

# Blind Citizens NewsWinter 2024

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Blind Citizens Australia is the National representative organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired.  Our purpose is to inform, connect, and empower Australians who are blind or vision impaired and the broader community.

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### Other Publications

[New Horizons Radio Programme and Podcast](https://www.bca.org.au/new-horizons/)

[Blind Citizens Australia Annual Report](https://www.bca.org.au/reports/)

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Table of Contents

[Editor's Note 6](#_Toc167879369)

[Editorial – by Amila Dedovic 6](#_Toc167879370)

[Fireside Chat with BCA CEO Deb Deshayes – by Amila Dedovic 8](#_Toc167879371)

[2025: A very special year for Blind Citizens Australia - By Lynne Davis 13](#_Toc167879372)

[BCA Trivia is Not Trivial – by Ramona Mandy 15](#_Toc167879373)

[The Benefits of Joining the Acquired Sight Loss Group - by Martin Stewart 18](#_Toc167879374)

[3D Printing for Access is in Good Shape – by Ramona Mandy 19](#_Toc167879375)

[Playing Backgammon Blind: Yan’s Incredible Story - by Kaz Wellington 22](#_Toc167879376)

[How I Challenge, Inspire and Trust - by Arkan Yousef 25](#_Toc167879377)

[Feedback for BCA 31](#_Toc167879378)

[How to Make a Complaint About BCA 31](#_Toc167879379)

[Funding and Donations for BCA 32](#_Toc167879380)

[Submit Your Writing to Blind Citizens News 32](#_Toc167879381)

[New Horizons Radio Broadcast Schedule 33](#_Toc167879382)

## Editor's Note

Blind Citizens Australia refers to our members as people who are blind or vision impaired. However, we respect the right of individual authors to use whatever language is most comfortable for them.

Editorial – by Amila Dedovic

In 2025, Blind Citizens Australia stands on the cusp of a remarkable milestone: half a century of informing, empowering, advocating for, and championing the rights of people who are blind or vision impaired across the country. As we prepare to celebrate this momentous occasion, it is not just a commemoration of the past but a testament to the enduring spirit and ongoing mission of our organisation.

Founded in 1975, BCA emerged as an organisation to help Australians who are blind or vision impaired live their lives in the way they choose. To ensure they are respected and recognised, and their rights are protected within society.

Over the last five decades, we have witnessed tremendous strides in accessibility, technology, and societal perceptions regarding blindness and vision impairment. Through it all, BCA has been at the forefront, tirelessly working to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and foster inclusivity.

Reflecting on our journey, it becomes evident that our success is deeply rooted in the dedication and passion of our members, supporters, and leaders. And speaking of leadership, we are excited to welcome our new CEO, Deb Deshayes, who has expertly stepped into her role, bringing with her a wealth of experience, vision, and commitment to our purpose.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Deb’s leadership style is defined by empathy, inclusivity, and a genuine commitment to serving others. Under her guidance, BCA has continued to strengthen its culture of collaboration, transparency, and accountability, empowering staff and volunteers to contribute their unique talents and perspectives towards our shared cause.

In this issue of BC News, Deb Deshayes discusses what the past six months as CEO have been like for her, covering the challenges of the role and what qualities she believes make a good leader for any organisation. As we look ahead to the next 50 years, we are inspired by the legacy of resilience and determination that defines Blind Citizens Australia. Our journey has been marked by challenges and triumphs, but through it all, one thing remains constant: our unwavering commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

As we celebrate this milestone anniversary, let us not only reflect on our past achievements but also recommit ourselves to the values and principles that have guided us thus far. Our National Convention, to be held in mid-2025 in Melbourne, will give us the opportunity to come together and celebrate our rich history and achievements.

We are confident that Blind Citizens Australia will continue to be a driving force for positive change, empowering individuals to live their lives with dignity, independence, and purpose.

Read on to hear Lynne Davis highlight BCA’s 50-year anniversary and the importance of the upcoming National Convention in 2025. Ramona Mandy shares the outcomes of a research project that was investigating 3D printing as a way to access graphical material by people who are blind or vision impaired, as well as her reflections as a BCA Trivia Host. Martin Stewart, BCA National Advocacy Officer, outlines the history of BCA’s Acquired Sight Loss Peer Group, encouraging members to join the conversation. We also hear from Kaz Wellington, who shares the story of Yan Kit Chan – a person who is blind and plays backgammon, a popular board game that originated from Persia more than 5,000 years ago. And finally, we learn about Akran Yousef, a 65-year-old Iraqi refugee who shares his inspiring story of how he continues to pursue higher education in Australia after fleeing Iraq and navigating the world with his acquired sight loss.

Fireside Chat with BCA CEO Deb Deshayes – by Amila Dedovic

“To me, everyone's equal. I don't particularly like the title of CEO. All I do is work with other people and that's a title that I have because my role and responsibilities have got to be identified in some way. But I'm at the same level as everybody else.” – Deb Deshayes, Blind Citizens Australia CEO.

Having worked in senior management roles with service providers Vision Australia, Women with Disabilities Victoria and Yooralla, Deb has spent close to two decades in the disability sector and understands the intricacies of working for an organisation that serves as a voice for people who are blind or vision impaired.

As many may know, she also previously served as BCA’s General Manager, Projects and Engagement. She also owned and operated a counselling practice for 11 years.

Deb’s experience is bolstered by qualifications in counselling, mental health, management, and coaching, with her completing the Certified Community Directors Course with the Institute of Community Directors Australia. In addition to her background in mental health, her own lived experience has shaped her approach solving challenges and what it means to be a leader.

Having been at the helm of Blind Citizens Australia for six months, Deb spoke with Amila, Communications Coordinator, about what the journey has entailed so far.

### Question: What has it been like stepping into the CEO role for you?

It’s an honour to serve our members, be challenged by members, and to navigate challenges together with the members – the 2025 Convention is a classic example of that. Making sure we've got the best possible skills and people to take us to where we need to be - that's not easy either.

I always think how you start in a job is how you continue in the job and how you end up. Always with grace, commitment, effective communication and an authentic approach. It's important to be vulnerable - to show your team and your directors that vulnerability. Apologise if you're late for something, say that you don't get everything right and everything's not perfect because then your people know that it's okay for them to bring a problem to you. Show that vulnerability when they're sharing what that problem or issue is. I'm very grateful for when people do that. I thank them for showing that openness and trust. You connect with people on a much deeper level, which is a real gift to me.

It's a real privilege to lead Blind Citizens Australia. I feel fortunate that I've worked here before in another role. I had a good sense of what our processes are like, what our people are like, and what we could do differently. To streamline processes and trim the double ups - those sorts of matters.

I can't really speak enough about the privilege of being able to lead an organisation with such passion and purpose. I hope I do it justice like many have before me. I was so excited that I was going to work with all these people again.

### Question: When you’re dealing with unexpected situations – what type of leadership do you think is needed?

To be adaptable. It’s like you go out for a swim at the beach and you’ve already arrived with a plan, but then suddenly there might be a current that washes over you. You’ve got your paddle board but what are you going to do? You need to constantly be adapting to that environment and be very focused on options. What are the solutions? Being solution focused - What's option one, two, and three? It's important to be to be calm, particularly the more stressed everyone else is around you.

### Question: What does leadership in general mean to you?

Trusting your people and trusting yourself is important to me. Trusting your people to do what they need to do, you've got a skill set, you can do the job, and your values align with BCA. We've gone: Yes, you're the right person to be part of our team – you can get on with your job. I trust you to do your job. If something doesn't go right, we'll talk it out and work out what area, gap or bit of development needs improvement. We'll keep moving through it and move on. If it’s something major, we’ll have a different process to work through together.

But if you show you trust your people, because you do genuinely trust your people, then they're going to trust you. They're going to trust you to lead the organisation, process or decision-making. Then the Board is also going to trust you. It's all about trust at those different levels. I've got a bit of a different view. I don't think you earn trust. You start with trust - you give people trust from the beginning and then what they choose to do with it is entirely up to them. They can take it and run with it, or they can question it and challenge it. I don’t mind being challenged.

It’s also important to treat people as people - we are people first. Not a project, not a policy, not an advocate. You treat them in their preferred style. A conversation I have with one staff member might be approached differently from a conversation I have with someone else because they’ve got different needs and expectations.

Sometimes people open up straightaway and you know more about them. Then you go: Oh yeah, now I get it. Now I understand why they do what they do. I understand their stress points. I understand what they revert to when things are too much for them. People show you that at different points in their working relationship with you.

I think it's much harder working remotely in some ways because you don’t get to have as many incidental conversations in the lunchroom – the water cooler talks as they say. But I think you listen better when it's remote. You have to listen to what people are saying to you, but it's also listening to how they say it - how they're communicating that to you. Listening, hearing the views of others, seeing the person first, before their disability or lived experience - however someone chooses to describe themselves, that's a personal matter. That's going to be really important. So that's about valuing people, who they are as a whole and where they're at in that point in time as well.

To me, everyone's equal. I don't particularly like the title of CEO. All I do is work with other people and that's a title that I have because my role and responsibilities I've got to be identified in some way. But I'm at the same level as everybody else. I think we do it pretty well here. We're not very hierarchical.

### Question: Have there been any challenges that stood out to you so far?

Certainly, navigating challenges is an inherent part of any leadership role. One challenge that stands out to me is the ongoing need to balance the diverse needs and priorities of our community with limited resources. Ensuring that we are effectively allocating our resources to maximise impact while also remaining responsive to the evolving needs of our community requires careful strategic planning and decision-making.

Another significant challenge has been navigating the complexities of advocacy and policy reform. While we've made strides in raising awareness about the issues facing individuals who are blind or vision impaired and advocating for change, there are still systemic barriers and entrenched attitudes that we must work to overcome. Building consensus among stakeholders, engaging with policymakers, and driving meaningful change requires persistence, patience, and strategic collaboration.

I am confident that we will continue to rise to the occasion as we work towards our shared mission of informing, connecting, and empowering.

### Question: What have you enjoyed the most in your role as CEO?

I've found so much fulfillment in my role, particularly in the opportunity to witness the impact our organisation has on the lives of people who are blind or vision impaired. What I've enjoyed the most is the chance to connect with our community, hearing their stories, their challenges, and their triumphs. Every interaction, whether it's with a member, volunteer, or partner organisation, is a reminder of why we do what we do.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to advocate on behalf of our community, whether it's raising awareness about the issues facing people who are blind or vision impaired, or consulting with government for policy changes to improve accessibility and inclusion. What I've enjoyed the most is seeing the tangible impact of our work and knowing that we're making a positive difference. I'm constantly inspired by the resilience and innovation that our team brings to the table. Together, we've been able to develop strategies that really make a difference for our members.

## 2025: A very special year for Blind Citizens Australia - By Lynne Davis

In March 1975, a meeting of people with vision impairments and blindness was held in Melbourne to discuss forming an organisation which would give a voice to Australians who were blind or vision impaired in their own country.

The meeting was attended by around 40 people, mostly from Victoria but with a sprinkling of people from New South Wales and one from Queensland. Those present decided to form such an organisation, to meet again in June of that year, and to draw up a constitution for the new organisation – to be called the National Federation of Blind Citizens.

The very first convention of what has since come to be known as Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) was held in mid-1975, and next year we will be celebrating the longevity and success of our organisation. It will be a year to acknowledge the foresight, courage and abilities of all those who have made it happen, wherever they are, to honour the people whose determination and commitment lay the foundations for what has become a major presence in Australian human rights and in international forums, to review what has been accomplished and what remains to be done as new challenges emerge and old ones persist.

Sadly, some of the ‘originals’ are no longer with us except in memory. But there are many who have been members for decades, some as far back as 1975. Planning has already begun for celebrating half a century of achievements in advocacy, community and developing identity. There will be a national convention in mid-year, as well as many opportunities to celebrate our legacy throughout the year and around the nation, either in person or via the many connections made possible by an amazing array of new technologies (something never even imagined back in 1975).

The planning is being overseen by 2 member committees and 1 staff committee – a celebrations committee, convention planning committee and logistics committee.

There will be regular updates on the progress of planning in the weekly email updates and on New Horizons. If you have any suggestions, or want to contribute in any way, please get in touch so we can talk to you. A number of our members have already contributed their ideas via responding to our online survey, and there have been some fabulous ideas put forward.

Here are the names of the committee members involved in the planning for next year’s events:

Convention Planning: Robyn Mackenzie, Annette Ferguson, Doug McGinn, Katrina Taylor, Michael Janes.

Celebrations Committee: Stephen Belbin, Lynne Davis, Susan Thompson, Carmel Jolley, John Hardie, Amy Curran.

Logistics Committee: Deb Deshayes, Angela Jaeschke, Amila Dedovic, Christina Micallef, Samantha Marsh.

We welcome your contributions and encourage you to get involved!

Please reach out us on bca@bca.org.au with the subject headline ‘2025 Convention’.

## BCA Trivia is Not Trivial – by Ramona Mandy

When the Covid-19 virus came to visit and we found ourselves with pandemic restrictions, it meant we couldn't visit and socialise with others in the face-to-face way we used to. BCA responded very quickly by establishing various peer support groups for members, where they could meet in Zoom and discuss topics of common interest. True or false, one of those peer support groups is BCA Trivia? I'm pleased to say you get a point if you said "True". Did you know that the Penrith Panthers were the 2021 National Rugby League champions? Do you know that in Norse mythology, Fafnir is a dragon? Do you know that Arborio and Basmati are types of rice? These are the things you might learn at trivia, but the answer is that it does not matter at all if you do not know these things. What I do want you to know is that BCA Trivia continues to run and is alive and well, even though we as a society are able to get out and about now to many in-person events.

Sadly, I have heard people say they aren't brainy enough to play trivia. You don't need to be smart to play trivia. Playing trivia is all about seeing if you know the answers to a lot of unimportant facts. It is unimportant if you can't answer them. What is important is the fun you can have and the extra value that comes from playing. Everyone has some degree of general knowledge. If you have happened to have read the book, or know the song, or have travelled to the place that features in the question and can answer the question correctly, then sure, you can help win a point for your team. However, I've seen a number of other benefits come from joining trivia.

I've been attending the group almost since its start in 2020, and it’s proven to be much more than just another great social option. I've seen real peer support from the kind and generous BCA membership.

Players have been helped to get to know each other. Players are put into teams of two to five people and when you must work as a team, then you naturally talk with each other. You get to know who's interested in the field of sport, or music, or cooking or geography, for example. Whilst much of the hour is aimed at answering questions, it is a relaxed atmosphere and there is a bit of chat and so we get to know people, their personalities and their stories. It's been lovely learning about other BCA members that I didn't know.

Often teams need captains. This is a person who is nominated to make the final decision of an answer to put up where there might be some debate or indecision from the team members. The captain can also rally the team to work together and make sure everyone has input. I've seen people grow in confidence when they have tried captaining a few times. Some are reluctant to captain as they are nervous, but when they see how supportive others are, they give it a go and are usually pretty happy to give it another go twice and thrice over.

The support for each other is what has really struck me as a big positive. Whether you accidentally answer for a team other than your own - I'm guilty as charged – or you have called it for your team and the answer is wrong, it isn't something that matters. There is no judgement, just friendly competition and lots of learning about things that you may never have to ever call on again, unless you need to know that dogs are banned in Antarctica or that the aorta is the largest artery in the human body.

We're in need of more hosts though. There are different ways to collate and deliver questions and hosts have the freedom to design how the session is run and choose the topics or themes they use. Even if someone wanted to do a once-off hosting, just to try it on, that would be welcomed. If anyone would like to consider hosting, please speak to Layal Hage at BCA.

We have new BCA members join trivia all the time. Some stay as repeat offenders, and some come along occasionally. Everyone is welcomed. You get to play with different people at different times. There is no set team allocation. Different hosts have their different styles, and it is a fun way to spend one hour on a Saturday night. Whether it is a confidence boost, a good laugh, an addition of a fun fact to your repertoire or just a chance to find out that you knew more than you thought you did, you'll get something out of coming along to Trivia.

So whatta ya know: BCA Trivia thrives beyond lockdowns!

## The Benefits of Joining the Acquired Sight Loss Group - by Martin Stewart

If you live with acquired sight loss, you can join BCA’s Acquired Sight Loss Peer Group. This group meets via Zoom on every fourth Monday of each month to share and inform.

The group was established in 2022 out of feedback that we were receiving from our advocacy work and some events, where we were often being told that there was a lack of peer sharing opportunities available for those who have an acquired sight loss.

If you wish to participate, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences and the tips and tricks which you have found to improve your independence and quality of life in an always safe, supportive, and non-judgemental environment.

One of the participants Patrick Edwards said “the experience of the journey into vision loss is never the same for any two people so you cannot apply a one size fits all approach in supporting them. I have found the acquired vision loss group provides me with a very good forum to explore these different approaches.”

His comment expresses the positive value that can be obtained when joining this group.

If you feel that this supportive group is for you, please contact Blind Citizens Australia to join. Phone 1800 033 660 or email bca@bca.org.au.

BCA also runs other Peer Connect groups on a wide variety of topics. To find out further information on how to join, contact BCA.

## 3D Printing for Access is in Good Shape – by Ramona Mandy

Four years ago, I outlined in an article for this newsletter how I had the privilege of representing BCA as part of an expert advisory panel for a research project which was investigating 3D printing as a means to access graphical material by people who are blind or vision impaired. I wanted to report that the project has now concluded and was very successful in meeting its objectives. There were a number of positive outcomes from the study and I wanted to share a little about the findings and associated developments with you here.

The investigation was carried out by researchers from Monash University's Inclusive Technologies department of the IT Faculty, in partnership with several organisations from the blindness community: the Round Table for Information Access for Print Disabilities Inc., the Department of Education Victoria, Guide Dogs Victoria, NextSense (formerly RIDBC) and the Royal Society for the Blind.

At the start of the project back in 2018, it was generally thought that 3D printed models may be easier to understand than tactile graphics, but such models had not yet been used within the blindness community in Australia and New Zealand beyond one or two isolated examples. The project aimed to transform the provision of accessible graphics within Australia by overcoming existing barriers to the production and use of 3D printed models, particularly for education and Orientation & Mobility (O&M) training.

Initially planned for three years, COVID lockdown restrictions saw the project extended to 4 years. In this time, significant steps have been made towards overcoming these barriers. Previously, guidelines for the use and design of 3D printed accessible models didn't exist and the blindness sector needed support to build capacity for 3D printing production. Some of the achievements coming from the hard work of the project staff are described here.

There is now a set of guidelines for 3D printing for touch readers which has been published on the Round Table website, findable at: <https://printdisability.org/about-us/accessible-graphics/3d-printing/>.

The evidence-based guidelines cover a wide range of topics, including when to use 3D printing, where to find pre-existing models, recommended software to design your own 3D models, 3D printing services, labelling 3D models, preparing 3D prints for touch readers, touch reading 3D printed models, and how people who are blind or have low vision can do their own 3D modelling and printing.

A lot of awareness raising around the issues of how 3D printing can address access to graphics for people who are blind or vision impaired has been done through numerous presentations, workshops and displays at conferences, professional development sessions and assistive technology showcases for vision specialist teachers, O&M professionals, parents, students who are vision impaired, disability service providers and the general public.

Networks of professionals and users in this space have been formed for the purpose of ongoing collaboration. There are now in-person and online groups and social media forums to allow Australians and New Zealanders to continue to share knowledge, ideas and resources for 3D printing.

This all has served to support the successful adoption of 3D printing for touch readers in Australia and New Zealand across seven organisations - the Victorian, NSW, SA and ACT Departments of Education, NextSense, BLENNZ and Vision Australia. Australia is now a world leader in 3D printing for accessibility, with expertise that is sought by international professionals.

Most importantly, touch readers have benefited from improved access to learning materials and maps to support education, independence and inclusion.

The job of the Expert Advisory Group was to ensure the research was taking the right direction and staying on track. Apart from the investigators, the group comprised of representatives from Round Table, the Victorian Department of Education, Guide Dogs Victoria, Royal Society for the Blind, Tactile Mapping Solutions, Vision Australia and BCA. This brought together many experienced people in the field of education for blind people. What pleased me was that I was only one of five blind people on the advisory group. So, the "touch reader" perspective was certainly given a good hearing.

As I am in Melbourne, I also was fortunate enough to be a touch reader tester and felt many samples and could provide feedback on a range of questions around models. The touch testing was done with a significant number of blind and sighted testers.

As O&M was an area of focus, a corpus of 3D representational icons for future use on maps of shopping precincts, parks and playgrounds has been developed. Similarly, STEM education topics was the other focus, and we now have the creation of accessible 3D printed models to support education, which have been shared publicly on Thingiverse, a public repository of 3D print models, and used in classrooms.

Teachers reported that the 3D models were preferred over tactile graphics because they were more tactually distinct, easier to understand, gave more information about dimensions in 3D and were more engaging. They also contributed positively to inclusion, with many of the 3D models being shared with the non-vision impaired students in the class.

I believe this project has kick-started the growth and spread of the use of 3D printing for access to graphical material by people who are blind or vision impaired in Australia. As identified by the research, there is a need for more 3D model designs that are suitable for touch readers, in more education subject areas and for adults as well as children. More training is needed for those in blindness agencies and organisations to design and produce 3D printed models. Additionally, more sharing of models needs to be facilitated. However, with the guidelines, networks and awareness that have come out of this project, I feel we are now at a point where 3D printing can soon become another feasible alternative format for information access for Australians who are blind or who have low vision.

## Playing Backgammon Blind: Yan’s Incredible Story - by Kaz Wellington

Learning backgammon strategy and improving your game can be hard enough when you are able to see. Now imagine you are playing the game without your sight! That is the incredible reality of Yan Kit Chan, a blind backgammon player who, amazingly, has found a way to play online and compete in tournaments with ease.

Born in Hong Kong, Yan went on to live in the UK and Amsterdam, and now resides in Singapore. He studied physics and philosophy at university in the UK, and then delved into digital marketing. He currently works at Facebook, helping customers understand how to improve their advertising. When he is not working at Facebook or playing backgammon, Yan practices Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. He is also an avid writer who dreams of one day writing a novel.

Yan was first introduced to backgammon by a staff member at the senior school he attended in the UK. Drawn into the game, Yan looked for websites where he could play online. He found that he was able to play on DailyGammon, a turn-based version of backgammon where you take turns to play and submit your move. With the use of screen reading software, Yan was able to go through the board and hear how many checkers are in each of the positions.

After he left school and entered the workforce, Yan looked for opportunities in London where he could play in person. He found himself at a backgammon tournament run by Mike Main, and that’s where it all started. Yan wound up doing quite well at tournaments, taking second place and then winning intermediate tournaments at the UK Open.

When playing backgammon in person, Yan touches and memorises the position of checkers on the board as the game unfolds. How does he tell which are his checkers and which are those of his opponent? Sometimes the different coloured checkers in a backgammon set have a different feel, but not always.

Over time, Yan has learned how to memorise the entire structure of the game and keep it in his mind, even when all checkers feel the same. When he is tired, though, he does make use of a set of checkers that have a different feel between the colours so he can play more easily. Yan also uses BGBuddy – an app that reads out loud dice rolls – while playing in person, so that he can play completely independently.

According to Yan, being blind can be quite restrictive when it comes to choosing board games to play, as not all are accessible. He says that many blind people play checkers and chess, which are perceived as being easier to play. However, with the use of technology and developers who develop accessible software and apps such as BGBuddy, eXtreme Gammon (XG) and Backgammon Studio Heroes, it’s never been easier for visually impaired people to learn and play backgammon.

The developer of Backgammon Studio Heroes, Terje Pederson, collaborated with Yan directly to introduce changes to the website to make it easier for Yan to play. Yan and Terje first met at a Nordic Open Tournament. Yan later contributed ideas for some changes to Heroes, including voice descriptions of moves and improved shortcut key interaction. Another visually impaired player reported that the dice were too hard to see, so Terje added a “Big Dice” board setting. Terje is glad to have been able to introduce changes that make it easier for players like Yan to enjoy and excel at backgammon.

XG is another backgammon tool that Yan particularly enjoys using. The developers were able to make sure it could be used with screen reading software. When playing on XG, Yan moves the checkers around on a physical board next to him, then types the moves in and listens to the screen reader.

Yan has never met another totally blind person playing at tournaments and he is not aware of any other blind backgammon players. Backgammon is thought of as being difficult to play – which may be a barrier to newcomers, especially those who cannot see. However, Yan asserts that even for those who are not mathematically minded, backgammon is still very fun due to the element of luck.

Yan would love for more blind people to experience the joy of backgammon and to become involved in the community. As we have seen with the use of new technologies, there has never been a better time for more blind people to start out by playing online. Then, why not attend a tournament or two!? Yan shows us all that when you have curiosity and apply yourself, anything is possible.

## How I Challenge, Inspire and Trust - by Arkan Yousef

I am Arkan Yousef, totally blind. Date of birth 1959, born in Iraq, and English is my third language.

I have a bachelor’s degree in the Department of Mathematics at the College of Education, Al-Mustansiriyah University in Iraq, in the academic Year 1981/1982. I taught high school mathematics from 1982-1988, while continuing my university studies and completed my master’s degree in mathematics in 1986.

I continued to teach at Al-Mustansiriyah University, at technology TAFE, and at high school until the end of 1999. At which point it was too dangerous to stay and teach, fearing life in my hostile home country, my family and I had to escape and flee Iraq to Greece-Athens in January 2000, because of some problems with the government in the time of Saddam’s regime and then to Australia in 2006.

During this time, I started to lose my sight from the end of 1999 and within 12 months, I had completely lost my sight. I have never found out what caused my blindness.

Losing my sight was one of the biggest hardships, in addition to the war in Iraq and having to flee the Saddam regime with my family (my parents and sister) but my enthusiasm and my positive outlook in life has not stopped me from achieving my goals.

I migrated to Australia on Monday, 4th of March 2006, and since arriving in Australia, despite my vision impairment, I have completed the following studies:

* 2010, Liverpool TAFE NSW, Tertiary Preparation course Certificate IV in English.
* 2013, Liverpool TAFE NSW Certificate III in Information, Digital Media and Technology.
* 2019, Master of Science (Mathematical and Statistical Modelling) University of Technology Sydney UTS.
* 2021 Master of Philosophy in Science, University of Technology Sydney UTS.

My next academic goal is to complete a PhD in Mathematics.

In 2011, I commenced volunteer work teaching mathematics at Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre and at Fairfield Library to assist students with their homework in mathematics. I taught mathematics in three languages: Arabic, English and Chaldean.

Between April and December 2015, I initiated a homework program for high school students at St Thomas Church, Bossley Park to help them with their mathematics. Throughout 2013 to 2018, as a volunteer, I taught people who are blind at Vision Australia basic computer skills and how to use adaptive technology software. In 2013, I started volunteering in nursing home at Quarry Road Bossley Park, NSW up until now to give residents hope and love in this life.

As a result of my dedication to community service I have been recognised with numerous awards of appreciation and service, including 2021 Blind Australian of the Year finalist and a finalist in the Pride of Australia Award 2013.

It is my passion to continue my work in mathematics and provide professional tutoring services.

From 2010 until the end of 2020, nearly every day I met 4 to 5 people during my travels to my volunteer job or study at TAFE/university. I talk with them about what I am doing to have a good life.

My disability doesn’t stop me or let me give up, but encourages me to find myself by challenging myself, inspiring others, and sharing the faith.

I want to prove to everyone that people with disabilities - especially people who are blind - can do a lot more than they expect.

I am blind, yes, but it doesn’t stop me from continuing in life.

I have a strong determination to help others and I refuse to let my blindness stop me from doing what I love.

I want to show Australians that regardless of where you come from or what obstacles you face, you can, with determination, fulfil your dreams.

Since 2011, I have been trying so hard to find an opportunity to work in any area, teaching mathematics but without success. This entire situation has led me to challenge all the people who are saying: You are blind, and your term is finished!

In 2023, I aimed to start my PhD in mathematics education to achieve my goals. When people ask me the reason for continuing my studies at this age, I respond:
“I want to show everyone in Australia that you have every opportunity to fulfil your dreams in this beautiful country. It doesn’t matter what your background is, what your abilities or disabilities are, and what your age is - you have all the help available to achieve your goals in life”.

There are famous people who are blind and that did not stop them from achieving their goals, such as Louis Braille (invented Braille), Helen Keller (writer), Stevie Wonder (singer), Ray Charles (singer), Jacob Bolotin (Medicine), and Abraham Nemeth, who developed a system that would teach blind students to read and write mathematics. There are politicians, writers, composers, artists and performers, adventurers, engineers, activists and hundreds more that are blind and never give up because of their disability.

I have a threefold purpose:
1. To challenge others as I achieve my goals despite my disability,

2. To inspire others to reach higher, and

3. To ignite trust. I am man of strong Faith, and this is the strength that makes me believe in myself and build others’ up so they can rise and overcome their obstacles.

Thus, my purpose can be summarised in three points: CHALLENGE, INSPIRE, and TRUST.

1. Challenge.
In this point, I have two goals:

Challenge all the people who discriminate against a person living with disability by saying “you cannot do it, just stay home”. This statement makes me more determined to achieve my goals and prove them wrong.

I get a bus from my home in Smithfield to Fairfield (about 25 minutes) and then a train from Fairfield to central train station (one hour) and walk from the Central train station to the UTS UNI (twenty-five minutes). Is this not a challenge?

I am totally blind and sixty-four years old. I sit in class with a young student, and they have sight and fresh information because they are a new graduate. Some of them they speak English better than me. Is this not a challenge?

My knowledge in mathematics was limited, as my last class was in 1999 and in the Arabic language. My knowledge in computers was little to nothing. I learned how to use a computer when I arrived in Australia in 2006. I have responsibilities. I am caring for my parents and two sisters since traveling from Iraq to Australia.

I finished the first Master of Science (Mathematical and Statistical Modelling) at University of Technology Sydney during four semesters, and I finished the second Master of Science (Master of Philosophy in Science). And I hope I will continue to achieve my goal to complete my PhD in mathematics. Is this not a challenge?

And the second goal is to show to students and all the people around me what the meaning of challenge is, and what a challenge should be. This was my way of teaching mathematics in the past and my philosophy now. This was my way with all the students in my life in Iraq and Australia.

2. Inspire others to reach higher.

If I am doing this all of this, then this gives me the motivation and the ability to continue to study my Master and PhD. My hope is that this will inspire lecturers, students and Australians in every walk of life to try harder and do better.

I want to inspire the lecturers and students while I am at university or in a lecture or tutoring class. Inspire them to do better than me and to tell them that a person who is blind is just as human as themselves and that I can do anything as well the students around me.

I have the confidence and the ability to work in my community as I love this country of opportunity.

3. To ignite trust. This is the important point.

I am man of strong faith, and this is the strength that makes me believe in myself and build others up so they can rise and overcome their obstacles. I believe that if you are not confident in yourself, you will struggle to achieve anything. While teaching mathematics in Iraq, I built trust with students and showed them how to face life’s challenges, and to not be afraid and not fear any obstacles they may encounter.

This is my method with all students in my life in Iraq and Australia, and always I tell them you are bigger than everything. If I let the students love the subject and the school, they will do the perfect job.

Never give up. Believe in yourself. Be passionate. Work hard. Know it’s never too late.

## Feedback for BCA

Do you have any compliments, suggestions or concerns you wanted to let BCA know about? You can do this anonymously by going to our website [www.bca.org.au/feedback](http://www.bca.org.au/feedback) and completing a feedback form or you can call the BCA Office toll free on 1800 033 660. Your feedback will be used to improve our services to better meet the needs of our membership.

## How to Make a Complaint About BCA

Any member, client, volunteer, or their advocate, can lodge a complaint about the services provided by BCA. Complaints can be made in the following ways:

Phone: 1800 033 660
Email: bca@bca.org.au
Website: www.bca.org.au/feedback

Post: Blind Citizens Australia, Level 3, Ross House
247 – 251 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, Vic 3000

If there are complaints of a serious nature, the Chief Executive Officer will ask that the complaint be put in writing.

Complaints will be recorded in accordance with the requirements for complaints management outlined by The Office of Disability Services Commissioner. Member and client privacy will be respected and protected in relation to the recording, management and resolution of the complaint. For a full copy of BCA's complaints policy, please go to our website [www.bca.org.au/feedback](http://www.bca.org.au/feedback) or call BCA.

## Funding and Donations for BCA

BCA would like to acknowledge the generous work of the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation. The Foundation was formed in 1995 with BCA being the primary beneficiary. And the Shirley Fund, which now sits with the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation following the merger of BCNSW with BCA.

We would also like to acknowledge our funding partners: the Federal Department of Social Services (DSS), the National Disability Insurance Agency, the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) NSW; the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Victoria, DSS via the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), Vision Australia, Guide Dogs Australia, EverAbility, the Community Broadcasting Foundation, the Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation and our generous members and BCA Backers.

If you would like to make a donation to Blind Citizens Australia, you can call 1800 033 660, and use your credit card. You can also donate online using the “Donate Tab” on the BCA Website. All donations over $2 are tax deductible.

## Submit Your Writing to Blind Citizens News

The Editor welcomes your submissions for Blind Citizens News. Submissions for the next edition close on Monday 2nd September 2024. Contributions can be submitted in braille, print, audio CD or electronic format (in Word or text format). Send emails to bcnews@bca.org.au and write “Blind Citizens News Submission” in the subject line. For all other format contributions, please send the document to the BCA Office or phone 1800 033 660 for enquiries. Submissions should be between 500 and 1200 words in length. Submissions cannot be made anonymously, and the Editor must be made aware of any conflict of interest which may be relevant to the author's work.

## New Horizons Radio Broadcast Schedule

### South Australia

Adelaide, 5RPH 1197AM and on RPH Adelaide digital

Times: 4.30pm Wednesday; Repeated 8.15am Sunday

### Queensland

Brisbane, Reading Radio 1296AM

(Can also be heard on DAB Radio station and IHeartradio, Community Radio Plus, 4RP and TuneInRadio apps – details found at <https://readingradio.org.au/>

Times: 2.00pm Fridays. Repeated Friday 11.45pm and Saturday 4.45pm

### NSW and ACT

Sydney, 2RPH 1224AM, Sydney East 100.5FM

Newcastle/Lower Hunter 100.5FM

Times: 3.15pm Friday; Repeated Saturday 2.00pm

Canberra, 1RPH 1125AM, Wagga Wagga 89.5M, Junee 99.5FM

Times: Tuesday 9.15am: Repeated 8.00pm Tuesday, 9.30am Saturday.

### Northern Territory

Darwin VAR digital service (DAB+) and the Darwin web streaming service. Times: 4.30pm Wednesday; Repeated 8.15am Sunday.

### Tasmania

Hobart Print Radio Tasmania 864AM, Launceston 106.9FM, Devonport 96.1FM

Week 1 Times: 3.45pm Wednesday, repeated 8.45am Friday

Week 2 Times: 3.45pm Wednesday, repeated 8.45am Friday

### Victoria

Melbourne, 3RPH 1179AM and Vision Australia Radio regional stations; RPH Albury 101.7FM, RPH Bendigo 88.7FM, RPH Geelong 99.5FM, RPH Mildura 107.5FM, RPH Shepparton 100.1FM, RPH Warragul 93.5FM, RPH Warrnambool 882AM

Times: 4.30pm Wednesday; Repeated 6.30pm Sunday.

### Western Australia

Perth, 6RPH 990AM

Times: 4.30pm Wednesday: Repeated 6.30pm Sunday.