

Iris Circle Bequest Society: Thank you event Queensland 2025

What a fantastic morning we had at The Gabba on Wednesday, April 2! Despite a little rain, nothing could dampen the spirit of our Queensland Iris Circle thank you event. Our incredible supporters, some travelling for more than two hours, gathered to celebrate those who have generously included Vision Australia and/or Seeing Eye Dogs in their Will. The undeniable stars of the show were Seeing Eye Dog pups Peter, Pedro, Tinker, Twanny, Apache and Greg, charming everyone and enjoying plenty of love and attention.

Gathering in gratitude: A celebration of generosity



Ian Finlayson, our enthusiastic MC and General Manager of Fundraising and Marketing, welcomed guests. He took a moment to describe the venue for those with low vision and acknowledged the Turrbal people, the traditional custodians of the land.

With a sincere smile, Ian thanked our supporters, saying, "We couldn't do this without you. Your generosity helps us provide life-changing services, empowering people who are blind or have low vision to live a life they choose." He also recognised those who have included a gift in their Will, honouring their lasting commitment to Vision Australia's future. Ian expressed gratitude to the Queensland Cricketers' Club for their hospitality and welcomed Fortunato, (www.facebook.com/fortunatoisgro) whose music created an inviting atmosphere throughout the morning.

A future made possible: Celebrating the power of giving

Next, Justine Heath Acting CEO shared Vision Australia's future direction, warmly thanking donors for their continued support. "Every life changed is thanks to you," she said, emphasising the vital role of philanthropy in helping us reach and support more people in our community.

Justine announced several exciting initiatives, including the expansion of the Seeing Eye Dogs youth program to support younger clients, investment in the electric wheelchair mobility program, innovations to simplify onboarding of new clients, and a strengthened older adults wellbeing program.

With heartfelt thanks, Justine introduced Jane as our newest Iris Circle member. As Nigel Mapes, National Manager Gifts in Wills, handed her a certificate of appreciation and keyring, the room celebrated her generosity.

Following Justine's presentation, Ian shared a touching story about long-time Vision Australia supporter Robin Eden. "Robin's generous and unexpected gift will have a lasting impact on our services," he said. In her honour, we invited her dear friend and neighbour, Scott, along with his partner Tara, to accept an In Memory certificate." Clearly moved, Scott thanked Ian and Justine for the thoughtful tribute to his remarkable mentor.



With a smile, Ian introduced the next speaker: "Bashir helps people navigate when the path ahead isn't always clear. His work is vital, and we're lucky to have him here today."

The art of orientation and mobility (O&M)



Bashir Ebrahim OAM, Orientation and Mobility service lead, gave us a fascinating look into orientation and mobility (O&M). He explained that orientation is about knowing where you are, where you want to go, and how to get there. "It's not just about walking – it's about understanding your surroundings and moving with confidence," he shared. Bashir highlighted that mobility is achieved through independent travel, guides and mobility aids. O&M training helps individuals use their senses – like vision, hearing and touch – to build a mental map of their environment and navigate effectively. He also discussed different mobility aids, such as the long cane, Seeing Eye Dogs, and electronic devices like the Miniguide or Sunu Band. The choice depends on personal preference and lifestyle.

Bashir's presentation showed that O&M services are key to helping people who are blind or have low vision live more independent lives.

Accessing O&M support is easy. Simply call our friendly team, and they will help connect you with our specialists.

Call Vision Australia on 1300 847 466 or visit www.visionaustralia.org/referrals.

Making a difference: The Know Your Vision clinic



After Bashir's presentation, Ian introduced Chris Li, low vision optometrist, who gave an overview of the Know Your Vision clinic's essential services. Chris explained that the clinic offers personalised care, education, and access to technology, helping individuals with vision loss maintain their independence and confidence.

Chris shared the story of Nancy, a 78-year-old client dealing with wet age-related macular degeneration (ARMD), highlighting her daily struggles with blurry vision, safety, and the emotional toll of her condition. The clinic uses a transdisciplinary approach to create personalised support plans, connecting Nancy to services such as orientation and mobility training, occupational therapy, and peer support groups.

To help guests understand low vision, Chris invited them to wear special glasses simulating various eye conditions. The group was struck by how much low vision can impact daily activities and quality of life.

Accessing the Know Your Vision clinic is simple – call our friendly team and they will help find the right support for navigating life with confidence.

Call Vision Australia on 1300 847 46 or visit www.visionaustralia.org/referrals.



Behind the scenes of the Seeing Eye Dog program

After lunch, Brendan Ainsworth, Seeing Eye Dog instructor, and Dr. Theresa Ruig, Seeing Eye Dog handler, with Jango, shared their insights.

Brendan discussed the breeding program, focusing on selecting puppies with the right temperament for guide work. He explained the puppy development program, where volunteer puppy carers raise and socialise pups from eight weeks to 12 months. "The puppies learn to ride calmly in cars, buses, trams, ferries, and planes," Brendan said.

At 12 months, dogs begin a 20-week training program, including blindfold walks to assess their performance in real-world situations. While not every dog completes the program, many go on to other assistance roles. For those who qualify, client matching is based on lifestyle and personal preferences. Training with clients takes two to four weeks and is tailored to individual needs. "Every person and dog are unique," Brendan explained, "so our approach is flexible to ensure success."



Passport to freedom: How Jango changed my life



Theresa's life changed dramatically at age 10 when she was diagnosed with bilateral retinal detachment. Despite several surgeries, her vision steadily declined. "Losing my sight was heartbreaking," she says, "but I refused to let it define me."

A major turning point came in 2022 when she was matched with Jango, her energetic Seeing Eye Dog. "Leaving my daughters in Queensland was daunting," she admits, "but I knew this could change my life for the better."

The two-week training in Melbourne was intense but transformative. "The difference between using a cane and working with Jango is incredible. He gives me confidence, and I trust him completely."

Theresa's role at Oz Minerals involved frequent flights between Queensland and Adelaide. With help from a Seeing Eye Dogs instructor, Jango quickly learned to navigate the airport and her workplace. "Within two days, he had memorised every route – even finding the same desk on our return visit. He made it all so easy."

These days, Theresa enjoys the freedom of everyday moments—like going to cafés with her young daughters. "Before Jango, I needed someone sighted with me. Now, I can go independently. He's not just my guide; he's my companion, and my connection to community. When people stop to ask about him, I feel seen and included. I'm so grateful for everything your generosity has made possible."

Ian closed the event by congratulating Theresa's heartfelt presentation, the Gifts in Wills team, all supporters, volunteer puppy carers and staff who made the day so special.

Theresa's journey is a powerful reminder of the profound difference every gift can make in someone's life.

To explore how your legacy can support Vision Australia or Seeing Eye Dogs, feel free to contact Anthony on 0400 551 068 or Litsa 0409 956 132. We would be delighted to answer any questions you may have.

