# Community Impact Report 2021

Blind Low Vision. NZ

Produced 2021 by Accessible Formats Service, Blind Low Vision NZ, Auckland.

This edition is a transcription of the following print edition:

# Transcriber's Note

Images have been omitted in this e-text edition. Where captions are present they have been retained.

If reading this etext on a portable braille device, please note that it is unproofed by touch.

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# A note from our CEO and Board Chair

**It has been another big year for Blind Low Vision NZ as we continue to empower New Zealanders who are blind, deafblind or have low vision to live the life they choose. We used the lessons we learned last year in lockdown and changed the way we work. This meant we were able to lower waiting times and help more people live the life they choose.**

We spent this year working on the four key priorities we laid out in our 2020-2024 Strategic direction, Our Vision, Your Future:

## Independence

People who are blind, deafblind or have low vision have choices about how they live their lives as independent citizens in their communities.

## Educate and Equip

Empower people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision with the information, advice and tools to thrive through lifelong learning opportunities.

## Social Inclusion

People who are blind, deafblind or have low vision are included in society and have choices as to how to actively participate.

## For Purpose Organisation

People centred, knowledge based, adaptable and drives change.

Earlier this year, Blind Low Vision NZ was selected as the winner of the New Zealand Primary Healthcare Award for Innovation in Service Delivery for our response during the COVID-19 pandemic. The award recognises a forward-thinking person

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or people who have made primary healthcare services significantly better through new ideas and initiatives. Their innovation might have enabled healthcare to continue during a period of uncertainty or significantly improved patient experiences, access and equity. We were nominated for the development of our remote consultation process during COVID-19. Our service delivery staff were redeployed to call our entire client base (14,500 people) to assess their needs. This resulted in a 19% increase in requests for services, and greater support was needed to deliver rehabilitation services quickly.

COVID-19 not only changed the way we work but also, what people have come to expect of organisations such as ours. Preceding this, our counselling service was almost exclusively a face-to-face model and the limitations of that approach meant that we were simply unable to provide equity of service across the country. Moving forward we will be partnering on the delivery of our emotional support services with Habit Rehabilitation, which will allow us to meet our objective of delivery in a timely, consistent and person centred manner.

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We have also made improvements to our Employment Service Provision. To date, the employment service for clients has had a very broad remit including working with clients who are transitioning from education into work, with clients who are in work but requiring technical support within their work environment through to providing assistance to a client where they are at risk of losing their employment. Our new model is titled Work Readi and we will continue to work with our community partners to ensure those critical elements listed are still addressed. Work Readi will also include a comprehensive online vocational support platform/information hub that empowers clients by providing them with tools they can access as needed in pursuit of their pre-employment endeavours. Work Readi will also facilitate connections with external providers for internships, work experience, community service and volunteering.

To replace CDs, we have put in place new ways for people to get their library books and magazines. Now people can get their talking books right from their armchair in the living room. With a smart speaker on the table, they can ask Alexa to play any one of our 36,000 talking books. Books can also be accessed through the Daisy reader and a range of accessible formats such as braille and large print.

4,350 clients are using an Alexa, thanks to funding from the Ministry of Social Development. This means, compared to last year, the number of clients utilising the helpful Alexa skills has increased by 23%. Beyond

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reading books, they can search the internet, hear the latest news and write a list by using their voice. Many have said that once they get used to talking to Alexa, they wouldn't be without it.

We continue to advocate for better eye health services in Aotearoa, and support those groups who are contributing to this goal through their work and research.

Out at Guide Dogs we are building a new mobility training centre. This will help us get more guide dogs trained up and out to waiting clients. We have formerly commenced the construction of our joint venture retirement project in Parnell, which will provide a sustainable revenue stream for the organisation well into the future.

In the last year, we have increased the number of registered members by 546, seen a 30% increase in the number of unique clients per month and reduced wait times from first contact until first service. Additionally, we are delighted that the Government and all the Parliamentary parties are committed to accelerating accessibility through new legislation and regulations within the next two years.

We've got a big year ahead and look forward to sharing this journey with you all.

**Me mahi tahi tātau hei whakapakari te hunga kāpō**

**Work together to give strength to people who are blind or have low vision.**

**John Mulka**

Blind Low Vision NZ

Chief Executive

**Judy Small**

Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind (RNZFB)

Board Chair

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# Who we help and how

Our dedicated staff and volunteers help people from **Cape Reinga to Bluff—we have 19 offices,** and no location is off-limits.

**Upper North Island** (excl Auckland): 3,175 **clients**

**Auckland:** 2,456 **clients**

**Lower North Island:** (excl Wellington) 3,790 **clients**

**Wellington:** 1,238 **clients**

**South Island** (excl Christchurch): 2,481 **clients**

**Christchurch:** 1,427 **clients**

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This year our contact centre staff received **39,674 calls**

We received **317,500** requests from the library (total number of loans in the last 12 months)

We have clients of all ages, though the majority are over 65, due to the correlation of aging and vision loss.

8%: 0-21

12%: 22-24

16%: 45-64

18%: 65-79

46%: 80+

**130 years** Blind Low Vision NZ has been supporting Kiwis whose sight cannot be improved with lenses.

This year we supported **6,237clients**

We tailor our **services, events, and activities to cater for different age groups,** needs and interests.

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# A snapshot of blindness, deafblindness and low vision in New Zealand

Some people assume that blindness, deafblindness or low vision is rare and that it could never happen to them or someone they love. But it's more common than you might think.

* 4% of Kiwis are currently living with blindness or low vision.
* Every 2.5 hours, someone in NZ develops blindness.
* 1 in 5 people will experience blindness or low vision in their lifetime.

And it will be more common in the future because of our ageing population.

* By 2030, the number of Kiwis with blindness, deafblindness or low vision is likely to increase by over 25%.
* The number of Kiwis with age-related macular degeneration is projected to increase by 70%.

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There are also many people in NZ who (sometimes unknowingly) have diseases that may lead to blindness or low vision. These diseases are often treatable if diagnosed in time, which is why raising awareness is an important part of what we do at Blind Low Vision NZ.

* 50% of sight loss is preventable, 25% of sight loss is treatable.
* Cataract surgery has good success rates, but leads to sight loss in 5% of cases.
* An estimated 2% of Kiwis over 40 have glaucoma. Half of them are unaware of this.
* Over 70% of Kiwis aged 40-49 do not have a regular eye examination.

With the right training, assistive technology, and mindset, most people with blindness or low vision can live the life they choose.

* 74% of Blind Low Vision NZ clients live in their own homes, either alone or with a partner and/or children.
* 57% of working age people who are blind or have low vision are currently in work compared to 77% of the NZ working age population.

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# Lottie's story

Six-year-old Lottie did not have the easiest start to life. With the support of family, specialists and Blind Low Vision NZ, she has grown into a young girl who lights up every room.

Nelson based couple Hayley and Sam were 36 weeks pregnant when they experienced what they described as the hardest moment of their lives. During a conversation with the doctor, the expectant parents received the news that Lottie had suffered a brain haemorrhage.

Little Lottie spent 10 days in intensive care following her birth. On the ninth day, Sam and Hayley's paediatric neurologist explained that extensive brain damage meant she was likely to have severe loss of vision and other disabilities.

Lottie started working with a visual therapist at around the age of 9 months, where she was formally diagnosed with cortical visual impairment. This is an eye condition that makes it very hard for her to both see and process what she's looking at.

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Lottie can see to about an arm's length and a bit better on the left than the right. Things further away are a blur. Her specialist attaches tinsel to her belongings, as things that sparkle are the easiest for Lottie to see. This is why, of the things she can see, she likes sparkly things the most.

Having access to Blind Low Vision NZ specialist support makes all the difference, and it's setting her up for life. Lottie's family initially received support from one of Blind Low Vision NZ's child and family social workers.

"You don't realise you're going to be a mum that's going to need these services behind you, but as a recipient of Blind Low Vision NZ services, you come to understand how important they are for families like us," stated Hayley.

"Blind Low Vision NZ counsellors are there providing support through this often frightening time."

Alana, an Independent Living Skills Specialist at Blind Low Vision NZ, has been visiting Lottie since she was a baby. She also helped make Lottie's kindie and primary school more accessible, ensuring she has everything needed to properly access her education.

Lottie loves learning and enjoys listening to her favourite stories using the Blind Low Vision NZ Talking Book library.

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# Holly's story

When Holly was only 10 years old, her family discovered that she had a brain tumor. She then received the news that she may never recover her sight. After a year or so, Holly regained a small amount of tunnel vision in one eye, which allowed her to make out things about a metre away.

Right from the very beginning, Blind Low Vision NZ was there to support Holly. From helping her to work through the shock of sight loss to providing support with adaptive technology and daily activities, Blind Low Vision NZ has helped Holly to live with the same hope and ambition as any other kiwi.

"Blind Low Vision NZ helped me use my laptop," she said. "They put JAWS on it, which stands for Job Access With Speech. JAWS is a screen reader. So, it reads anything that's on the screen and also if you are writing notes or anything like that it has a little speech thing and it echoes what letters and words you are writing."

Equipped with speech to text technology, and help from

Blind Low Vision NZ to learn braille, Holly was ready to shine in education. As she moved from school to university, Holly

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developed an ambition to study social work. Whilst pursuing her dream career, she also ran a music group volunteering with people with disabilities.

Her trusty guide dog Laura, a lovable black lab, guided her through her years of study. Laura was popular on campus and made it much easier for Holly to get around.

Prior to University, Holly had learnt to use a white cane to navigate her world; a skill she learnt through orientation and mobility training. When Laura retired, she decided to return to her white cane.

Blind Low Vision NZ will continue to walk alongside Holly as she undertakes big challenges, like recently moving to a new town. Several refresher sessions of orientation and mobility training are helping Holly to become familiar with her new location, so she can continue to live an independent and successful life.

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# All about Alexa

**All Blind Low Vision NZ clients are offered an Echo Dot Speaker, which not only includes the regular Alexa functionality but also access to a bespoke Blind Low Vision NZ Skill.**

Our skill includes information about the range of services available from Blind Low Vision NZ, including priority news and upcoming member events across the country. You can also find out about our office locations, or request a call back for assistance.

The Library service in our skill lets you now read audio books, magazines, and newspapers from Blind Low Vision NZ with your Alexa, using voice control.

With more than 36,000 book titles in our collection, Blind Low Vision NZ's Library features New Zealand and international audio books, and selected magazines produced in studio. Just ask Alexa to find a book or magazine, and you can listen directly online. You can search by author, title, or just ask for a random book to start reading. We also have daily newspaper articles available from more than 60 local newspapers, provided by kind permission of their publishers.

When you start the skill for the first time, Alexa will start by offering you a tutorial in basic operations. In the tutorial, you can practice interacting with Alexa, asking for help, looking for books, and choosing books from a menu. You can then get started requesting your own books, magazines, and newspapers to read. The next time you start the skill, Alexa will ask whether you would like to carry on with the last title you were reading. While you are reading a title, you can increase or decrease the volume, and skip between chapters. When you go back to a book you have started reading, Alexa will take you back to the place you left off.

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Box.

"Going well and we talk to each other! I read the books and she is wonderful for appointment reminders. She has also told me some funny jokes (and terrible ones) and keeps me up with the news."

**A Blind Low Vision NZ Client**

End Box.

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# Our services

## Personalised rehabilitation services

We provide specialised training that gives children and adults who are blind or have low vision the practical skills they need to live safely and independently. This may include learning how to get around independently using a white cane or a guide dog or accomplishing tasks at home. We can also advise on home and kitchen modifications and household organisation.

## Technology

We advise clients about relevant new devices and apps that may transform their lives. Our adaptive technology courses cover topics such as accessible computer functions, word processing, spreadsheets, email, using the internet, reading the news, social networking, shopping, travelling, and accessing our books.

## Community & support

We organise social, recreational, and cultural activities to enable people to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle and connect with others. Our support groups, peer mentoring programme and phone peer support service allow clients to talk to others with similar sight loss experiences. We also offer one-on-one emotional support services through vision loss counselling.

## Our Employment Service, (known as Work Readi), consists of:

* A comprehensive on-line vocational support platform / information hub that empowers clients by providing them with comprehensive tools they can access as needed in pursuit of all their pre-employment endeavours.
* BLVNZ and key partners providing Specialist services as and when required, driven by the client, such as O&M and ACATS.

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* Facilitation of connections with external providers for internships, work experience, community service and volunteering.

## Library services & accessible formats

We make it possible for people who are blind or have low vision to access books, newspapers, and magazines in the format they prefer, whether that's braille, audio, large print or digital.

The newest way to access our library is through a "skill" (similar to an app) on a voice-activated Alexa smart speaker. We can also convert personal printed materials into any accessible format.

Box:

"Blind Low Vision NZ supporters may have saved my life …"

**Sue, a Blind Low Vision NZ Client**

End Box.

## Financial support

We have several funds that provide financial assistance to clients who cannot meet the costs of vision rehabilitation, equipment, or tertiary education.

## Specialist services

We provide cultural support for Pasifika clients, a specialist team for Deafblind clients, and a Parent and Child Enrichment (PACE) programme to help families who have a child with visual impairment.

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# A small taster of how our work made an impact this year

**10,000** votes were received for Access Alliance 2021 People's Choice Accessible Business Awards. Blind Low Vision NZ is a driving member of the Access Alliance and we have worked together to demand the implementation of accessibility legislation in Aotearoa, which has been confirmed, will progress in the coming year. Watch this space.

**4,530** clients now have an Alexa, that is about 33% of our clients. With Alexa, they can instantly find out the time or the weather, or what's on TV. Or play music, make to-do lists and set alarms. All by using their voice.

**1,293** clients have completed **4,627** hours of mobility training this year, gaining the skills and confidence to travel independently using a white cane.

**215,927 est.** audio books were loaned. Over the last year we have continued to add audiobooks to our collection and now have available 355,061 hours of reading time. This includes an addition of 6,391 hours of audiobooks and 881 hours of magazines. Many people have enjoyed the library and have spent 2,123,282 hours of reading, which equates to 215,927 loans!

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Box:

"Tallulah is an intelligent, energetic, determined child who pushes herself to keep up with her older, fully sighted brothers. She is literally without fear—and never, ever stops talking."

"I don't know where she gets the energy to talk so much, but that's how she learns. And it's how she finds out about the world around her."

**Jess, whose daughter Tallulah is a Blind Low Vision NZ Client.**

End Box.

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# Getting together to support Blind Low Vision NZ

**Blind Low Vision NZ couldn't exist without our family of volunteers. We are grateful for the diverse group of 12,000 registered volunteers that share their unique skills to a variety of roles within our organisation.**

Our tūao support Blind Low Vision NZ by assisting with client engagement activities, technology support, library assistance, guide dogs services, fundraising, policy & advocacy and general business. Our accessible formats volunteers collaborate with our Blind Low Vision NZ team to create tactile books for children, proof reading and copy holding to enable our clients to easily access reading material in a variety of formats. Our Guide Dog volunteers not only dedicate their time, but they also open up their homes to our Guide Dogs from puppy raisers, breeding stock carers and volunteering within our Guide Dog Centre to ensure our Guide Dogs are ready when paired with our clients, our guide dog volunteers are the kaitiakitanga of a most precious resource offered to our clients.

Blind Low Vision NZ is proud to collaborate with our 35 Community Groups nationally.

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Community groups provide a valuable connection and support to our local Blind Low Vision communities. And of course, many people dedicate their time to fundraising. Whichever way people choose to get involved, it's always a lot of fun.

In March, more than 1,900 people grabbed a bucket and collected money on the streets for our Puppy Appeal. Passers by donated $274,000 towards Blind Low Vision NZ Services. Our cute guide dog puppies often come along to these events.

Photograph: Ivan hard at work in our contact centre

Blind Low Vision NZ engages with our tertiary and youth volunteers, we were fortunate to host a group of University of Auckland students who participated in a range of voluntary activities in preparation for Blind Low Vision Week 2021. The street appeal couldn't go ahead in some parts of NZ due to the lockdown restrictions, but the buckets are now ready for 2022. In the last year Blind Low Vision NZ client engagement volunteers have generously given over 19,000 hours across Aotearoa. At Blind Low Vision NZ our volunteers are a part of our fabric and our organisations whanau.

Box:

"A lot of the time people need someone to lend an ear in their time of need. It's a very rewarding job when you are able to help someone through a difficult time."

**Ivan Dodds**

End Box.

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# Blind Low Vision NZ Financials

Three-quarters of the income we receive is from the generous support of New Zealanders. Without donations and gifts in Wills, we would not be able to do our important work.

We would particularly like to acknowledge the thoughtful people who have left money to us in their will. We are always touched when we receive these gifts. We take care to honour the memory of our benefactors by using their gifts in ways that create the most impact and build a sustainable future for blind, deaf blind and low vision New Zealanders.

To support our clients to live the life they choose, we align our spending to our four strategic priorities—supporting independence, educate and equip providing ongoing learning opportunities, promoting social inclusion, and becoming a best practice for purpose organisation.

As we consulted with our clients to develop these priorities, we can be sure our income is spent in ways that genuinely benefit them and the things they care about.

And our focus on innovation ensures our services will continue to be relevant into the future.

## Where our income comes from

Charitable gifts: **41%**

Gifts in Wills **33%**

Government **24%**

Property and rental income **1%**

Other **1%**

## Where our income goes

Personalised rehabilitation & support services **48%**

Fundraising **19%**

Awareness raising and advocacy **15%**

Innovation and adaptation for client services **14%**

Grants to client peer support groups **3%**

Governance **1%**

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# In Gratitude

**We are extremely grateful to all our generous supporters. Your kindness helps empower New Zealanders who are blind, deafblind, or low vision to live the life they choose.**

**Thank you so much for the difference you have made. From our street collection volunteers to the avid readers who made our inaugural Great Kiwi Book-a-thon so successful, to our puppy sponsors and all our wonderful supporters, we could not do it without you.**

**We would like to say a special thank you to some of our key supporters in financial year 2021.**

Acorn Foundation

Aoraki Foundation

Aotearoa Gaming Trust

Aylene Hobson Memorial Trust

Barbara Theresa Lipanovich and Robert Covich Charitable Trust

Beatrice Georgeson Trust

Betty Baynton Stoker Charitable Trust

Central Lakes Trust

Chorus NZ

Colin Spratt Charitable Trust

Community Trust of Mid & South Canterbury Inc

Community Trust South

Dawn Lay Charitable Trust

Dowdall Trust

Eastern & Central Community Trust

Emeric Erdei Trust Fund

Alan & Fey Frewer Charitable Trust

Florence and George Chamberlain Charitable Trust

Florence Smaill Charitable Trust

Foundation North

Four Winds Foundation Limited

Frizelle Charitable Trust

Geraldine Glanville Charitable Trust

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Geyser Community Foundation—Wallace Trust Fund

Glyn Harvard Evans Charitable Trust

Grumitt Sisters Charitable Trust

H & K Reynolds Charitable Trust

Internet NZ

Irene and Stanley Sawtell Charitable Trust

Ivan & Nancye Davis Charitable Trust

Jack and Enid Hutt Blind Trust

James Smaill Charitable Trust

John Beresford Swan Dudding Trust

Joyce Mary Shanley Trust

Julia Choyce Memorial Charitable Trust

Kelleher Charitable Trust

Kelliher Charitable Trust

Kiwi Gaming Foundation

Lottery Grants Board

Mac and Tui Chapman Charitable Trust

Mae and Betty Sherratt Charitable Trust

Mainland Foundation

Manchester Unity Welfare Trust Board

Margaret Tudor South Charitable Trust

Marion Aitchinson Charitable Trust

Maurice Paykel Charitable Trust

Milestone Foundation

Mt Wellington Foundation Ltd

N H Taylor Charitable Trust

New Plymouth District Council

New Zealand Community Trust

Nightingale Trust

Nikau Foundation

One Foundation

Oxford Sports Trust

P H Vickery Charitable Trust

Pelorus Trust

Ray Watts Charitable Trust

Reed Charitable Trust

Room-Simmonds Charitable Trust

Ruth Petty Trust

Sir George Elliot Charitable Trust

Stanley V. Ratley Trust

Tennyson Charitable Trust

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The David Ellison Charitable Trust

The Lion Foundation

The Timothy Blair Trust

The Trusts Community Foundation Inc

Timaru District Council

Trust House Charitable Trust

Trust Waikato

Van Teefflelen Charitable Trust

W A & E M Anderson Memorial Trust

Wellington Community Trust

William Anderson Dutch Charitable Trust

Zena & Jack Peat Charitable Trust

## Gifts in Wills

**Gifts in Wills support in 3 services at Blind Low Vision NZ. A gift in a Will of as little as 1% makes a tremendous difference. Last year, many of our services would not have been possible without the kind support of the following people who left a gift in their Will.**

The Estate of Graham Rowles

The Estate of Donald Banks Laxon

The Estate of Robert Bernard Malone

The Estate of Jean-Clare Harper

The Estate of Edna Jessie Adie

The Estate of Annie Gweneth Ross

The Estate of Margaret Jill Caldwell

The Estate of Miriam Frances Wright

The Estate of Jillian Clare Pitu

The Estate of Peter David Arthur

The Estate of Barbara Holthouse

The Estate of Betty Minniss

The Estate of Thoamsina Kennedy

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The Estate of Elizabeth Catherine Loxton

The Estate of Margaret Bruss

The Estate of George Henry Dear

The Estate of Suzanne Dickens

The Estate of Gilbert Anthony Hay

The Estate of Kay Rouse

The Estate of Marlaine Heath

The Estate of Myrtle Jean Sallis

The Estate of Anna Irene Ward

The Estate of L A Bravenboer

The Estate of Lyn Goody

The Estate of Janis Marion Bell

The Estate of Emma Jane Price

The Estate of Ray & Eva Shepherd

The Estate of Marlies O'Rielly

The Estate of Patricia Roadley

The Estate of John & Philippa Lang

The Estate of Estate Frederick Percival Adams

The Estate of John Sylvanus Cotterell

The Estate of Ralph Dingle

The Estate of Leslie Charles Doubleday

The Estate of Evelyn Joyce Fawkes

The Estate of Constance Hilda Hodgson

The Estate of Robert Lennard MacGillivray

The Estate of James Chrystal Morton Mallach Bequest Trust

The Estate of Estate of John Edward Millar

The Estate of Agnes Isabella Wood

The Estate of Ernest Stanley & Beryl Beck

The Estate of Fifeshire Trust

The Estate of James Murphy

The Estate of M F Anderson

The Estate of Patricia Aitken Trust

The Estate of Sarah Lily Slack

The Estate of William Herbert Baker

The Estate of The Estate of Kenneth Alexander Roberts

The Estate of Elma Sims

The Estate of Renee Mae Spain

The Estate of Grace Helen Stevenson

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Blind Low Vision NZ

Thank you for your support

<https://blindlowvision.org.nz>

End of Community Impact Report 2021