

2008/09 Annual Report

Vision Australia blindness and low vision services

Welcoming Seeing Eye Dogs Australia

Our Vision

Vision Australia is a living partnership between people who are blind, sighted or have low vision. We are united by our passion that in the future 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.

Making it accessible

We are committed to producing information in a form accessible to people who are blind or have low vision. This is why our Annual Report looks different. The spiral-bound format can be spread flat, assisting people using magnifiers. The text is 18 point, the font size recommended for large print documents.

Print always appears against a clear, contrasting background. This report is also available in standard print, braille and audio formats, and can be downloaded at **www.visionaustralia.org** to read using speech output software.

Cover images, clockwise from top: Rachael Berka in the garden with her Seeing Eye Dog Xavier (photo courtesy of Quest Newspapers); Karen Knight hugging her children Joel and Alannah; Noreen Johnstone holding a silk scarf she decorated at our Kooyong Day Centre and John Hessey outside practising using Filipino fighting sticks.

Contents

Message from the Chair and CEO

Our key supporters

About us

Refining and delivering quality services

Enhancing the quality, quantity and reach of our services

Making information fully accessible and usable

Advocating to break down barriers

Building our capacity as a strong national organisation

Establishing and growing Vision Australia in the community

Working together

Our Executive

Corporate governance

Our Board

Financial summary

Text accompanying image: Erica Chiandotto is one of more than 14,000 Vision Australia clients who uses a digital playback device to read audio books.

Message from the Chair and CEO

Almost every hour of every day an Australian is diagnosed with an eye condition that cannot be corrected by glasses. This means every year more than 8,000 people face the prospect of living with blindness or low vision.

As frightening as the future may seem to someone who has been told they are losing their sight, with the support of Vision Australia as well as family and friends, people positively adjust and can continue to participate in every part of life they choose.

As Vision Australia has demonstrated in recent months, organisations can also successfully adapt when faced with changing circumstances.

Like countless other organisations the world over, during 2008/09 Vision Australia faced tremendous challenges.

The global financial downturn has had a particularly adverse effect on the not-for-profit sector. In fact, the Managing A Downturn report – a collaboration between PricewaterhouseCoopers, the Fundraising Institute Australia and the Centre for Social Impact – found that 62% of Australian not-for-profits surveyed saw a decline in income from the six months to May against the corresponding period in 2008.

Drawing inspiration from those we serve, Vision Australia realised the need to make changes to ensure we could remain financially sound and maintain all services. Fortunately, our early response to the downturn minimised some of the impact.

By February we had significantly reduced the size and cost of our Executive and had started an organisation-wide cost-cutting process. Travel costs, for example, were reduced by 60% through the fantastic cooperation of our staff.

Yet facing the prospect of a significant fall in investment income over the 2010 financial year and beyond, we had to act in order to maintain the strong reserves that the organisation had built up over a century of work. Inertia would have potentially seen this reserve eaten up in as little as three years.

As we rely on the income from our investments and community generosity to deliver free services to our clients, it was very important to take pre-emptive action.

Through a significant restructure in May 2009, which unfortunately meant we had to say goodbye to many staff members, the organisation managed to maintain all of our services.

While we have had to slow down our growth plans, as part of the restructure we did manage to create positions in Queensland, where there is a rapidly growing demand for our services.

By acting early, we emerged from a volatile year with our services intact and a fresh structure that will enable us to take on the challenges of the next decade. This is quite an achievement, considering almost a third of not-for-profits surveyed in the Managing A Downturn report intended to reduce their services.

The organisation has fulfilled its obligation to provide clients with a sense of security about our ability to offer services. It is important that our staff share this sense of security. Uncertainty followed in the wake of the May restructure, but our employees can now be confident that they are working for an organisation that is well positioned to ride out any future volatility.

Government too should consider a restructured Vision Australia to be an efficient and well-managed organisation and acknowledge our role in enriching the community.

Fortunately, certainty can be provided even in the light of the loss we need to report this year. The decreases in the value of our property portfolio and listed investments were both significant enough to each be recognised as an impairment. This business valuation tool is applied when the carrying amount, or amount after depreciation, of a long-term asset is greater than its recoverable amount, which is the fair market value less the costs to sell.

Reporting an impairment has become increasingly common in light of the global economic downturn. Vision Australia's net impairment adjustment to the listed investments and property for 2008/09 was just over \$13 million.

Impairment is a snapshot in time. In fact, given improvements in the market our position is considerably better than reported as at June 30. It is important for stakeholders to understand our position and appreciate that we have managed well. We strongly urge you to please read our Financial Report for further details.

Support from the community has been fantastic and fundraising remained steady over the past year, even increasing in some instances. We believe the community, particularly the business sector, rewarded the organisation's early, positive action.

Indeed, our early action has been commended by respected analysts such as Professor Peter Shergold AC, who heads the Centre for Social Impact, as well as financial commentator Ross Greenwood.

Vision Australia is a living partnership between clients, staff and supporters, and these partners can take credit for our survival. Some 30% of our clients donate to the organisation so their fellow Australians who are blind or have low vision may enjoy the same support. Encouragingly, during this difficult year client engagement measures hit an all-time high.

Despite the sacrifices made and the financial restraint, the level of energy and service displayed by our staff has remained high. We truly appreciate their forbearance and passionate desire to see the organisation succeed.

The work carried out in this year of transformation establishes us for an exciting future.

We have taken the opportunity to reflect deeply on how to improve services and find practical ways to respond to the demand for our services. Our transformation will continue as we refresh our strategic planning.

However, an annual report is a time of review and we have much to be proud of this year. Maryanne Diamond, our General Manager Stakeholder and International Relations, was elected President of the World Blind Union and now represents 161 million people. Our international standing was further strengthened by the appointment of one of our Board members, Professor Ron McCallum AO, as Rapporteur to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Over the past year we have worked with the Client Representative Council to improve how we communicate with those receiving our services – and our efforts are bearing fruit.

For instance, we have received a positive response to our i-access® project. Last year, clients downloaded 42,000 issues of the 124 newspapers we offer online as well as 2,500 books. Because of i-access®, a wealth of web and CD-based information in our library can be read using a variety of digital playback devices.

It's all part of our strategy to offer clients the maximum choice of equipment, maximum flexibility in its use and maximum access to content.

Thanks to supporters, Vision Australia has sent out 14,000 playback devices. It's but a drop in the ocean to the four million Australians who have a print disability and need our help. Yet with continued support we can bridge the information divide that has been a barrier to our community for too long.

However, the blindness and low vision community is resilient and abounds in knowledge and experience. A highlight of 2008/09 was the success of our peer

support programs, which so effectively draw on our community's strengths, enabling clients to help each other to build confidence and independence.

While we have focused much attention on our financial stability, Vision Australia also recognises the need to be environmentally sustainable. We are steadily developing a "green" strategy and over the past year successfully reduced our carbon footprint. Indeed, our new Brisbane centre in Coorparoo, funded by the Queensland Government to the tune of almost \$11 million, will incorporate environmentally friendly elements like wall plantings, natural lighting, water tanks and solar panels.

Our July 2008 union with Seeing Eye Dogs Australia has enabled us to improve our orientation and mobility capabilities. A new centre adjacent to our Seeing Eye Dogs, Orientation and Mobility division in Melbourne's Kensington will increase our capacity to teach more Australians who are blind or have low vision to move about safely and confidently.

As with our new centres opened in 2008/09 – at Dandenong in Victoria, Caringbah in Sydney and Orange and Tamworth in rural New South Wales – our highly accessible Coorparoo and Kensington buildings are designed to meet the needs of people who are vision impaired living in growth areas.

We are as committed to providing staff with a dynamic, nurturing work environment. During 2008/09, our Learning and Development Program provided training in leadership, project management, customer service, team building, supervision, mediation and appreciative inquiry – a collaborative problem-solving process we are using to take Vision Australia into the future.

Make no mistake, the past year has been extremely challenging. However, yet again our team's ability to devise practical solutions, prioritise and, most of all, care has shone through.

We thank each and every member of our family – staff, client, supporter and volunteer – for their ongoing support and efforts during this critical year.

With your continued passion and commitment, we are building a more flexible, responsive, innovative and sustainable organisation that is better equipped to respond to the nation's ever-growing demand for our services.

Kevin Murfitt, Chair and Gerard Menses, Chief Executive Officer

Text accompanying image: Seeing Eye Dog Kane has been alongside Vision Australia Chair Dr Kevin Murfitt since December 2008.

Text accompanying image: The French Consul General, Lionel Majesté-Larrouy, with Dr Kevin Murfitt and Gerard Menses at our 2008 AGM. Mr Majesté-Larrouy, launched a Vision Australia/Australia Post envelope marking 200 years since Louis Braille's birth.

Our key supporters

Throughout this difficult financial year, Vision Australia was immensely grateful for the ongoing and committed support we received from individuals, trusts and foundations, auxiliaries, fundraising groups, corporations and government.

Our partnerships with governments nationwide have strengthened over the past year, with some major projects realised through significant funding.

The Victorian State Government – our largest single supporter – allocated \$17.6 million in funding in 2008/09.

We also received generous support from the Queensland Government, which committed almost \$11 million to our new Coorparoo centre in Brisbane.

In addition, the organisation received a much-needed \$1 million grant from the New South Wales Government for Children's Services projects.

Vision Australia is extremely grateful to everyone who has helped to fund and champion our i-access® digital information project, particularly Pauline Gandel, generous donor and National Campaign Benefactor.

Myer CEO Bernie Brookes has also been particularly active, hosting a series of i-access® fundraising dinners. Myer continues to work closely with us by presenting our flagship event, Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight®.

Vision Australia also appreciates the fantastic support offered by our media sponsors, including the Nine Network, Prime Television and The Australian.

We also enjoy a collaborative relationship with software giant Microsoft. Their \$6.5 million in-kind software grant is helping us upgrade computing systems and enabling clients to access information from our growing digital library.

In addition, Royal Canin remains a valued supporter, having taken care of the dietary requirements of growing Seeing Eye Dogs and pups for almost five years now.

A full list of our valued supporters appears in our Financial Report. Vision Australia appreciates each and every one of them.

Text accompanying image: Gerard Menses, Vision Australia's CEO, and Kevin Turner, Chief Operating Officer, Microsoft Corporation, celebrate the official announcement of the corporation's generous in-kind donation.

Text accompanying image: Valeria Valeri (pictured wrapping a gift) was one of 960 volunteers who donated their time and decorating skills to ensure Myer Gift Wrap was such a success in 2008. In the lead-up to Christmas, Valeria wrapped gifts at the Myer Doncaster store in Melbourne to help raise a much-needed \$78,583 for our services.

For a not-for-profit service provider such as Vision Australia, the talents, knowledge and enthusiasm that volunteers like Valeria so selflessly inject into our organisation are of enormous value.

We sincerely thank all of our **4,500** registered volunteers for the dedication and generosity of spirit displayed during the past year.

About us

Vision Australia is a living partnership between people who are blind, sighted or have low vision. Together we are working towards a future when people who are blind or have low vision will have access to and fully participate in every part of life they choose.

We are committed to delivering services that facilitate people's independence and their active citizenship.

In 2004 this passion brought four leading agencies together. Seeing our potential, we have since been joined by three more agencies. We are now the only national provider of blindness and low vision services. The efficiency we have created has allowed us to provide greater diversity and choice of service, ensuring we are better able to meet our community's needs.

Vision Australia's programs cater for the diverse needs of people of all ages who are blind or have low vision. In addition, we support the four million Australians with a print disability. Our dedicated staff support people to learn, find work, use assistive equipment, enjoy pastimes, live independently and access information and places.

We offer our broad range of services from 31 centres in New South Wales, the ACT, Queensland and Victoria, with sessional support provided by our Darwin facility. Our staff also conduct regular clinics from 40 other locations. We also provide Seeing Eye Dogs and a library service that sends information in braille and audio formats nationwide.

Vision Australia has an unusual mix of income. With only a third of our income derived from government, we rely on income from investments and community support. We are grateful for the contributions of individual donors, businesses and our valued partners.

Demonstrating this living partnership, Vision Australia invests heavily in our client consultative framework. Made up of more than 40 Local Client Groups, it enables service users to guide our future direction by linking client input to our Board and senior management.

This framework, as well as our close relationship with Blind Citizens Australia and the fact we are a national organisation, gives us great potential to work with government for social change. Two areas for change we are concentrating on are information and employment. Yet the key to our Vision is to ensure an inclusive society.

Only 3-5% of published information is accessible to people with a print disability, which is why we continue to work for changes to copyright. Through

our i-access® program, we are using digital technology to disseminate books, newspapers and magazines to Australians who have a print disability.

We also educate government, business and the wider community about the need to address accessibility issues at the beginning of the information production process. Indeed, we work with Microsoft, Apple, Plextor, Humanware and other technology manufacturers to increase access.

Given Australians who are blind or have low vision are five times more likely to be unemployed than their sighted peers, we must challenge employers' attitudes and enable participation in further education.

We are leading the way for all employers to follow. Our progressive Affirmative Action policy has resulted in employing 18.7% of staff with blindness or low vision, which is a major achievement, both in a national and global context.

We seek to measure our impact on the above issues. One way is by measuring social return on investment. A preliminary study into our ability to impact on our community's high unemployment rate showed for every dollar invested the community benefited by almost \$16. These social return on investment measures are supplemented by client surveys, online reports and ongoing communication with our consultative framework.

To achieve our vision, the organisation has set the following Strategic Goals.

Refine and deliver quality services: to deliver programs that enable full participation in life

Enhance the quality, quantity and reach of our services: to ensure consistent, equitable access

Make information accessible and usable: to overcome barriers to learning and employment

Advocate to break down barriers: to change community attitudes and enable full participation in life

Build our capacity as a strong national organisation: by efficiently managing our resources

Establish and grow Vision Australia in the community: to build awareness and fund our work

How we organise ourselves to meet our goals

The CEO reports to Our Board. Each of the following six divisions report to our CEO.

Independent Living Services: Delivery of Children's, Employment, Low Vision, Equipment Solutions, Lifestyle and Peer Support Services, (also Service Development, Operations and Partnerships).

Seeing Eye Dogs, Orientation and Mobility (O&M): Operations and Client Services, Training and Production, O&M, Community Liaison, O&M Training and Courses.

Community Information Access: Information Library Service, Technical Development, Vision Australia Radio, i-access® Program, Audio Description, Alternative Format Production.

International and Stakeholder Relations: Policy and Advocacy, Government Relations.

Corporate Services: Compliance and Treasury, Human Resources, Organisational Development, Property and Facilities, Business Development, Volunteers, Accessibility Services, Information Systems Group.

Marketing and Fundraising: Fundraising, Marketing, National Contact Centre, Community Engagement.

Refining and delivering quality services

Vision Australia is proud to have maintained our high level of support throughout a difficult year.

This support encompasses all ages and needs – from the families of children who are born blind right through to people who have lost their sight late in life but require our help to remain active, engaged and independent.

In 2008/09, 18,530 clients (6,552, or over a third, being new) received an average of 22.5 hours of Independent Living and Orientation and Mobility (O&M) services while our Information Library Services loaned 718,431 items.

Given Vision Australia is the product of several diverse agencies, we are constantly working on strategies to ensure our clients receive consistent services regardless of their location. For example, over the past year our organisation standardised the manner in which we teach braille.

The past year also saw the launch of our competency training program, developed to equip Independent Living Services (ILS) staff with the knowledge to provide effective service and consistent processes across all teams, sites and roles.

Vision Australia has provided training in the use of our Integrated Client and Volunteer Management System. The program enables ILS staff to review and build on their knowledge to ensure more efficient data collection and improved service delivery.

In 2008/09 we sold 64,211 items (excluding internal sales) through Equipment Solutions shops – both in centres and online. This represents a 14.3% increase from 2007/08 sales.

While assistive technology is breaking down barriers for our clients, attaining employment remains out of reach for many. Our Employment Services team is rising to this challenge, assisting 400 people who are blind or have low vision at any time to find and maintain work.

During 2008/09, 289 new clients registered with the service and about 40% entered the program to maintain their current jobs. We assisted 63 new job-seekers to find work.

Over the same period we supported 193 people to access funding through the Australian Government's Workplace Modification Scheme, with an average client receiving \$4,600 to buy equipment. Vision Australia is the largest national user of this scheme, securing \$882,000 in funding to deliver these outcomes.

In March, Vision Australia's Employment Services was audited against all 12 Disability Services Standards and was found to be fully compliant.

Text accompanying image: Two-year-old Emily Bowditch captured hearts and new donors when she appeared in our Winter 2009 Tax Appeal, which raised over **\$1.3 million** for our services. Vision Australia Children's Services staff are now helping to prepare Emily for preschool.

Other ways we refined and delivered quality services included:

- Introducing a Remote Incidence Manager, which enables Adaptive Technology Consultants to remotely access a client's personal computer to troubleshoot or install magnification or screen-reading technology.
- Producing an Online Knowledge Base to help National Contact Centre staff respond to queries.
- Launching our Assistive Technology Service Model Project with a view to evaluating and offering a greater range of products to our community at lower costs. As part of this project, we partnered with the CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind) to improve equipment provision to our community.
- Running Come 'N' Try days and promoting groups for people who are blind or have low vision through our Client Update, sent to 25,000 stakeholders a quarter.
- Training five young job-seekers in Queensland through our 26-week Stepping Forward Program. This program gives participants the opportunity to study Business Certificates II and III modules; receive technology and job-search training and participate in 16 weeks of paid work experience.
- Supporting students' technology needs, including hosting free workshops with Sonokids, which develops accessible web tools for children who are vision impaired.
- Updating server licenses, thanks to Microsoft's \$6.5 million in-kind software grant. We also started to roll out the Microsoft System Centre Configuration Manager, which improves the management of our software and hardware.

- Resolving 15,000 technical support calls. Our Information Systems Group (ISG) team also supported 30 infrastructural and 29 software applications.
- Working with Social Ventures Australia to determine that for every \$1 invested in Vision Australia’s Employment Services, it returned \$15.64 in social, economic and environmental value to its stakeholders.
- Working with the New South Wales Government to increase budgets for services for people with sensory disabilities in areas like specialist therapy and telehealth.

Employment Services	07/08	08/09	Year-on-year growth
New Employment Services clients registered	273	289	5.8%
Access to Workplace Modifications	192	193	0.5%

Decades of dedication

At Vision Australia it’s often said that while the organisation’s whole is greater than the sum of its parts, it’s the individual parts that make us strong.

Maree Cobb is a fine example of this. Known for her caring nature, since 1980 she has supported hundreds of people to adjust to life with low vision.

As a Senior Low Vision Advisor at our Enfield centre in Sydney, Maree teaches clients to manage daily activities such as cooking and reading using a variety of techniques and equipment.

When she joined us, close to three decades ago, Maree visited clients in their homes as a Welfare and Training Officer. Today, Maree assesses, trains and emotionally supports clients from our Enfield low vision clinic.

Many of Maree’s clients have low vision due to age-related eye conditions such as macular degeneration and glaucoma. In fact, more than 70% of our clients are aged over 65 or more.

“I love being an agent of change in the clients’ lives and seeing them becoming positive again on realising they can continue in their chosen lifestyle.”

Text accompanying image of an elderly male client smiling as he knits at our Kooyong day centre: According to our Client Satisfaction Survey for the last quarter of 2008/09, clients aged over 65 are the most pleased with our programs, with 94.6% indicating satisfaction. In addition, 93.6% of Low Vision service users were satisfied.

Enhancing the quality, quantity and reach of our services

Vision Australia was formed with the aim of delivering a wider range of support programs to more Australians who are blind or have low vision. By sharing resources and devising more efficient means of delivery, we have improved existing programs and implemented new services that encourage independence in our community.

Last year our new Seeing Eye Dogs, Orientation and Mobility (O&M) division matched 30 Seeing Eye Dogs with clients across Australia, bringing the total using these working animals to 163 (making us the nation's second-highest provider).

Last year 1,681 people received our O&M services, including cane training, to move about safely. Among those training clients are six new instructors who attended our inaugural Graduate Certificate in O&M. Conducted in our Enfield centre in Sydney, this course aims to provide more O&M professionals. Five more instructors will graduate from the course in 2009.

Vision Australia continually strives to ensure we reach areas of greatest need. In the past year we opened new centres in Orange and Tamworth in regional New South Wales, Dandenong in Victoria and Caringbah in Sydney.

The Caringbah centre's opening in May coincided with the official launch of our Equipment Solutions Online Shop, www.visionaustralia.org/shop. It enables clients to buy specialised reading devices, kitchen aids, braille products, canes, phones and computer software from anywhere in Australia.

Vision Australia continues to service the needs of Northern Territorians who are vision impaired. To maximise our resources, this support is coordinated in Brisbane with consultations arranged sessionally in Darwin. Territorians can also access our National Contact Centre and library, which sends out information to 90 local members.

The past year also witnessed the national expansion of our face-to-face and telephone peer support programs that enable people who are blind or have low vision to help each other overcome isolation and build confidence.

Originating in Victoria, this network now connects clients face-to-face and by teleconference across the nation. Significantly, people who gain emotional support through these groups are more likely to access our other services.

Text accompanying image: Jason O'Toole and David Weickhardt belong to Vision Australia Ballarat's Quality Living Group. It is among our growing

network of peer support groups that enable people who are blind or have low vision to share experiences and encourage each other.

Other ways in which we enhanced the quality, quantity and reach of our services over the past year included:

- Supporting 22 Northern Territorian children through our Step-Up Program. Provided from our Darwin centre and via outreach to Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy, the joint project with the Northern Territory Educational Resource Centre for Vision Impaired provides assistive technology training. Forty adults who are blind or have low vision also receive our support in Darwin.
- Ending 2008/09 with 30 dogs completing advanced training, 73 dogs in puppy development and 163 clients with Seeing Eye Dogs.
- Providing 2,057 free canes. This is more than three times the number given to clients in 2007/08.
- Developing Texpo, a two-day showcase of technology and services for people who are blind or have low vision. Texpo attracted around 600 visitors to our Enfield centre in Sydney.
- Providing an Equipment Library service to Tasmanian children, supported by the state’s Department of Education. This service is delivered from Melbourne and supported by two staff members from our Prahran centre who visit Tasmania monthly.
- Receiving a \$1 million grant over four years from the New South Wales Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care to support services to children in that state.

Peer support groups	2007/08	2008/09	Year-on-year
Total groups	19	25	31.6%
Total clients participating	168	199	18.5%

Penny steps forward

In May Penny Stevenson landed her perfect job – that of a Vision Australia Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Instructor.

“I’ve dreamed about doing this since I was a kid, but always thought I couldn’t be an O&M Instructor as no blind person does that!”

Penny was born with retinopathy of prematurity, a condition that affects retinal development. She received her first cane at 16 when she suffered significant vision loss.

Penny has a “lot of strings to her bow” having studied arts, psychophysiology, outdoor education and teaching before deciding “O&M was achievable”.

In May she finished her Diploma of Rehabilitation Studies at Massey University before joining our Essendon team. Penny is the first O&M Instructor in Australia who uses a Seeing Eye Dog for everyday mobility.

“I’ve used a cane and have a Seeing Eye Dog, so I’m open to both. There’s a different choice for different people at different times.”

“I use my remaining vision well and listen to the sound of the cane on the ground. Most people I teach don’t realise I am vision impaired.”

Text accompanying image: Newcastle Permanent Community Lending Manager (Coffs Harbour) Darren Kidd with Vision Australia Coffs Harbour, Lismore and Tamworth Team Leader Lynn Dalmazzo. Over the past year the Newcastle Permanent building society donated \$42,163 towards Children’s Services, Equipment Solutions, Low Vision equipment and assistive technology at our Tamworth centre.

Text accompanying image: In May, James Moore (left) and store manager Barrie Ohlin from Winning Appliances in Taren Point and Electrolux account manager Melissa Croker celebrated the launch of our Caringbah centre. Together they donated \$5,000 worth of whitegoods to the centre. They are among the many businesses to have supported our services with in-kind gifts.

Making information fully accessible and usable

Information is the currency of the modern world, providing the power to study, work, make financial decisions and connect. For Australians with a print disability, one of the biggest barriers to social inclusion is the fact that less than 5% of published information is accessible. That places a wealth of news, coursework, timetables and literature out of reach.

Vision Australia believes information should be freely available to all. It's the reason we produce alternative formats, audio describe events, broadcast via our Vision Australia Radio network and send braille and audio information from our national Information Library Service.

Our library offers 35,000 titles, sourced from our original collection, commercial publishers, international agencies and created in-house. In recent years, digital technology has opened up a world of information to library members. Through our i-access[®] project, we have built a collection based around the Digital Accessible Information SYstem. Known as DAISY, this format enables people with a print disability to read with increased ease and flexibility.

Books, news and other information in DAISY can be accessed from CDs or downloaded from the internet. A DAISY CD can contain up to 50 hours of audio. This format is easier for clients to use as it can contain multiple books.

DAISY titles can be read on a computer with special software or a digital playback device, enabling the user to skip to a page and bookmark passages. To date we have sent out more than 14,000 of these, including some 500 devices that read information downloaded from our i-access[®] Online service.

We now offer a wide range of local, state and national newspapers through i-access[®] Online, with members downloading 41,931 issues over the year, in addition to 2,500 books and 1,000 magazines. Every month more titles are becoming available.

Last year overall library membership grew by 9%, with 24% of members joining in 2008/09. We have developed a process to accommodate ongoing growth. Known as Burn On Demand, it enables us to create CD copies of titles as needed. The recyclable DAISY CDs are posted out in mailers designed to significantly reduce costs. In the eight months to June 2009, 30,000 CDs were created using this process.

Technology is changing how we connect, work and learn. Thanks to our generous supporters, in 2009 Vision Australia presented 22 Further Education Bursaries, which enable clients engaged in tertiary study to buy assistive technology.

Text accompanying image: Elliott Agnew of Armidale in New South Wales is using a video magnifier purchased using a Vision Australia Further Education Bursary. A 2009 study found 86% of bursary recipients complete their tertiary courses as compared to 72% of the general population.

Over the year we have made information accessible and usable by:

- Converting 22,700,000 print pages into braille, large print and audio. We also loaned 718,431 books and produced 2,612 DAISY titles, an increase of 27% from 2007/08.
- Consulting with the i-access[®] Advisory Committee, a service-specific client consultative body.
- Upgrading i-access[®] Online to allow easier navigation. Last year we added 92 newspapers to this service. By June, 500 subscribers had used this service.
- Presenting on i-access[®] to Federal Parliamentarians at an event at Parliament House.
- Enhancing Vision Australia Radio by introducing new programs and moving towards a digital radio platform that supports podcasts.
- Developing the Hear This program on Vision Australia Radio and Read This email newsletter to keep library members up to date. We also cut member registration from three days to one hour.
- Working with Government and business to produce accessible materials, including a Consumer Affairs Victoria rental guide and ANZ product information.
- Participating in the Round Table conference on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities.
- Undergoing a full system quality audit by SAI Global. It determined our library and production standards continued to comply with international standards.
- Assisting in the development of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (V 2.0), the benchmark for online accessibility. Our website was one of only two worldwide to achieve the highest level of conformance, Level AAA, when the guidelines were launched in December.
- Working with Microsoft to develop accessible solutions. Our Manager Architecture, Innovation and Accessibility, Operations, Kenny Johar,

was awarded Microsoft's Most Valued Professional for his outstanding contribution.

- Increasing the number of languages in our library, adding 87 DAISY titles in Russian, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Vietnamese and Arabic.

Text accompanying image: Despite advances in technology, braille continues to play a vital role in informing people who are blind. Last year, Vision Australia's library had 21,860 braille titles in circulation, with the average borrower taking 37.5 loans. In addition, we produced 458,282 braille pages.

Last year we received \$39,000 from the Copyright Agency Limited to establish the Australian Braille Book of the Year Awards.

Tech expert to the rescue

Although only a fraction of clients may have met David Woodbridge in person, many know him as the "go-to" man when they need to solve a technological problem.

As Senior Adaptive Technology Consultant based at our Gosford centre, David takes calls from clients who need support with phones, computers and accessible software.

David's retinas were damaged at birth and his sight deteriorated throughout his childhood. By age eight, he had lost his vision and had begun to learn braille and touch typing.

At the time, David thought typing on a page he couldn't see was "useless". But when personal computers appeared, this skill enabled David to explore the new technology and attain a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Sydney.

David joined Vision Australia's staff in 1990 and has since built up a comprehensive knowledge of accessible technology.

David regularly assesses product suitability for our community and over the past year has worked with Apple and the Powerhouse Museum on accessibility issues. "Having a job that involves your hobby is not a bad position to be in."

Information Library Service	06/07	07/08	08/09
Total membership	16,045	16,304	17,748
Digital playback devices on loan	3,245	9,584	13,072
Online handheld devices on loan	204	319	507

Advocating to break down barriers

For the thousands of Australians who are blind or have low vision, the daily activities most sighted people take for granted can present big challenges.

At Vision Australia, we believe using public transport, paying bills, shopping, voting and safely moving about should not be needlessly complicated tasks for our clients. As a national organisation, we are committed to overcoming any obstacles to full participation in society.

Last year our Policy and Advocacy team made 34 submissions to government about access to built environments and ways in which the National Disability Strategy could address common barriers.

We also provided the Australian Government with input on how the national broadband network can provide opportunities for people who are blind or low vision and ways to adapt the digital economy to our community's needs. This includes improving access to online banking, government forms and transport ticketing machines.

Vision Australia continued to work with the Federal Government to develop an understanding of the growing need for accessible information. We submitted a detailed policy paper to shape the future of the government's Print Disability Services Program, which funds service providers to produce alternative formats.

Vision Australia is a strong advocate of electronic voting, having supported its trial at the 2007 Federal election. We are continuing to work with the Australian Electoral Commission, various State Electoral Commissions and like-minded agencies to ensure voters with a print disability can privately and independently exercise their democratic right.

During the past year we established a Government Relations unit to strategically guide dealings with federal, state and local departments, agencies and representatives. This team works alongside our Policy and Advocacy and International and Stakeholder Relations teams.

Our Policy and Advocacy team continues to communicate with client consultative bodies to seek grassroots feedback about barriers and ongoing areas of concern. In 2008/09, we held clients forums on topics such as access to transport, pedestrian safety and employment.

Community education goes a long way towards advocating for change. We are expanding our Speakers' Network into Victoria and Queensland. Originating in New South Wales, this network of volunteers share its experiences of living with blindness or low vision with businesses and community groups.

Text accompanying image: Renee Williamson, our National Advocacy Manager, won two gold medals at the Taekwondo Belgium Open Challenge Cup in March of this year. It was the first time a competitor who is vision impaired had competed in this event.

Other ways we advocated to break down barriers included:

- Addressing incidents where clients were refused access to taxis, restaurants, medical facilities and rental properties because they have a Seeing Eye Dog. We also represented the interests of clients who had difficulty acquiring accessible bills, parents of children whose needs were not being met by schools, and workers medically retired based on vision loss.
- Improving pedestrian access through the installation of audible traffic signals and tactile tiles. Client Representatives also advocated at a local level. For example, Steve Hardy negotiated with Maroochydore Council in Queensland to install obstacle-free paths around the local Vision Australia centre.
- Engaging with the Reserve Bank on ATM and currency accessibility and with financial institutions regarding the lack of audio-enabled ATMs and ATM charges.
- Working with the Human Rights Commission and Medicare Australia to address the inaccessibility of Medicare office queuing systems.
- Joining the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy advisory body on how digital television will affect our community.
- Engaging with Qantas, Virgin Blue and Jetstar about accommodating the needs of passengers who are blind and deafblind.
- Supporting the establishment of the Papua New Guinea Blind Union.
- Approaching the office of the Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, regarding equal access to the national education curriculum.
- Participating in a workshop in Fiji to develop a plan for Education For All Vision Impaired initiative. Three staff members and our Chair, Dr Kevin Murfitt, attended. Dr Murfitt also joined the Board of the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF). Maryanne Diamond, Vision Australia General Manager International and Stakeholder Relations and World Blind Union President, gave the Keynote at the PDF conference.

Text accompanying image: Melbourne client John Quilligan with his Seeing Eye Dog Duke is assisted by a taxi driver during a training session. Vision Australia has worked with the Victorian Taxi Directorate since early 2008 to develop a driver education program.

Jordie hits the right note

A long-time advocate for her community, Jordie Howell has served on the Women's Special Interest Branch Committee of Blind Citizens Australia as President and is now its Secretary.

Jordie's life centres around music and literacy – yet she has never seen printed words or musical notation.

Blind from birth due to retinopathy of prematurity, she is a well-regarded singer who performs with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Chorus. Also a talented writer, last year she also reviewed Stevie Wonder, Andrea Bocelli and The Blind Boys of Alabama concerts for *The Australian*.

Jordie has been a Vision Australia Adult Braille Instructor for seven years.

She supports students through what can be a very difficult learning process.

“Although the code is very logical, developing sensitivity in the fingertips to distinguish it is hard, especially for older people or diabetics,” she says.

Jordie recently helped standardise braille course materials across the organisation. Attending the ‘Braille 1809 – 2009: writing with six dots’ conference in Paris in January was another highlight. This gathering coincided with the 200th anniversary of Louis Braille's birth.

“I love learning about each of my students. They're of different ages, come from different backgrounds and have different eye conditions.”

Building our capacity as a strong national organisation

With the number of Australians who are blind or have low vision expected to double to 600,000 by 2020, the need for an agency that can consistently deliver efficient and diverse services throughout the nation has never been greater.

Since 2004, Vision Australia has redistributed our resources in order to equally serve both urban and rural populations. The major mergers subsequent to our foundation – with Royal Blind Foundation Queensland and Seeing Eye Dogs Australia (SEDA) – helped establish Vision Australia as a national organisation.

Having addressed incidences of resource overlap, such as in Melbourne, Vision Australia was able to open new centres in areas of high need. These included establishing new facilities in Dandenong, a growing population base to Melbourne's east, as well as Caringbah in southern Sydney.

We also bought a site adjacent to our Kensington Seeing Eye Dog, Orientation and Mobility facility. A new 5,805 square metre service centre on this Macaulay Street site will also house administrative support and Employment Services staff.

Vision Australia has also upgraded new facilities in Orange and Tamworth, both expanding regional centres. All our new centres are highly accessible and accommodate our diverse programs.

Prompted by the upgrade of the nearby Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane, Vision Australia is preparing to move from premises in Kent Street, Woolloongabba, which has served the local blindness and low vision community for 126 years.

Vision Australia is now working with the Queensland Government to build a state-of-the-art facility to meet the rising local demand for our services.

A 3,800 square metre greenfield site 4km from the CBD was chosen for its proximity to a proposed major transport hub, shops, hospitals and community amenities. The model centre will include a children's therapy area, a community centre, an independent living skills training kitchen, an Equipment Solutions area, assistive technology rooms and low vision clinic.

With the capacity to support up to 102 staff and volunteers, it will become the base for service delivery to the state's south-east, which is the nation's fastest-growing region.

As we continue to standardise systems, improve processes and increase communication via teleconferencing and online, members of the Vision Australia family in this area will feel every bit a part of our organisation as their colleagues and fellow clients throughout Australia, be they in Canberra, Cairns or coastal Victoria.

Other ways we built our capacity as a strong national organisation:

- Rolling out a digital telephony system to enhance our service and also provide significant savings.
- Running sports classification courses in NSW, Victoria and the NT, supported by a \$60,000 Australian Paralympic Committee grant. Twelve assessors, including Vision Australia Orthoptists Cem Oztan, Tim Nolan, Beverley Devidas and Helen McKinley, classified 250 athletes who are blind or have low vision.
- Centralising our audio studios by moving equipment from Enfield to Kooyong to provide greater process alignment and efficiency.
- Rolling out new technology for greater efficiency, including new computers and Skills Based Routing, which delivers incoming calls to the most experienced agent in our National Call Centre.
- Progressing the Global Library Project as members of the DAISY Consortium and the International Federation of Library Associations, we aim for international sharing and collaborative collection development for people with print disabilities.
- Working with The Australian to reach a national audience via articles and in-kind advertisements.
- Developing an exhibition with the Powerhouse Museum, which is designed to tour Australia. With Federal Government funding, 'Living in a sensory world' was officially launched in March.
- Running 110 telelink social groups that enable clients from diverse areas to regularly connect by phone.
- Establishing a Client Representative Committee to represent Indigenous clients and engage with more Indigenous communities.

Text accompanying image: Nick Gleeson, Speakers' Network Officer New South Wales, with Enfield volunteer Christina Tilston. In 2008/09 our 20 volunteer speakers addressed 201 community groups and businesses. We are now expanding this service.

Text accompanying image of NCC Information Team Member Chloe

Maxwell on the phone: In October 2008, Vision Australia launched its National Contact Centre (NCC). Based in Sydney's Enfield, it enables clients, their families and health professionals to obtain information via one phone number.

From day one, this central team increased our capacity to take calls by 400%. Staff also respond to email inquiries. Between April to May 2009, the number of emails being directed to this team grew by 100%.

This team, of whom 36% are blind or have low vision, takes 9,000 calls a month and relies on a well-constructed knowledge base to respond to a wide range of inquiries.

We appreciate the Profield Foundation's \$50,000 gift to assist the NCC's operation.

Vision Australia online	Jan-Jul 08	Jul-Dec 08	Jan-Jul 09
Visits to website per day	1410	1,790	1,677
Total visits to website	256,716	329,315	282,774
Intranet visits per day	N/A	1,295	1,842
Total visits to intranet	N/A	238,253	333,316

We are increasingly informing the nation via our website. In 2008/09 the site recorded 612,089 visits (or 1,700 a day). Interest peaked in late 2008 to coincide with Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight[®]. Visits doubled on Christmas Eve.

Looking forward to the next chapter

Merryn Hawkins is among the 63 staff members preparing to move from our old Woolloongabba centre in Brisbane to new premises in Coorparoo in 2010.

“There’s a lot of nostalgia associated with Kent Street, but it’s very exciting to be moving to a modern building.”

Even before the Administration Officer joined our staff four years ago, she was already a champion of Vision Australia, having volunteered and experienced our support first-hand.

Merryn’s daughter, Gabbi, is legally blind, due to conditions associated with her premature birth. Vision Australia helped her to attain early living skills like sitting up and feeding herself.

In recent years we have provided orientation and mobility training and helped Gabbi to develop independent living skills.

“I know Vision Australia will be there to help my daughter reach her dreams.”

Establishing and growing Vision Australia in the community

As the product of several established agencies, Vision Australia has risen to the challenge of introducing itself as new force capable of meeting the needs of the growing national blindness and low vision community. Through our volunteer speakers, ambassadors, school education and heritage programs we are maintaining relationships and building awareness in the community.

Over the past year our Seeing Eye Dogs have also spread our positive message by appearing on television and making promotional visits to schools, shopping centres and offices, including that of our print media partner, The Australian.

Prime Television continued to promote Vision Australia by again producing and airing six community service campaigns for us free of charge. They also rallied behind Gerrard Gosens, our Special Projects Manager Brisbane, when he competed in Dancing With The Stars.

Vision Australia has also raised its profile through radio and print articles. In 2008/09, we recorded 1,742 media hits – up 25% from the past year.

While Vision Australia is grateful for the funding it receives from government, our work is largely made possible by community support. Despite the economic downturn, donations remained solid. We acquired 2,300 new pup sponsors and 6,729 new cash donors throughout our Seeing Eye Dog appeals, and 110 pledge givers and 12,504 new cash donors via Vision Australia appeals.

Loyal fundraising groups, including the three Black and White Committees, Sydney's International Committee, local auxiliaries and service clubs, continued to support us through a range of events – from cake stalls to glamorous balls.

Vision Australia also appreciates the thoughtful people who included us in their wills. Last year our organisation received bequests from 254 estates, which represents a 21% rise in the number of gifts from the past year.

We are grateful to many trusts and foundations, including the Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation, which granted \$657,000 to establish a low vision clinic in Coorparoo. Similarly, our Caringbah low vision clinic was made possible by a gift of \$67,948 from The Bill and Jean Henson Trust.

Our i-access® campaign also continued to receive generous backing from the business world. Among our new supporters of this project is Melbourne-based clothing manufacturer TS14+.

Once again in May we recognised the individuals, businesses and service groups who have gone that extra mile for our community at 18 Making A Difference Award ceremonies.

Text accompanying image: Gold Coast tandem cyclist Bryce Lindores and his pilot Steve George won bronze in the 4000m Mens Individual Pursuit at the 2008 Paralympics. He joined Vision Australia clients Ben Demery, Gerrard Gosens, Courtney Harbeck, Lindy Hou Russell Short, Ian Speed, Prue Watt and Teigan Van Roosmalen in Beijing.

Our night of nights

Each Christmas Eve Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight® introduces more Australians to our work through a night of fun, family and music.

Presented by Myer, the show attracted stars such as David Campbell and Jimmy Barnes as well 10,000 people to the Sidney Myer Music Bowl. A further 5,000 joined in the fun at Federation Square, supported by HealthSuper. Rehearsal night was also a hit, attracting a crowd of 7,500.

We were once again privileged to enjoy very significant support from the Nine Network, whose broadcast attracted a staggering 1.79 million viewers. Vision Australia appreciates this close partnership and the great contribution made the Nine Network year after year.

Magic 1278, 3AW and Vision Australia Radio brought the show to thousands of listeners. And thanks to VicDeaf, which provided Auslan interpreters, the show was more accessible than ever.

The Herald Sun promoted the event by distributing the official program to 120,000 readers. On the night supporters called our hotline to donate \$135,145 – this included a \$100,000 gift from businessman Dick Smith.

We could not have staged such an event without the efforts of our many volunteers working behind the scenes.

To our delight, the 2008 event was a national finalist in the Australian Marketing Institute Awards.

Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight®	2008	Year-on-year growth
Ticket revenue	\$381,891	6.3%
In-kind support	\$725,719	86%
Donation line support	\$135,145	527%

Text accompanying image: Nine Executive Producer Adrian Dellevergin, Myer CEO and valued i-access® supporter, Bernie Brookes, our CEO Gerard Menses and Nine Network Executive Director Jeffrey Browne at Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight®.

Text accompanying image: Our Brisbane Fundraising Team enjoyed a big year, promoting Seeing Eye Dog puppy sponsorship, selling merchandise, running lotteries and raising support for services and our Coorparoo centre.

In May, the team held its first Seeing Eye Dog Meet And Greet Day, which brought together puppy sponsors, carers and supporters. They also gained major support from the Heritage Building Society, which raised over \$50,000 and distributed sponsorship brochures state-wide.

The team consists of Queensland Fundraising Manager Margaret Scott, Fundraising and Lotteries Officer Peter Evans and Fundraising Officer Toni Palmer. Administrative Assistant Robert Cini supports the team.

Going green

Over the past year Vision Australia has developed a Carbon Emissions Plan, which focuses on a greener approach to energy usage, fuel consumption and waste management.

Prior to its implementation, we had already taken measures to reduce our carbon footprint by 16% from 2007/08.

A stricter travel policy, promoting videolinks and teleconferencing, reduced air travel (a major source of greenhouse gas emissions) by 60%.

By configuring printer settings to print on both sides we cut paper usage. Also, this year's Vision Australia's Carols by Candlelight® program will be printed on carbon-neutral paper.

Our library's growing use of digital technology is reducing our reliance on packaging. By making information available via i-access® Online, we are minimising the need to produce and post braille and CD copies. And the Burn on Demand CDs we post out in environmentally friendly mailers are made from recyclable materials.

Our Coorparoo centre will be a five-plus Green Star-rated building with wall plantings, natural ventilation and lighting plus underground water tanks and solar panels. We received \$45,000 from Brisbane City Council for Coorparoo's greening initiatives, such as worm farms and compost stations.

Working together

Vision Australia's people are by far its greatest asset. United by our shared goals and values, it is the professionalism and dedication of our staff and volunteers that helped us to weather the past year and remain focused on service provision.

We began 2008/09 by welcoming Seeing Eye Dogs Australia staff, who now enjoy the same terms and conditions as their Vision Australia colleagues thanks to the establishment of a Unifying Employee Agreement. We also introduced a broadbanded classification structure for the vast majority of employees covered by the Unifying Industrial Agreement.

Vision Australia also increased its commitment to training. Sessions on bullying, harassment and discrimination were offered at all centres and staff were given the opportunity to build their leadership skills through our Diploma of Business and Project Management courses.

As ever, we celebrated opportunities presented to individual staff, including Enfield Physiotherapist Isabel Baker who received the Dr Dorothea Sandars Churchill Fellowship 2009.

Vision Australia also supported staff to manage changing work environments. For example, the organisation developed a plan to help library staff adjust to the impact of our Burn On Demand service on their workload and conducted National Contact Centre information sessions Victoria-wide.

Following the unfortunate but necessary round of redundancies in May, we supported departing staff with one-on-one counselling and career-transition consulting sessions.

A concerted effort to enhance our safety performance was undertaken in 2008/09. This achieved a dramatic improvement in two key Occupational Health and Safety indicators, Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate (lost time injuries per million hours) and Lost Time Injury Severity (shifts lost due to injury per million hours of work).

Vision Australia continued to draw on the talents of our community. Of our 743 Equivalent Full-Time staff as of June 2009, 192 (or 18.7%) were vision impaired – a rise of 0.5% on last year.

Our wonderful volunteers

During the past year, the contribution made by our 4,500 registered volunteers took on extra significance. For a not-for-profit service provider, their skills are of enormous value.

By sharing their time, volunteers enable us to provide support while managing our resources for the future. Their contribution represents 283,284 hours a year. Encouragingly, we welcomed 1,250 new volunteers.

OHS key indicators	June 08	June 09	Improvement
Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate	21.1	5.4	74%
Lost Time Injury Severity Rate	675	411	39%

A perfect fit

Cassie Hassall has been part of the Vision Australia family for almost a quarter of a century – as a client, volunteer and now staff member.

Legally blind due to Stargardt’s disease, a type of macular degeneration, Cassie first came to Vision Australia in her early twenties.

“I remember thinking it was for people who had no sight at all and it wouldn’t be for me. I came in to get a magnifier and have never looked back!”

A long-term volunteer, Cassie has helped with administrative duties in our Wollongong centre and been part of our Speakers’ Network – a role she still enjoys. In 2007, she joined our staff as a Coordinator of Volunteers.

“My own experiences have given me a lot of empathy,” she says. “Everything I have done – hospitality and administration work – has helped me get here. I love it! I work with a nice group of people who put me at ease from the start.”

Cassie is held in high regard by staff and the volunteers who are vital to the daily running of our Wollongong centre. One volunteer, who helped out at Myer Gift Wrap in December 2008, nominated Cassie for the Keira electorate’s Woman of the Year Award. In March, she received the award at a NSW Parliament House ceremony.

Our Executive

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

Chief Executive Officer

Gerard joined Vision Australia in late 2004. He has a diverse and interesting background, working and consulting throughout Australia and New Zealand. Starting as a psychologist working with young offenders, Gerard has led some of the largest not-for-profit organisations in Australia. The common thread in his diverse portfolio has been working positively to create social change and an inclusive society that will give all Australians a fair go. He has served on many government and industry advisory and review bodies and was the Australian Institute of Management's (Queensland) Professional Manager of the Year in 2001. He currently serves on the Boards of Vision2020, the Centre for Eye Research Australia, the Ansell Ophthalmological Foundation, the Australian Blindness Forum, RPH Australia and Macular Degeneration Alliance International.

Glenda Alexander, BSocWk, Grad Dip Comm, Grad Dip Man, Cert IV

Training and Assessment

General Manager Independent Living Services

Prior to joining Vision Australia in 2008, Glenda worked in senior management roles in government and the not-for-profit sector, spent several years presiding on tribunal panels, and served as Chair of Queensland's Child Care Forum, which provided strategic advice to the Minister for Communities. Glenda has many years of experience working in the disability sector.

Maryanne Diamond, BSc, Grad Dip IT

General Manager International and Stakeholder Relations

Maryanne, who was born blind, worked in the information technology industry before moving into the community sector in the late 1990s. She was a founding Board member of Vision Australia, joining after five years' service on the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind Board. Maryanne was also Executive Officer of Blind Citizens Australia, CEO of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations and is now President of the World Blind Union. In 2007, she became our Manager International Development and joined our Executive team in 2008.

Trish Egan, BBus, MFIA, AIMM

General Manager Marketing and Fundraising

Holding a Bachelor, Business Studies, Trish has extensive experience in the marketing arena having trained and worked with Unilever in Sydney, London and New York for 10 years. Upon returning to Australia, she worked on many large global brands and within global marketing and project teams. She branched into broader management roles at Kellogg, leading the Export

Division and establishing a new, company-wide Integrated Planning process. Trish joined Vision Australia in 2005.

Leigh Garwood, MA (Comm) AIMM, MFIA

General Manager Seeing Eye Dogs, Orientation and Mobility

Leigh has run several not-for-profits, including Seeing Eye Dogs Australia, the Gawler Foundation and Arthritis Foundation of Victoria. He also has considerable marketing and advertising experience, having been publisher and general manager of a newspaper group.

Julie Rae, AALIA, BA Librarianship, Grad Cert Bus. Admin

General Manager Community Information Access

Julie joined Vision Australia early in 2008 and prior to this worked in senior Local Government roles, including as CEO of a Regional Library Corporation in western Victoria. Julie also has extensive business development experience and is Chair of the IFLA Libraries Serving Persons with Print Disabilities Standing Committee. She currently sits on both the 5RPH and 6RPH boards and is heavily involved in access to information issues through RPHA, Roundtable for Print Disabilities, ANZAIG, Australian Blindness Forum and IFLA.

David Speyer, (ACA) UK

General Manager Corporate Services

David is a qualified Chartered Accountant who, for the first 20 years of his career, worked in various roles in finance functions, beginning in an auditing role for Price Waterhouse and culminating as a Financial Director based in Asia for a UK multinational. He then moved to a Merger and Acquisitions role for a US conglomerate. His last position in industry was Vice President of a significant operation located across 12 countries. Since joining Vision Australia three years ago, David has worked on the Royal Blind Foundation Queensland and Seeing Eye Dog Australia mergers and managed Planning and Business Development until assuming his current role in March 2009.

Corporate governance

The Board of Directors of Vision Australia is responsible for the corporate governance of the consolidated entity. The Board guides and monitors the business and its affairs on behalf of the members, to whom they are accountable.

Composition of the Board

Vision Australia has a Board of 12 non-executive Directors who have an appropriate range of qualifications and knowledge of finance, business, law, marketing, information technology, property, sensory loss, disability and consumer issues.

Directors act in a voluntary capacity, except for the Chair, who is remunerated. In limited cases, Directors or their firms may act in a professional capacity for Vision Australia. In such cases the nature of the work and the remuneration are subject to approval by the Board and full disclosure (See Note 30 of the Annual Financial Statements). This process is governed by the Board's Director Disclosure of Personal Interest Policy and Policy for Handling Conflicts of Interest.

Board Responsibilities

The responsibility for operation and administration is delegated by the Board to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The Board, CEO and Executive Management Team set the corporate strategic direction.

The Board meets regularly and monitors the achievement of agreed targets and financial objectives.

Board Committees

To maximise its efficiency and effectiveness, the Board has formed a number of sub-committees that consider specific areas of Vision Australia's activities and report back to the Board. Each Committee operates under its own Board approved Charter. The Chair of the Board is an ex-officio member of each Committee.

Audit, Finance and Business Risk Committee

The primary roles of the Committee are to provide strategic advice to management and to monitor and review, on behalf of the Board, the effectiveness of Vision Australia's financial reporting and legal/regulatory framework. The overriding objective of the Committee is to oversee Vision Australia's discharge of its responsibilities with respect to; financial statements, financial reporting, annual reporting, legal and regulatory compliance protection of Vision Australia's capital and risk management. The Committee

also oversees Vision Australia's relationship with external and internal auditors.

Members of the Committee are Paul Gleeson (Chair), Timothy Griffiths, Tony Hanmer, Ross McColl, Derek Shaw and Roger Zimmerman.

Co-opted members of the Committee are Derek Shaw, FCPA, Retired Executive and Roger Zimmerman, B.Com (Hons), Retired Executive. Timothy Griffiths continued his role on the Committee after his resignation from the Board in July 2008.

Human Resources Committee

The primary roles of this Committee are to provide strategic advice to management and to assist the Board in fulfilling its corporate governance responsibilities in regard to human resources issues. Members are Keith Barton (Chair), Ron McCallum and Theresa Smith-Ruig.

Client Services Committee

This Committee's primary role is to provide strategic advice to management and a mechanism to review, assess and recommend client service policies and procedures to the Board that are consistent with community expectations and Vision Australia's Mission Statement.

Members are Owen van der Wall (Chair), Lyn Allison, Jan Lovie-Kitchin and Geoff Morris. Ms Allison joined the Committee during the year. Mr Morris was co-opted onto the Committee during the year under the terms of the merger agreement with SEDA.

Board Development Committee

The role of this Committee is to assist the Board of Directors in fulfilling its corporate governance responsibilities by ensuring that the Board has an appropriate mix of skills and experience. Members are Kevin Murfitt (Chair), Owen van der Wall and Ron McCallum, both Deputy Chairs.

Property Committee

This committee's role is to provide strategic property advice to management and monitor and review the organisation's property planning, development and maintenance policies. Members are Nick Carter (Chair), Keith Barton, Paul Gleeson and Ross McColl.

Service monitoring and customer outcomes

Client Representative Council

The Board actively seeks feedback and information from a range of sources including client surveys, information sessions and focus groups. Vision Australia clients are formally represented by the Client Representative Council

(CRC). Established under Vision Australia's Constitution, it is the peak internal consumer body and interacts with, but remains separate from the Board. CRC representatives are elected by Vision Australia clients to represent their needs and views. The CRC operates under a Charter approved by the Board and its primary purpose is to provide advice to the Board and Management on issues of an internal nature.

The Board shall receive and consider any recommendation and advice given by the CRC, but shall not be bound by any such recommendations or advice. The CRC, in consultation with the Chair of the Board, will annually nominate two Board members to participate in the meetings of the Council. Additionally, the Council formally reports to the Board on a regular basis. The current Board nominees are Kevin Murfitt and Lyn Allison. Ms Allison was appointed to this role during the year.

Note that all policies and charters mentioned above are posted on **www.visionaustralia.org**.

During the year there were eight board meetings, 10 Audit Finance and Business Risk Committee meetings, seven Property Committee meetings, two Human Resources Committee meetings, four Client Service Committee meetings and three Board Development Committee meetings.

Our Board

Dr Kevin Murfitt, BA (Hons), PhD, Chair

Kevin was conferred his Doctor of Philosophy from Deakin University in 2006 after researching employers' attitudes towards people with a disability. He now lectures at Deakin, where he was previously a Disability Liaison Officer, and also 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 contributing to the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) Accessible Public Transport Standards.

Appointed to the Board in May 2004.

Professor Ron McCallum, AO, BJuris LLB (Hons) (Monash), LLM Qu, Deputy Chair

A former Dean of Law at Sydney University, Ron was the first person who is blind to be appointed to a full professorship at an Australian university. He is Chair of 2RPH and served on the former Royal Blind Society Board. Ron taught labour law in the United States and has written widely on industrial law. He has also worked on industrial relations taskforces for several State Governments.

Appointed to the Board in January 2006.

Owen van der Wall, Deputy Chair

Owen worked for Westpac Banking Corporation for 37 years, both in Australia and overseas. He was Group Executive for Retail Banking and Investment and International Banking and Director of Public Affairs. Owen is a former President of the Australian Foreign Exchange Association, a committee member of Cambiste Internationale and Director of Mastercard International as well as a member of the Girl Guides (NSW) Finance Management Committee. He joined the Royal Blind Society Board in 2001 and Vision Australia's Board in 2004.

Appointed to the Board in May 2004.

Lyn Allison, BEd, AAICD

Former teacher Lyn was elected to the Senate in 1996 and served as Parliamentary Leader of the Australian Democrats from 2004 to 2008. She held the Health and Disabilities portfolios along with Education, Energy, Treasury, Infrastructure and Commonwealth/State relations and initiated a Senate inquiry into education services for people with disabilities in 2002. Lyn has been an advocate of better job opportunities for people with low vision, greater macular degeneration awareness and the eradication of trachoma in Indigenous communities.

Appointed to the Board in July 2008.

Dr (Ronald) Keith Barton, BSc, PhD, FTSE

Keith graduated with degrees in Chemical Engineering from the University of New South Wales. He retired from full-time employment 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 Amcor Ltd and Air Liquide (Australasia) Ltd.

Appointed to the Board in May 2004.

Nick Carter, FRICS, FAPI, FAICD

Nick has been active in blindness and low vision organisations since 1992, when he was appointed to the Board of the Singapore Association for the Visually Handicapped. In Brisbane he was Chair of The Royal Blind Foundation Queensland at the time of its amalgamation with Vision Australia in 2006. Nick heads his own commercial, industrial and retail property company, Hillier Carter Properties.

Appointed to the Board in December 2006.

Dr Donald Fraser, BSc (Hons), Dip. Ed, MBA, DBA, FACS, FAICD

Donald has been involved in information technology for more than 30 years, teaching at CIT (now Monash) and working for US technology companies. He has leadership roles in an Australian multinational technology company and is on the Australian Computer Society Immigration Assessment Panel. His 14 years' experience on corporate and not-for-profit Boards has been enhanced by Australian Institute of Company Directors membership and doctoral studies. He joined the Board of Seeing Eye Dogs Australia in 2007.

Appointed to the Board in July 2008.

Paul Gleeson, BSc, LLB, LLM

Paul is a solicitor practising in intellectual property, corporate and commercial law. With a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Laws, he is a Principal and Managing Director of law firm Russell Kennedy and Chairman of the Intellectual Property and Information Technology Committee of the Law Institute of Victoria. Paul joined the Vision Australia Foundation Board in 1999 and Vision Australia's Board in 2004. He also serves on several not-for-profit Boards, including Inclusion Melbourne.

Appointed to the Board in May 2004.

Tony Hanmer

Tony has more than 25 years' leadership experience and a track record of company management acquisitions and leveraging new technologies to build professional organisations. He was Senior Vice President and a Director of McCann Erickson Worldwide and Regional Director Asia and South Pacific, responsible for 29 offices worldwide. Tony is a Non-Executive Director and Board advisor specialising in strategy, marketing and research for a number of

Government, public and private companies. Before joining our Board, he was Deputy Chairman of the Endeavour Foundation.

Appointed to the Board in June 2007.

Professor Jan Lovie-Kitchin, PhD QUT, MSc (Optom) (Melb), Grad Dip (Rehab Stud) (La Trobe), FAAO

Previous to her current role as Adjunct Professor at Queensland University of Technology's School of Optometry, Jan was Assistant Dean for Research in the Faculty of Health and Director of QUT's Centre for Health Research. She has lectured internationally and the Bailey-Lovie visual acuity charts, which she co-created, are used worldwide. In 1993 Jan established the QUT Vision Rehabilitation Centre, where she is a consultant optometrist. She is also Assistant Editor of Clinical and Experimental Optometry, the journal of the Optometrists Association of Australia.

Appointed to the Board in June 2007.

Ross McColl, BEcon (Monash) FCA

Melbourne-born Ross has been a partner of PricewaterhouseCoopers for more than 20 years. He specialises in the areas of corporate governance, risk management, regulatory compliance and internal audit. Ross completed a Bachelor of Economics at Monash University and is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia. Ross is blind, having lost his sight completely six years ago.

Appointed to the Board in July 2006.

Dr Theresa Smith-Ruig, BCom, PhD

Theresa is a lecturer in the School of Business, Economics and Public Policy at the University of New England. She gained a PhD in 2006, specialising in Human Resource Management and has research interests in work-life balance, career development and disability and employment. Vision impaired since 10, she was Vice-President of Blind Citizens Australia, serving on their Board from 2003-05 and as Secretary of its National Women's Branch. In 2004-05, she was a delegate to the World Blind Union.

Appointed to the Board in June 2007.

Financial summary

Total revenue for the period 2008-09 was \$79.523m. The major sources of income were:

- Legacies, bequests and donations – \$32.564m (40.9%)
- Government grants – \$29.786m (37.5%)
- Investment and other income – \$8.920m (11.2%). Includes deposit foregone on renegotiation of contract for the sale of property – \$2.513m
- Revenue from the sale of goods and services – \$8.253m (10.4%)

Total expenditure and losses for the period totalled \$106.786m. Expenditure was applied as follows:

- Client Services and Information Library Service – \$67.155m (62.9%)
- Marketing and Fundraising – \$11.229m (10.5%)
- Corporate Services – \$8.158m (7.6%)
- Other expenses – \$17.798m (16.7%) (Includes impairment write-down on investments and Property Plant & Equipment of \$13.187m)
- Loss on disposal of investments and property – \$2.446m (2.3%).

Three-year financial performance

	2009 \$'000	2008 \$'000	2007 \$'000
Revenue			
Legacies, bequests and donations	32,564	34,368	27,981
Government grants	29,786	29,066	26,751
Investment income and other revenue	8,920	6,813	9,196
Revenue from the sale of goods	8,253	8,005	8,042
Gain on disposal of investments and property	-	7,774	2,610
Total revenue	79,523	86,026	74,580
Expenditure			
Client Services and Information Library Service	67,155	59,655	54,889
Marketing and Fundraising	11,229	8,988	7,095
Corporate Services	8,158	8,973	7,101
Other expenses	17,798	3,743	1,119

Loss on disposal of investments and property	2,446	-	-
Total expenditure	106,786	81,359	70,204
Surplus/ -Deficit	-27,263	4,667	4,376

Three-year financial position

	2009 \$'000	2008 \$'000	2007 \$'000
Assets			
Cash, debtors and inventories	10,512	15,732	16,751
Investments	67,872	81,586	76,901
Property plant and equipment and intangibles	126,561	111,186	113,329
	204,945	208,504	206,981
Liabilities			
Payables and provisions	26,240	17,458	17,667
Interest bearing loans	12,310	-	-

Other (including income in advance and deposits on property sales)	8,875	6,156	390
	47,425	23,614	18,057
Net Assets	157,520	184,890	188,924

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