

# Focus



Vision  
Australia

Blindness. Low Vision. Opportunity.

**150+**  
years of vision

Issue 2, 2025

## Bella's future starts now!

(See page 2.)



Thank you!

Your support is  
making a difference  
to kids like Bella.

# Thank you

It's such a joy to share the stories of independence and joy you bring to Australians who are blind or have low vision.

With your help, people of all ages are doing what they love, connected with community, learning and growing. Whether through specialised equipment or vital early intervention support, you are making a life-changing difference.

I hope you'll enjoy reading about how paediatric occupational therapist, Kaylie uses creativity and problem solving to work with young clients like Bella, the gorgeous star of our Tax Appeal.

You can also read about other ways you can get involved, through a gift in your Will to taking part in one of our events.

Your support is so important to us. Thank you!

*Justine Heath*

Justine Heath  
Acting Chief Executive



# "Thank you for helping our beautiful Bella."

Little Bella captures the heart of everyone she meets, including compassionate donors like you!

We were overwhelmed with your wonderful response to our Tax Appeal, sharing the story of Bella and her ongoing need for early intervention and tailored therapy. Thank you for caring so much.

When Bella was born with albinism, her mum Sophia was told she had a bleak future ahead. Fortunately, thanks to the support of people like you, Bella was connected with Vision Australia when she was just a few weeks old. Today she is bright, bubbly, inquisitive and ready to take on every challenge.

"Now Bella will not be left behind. She will never have to think, 'I can't do that.' We are so very grateful to you for being part of Bella's 'village'," said Sophia.

*Your compassion means Bella and children like her receive the vital early intervention support they need to navigate their world with confidence.*



## You're keeping Bob connected to the game he loves

For more than 10 years, Bob had regular check-ups with his optometrist and photos taken of his eyes. He knew there were early signs of macular degeneration (MD). But one day at home he was looking at a window frame and it went from "straight to wonky".

After a visit to a specialist, Bob was diagnosed with dry MD. It was a huge blow for this busy, active Collingwood super-fan.

Bob watches Collingwood play every game and reads every word written about his favourite team. He also faithfully records each season's 'highs and lows' in special scrapbooks.

His diagnosis led to big changes. Bob struggled to read books, documents, even text messages on his phone. He found he could no longer read newspaper articles about his beloved team, much less keep filling his scrapbooks.



Our access technology specialists recommend accessible technology and products that suit peoples' needs, enabling them to live independently.



But his connection with Vision Australia changed everything. The compassionate Vision Australia team worked one-on-one with Bob to get him the equipment he needed to be able to read again. Using new lighting and a magnification device, Bob is now able to stay connected to the team that he loves.

Vision Australia offers a diverse range of services for older Australians, tailored to suit each person's needs, and it's all thanks to people like you. Whether maintaining independence at home, getting out into the community or socialising with people going through similar experiences, Vision Australia is there to help.

Your kindness helps people like Bob live the life they choose. Thank you so much for your support.

# Creativity, problem solving and fun every day – meet Kaylie

Kaylie joined Vision Australia as a paediatric occupational therapist two years ago. She says working in paediatrics is simply, just fun! “There aren’t many other jobs where your hands spend more time in puppets than on a keyboard.”

Initially drawn to occupational therapy because it would allow her to help people, Kaylie says she loves the creativity and problem solving involved in client centred practice.

Taking the time to build rapport and understand each client’s likes, dislikes, dreams and motivations is critical, as is working closely with families.

A typical workday for Kaylie means session planning, finding and packing resources, and travelling up to 1.5 hours a day to visit clients, then finishing the day in the office.

Kaylie says her favourite moments are when she is challenged to think ‘outside the box’, such as when a young client found learning to use scissors very difficult. She found a solution through something they loved doing – watching YouTube videos.

“I made mock ‘YouTube’ videos that taught the viewer how to grasp scissors



and complete various activities. When I presented these to the client on an iPad, they LOVED it!”

Planning and building strong connections are essential. Kaylie dedicates many hours to designing sessions to fit the specific needs and challenges of each client, tailoring activities to help them work towards their goals.

*“It is a really special feeling to be thanked for your efforts. I get to be in a beautiful and unique position of working closely with families, becoming a support person and helping people grow their confidence. Not a lot of jobs offer this, and for that I am really grateful,” says Kaylie.*

*It’s no wonder Kaylie and her young clients are thriving. Your compassion and kindness makes this possible.*

# Comfort, care and connection in one call

The emotional toll of coming to terms with vision loss is immense at any age. But for older Australians coping with both physical and vision changes after a life of freedom and independence, realising what lies ahead has a huge impact.

Vision Australia's mission is to support people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose. And after undertaking significant research into the mental and emotional state of clients living with vision loss, particularly older Australians experiencing vision loss late in life, there was a clear need for a wellbeing-led solution.

The Check in and Chat program, initially funded as a pilot through The Wicking Trust, has been an extraordinary success. The service offers structured telehealth sessions conducted by specially trained wellbeing officers, that help clients navigate the grief associated with vision loss, build resilience and reconnect with life.

Vision Australia Wellbeing Team Lead, Megan, says giving participants all the space and time they need to express themselves has been one of the greatest outcomes.

Each Wellbeing Officer uses Mindspot's 'Big 5' questionnaire at the start of a program, to focus on actions strongly linked to good



wellbeing and mental health. Wellbeing officers have also become strong advocates for people who are missing out on services they are entitled to through My Aged Care.

Megan says there are countless positive stories from the program. "I particularly remember this feedback from Josie\*, who was new to vision loss.

*"I was absolutely distraught. But since speaking to Lucie I've learnt so much. I'm preparing for what might be ahead and it's been so helpful. Now I can see there will be ways to manage in the future."*

**If you are feeling disconnected from your community, or you know someone who is, please call 1300 847 466 and find out how we can offer support.**



\*Name changed to protect privacy.



# Transforming lives through employment

While being successfully employed is an important milestone in life, research shows people who are blind or have low vision face additional employment challenges. Only around three out of 10 people who are blind or have low vision are employed full time.

At Vision Australia, around 15 percent of our employees are blind or have low vision; we believe in the power of workplace inclusivity.

To help address these employment disparities and assist recent higher education graduates to enter the workforce, our Vision Australia Graduate Program (VAGP), was established in 2015 through the generosity of benefactor Ian Paul.

Upon acceptance, candidates receive a 12-month paid role and practical experience in a real-life work environment. This includes a 9-month, mentored position with training in a Vision Australia business unit and a 3-month placement with an external employer.



Jane



Olivia

Now in its tenth year and fully funded by our amazing supporters, VAGP provides graduates with the expertise, confidence, self-advocacy skills, support and crucial CV elements to successfully begin their careers.

In late 2024, we celebrated the initiative's achievements which has seen 35 graduates complete the program; of these, 33 are gainfully employed! We have five current incumbents. Thank you so much for making this program possible.

Program graduate Olivia is now employed by Vision Australia. A dog-handler herself, she bravely shared her life-changing vision loss story at the celebration.

Reflecting on her program journey, Olivia said, "I learned how to use the computer to reduce visual fatigue, advocacy, how to interview successfully, assistive technology training and how to hold respectful conversations without conflict."

And well-known disability advocate Jane recalled, "Instead of a girl with glasses and a cane, I became a woman with the capability to reach my career goals like everyone else. I will forever be grateful for that experience..."

**We are eternally grateful for your support – if you would like to partner with us and help more talented, driven and resilient graduates achieve their career aspirations, we'd love to hear from you! Please contact us at [philanthropy@visionaustralia.org](mailto:philanthropy@visionaustralia.org)**

# Making a difference: David's Gift for Vision Australia

David's connection to Vision Australia spans 60 years, shaped by his family's long association with the Royal Blind Society (RBS) NSW.

His mother, Rosalind, was a member of the Bank of NSW Women's Auxiliary for the RBS, briefly serving as treasurer. At the same time, his father, a bank manager, handled the financial management. As a teenager, David fondly recalls helping his mum and dad at fundraising events. One standout memory was assisting his dad in collecting and counting proceeds from a successful fete held on the picturesque grounds of Mahratta in Wahroonga. "I was made my dad's helper – I was handy counting and rolling the different denominations of coins and notes into their appropriate wrappers," he smiles.

Sadly, when David's grandmother lost her sight later in life, the family turned to RBS for support. "They provided practical assistance and genuine care," he recalls. "I still vividly remember the 'talking books' – she loved them. They kept her mind sharp and her spirits high. Remarkably, she lived to 93! The help she received made all the difference, and I'll never forget it," he shares warmly.

David has generously chosen to honour his family's legacy by including a gift in his Will for Vision Australia. Acknowledging the growing need for extra support as we age, he shares

*"I'm proud to make a lasting difference. I hope others will consider including a gift in their Will to help Vision Australia continue their important work."*

**If you would like to help us by including a gift in your Will, contact the Gifts in Wills team on 1800 422 077 or email [giw@visionaustralia.org](mailto:giw@visionaustralia.org) – we would love to hear from you!**



The annual Iris Circle Thank You lunch is a great opportunity to connect with fellow members and hear from our clients and staff.

## Small but mighty, Finn is on his way to a bright future

Finn was just four weeks old when mum Claudia visited emergency at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. She knew something was wrong with his eyes. It was the beginning of a stressful 12-month period of testing and medication.

Fortunately, Claudia was connected with Vision Australia at that very first appointment.

While waiting for an official diagnosis, Finn received a functional vision test assessment, and was linked with an early childhood educator, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and a speech pathologist. Claudia says the support was such a huge comfort.

One year later, after extensive genetic testing, Finn was diagnosed with Leber's



Congenital Amaurosis, which affects the retina and causes severe vision impairment from birth.

Now almost two years old, Finn is always on the go! He loves interacting with the world around him, and he adores singing and humming. Now Claudia is looking to the future with hope.

**Thanks to you, Finn was able to get vital early intervention therapy and is learning the life skills he needs to thrive.**

## Triumph for Tri-Hard Trekkers

We're so proud of Shell and Leigh, who recently completed Trek for Vision, walking over 53km along the Abel Tasman Track in New Zealand. Every step taken supported Vision Australia, raising an incredible \$73,854 for the Quality Living Group programs.

Shell and her best friend Leigh have shared many ups and downs over 40 years of friendship, including Shell's journey with vision loss. Ten years ago, Shell and her sister Nell were both diagnosed with a progressive eye condition called Cone Dystrophy, which has also affected their father and other family members.

When the sisters connected with Vision Australia, they received much-needed guidance and support. To show their gratitude, Shell and Leigh decided to take part in Trek for Vision, raising funds to



ensure other Australians with low vision can receive the same vital support.

Their fundraising efforts have been incredible, including a variety night in their hometown of Forbes which raised almost \$20,000. Together, Shell and Leigh raised over \$36,200 to support people who are blind or have low vision.

**To support Vision Australia and join one of our fundraising events, visit: [fundraise.visionaustralia.org/events](https://fundraise.visionaustralia.org/events)**

For more information call **1800 42 20 77**

or visit [www.visionaustralia.org/get-involved/ways-to-help](https://www.visionaustralia.org/get-involved/ways-to-help)