

# Focus



Vision  
Australia

Blindness. Low Vision. Opportunity.

**150+**  
years of vision

Issue 2, 2024

## Amazing Alice defying expectations

(See page 2.)



Thank you!

Your support is  
making a difference  
to kids like Alice.





# Thank you

Right across Australia, children like Zarli and Alice, to energetic 85-year-old Diana, are enjoying their independence because of people like you.

Everyone needs the chance to live their life just the way they choose. But sometimes, we need extra help to make that possible.

While Diana needed advice on how to maintain her independence as she got older and her vision reduced, Zarli was born with low vision, and has needed specialist support from six months of age. That's why we rely on your help, to ensure we can tailor our support, advice and training to the individual needs of every Australian who is blind or has low vision.

Thank you for always being there, and bringing such joy to people like Zarli, Alice and Diana.



Ron Hooton  
Chief Executive Officer



# Thank you for believing in Amazing Alice

The determination and bravery of Alice really captured hearts, and thanks to the kindness of people like you, she continues to amaze everyone around her.

It's incredible to think that Alice's parents, Skye and Luke, were told she might never walk or talk. Born with part of her brain missing and diagnosed with nystagmus – involuntary movement of the eyes, and a cortical vision impairment which jumbles the messages between her eyes and brain, doctors couldn't tell Skye and Luke exactly how Alice would see her world.

Today aged five, Alice continues to defy expectations and achieve great things. She has already kicked all the goals her parents were told she wasn't going to achieve!

**The tailored early intervention support Alice received from us made this possible thanks to the support of people like you.**

Skye is so incredibly proud of her little girl, and so grateful to you for your generosity.

*As she prepares for primary school, we can't wait to see what's next for Alice.*



## Support turned Diana's life around!

When Diana began to experience vision loss, it came as a massive shock. A retired nursing sister, Diana had always been a busy, vital and active person. In 1996, she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, and realised she had to begin making some changes to her life.

Diana was determined to find ways to adapt and have the same independence and quality of life she'd always enjoyed. She was referred to several organisations, including the Royal Blind Society, one of Vision Australia's predecessors, for support with day-to-day living – and this connection made all the difference.

The most life-changing support Diana has received is from our daily living and occupational therapy support teams, who worked with Diana to help her feel comfortable and safe in her own home. She was delighted with the different ideas and accessible technology made available to her.

The team helped transform her backyard so it was more accessible, including painting boundaries that Diana had stumbled over so she was aware of trip



hazards, and installing handrails where needed. She has magnifiers for everyday tasks, and learned about new ways to tackle cooking and cleaning, so she can now safely and confidently move about and take care of herself in her own home.

Now aged 85, Diana never lets her age or low vision get in her way. It's wonderful to see Diana out and about, enjoying her independence, doing her shopping and outdoor tasks she loves, thanks to education and assistance funded by generous people like you.

While Diana hopes she will be independent for many years to come, she is also on a waiting list for a Seeing Eye Dog.

*Thank you for your incredible ongoing support, which enables people like Diana to live their lives to the full!*

*'Having a baby with low vision, we worried she might not grow up and find successful employment or a happy and productive life, but because Kate's been part of Vision Australia, she absolutely will.'*

*- Kim, Kate's mum.*





# Educating Australia on low vision

Almost half a million Australians currently live with low vision, and it is predicted to increase by 25% in the next 6 years.

But there is still a lot of work to be done to build awareness around what low vision is and more importantly how to make Australia a more inclusive place for those with vision loss. Many people with low vision experience discrimination, exclusion and social isolation, largely because the wider community doesn't know enough about how to be inclusive and supportive.

*Of course, it's hard to be inclusive if you don't know how. In 2023, we learned that 72% of sighted Australians are open to learning about being more inclusive\*, but many don't know where to start.*

This is why Vision Australia has launched **The Pupil Project**, a campaign to educate people on the lived experience of low vision. By building understanding and empathy in the community, we can reduce stigma and misconceptions about low vision.



The Pupil Project is a new 5-part video series designed to build understanding by showing the world through the eyes of someone with low vision.

The series represents five real life scenarios that people in the low vision community often find themselves facing, raising awareness of real challenges and misconceptions they experience. The campaign was inspired, written, and performed by people who are blind or have low vision.

This campaign includes informative resources with simple actions that people can take to adapt to and support Australians with low vision in everyday situations. Whether it's through simple communication tips or practical situations like guiding someone with vision loss, promoting inclusivity doesn't have to be hard.

There are also sharable resources for people experiencing vision loss, with a focus on advocacy and ways to adapt to life with a vision condition.

**The Pupil Project is one of Vision Australia's many advocacy and public education programs. To learn more and start seeing the world through the eyes of someone with vision loss, visit [visionaustralia.org/pupil-project](https://visionaustralia.org/pupil-project)**



# There's adventure and learning ahead for Zarli!

When Zarli was just eight weeks old, her parents noticed her eyes were moving involuntarily. After several tests, they learned that Zarli had nystagmus, which is caused by an abnormal function in the brain that controls eye movements.

By the age of six months, Zarli began receiving early intervention support from Vision Australia, including physiotherapy and speech pathology. Sarah, Zarli's mum, is ecstatic about the changes that she's seen – changes that your support makes possible for children like Zarli.

'Zarli loves gymnastics, and we've even been able to incorporate gym activities that will help her balance and vision,' said Sarah.



Today, Zarli is a bubbly, energetic three-year-old on a great adventure – a 12-month road trip around Australia! Zarli and her family set out from the Sunshine Coast in September 2023. In addition to all the wonderful experiences on her trip, Zarli continues her physiotherapy services with Vision Australia via telehealth while travelling.

A special recent highlight was a stay at her grandma's small farm outside Victoria, where Zarli became good friends with Bobby the horse. As a founding member for Riding for the Disabled, Zarli's grandma was delighted to introduce her grandchildren to equine therapy.

'We've only been doing equine therapy for a few months, but it has already made such an improvement in Zarli's balance. When we started, we were holding her hips as the horse trotted, but she's now strong enough to trot on the horse all by herself!'

*We couldn't do what we do without the wonderful generosity of supporters like you. Your kindness helps ensure that kids like Zarli have a bright future, and we are all so grateful to you!*





# Supporting families to be Life Ready

**GANDEL**  
FOUNDATION

Vision Australia's innovative Life Ready program supports children who are blind or have low vision to form strong foundations for life. It is comprised of three life stages – pre-school with the focus on family, primary school for school readiness facilitation, and high school, where tertiary education and preparedness for future employment are key.

Life Ready is based on years of research, world best practice principles, and incorporates the nine critical life skills areas, specific to children who have a vision impairment.

These life skills are designed to equip children, and families, to take advantage of choices that can lead to a better future and the confidence to believe they can truly achieve their goals and dreams, while being supported by qualified practitioners.

An important feature of the program is the Life Ready Hub – the digital heart of Life Ready!

The Hub is a comprehensive suite of resources and information that is relevant for the children and young people we work with, comprised of practical learning tools, instructions, examples and activities, to supplement growing needs that can be easily accessed by practitioners and families.

The development and ongoing success of Life Ready is only possible thanks to the support we receive from our incredible supporters, including John and Pauline Gandel, through Gandel Foundation.

'We decided to join forces with Vision Australia in support of the Life Ready program because research shows that helping children with vision impairment in those early years can ensure they meet life's challenges head-on and enjoy a much better quality of life in later years,' said a Gandel Foundation representative.

**To find out more about Vision Australia's Life Ready program and how you can make a significant impact to the life of a child who is blind or has low vision, please contact [philanthropy@visionaustralia.org](mailto:philanthropy@visionaustralia.org)**



# Denise's generous gift to Vision Australia, honouring her father's life

Meet Denise and Neville; they've been married for 42 years and share a love for cricket, opera, dogs, and sport. But their true legacy lies in their dedication to helping others, a commitment that extends beyond their lifetimes.

Denise's dad, Les, was a big influence on how they both see life. In his forties, an accident robbed Les of sight in one eye when Denise was just six weeks old. Over time, his vision deteriorated further, ultimately leading to complete blindness in his sixties. Despite major challenges, Les remained independent, continuing to work and navigate Melbourne with his white cane, confidently travelling on trams. In retirement, Les enjoyed participating in weekly workshops and socialising at what is now Vision Australia.

Denise and Neville were very impressed by the advancements in assistive technology and services when they recently visited our Vision Store in Kooyong. 'It's amazing how much of a difference technology is making,' they share. 'It would have made Dad's life so much easier!'



They both cherish memories of Les, reflecting, 'We really miss him. He worked hard, had a good sense of people, was intelligent, and kind.' Les's legacy lives on in their hearts, inspiring them to embody his resilience and generosity.

Because Denise and Neville have chosen to include a gift in their Will, they were invited to attend a recent Iris Circle event.

*'We were excited to find out about new services and meet the adorable Seeing Eye Dogs!'*

It's an occasion they mark in their calendar each year.

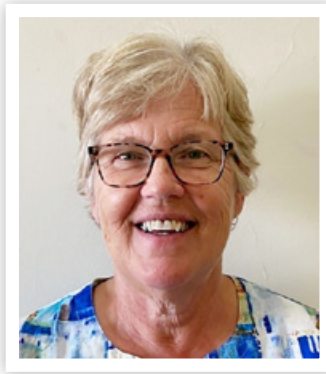
**You can join Denise and Neville by including a gift in your Will and help people, like Les, to live the life they choose. For a confidential chat, please get in touch on 1800 42 20 77 or you can email [giw@visionaustralia.org](mailto:giw@visionaustralia.org)**



Visiting the Vision Store in Kooyong.



# You help Simone make a difference!



Every day, our Allied Health Assistant Simone steps into the life of a Vision Australia client and experiences their world first-hand. It's a process that helps her find the best specialist

technology and equipment to meet client needs and bring freedom, mobility, independence and entertainment.

'I've been working with Vision Australia for almost five years now,' said Simone. 'My work covers everything from assistive technology and orthoptics to mobility and accessibility.'

Simone shows clients how to take advantage of state-of-the-art technology and equipment, helping with mobile phones, adapting kitchen appliances, assisting with library apps or delivering orientation and mobility training.

'It's so rewarding when clients think they can't do something anymore because of their vision loss, then discover they can through the use of equipment or technology. I love making a difference. I am so grateful to our supporters, who help me to help others!'

*Thank you – your support an extraordinary difference to people who are blind or have low vision.*

## The Vision Store – your one-stop assistive technology shop

At Vision Australia, we help people who are blind or have low vision to live on their own terms and make the most of every moment, and the Vision Store is a great place to start.

The Vision Store showcases the latest products and technology available from suppliers around the world, from magnifiers to mobility aids, talking products to assistive technology, and more! You can shop online or at one of 23 stores across Australia.

The Vision Store is an approved Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and My Aged Care



(MAC) supplier and can help you get the most from your funding.

Plus, you don't have to be a Vision Australia client to shop at the Vision Store. If you have a loved one who needs assistance or advice, we're here to help.

**To shop online or check out the product range, visit [shop.visionaustralia.org](http://shop.visionaustralia.org)**

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

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