now i know I don't have to be: we all lead in different ways, using different styles and, I will do the best I can to be an effective leader in my own way. Finally, I would not have thought about becoming BCA President because, as a young person, i would not have wanted to identify myself so closely with blindness. Partly i have matured, partly I have recognized that my disrespect for myself stemmed from negative attitudes I had absorbed, and partly I have developed pride in and understand the value of identifying myself as a blind leader. I am glad to say that, during my lifetime, the world has developed greater respect for disability and the disability movement and we now have an acknowledged place in a more inclusive world.

During my presidency, BCA will maintain six key characteristics. For those of you who like acronyms, this one comes out as I-clasp; it's not great, but it's better than a previous iteration, where it resulted in Iscalp!

First and above all, BCA will be inclusive: I don't want to just say it, but for everyone to feel it, so no-one feels alienated. We want to make sure our meetings, publications and conversations feel welcoming to everyone. We are better than we used to be at talking about blindness and vision impairment, but we need to become better at acknowledging that the vast majority of Australians who could join BCA will have lived most of their lives as sighted people. We need to recognize that the experience of blindness or vision impairment will be different if you are deafblind or have other disabilities, if you are from a culturally diverse community, if you identify as a First Nations person, or if you are also the member of another minority group. Nothing we do will inadvertently silence or invalidate anyone's experiences and right to be heard. Everything we do or say will let every person who is blind or vision impaired know that they belong in BCA.

Second, BCA must be credible: this means that members and society generally should believe that we know what we are talking about. Our advocacy is based on strong public policies, which are solidly founded in consultation with members, from data derived from advocacy cases and research. Our staff are well qualified and have the skills to speak on behalf of the breadth of our membership. I have the lived experience of a privileged white woman who has been totally blind almost from birth. To be an effective President of BCA, I will need to hear and amplify the voices of our diverse membership. I will need to speak up for all of us, in a way that acknowledges our many perspectives, while representing our shared experience as Australians who are blind or vision impaired.

Third, BCA displays leadership: we have a committed group of leaders all around the country. This has been demonstrated in many ways during the recent disruptions resulting COVID19. The ceo attended high level forums with leaders of disability and health agencies to ensure the needs of people who are blind or vision impaired were not overlooked. The staff sat on health, transport and other committees to get the most up-to-date information for members. The board established a business continuity working group, to ensure that BCA's work could continue, whatever contingencies arose. The inaugural Executive Leadership Program was completed, with contributions from a galaxy of former leaders. Branch leaders set up regular Zoom meetings, phone chats and telephone trees to limit the isolation of members confined at home. I have been proud to watch so many wonderful leaders putting in unprecedented individual efforts during these challenging COVID times. Even more gratifying for me, is the knowledge that each of these leaders has been supported by you the members, who have Zoomed in or dialled up to make sure all these projects would succeed.

Fourth, BCA must have autonomy: BCA forms its positions based on board, staff and member input. We are a disability-led organisation. We will not be dictated to by any government, service provider or indeed member. This does not mean every member will agree with every position we take or every decision we make. People who disagree with our decisions have the right to express their disagreement respectfully, to vote and to stand for election. While guarding our autonomy, BCA values and seeks opportunities to work collaboratively with all elements of the blindness sector, with other disability organisations, with governments and the broader public to reshape a more inclusive world for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Fifth, Bca must be sustainable financially. While we have the gift of ongoing security bestowed by the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation and by the Shirley Fund, with much of our funding secured project by project, we can never afford to feel too comfortable. Our funding relationships with blindness service providers have evolved beyond financial exchanges into relationships of collaboration and respect. we aim to extend this to private sector entities. Although we recognize that people who are blind or vision impaired are not often among society's most privileged, generous contributions from board, staff and members are a tangible pledge of trust in BCA.

Finally, BCA needs to publicise itself. We are good at what we do. We have improved the ways we tell each other and our members about what we do. Now we need to tell the world. We need the rest of Australia to know about BCA and why it matters. We will be telling a positive story about blindness and vision impairment. This will let all those Australians who are blind or vision impaired know about us and encourage them to become members, join our conversations, get involved, apply for jobs and stand for election, both within BCA and beyond. This will bring us and the world new talents, new voices and new perspectives. It will also impact broader community attitudes, changing the assumptions of friends, employers, families and communities.

With me as President, BCA will fulfil two aims. First, we will continue to inform, connect and empower members, drawing on your skills and experiences and keeping you engaged in our campaigns and consultations and contributing to discussions which build one another's capacities. Secondly, we will inform and connect with governments, blindness sector organisations, allies and other groups across society. Greater public awareness will make BCA more visible to potential members and change the perceptions and attitudes of people who interact with people who are blind or vision impaired.

Looking back at that young woman at her first BCA convention in a snowy Canberra in 1993, I now know that Bca is bigger than any one of its members or leaders. From my years as a parent and community volunteer, several years on the BCA Board and the Executive Leadership Program, I believe I now have the range of experiences and skills to be BCA's President. We have a dedicated staff, some of whom show every day what employees who are blind or vision immaired can achieve and others of whom demonstrate every day that our issues and human rights matter just as much to people who have the advantage of sight. We have a board of people with a broad range of attributes who care passionately about this organisation. We will have a new and visionary ceo. We will have the good will of our former President and former ceo.

BCA has been informing, connecting and empowering for 46 years and it does like look like becoming redundant any time soon. BCA does not need to change what it is doing. It's about together, finding new, relevant and inclusive ways of achieving our mission.

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