***CANBERRA BLIND SOCIETY (CBS)***

*4th Quarterly Newsletter – December 2023 - Edition* 444

Contact details - Telephone: 6247 4580

Email: canblind@[canberrablindsociety.org.au](http://www.canberrablindsociety.org.au)

Website: www.canberrablindsociety.org.au



**Contents**

[Core Programs 2](#_Toc151467290)

[Upcoming Events for your diary 2](#_Toc151467291)

[Southern Cross Club Community Rewards Program 2](#_Toc151467292)

[Message from the President 2](#_Toc151467293)

[Multi-Sport and Recreation Day – Thursday 30th November 4](#_Toc151467294)

[Storytelling at National Museum – Sunday 3rd December 5](#_Toc151467295)

[Audio Book Group – Wednesday 6th December 5](#_Toc151467296)

[Christmas Picnic - Saturday 9th December 6](#_Toc151467297)

[Office Shutdown - Christmas and New Year 11](#_Toc151467298)

[Women’s Safety Program: Enrolments for February 2024 open now 6](#_Toc151467299)

[Sense-Able Cooking Recipes from November 7](#_Toc151467300)

[The Way I See It – Graham Downie 8](#_Toc151467301)

[Flexible Accessible Buses - Graham Downie 10](#_Toc151467302)

[Thanks to our Sponsors 11](#_Toc151467303)

# Core Programs

Special lunches Christmas

Friends of Braille Thursday of each week during school terms

Audio Book Group 1st Wednesday of each month

Art & Craft Group 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month

Sense-Able Cooking 3rd Friday of each month

# Upcoming Dates for your diary

* Monday 4th December - Zoo and Aquarium
* Saturday 9th December - CBS Christmas Picnic
* CBS Office Christmas Shutdown from close of business, Wednesday 20th December -  reopening Tuesday 2nd January 2024

# Southern Cross Club Community Rewards Program

Members of the Southern Cross Club can help us raise funds by taking part in the Southern Cross Club’s Community Rewards program.  The Community Rewards Program allows Canberra Southern Cross Club members to give back to the group most important to them.

By nominating Eyes for Life Canberra / Canberra Blind Society - 7.5% of your spend on food and beverages at the Southern Cross Club is donated to your chosen group

Message from the President

Hi All, I will be away until mid-January 2024 whilst helping family members. In my absence, newly appoint Vice President Damien Wright will be filling the position as Acting President.

There are two vacancies on the Board and so I would encourage anyone who wishes to be involved with the strategic planning of the Canberra Blind Society to nominate for one of those positions on the Board. Unfortunately, current Board member and previous staff member Brittany Bevan has announced her resignation from the Board so she can spend more time with her young family. She has brought about significant changes to CBS / ELFC during her tenure, especially in the areas of policy development in Eyes for Life Canberra, and the way the multifaceted team of Outreach, Occupational therapy and Social Work / Counselling all interlace with each service. Brittany was the main contributor to the highly successful Women’s Safety Program that provides education and training workshops for vulnerable women with a sensory or physical disability or otherwise considered ‘at risk’, that aim to increase self-reliance, empowerment, and personal safety. I would like to thank Brittany for her time on the Board and I know she has left the Board in a significantly improved position from when she commenced nearly two years ago. On a personal note, I thank Brittany for her integrity, honesty, and friendship during the past year.

I would like to welcome Bianca David to our team. Bianca is our new Social Media Coordinator. Bianca comes with a significant wealth of social media experience from her work at the War Memorial. I am looking forward to working with Bianca over the coming year.

With Bianca commencing it allows Alex Parnell to move to a new position of Creative Marketing Officer where her main duties will be increasing the awareness in the community of both Eyes for Life Canberra and Canberra Blind Society.

We also have a new Occupational Therapist who works for Eyes for Life Canberra. Shilo Preston – Stanley will be away from early December, so please make direct contact with Shilo should you need her help. Shilo can be contacted via email at ot@eflc.org.au

On Monday 4th of October, we conducted a workshop for Optometrists both from within Canberra and online from around Australia. Our guest speaker was Dr Boon from the University of Canberra who presented “Exploring Early Intervention in Eye Care” sharpening Optometry skills and expanding insights. The Eyes for Life Canberra (EFLC) team of Outreach Officer Debra Quinnell, Occupational Therapist Shilo Preston – Stanley and Community Engagement Officer Prue Mayhew all spoke about the multifaceted team that provides multiple services to clients who have been newly diagnosed as vision impaired. The event was very well supported with 42 people attending via online to listen to both Dr Boon and the EFLC team. I would like to congratulate Alex Parnell for her planning and coordination of the workshop and then being the MC for the event. The EFLC socials received many enquiries following the workshop. We have more planned in the new year, to again increase awareness of our services. I think this brought us some much-needed exposure.

Our next excursions will be on Monday 4th December where we will visit the National Zoo and Aquarium. Finally, our annual Christmas lunch will take place at Lennox Gardens on Saturday 9th December. In the new year we have a planned activity to the Multicultural Festival in the City These events provide an opportunity to meet new friends. There will be something for everyone.

Please contact Hayley at admin@canberrablindsociety.org.au for details and how to get your name on the list.

Finally, I hope everyone has a fantastic Christmas and New Year celebrations and we kick off 2024 with a bang!

Heather Fitzpatrick

President CBS

Heather Fitzpatrick

President CBS

# Multi-Sport and Recreation Day – Thursday 30th November

Celebrate International Day of People with Disability with us! FREE and inclusive event for all abilities and ages.

When: Thursday 30th November 2023

Time: 10.00am - 2.00pm

Where: 6 Spoering Street PHILLIP ACT – Cricket ACT/AFL HQ fields

Come together as a community to embrace Diversity and enjoy a day of inclusion and fun. Try out sports, participate in exciting activities, and enjoy a delicious FREE sausage sizzle.

There’s something for everyone, including AFL, Cricket, Touch Football, Netball and Hockey and much more!

For more information about this event, email: jasonschmidt@feroscare.com.au

# Storytelling at National Museum – Sunday 3rd December

Centre Stage: Celebrating storytelling, creativity and advocacy.

Sunday 3 December 2023, 10.30am – 3.00pm

Join us at the National Museum of Australia to celebrate diverse and inclusive storytelling this International Day of People with Disability. Entry is free.

Experience a range of short films and hear from some of the creative talent behind Bus Stop Films or immerse yourself in the Great Southern Land exhibition during our free, curator-led access tours.

Families can join us for a unique range of activities including creative mask-making and an enchanted trail of discovery. Visit the Tim and Gina Fairfax Discovery Centre Play Space\* for a free play session or for Auslan Storytime.

This event will be live captioned and Auslan-interpreted. The National Museum of Australia is wheelchair accessible. Please visit our website for further information  <https://www.nma.gov.au/whats-on/international-day-disability>

\*Places in the Tim and Gina Fairfax Discovery Centre are limited, bookings essential.

# Audio Book Group and Christmas Lunch – Wednesday 6th December

This is our final gathering for 2023. We will meet again on Wednesday 6th December to discuss “Stone Sky Gold Mountain” by Ramandi Riwoe in the CBS meeting room at 10:00 am. Members and friends are invited to stay on for lunch with takeaway dumplings and an end of year celebration drink.

Here is a synopsis of our novel: Family circumstances force siblings Ying and Lai Yue to flee their home in China to seek their fortunes in Australia. Life on the gold fields is hard, and they soon abandon the diggings and head to nearby Maytown. Once there, Lai Yue finds a job as a carrier on an overland expedition, while Ying finds work in a local store and strikes up a friendship with Meriem, a young white woman with her own troubled past. When a serious crime is committed, suspicion falls on all those who are considered outsiders.

New members are most welcome.

# ****Christmas Picnic - Saturday 9th December****

CBS invites all clients, members and family to a picnic to celebrate Christmas 2023 on Saturday 9th December. Come along and join us at **Lennox Gardens**, a park in Canberra, lying on the south side of [Lake Burley Griffin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Burley_Griffin), close to Commonwealth Avenue Bridge and Albert Hall in the suburb of [Yarralumla](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yarralumla%2C_Australian_Capital_Territory).
Sandwiches, finger food, Christmas pastries and drinks will be provided, please bring your own beer or wine if you wish to drink alcohol.
Time: 12.30pm – 2.30 pm
The December sun may be a warm one, don’t forget your hat and sunscreen.
Please call Deb or Hayley on 6247 4580 or email events@canberrablindsociety.org.au if you are interested to attend.
While we will try to arrange transport to this event, we cannot guarantee it. Please contact Hayley at Volunteers@canberrablindsociety.org.au

# Women’s Safety Program: Enrolments for February 2024 open now

The *Women’s Safety Program* is a free 12-week program that provides 3 self-defence lessons plus weekly workshops for vulnerable women living in the ACT and surrounds. The weekly workshops explore topics such as respectful relationships, communicating with confidence, financial wellbeing, and online safety.

Enrolment is open to women over the age of 18 that have a sensory or physical disability, or are considered in vulnerable or ‘at-risk’ circumstances’. This could include life challenges such as lived experience of abuse or trauma; being under financial hardship; or living with a chronic or invisible illness.

Group 5 of the Women’s Safety Program is due to commence Tuesday 6 February 2024.

Enrolments close **Sunday 14th January 2024**.

To enrol or find out more, visit the Eyes for Life Canberra website at [www.eflc.org.au](http://www.eflc.org.au) or contact Akita Hodgson by email at sarc@eflc.org.au

# ****Sense-Able Cooking Recipes from November Class****

**Baklava rolls**

**Ingredients**

100g of chopped walnuts,

Almond and pistachio

1 Tsonga cinnamon

250g butter melted

1 packet filo pastry

1 cup sugar

1/2 cup honey

1 lemon juiced and peel

1 cup water

**Method**

Heat in saucepan medium heat sugar, honey, lemon juice and peel for 5 mins. Allow to cool.

Oven 180 degrees celcius.

Deep bake my dish.

Paint melted butter onto one sheet of filo.

Place a second sheet of filo on top  and butter.

Sprinkle tablespoon of coarsely chopped nut and cinnamon mix onto buttered filo.

Roll filo into a log and place in deep baking dish.

Repeat until all nuts and filo are used.

Brush tops of logs with butter and cut into bite size pieces.

Bake in moderate oven for 30 to 40 mins till brown.

Pour honey and sugar syrup onto hot baklava.

Allow to cool before serving.

# **The Way I See It – Graham Downie**

As one door closes, two others open with the introduction of VoiceVista and a new Soundscape.

In a previous edition of this newsletter, I noted the imminent demise of Microsoft’s Soundscape. Launched about six years ago, Soundscape became an important travel adjunct for many people who are blind or vision impaired, particularly in unfamiliar areas.

It is an iPhone app which uses augmented-reality and three-dimensional audio to give information about one’s surroundings. It is not a traditional turn-by-turn navigation app, but a useful tool to help orientation of pedestrians or passengers in a motor vehicle.

Microsoft announced late last year the app would no longer be available for download and would cease operation by the end of June. This was later extended to the end of August.

Microsoft release the code for Soundscape under an open source license for other developers to use. Hence the development of VoiceVista by Dr Jianfeng Wu, who by July had a fully functioning app, very similar to Soundscape.

More recently, Soundscape was resuscitated by the Scottish Tech Army, giving folk a choice between two similar apps. The Scottish Tech Army says it will work with people in the visual impairment community, including the charities Guide Dogs and Seescape, and other visual impairment charities in the UK To further enhance Soundscape with bettered functionality and improvements.

Having used both, my slight preference is for Soundscape, though at present the difference is quite subtle.

These apps are most effective when used with stereo headphones because announcements indicate the direction of each business, shop or utility in the relevant ear. If the announcement is balanced in both ears, the place is ahead. Especially when walking, it is best to use bone conduction headphones as they do not obstruct your hearing of ambient sounds.

I tested VoiceVista on a very familiar walk from my house to shops, about 600m away. Mostly, though not always, I was informed of approaching streets. I was also informed of nearby points of interest. Occasionally, having crossed a street, VoiceVista announced I was on that street. This could be confusing in an unfamiliar area, but could easily be checked by tapping the ‘What’s My Location’ button.

Recently, I had to travel on an unfamiliar Canberra bus route. It is one of those far too many routes which demonstrates the adage that the longest distance between two points is a Canberra bus route.

Typically, just when you need it, the onboard announcements of each stop were effectively inaudible. So, after 30 minutes and about 10 minutes from my destination, I opened VoiceVista and learned interesting details, such as the location of several embassies, nature parks, the streets on which we were meandering, and particularly important, each bus stop we passed.

Before this adventure, I had taken the precaution of checking the identifying number of the stop I needed. You can do this online at: nxtbus.act.gov.au. Thanks to VoiceVista, I knew I was one stop before the one I needed. So I approached the driver, a friendly chap who told me when I got on he missed my writing for The Canberra Times, the bus stop number I needed. All ended well. Nevertheless, and this point has been made to senior Transport Canberra and City Services staff numerous times, drivers should have onboard announcements at the prescribed level. Me, being somewhat of a coward, am reluctant to risk a scene by demanding it while on a bus. I should, and would have had I not had the use of VoiceVista.

A very useful feature of both apps is the audio beacon. It can be set by searching for a particular place or while at a location to which you want to return. Through stereo headphones, the direction of and distance from the location is indicated. Again, this does not give turn-by-turn directions, but can be very useful, especially in open areas.

When using any navigation app, it is important people who are blind or vision impaired maintain normal mobility techniques. These apps do not indicate potential hazards, but they can make navigation much easier.

Flexible Accessible Buses - Graham Downie

Promised improvements to Canberra’s accessible flexible bus service seem to have stalled, with no indication when a report due last July will be published.
The existing service is available to anyone aged more than 70 and people with a disability concession card. But it operates only between 10am and 3pm on weekdays, and limits travel within five zones and must be booked two days in advance by telephone or email.
As the CBS representative on the Transport and City Services Access Reference Group, I attended an online workshop on April 27 last year, address by consultants preparing a report on the service.
The workshop was told a report on the current service analysis was being finalised. A second report would be on stakeholder engagement and the final report on best practice.
We were also told a questionnaire would be prepared for organisations to distribute to their members to inform the final report due in July, 2022. There has been no questionnaire and no report to the organisations represented at the April briefing, though there was an online survey which closed on June 1 last year. The findings of that survey have not been made public.
At a meeting on July 14 this year, Executive Group Manager Transport Judith Sturman said improving the flexible bus service was taking longer than had been anticipated. The aim was for people to be able to call a flexible bus from a smart phone or website. Drivers would have a console to receive travel requests and to respond while carrying other passengers.
She said that ideally, the service would be expanded beyond week days and beyond the current five zones. The next step would be to have more buses which would require investment from government.
Reading between the lines, it seems no significant change can be expected until at least next year as there is obviously no money allocated in the current budget for new technology or buses.

The flexible bus service was introduced about seven years ago. Transport Canberra acknowledges that since then, service delivery has evolved considerably, as have the needs and expectations of the community. It also recognises not everyone can easily access the regular fixed route public transport network and that flexible or non-fixed route services, including last kilometre, flexible, on-demand services, are critical to the access and mobility needs of all.
Nevertheless, the lack of progress on any improvement to this service, particularly with the apparently semi-permanent two-hour fixed-route services on weekends, greatly restricts travel by people who have no access to motor vehicles.

# ****Office Shutdown - Christmas and New Year****

Eyes For Life Canberra – Canberra Blind Society send our best wishes to members, clients and families, have a wonderful holiday season and warm wishes for the New Year.
We appreciate your support over 2023 in attending our programs and activities and look forward to continuing to have more fun events and programs in 2024. We encourage you to provide us with ideas about how we might improve our services to you, please take into consideration that limited resources may mean we are unable to implement all suggestions.
The office will be closed for business from 5pm on Wednesday 20th December 2023, reopening on Tuesday 2nd January 2024. The Core programs will **NOT** commence until February 2024.
If you leave a phone, online or email message during the shutdown period, we will respond to your message from Tuesday 2nd January.

# Thanks to our Sponsors - Canberra Blind Society thanks all our sponsors for supporting us.

* Southern Cross Club Canberra
* Specsavers
* AU-IT
* Throttle Media
* Cre8ive
* Cliniko
* Jingl – voice in the cloud
* Aussie Broadband
* GO Hosting
* XERO
* Plastic Creations
* Officeworks Braddon
* ActewAGL
* Winning appliances