# Blind Citizens Australia

# Election of Directors 2017

# Nominee Statements.

## Vicki Alipasinopoulos

My name is Vicki Alipasinopoulos and I have been a member of Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) since 1998. As a long standing member of BCA I would like to nominate for the Board. I am totally blind and have been from a young age. I therefore have a good understanding of the issues faced by individuals who are blind or have low vision.

My background is in Social Work and until recently, I worked as a Case Manager at Vision Australia’s Kooyong office for ten and a half years, where I undertook Initial Needs Assessments, provided advocacy on behalf of clients, as well as making referrals to internal and external services. As part of my role I was also required to:

* Possess excellent written and verbal communication skills;
* Attend and participate in team meetings and external networking meetings.

During my time at Vision Australia, I also served on the Employee Consultative Committee (ECC), representing staff who were blind or had low vision. My role was to provide input to senior Management around policy changes and changes to employment conditions which may have impacted on this group of staff.

I have previously served on the Committee of the former Melbourne Branch as well as on the Committee of the Women’s Branch. I have also served on the Committees of Management for the Disability Resources Centre (DRC) and Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA). Serving on the committees of the Melbourne Branch and the Women’s Branch, as well as having volunteered for BCA in the past, has given me a good insight into BCA and how it works.

My areas of interest include:

* The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and My Aged Care (MAC) and how these schemes may benefit and impact on the lives of individuals who are blind or have low vision; and
* Audio Description on television and on DVDs; and
* Employment for people who are blind or have low vision.

Given my own personal experience with vision loss, involvement with BCA and with Vision Australia, I have developed a good understanding of the issues faced by people who are blind or have low vision. Given this experience, I also believe I have developed the skills required to undertake such a role on the BCA Board. I therefore hope to represent members on the Board as a director.

Members can contact me via email at: lola1@optusnet.com.au with any questions, or you can get my contact phone number via the national office.

## Michael Baker

My name is Michael Baker and I have lived experience of blindness as I was born with minimal sight which has deteriorated to light perception.

For the past 3 years I have had the opportunity to be a member of the BCA board and also a member of the Finance Audit and Risk Management committee. During my period as a board member we have overcome some difficult challenges due to a dramatic change in the way Government funding has been allocated.

### Qualifications

I have a diploma In HR Management. This along with my work experience has equipped me to handle the various issues which may come to the board.

### Experience

I worked for 25 years as a member of the Australian Public Service where I undertook a number of roles from leading a team of 17 to debt collection, Technical advisor and mentoring and training of team members.

### Advocacy

I have been president and secretary of our local school P&C where my children attended. During that time, the committee not only dealt with school issues but also successfully advocated for the interests of the local community as well as school and students where planned developments around the school could be detrimental to the amenity of the school and community.

I am also an active member of a Vision Australia Local Client group and we advocate on a number of local issues which directly affect our members.

I look forward to the opportunity to serve another term and continue as part of the development of BCA.

## Helen Freris

Dear BCA Members,

I write to offer my services in standing for election to the Board of Blind Citizens Australia.

Since joining BCA in 1991, I have met, socialised with and offered and received peer support from many members, mainly in my home state of Victoria. I follow BCA’s work and members’ interests through BCA media, and have been involved with BCA variously as an employee, and as a participant of various Victorian State Convention planning committees and the NPC review advisory group. Most recently, I have held the role of vice president on the National Women’s Branch committee. These activities have helped me to share insights and experiences of blind and vision impaired people in Victoria and Australia and the challenges faced by BCA.

With a social work background, most of my working life has been spent in non-government organisations, in service delivery and management roles. I believe I have gained knowledge and insights over the years of the difficulties faced by organisations such as BCA in supporting members and staff, maintaining independence and managing and competing for minimal resources. I believe this experience has given me knowledge and skills which I would like to offer to the governance of BCA.

BCA’s strength is its members, people of all ages, experiences of blindness, life stages, gender, faiths, sexualities and cultures. But we could be more diverse, and even stronger, reflecting our indigenous and culturally diverse blind peers in the membership of our organisation. Should I be elected to the Board, I look forward to overseeing BCA’s efforts to engage with our diverse blind peers, advocating for all our human rights and learning from diverse experience.

The NDIS and My Aged Care will bring both possibilities and uncertainties for BCA’s members, and for our organisation, such as the positioning of advocacy within the disability landscape. Systemic advocacy is certainly needed, to ensure everyone receives equitable services, irrespective of age, and to uphold service quality for blind people. I hope to assist in overseeing BCA’s negotiation of and advocacy within this new and complex environment.

I believe that, as blind people, we form a community in Australia and overseas. I have taken an interest in BCA’s role within the World Blind Union, and have attended as an observer, a few midterm assemblies in our Asia-Pacific region, and am a member of the Editorial Committee for the regional newsletter, East Wind. I believe that, as an international community, we can learn from and support each other in our quest for human rights under the UNCRPD. I look forward to supporting BCA’s continued international involvements if elected.

BCA has much to offer as we share the lived experience and advocate for the rights of people who are blind, though we face some challenges along the way. In standing for election, I offer my skills and knowledge to assist in overseeing the organisation’s work in advocacy and peer support and my personal commitment as a member.

Thank you for considering my nomination.

## James Manders

I am a former Investment Banker with over 21 years of experience in the global financial markets. I have worked for a number of global Investment Banks in leadership roles on 4 continents and have broad experience across the finance industry. Currently, I sit on a number of Advisory and Company Boards as an Independent Director in Australia and overseas with focus on governance, regulatory investment matters, as well on operating and strategy implementation. I was recently appointed to the NDIS Independent Advisory Council (IAC) where I have been asked to contribute to the Disability Sector Innovation, Corporate and Employment Policy.

From an early age, I championed diversity and inclusion. Having experienced a hearing impairment since birth and a gradual loss in my vision over the course of my working life I have a unique perspective on how we as a society embrace the challenge of tolerance and acceptance. I have looked through the prism of these critical issues from both the outside and from within. My experience has encompassed both the emerging and transformational aspects of disability in the workplace and in my personal life.

I have used my position in the financial services industry in a number of countries including Australia to advocate and increase awareness at leadership levels of the needs of people with disabilities to be active and supported in their employment options. I am currently a member of the Board for Blind Citizens Australia having been asked to fill a casual vacancy in January of this year. In addition, I am a member of the Retina Australia ACT Committee, I am a member of the ACT Brumbies Commercial Services Advisory Committee and a member of the Disability Advisory Council of Elections ACT and have contributed to their election initiatives of ensuring access to all disabled and non-English speaking voters. I am an independent Director for a Cayman Island domiciled alternative investment fund of funds, and a member of a Hong Kong domiciled venture capital accelerator fund.

I am a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. I am currently undertaking an MBA at the University of Canberra and studied at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology for a Bachelor of Business (Economics & Finance).

I wish to thank Vicki Scheeren, President of BCA ACT, and Graeme Innes for proposing and seconding my nomination.

## Mark Muscat

My involvement over the last twenty years with Blind Citizens Australia has ranged from being an active member on the original National Policy and Development Council and recently represented Queensland. A general member of the Brisbane and Melbourne branches. I was instrumental in forming the Young Blind Citizens (Victoria) which had inspired young people in Queensland to form their own branch. The last few years I have been a general committee member and treasurer for the Brisbane branch.

Professionally, I have had a number of positions within corporate, Non-profit organisations and operated a small business for several years. Currently I am an Access Technology Specialist with Vision Australia and during the last six years in this position have gained an understanding and appreciation of varying views from other vision impaired and blind people I have had the privilege to be acquainted with.

From experiences gained, I bring to the organisation knowledge in the areas of technology, business and abilities to listen and discuss issues or situations that affect vision impaired and blind people from many groups, ranging from recreational organisations to people who are not vision impaired, who have an interest in our perspective views.

The future for all Australians could be said to be challenging one ahead, but like many of you I have concerns that we may not necessarily have the outcomes that we really expect from not just the National Disability Scheme, but other government programs that affect us as vision impaired and blind people. The recent direction that has been taken by the directors and office of BCA is a good start in the future challenges that we have, the importance to listen to the membership, involve members in being active by writing to various representatives of our parliament and implementing strategies that match up with current marketing trends. To achieve the best for our community, it is important that we not only continue with this forthright approach, additionally by bringing new members into the organisation, providing access to all the community and develop easy to understand and simple realistic policies that can be used to benefit not just vision impaired but the general community.

Anyone can contact me to discuss my statement and if for some reason I cannot answer, please leave a message and I will endeavour to contact you promptly.

Email: markulani@gmail.com Mobile: 0438 771 424.

## Prue Watt OAM

As a current Director of the Board of Blind Citizens Australia, my intent to re-nominate has been driven by a thoroughly enjoyable, stimulating and rewarding past eight months of directorship. I have also enjoyed the opportunity to contribute towards the planning, organisation and programming of BCA’s 2017 National Convention in Melbourne in collaboration with a fantastic Convention Planning Committee and Lynne Davis as our wonderful Chair.

BCA is currently navigating through a period of rapid progression and is striving for some fantastic initiatives which are changing perspectives and creating a huge impact in multiple areas. Our crucial role in providing a national voice and empowering all Australians who are blind or vision impaired to access their local community and infrastructure independently and equitably is reflected in our current and increasing number of major systemic advocacy cases.

The future of BCA has many exciting aspects to it. One of these areas that I feel very strongly about is enhancing engagement with our members. I would aim to continue to support BCA in creating and facilitating opportunities to bring our members together in new and innovative ways and engage members in genuine conversations to discuss their views, issues and interests.

I would cherish the opportunity to continue my commitment to the organisations culture and strategic objectives. In particular, I would continue to represent the issues and interests of younger Australians who are blind or vision impaired to create future opportunities for young emerging leaders. In doing this, I would collaborate with others to create opportunities for young people to engage in peer networking and mentoring.

If re-elected, I would also continue to focus on our strategic objective to increase our engagement with marginalised and geographically isolated cohorts within our community and to encourage younger people to become members of BCA to actively utilise its services and networking opportunities

I would be delighted to continue to offer my skills, leadership and steadfast support to the organisation and its membership through a period of substantial change; ensuring a strategically sound and positive direction for BCA. It is such an exciting time to be part of the organisation and I would relish the opportunity to offer my support and guidance along this journey, together with the other wonderful members of our Board.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination.

## Fiona Woods

I am standing for election as a director of Blind Citizens Australia. I served on the then Council during the 1990s and have been filling a casual vacancy on the Board since early this year. I have enjoyed getting to know the current BCA members and staff and getting to grips with the governence and policy framework. I have represented the Board on the Convention Planning Committee and the National Policy Council and am enthused by the energy and focus which still typifies BCA.

Lots of things have improved for blind people since I first became a proud member, many of them due to our advocacy.  Yet these improvements are not available to everyone. Access to appropriate services and information should not depend on where you live or what technology you can use or when you were born. BCA still has plenty to work on and I am determined to help make life better for all blind people living in Australia.

BCA works hard to respond to its members' priorities, but acknowledges there are some voices we rarely hear -- First Australians, young people and those whose first language is not English. I am determined to change this and I know that we can, because I remember a time when the voices of women were rarely heard at BCA. I also know that there are many blind and vision impaired people who will never join BCA. Their needs must still be acknowledged and met. I never forget that Braille and websites are not the answer for everyone and that BCA speaks for all blind people.

Even if BCA achieved all its policy objectives, I would still want it to exist.  We all have questions, asked by ourselves or others throughout our lives: how could you do that job, how would you get around in a new city, how could you look after a baby? These and other questions led me to BCA and I am still learning from the experiences of its members. BCA members, over time, have encouraged and supported me to take on leadership roles in the organisation, including becoming President of the National Women's Branch.

I have been a student, a corporate lawyer, a public servant, unemployed and I am now engaged in domestic duties. I have lived in Melbourne, Canada, Canberra and the Blue Mountains. I am the mother of six children, one of whom has a vision impairment. During my time away from active participation in BCA, I volunteered as a breastfeeding counsellor, receiving training and experiences in facilitating groups and providing peer to peer support. I have honours degrees in Law and Arts from Melbourne University.  I believe my academic training and my (by now) quite extensive lived experience of blindness equip me to be a positive contributor to the Board. I have some skills and some time and would like to dedicate them to an organisation and cause I feel passionate about. Please consider voting for me, Fiona Woods.