

Focus



Vision Australia

Blindness. Low Vision. Opportunity.

Issue 1 – 2018

Exclusive

How your support is making a difference to 'little lives'!



In this edition of your Vision Australia supporter newsletter:

- Ben's Kokoda Trail adventure
- How your support is helping deliver vital services
- Technology making important connections



**Welcome
from Ron**

It's been an incredible year and, thanks to you, we've been able to help many people – thank you! I hope you enjoy reading their stories over the coming pages.

In this edition, you'll discover how your kindness has delivered a range of support services to many young Australians, like little Scarlett, teenagers like Taylah, and university students like Angus.

You will also read about Ben who, at 16, one day woke up blind. This young, inspiring man hasn't let this new life situation stop him from doing anything, and he recently completed the Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea.

I am also always impressed by the dedication of our volunteers, and I'm sure you, too, will be warmed by the story of Udari, a refugee who gave so much to our team.

There are many other wonderful characters in the pages ahead and each of their stories are possible through your support.

Thank you for helping enrich the lives of people who are blind or have low vision. I hope you feel that, through your kindness, these incredible stories are as much a part of your story, too.

Ron Hooton
CEO, Vision Australia

A bursary helps build bright future for Angus

Currently completing a double degree in Science and Mathematical Science at the Australian National University, 20-year-old Angus is excelling in his studies, despite having low vision caused by oculocutaneous albinism.

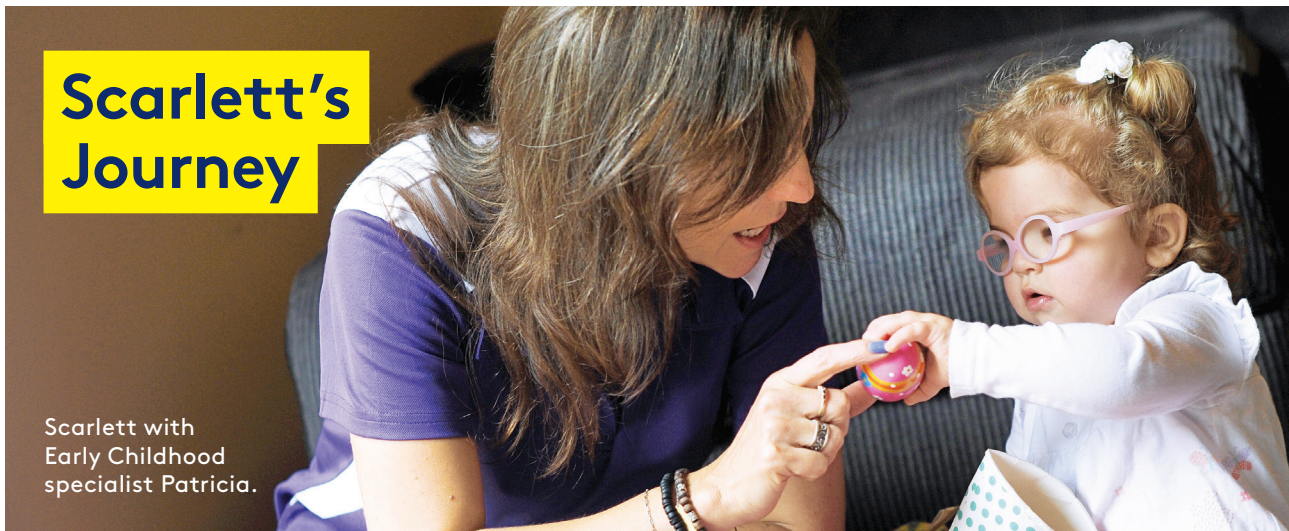
Angus is a beneficiary of Vision Australia's Further Education Bursary Program, a program that gives students access to assistive technology to help them with their studies. The program has provided him with a Dell XPS 15 laptop, Google Pixel XL smartphone and telescopic spectacles.

Angus is very grateful to supporters like you, for helping him further his education: *'The equipment means I can study and not have to worry about eye fatigue. It's made completing my course work a lot easier.'*

To find out more about Vision Australia's Further Education Bursary Program, please call 1300 84 74 66 or visit visionaustralia.org/bursary



Angus is excelling in his studies thanks to assistive technology.



As soon as baby Scarlett opened her eyes her parents Trish and Rick knew something was wrong. Both of Scarlett's eyes moved in jerky, uncontrollable movements, as if they were shaking. They would also roll around in different directions.

Scarlett was diagnosed with nystagmus, night blindness, and strabismus – a condition which causes her eyes to turn inwards. She also has limited peripheral vision. When her mum, Trish, would pick her up, Scarlett would become distressed. Trish was sick with worry.

Without the generous support of people like you, parents like Trish and Rick wouldn't have someone to call when faced with such a serious diagnosis.

It wasn't until Scarlett and her family were referred to Vision Australia, where they met Patricia, an Early Childhood specialist, that they found real hope for their daughter. Patricia helped Scarlett settle when she was picked up. The change was immediate.



Scarlett with mum Trish, dad Rick, and sisters Monique and Chloe.



Vision Australia offers specialist support and advice for the whole family.

As Trish remembers: *'I'd say "Hi, Scarlett. Mummy's here in your room. I'm going to pick you up now. One, two, three... got you."* Finally, Trish could enjoy cuddles with her baby girl.

Your support makes this type of tailored advice possible.

Patricia identified that Scarlett could see outlines and colours, so she helped the family use lighting, distance and high contrast to help Scarlett see more of her world.

Through the support of people like you, our specialised staff at Vision Australia have helped Scarlett to see nearly a metre in distance, a huge improvement from just 10cm shortly after birth. Trish is very thankful to have our support – and she knows that it's only possible thanks to the kindness of our donors. Thank you!

To help support families like Scarlett's, please donate at visionaustralia.org/donate



At the tender age of 16, Ben lost 98% of his eyesight to a rare genetic syndrome, Leber's hereditary optic neuropathy. It happened literally overnight.

The terrible shock left Ben in a state of grief. *'I had no warning whatsoever that I was going to lose my eyesight.'* Through sheer determination, and the support of Vision Australia, he's since been on an incredible journey – of highs and lows.

He remembers a tough day not long after his loss of vision: *'While walking past the general office at school I ran head first into a vertical pole and split my eyebrow and lip open.'*

'It wasn't until it literally hit me in the face that I accepted the fact that I was going to be blind for life.'

As tough as it was to accept his condition, Ben embraced Vision Australia's support and successfully completed Year 12. *'Access to equipment and training let me continue my studies at a conventional school with my friends.'*

Ben is very grateful: *'From big things to small things, everything has made a difference in one way or another.'*

But, there was another low ahead. At university, Ben struggled with his emotions, so he quit and worked for a while as a builder's labourer before deciding to use his own story

of loss as one that can help others through motivational speaking.

From feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope, Ben has moved on to gain the confidence and the courage to take on life. So much so, that in September he completed the Kokoda Trail – the arduous track that our bravest soldiers endured over 75 years ago in Papua New Guinea.

It was an incredible challenge: *'Physically the challenge was huge. Trekking up steep inclines and sliding down declines that literally disappear below you. Trudging through thick mud, crossing through rivers and balancing your way over poorly engineered bamboo bridges – each and every step had to be millimetre perfect.'*

To be able to complete such an intense physical challenge, having lost so much of his vision, is an amazing achievement for Ben. *'It was seven gruelling days and the mental challenge was as great as the physical.'*

He thanks Vision Australia supporters for giving him opportunities: ***'Your contribution has allowed me and so many others in similar situations to not only have the skills and knowledge to live independent lives, but also to have the confidence that, despite living with low vision, anything is possible. Thank you.'***

To help amazing young people like Ben, please donate at visionaustralia.org/donate

Like all teenagers, Taylah wants her independence!

Most teenagers want their independence, but for 15-year-old Taylah – a year 10 student living near Hobart – it hasn't been easy to find her own, due to being legally blind.

Thankfully, with your support, Vision Australia has paired Taylah with Gail, a Melbourne-based Orientation and Mobility specialist. Together they have completed white cane and traffic training, which allows her to walk safely. Gail also visits Taylah's school and other locations she regularly goes to, ensuring they are safe for her.

Taylah's Mum, Kylie, is so pleased. She says, 'Prior to Gail's involvement, Taylah was quite reluctant with her cane. Gail's



Taylah enjoying her independence.

approach is beautiful and seems to be on a wavelength that Taylah can relate to.'

Kylie is very thankful to generous supporters like you for making this partnership with Vision Australia possible. She explains '*...Vision Australia has been part of this kid's life since she was two. They have been our backbone ever since. Without them, we'd be completely lost.'*

To find out more about Vision Australia's services, please call 1300 84 74 66.



Udari is proud to help Vision Australia

Udari happily volunteering at Vision Australia.

The strong culture of volunteering at Vision Australia enriches lives and provides deeper connections within local communities. In addition to the rewards of giving their time and skills to the community, some volunteers learn skills that make them a more attractive candidate for the workforce.

Udari, 33, is one of the nearly 3,000 volunteers at Vision Australia. She arrived in Australia from Sri Lanka in 2015 with excellent administration and co-ordinator skills, but found it difficult to obtain paid work in Australia initially.

Udari became an administrative support volunteer with Vision Australia in Bendigo and her time there has had a genuine impact

on her life. She explains: '*Volunteering for Vision Australia has been an incredible experience. I enjoyed every single day. I developed my skills, gained confidence and learned.'*

Thanks to the additional skills she gained, the support of the team and the references they provided, she was able to find a job she genuinely loves.

She is very thankful: '*I thank Vision Australia from the bottom of my heart for giving me such an amazing opportunity and for the support they gave me.'*

For more information about volunteering, call us on 1300 84 74 66 or email volunteer@visionaustralia.org



Movies and theatre come to life with the help of audio description.

Bringing to life the theatre of the mind through audio description

While everyone has seen captions on a movie or TV show, many people may not know that people who are blind or have low vision will use audio description to enjoy their favourite programs and shows.

Audio description brings to life the on-screen or on-stage action, by narrating it for the audience. Our Vision Australia volunteers carefully describe what they are seeing so others can imagine what's happening, as it happens.

Here's what one audience member thought of *My Fair Lady* with audio description: *'The show was fantastic, thanks to the lovely narrators from Vision Australia providing audio description throughout the show. They help to paint a picture of the stage*

and allowed me to understand the visual cues given by the performers.'

Another loved the gaps it filled for *Carousel*: *'This was my first experience with the audio described program. It was really helpful to fill me into the storyline.'*

By painting the picture through words, people with blindness or low vision can enjoy the drama, suspense or comedy in real time.

Audio description is available at selected cinemas and has recently been trialled in some theatres and TV series.

To find out more about audio description and Vision Australia's services, please call 1300 84 74 66.

Technology for any generation

Like many older Australians, Kathleen has been experiencing age-related macular degeneration for many years. She has been legally blind since her mid-seventies. A client of Vision Australia, Kathleen joined an Access Technology Seniors Training Group, made up of people who had never used a computer before. She was 96.

Kathleen says: *'The group was perfect for me.'* Learning about voiceover options and gesture controls the iPad offers, was a major step in helping her become more connected with her family and friends.

'It helps me to really feel part of my family. They often visit me, but it's nice to be able to know that they're happy and what's going on in their lives.'

'Things like being able to look at their photos, or keep up with their birthdays on Facebook, or send them an email, are what really helps me stay connected with the people I care about, and that's what gives me the most enjoyment.'

Thanks to the kindness of people like you, Vision Australia is helping people who are blind or have low vision benefit from technology.



Technology helps elderly people stay connected with their loved ones.

Become one of our monthly supporters today

By joining our regular giving program 'Live the Vision' you can help us ensure that no one who comes to Vision Australia faces vision loss alone. You will help thousands of people who are blind or have low vision, practically and emotionally.

From the very young to the not-so-young, they can have access to services that help them achieve their goals, including receiving support to achieve independence and social inclusion, as well as education and employment. Why support in this way? Regular giving is so important because it provides security and assurance to the people that we help



Your monthly support will help children like Mieah, who was born blind.

on a daily basis, as they know we can be there for them in the long term and not just today.

Your regular monthly donation is truly valuable and will make a lasting difference in the daily lives of those affected by vision loss.

To pledge your regular gift today and support people with vision loss, please call 1800 42 20 77, head to visionaustralia.org/donate or complete the attached form. Thank you!



Meet Patricia!

Early Childhood Specialist Teacher Patricia Izzard is passionate about supporting families whose children are blind or have low vision. We sat down with her to find out what a typical day is like.

What is a typical day for you?

I love that no two days are ever the same. A typical day could see me juggling between home visits, visits to early childhood centres, and administrative tasks. Whether it's meeting a family who have a baby with a newly diagnosed loss of vision, or visiting an early childhood education centre to support with the inclusion of children, it's less about what I do directly and more about what I can do to build the capacity of families to make the difference in their children's lives.

What type of support or services do you provide?

I support families and other service providers to achieve full inclusion into mainstream services, I provide advice and information on maximising use of vision, access to literacy, reaching developmental milestones and increasing children's learning through play and during daily routines. Emotional support to families is also a big part of my role.

What do you love about your role?

I enjoy being able to help others (especially families) live their life to the fullest. It's very rewarding to see the children I support achieve great outcomes around inclusion, participation, access and education.

Yes! I would like to make a life-changing gift of:

\$35 \$50 \$100 My choice \$.....

– OR –

I would like to give a monthly donation of \$..... (min \$12)

My payment method:

Please debit my credit card (details below)

Card type: Visa MasterCard AMEX Diners

Card no: _____ / _____ / _____ / _____

Expiry: ____ / ____

Name on card:

Signature:

– OR –

Please find enclosed my cheque/money order payable to *Vision Australia* (for one-off donations only)

My Details:

Title:

First name:

Surname:

Phone:

Email:

Address:

Suburb:

State: Postcode:

Reference number (if known):

Please complete this coupon and return to the below address.

Send to Reply Paid 9802 IN YOUR CAPITAL CITY, call 1800 42 20 77 or donate at www.visionaustralia.org.au/donate

Occasionally we allow like-minded organisations to contact our supporters. This helps us reach additional generous Australians willing to support our cause. If you do not wish to receive communications from other organisations, please cross this box

Please read our privacy statement overleaf. If you do not wish to receive further information about the work Vision Australia does in the community, please call 1800 42 20 77.



Thank you for making a difference.
Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.



Transform someone's life!

\$35 can help pay for a long white cane, ensuring a person who is blind or has low vision can get around safely.

\$50 can help pay for a 30 minute independence and daily living activities session for a child to learn basic skills such as social interaction and personal care.

\$100 can help provide a Felix Library Kit for pre-schoolers, which includes brailled books, tactile toys and a copy of the story on CD. By bringing stories to life, this is an invaluable resource to help with early literacy skills.

PRIVACY STATEMENT:

Vision Australia respects your privacy and embraces the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs). We obtained your personal information from you directly. When you return this form to us, we collect your personal information so we can process your donation, and contact you again with information about us and our related entities, our services, our fundraising campaigns, and how you can support us again in the future. We may contact you by email, mail or telephone, and you can opt-out at any time.

You don't have to provide us with your personal information; however without it we are limited in how we interact with you.

Our Privacy Policy is available at www.visionaustralia.org/privacy, and contains important information about (i) how we collect and handle your personal information, (ii) how you can access and correct your personal information, and (iii) how you can make a privacy complaint. If you have any queries or concerns, please contact our privacy officer by email at info@visionaustralia.org, or call us on 1800 42 20 77.

Ways you can get involved



Vision Australia's mission is to support people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose.

Thank you for making this possible!

-  **Give a donation** – your gift will make a real difference and go towards providing vital services to those who need them most.
-  **Become a Live the Vision supporter** – give a monthly regular donation to provide ongoing support to clients to live the life they choose.
-  **Leave a gift in your Will** – create a powerful legacy that will positively impact many people beyond your own lifetime.
-  **Sponsor Seeing Eye Dog pups** – make a monthly regular donation towards the training and care of puppies to ensure the continuation of these programs that make a life-changing difference to people who are blind or have low vision.
-  **Volunteer** – make friends and have fun while enjoying the sense of reward that comes from helping others.
-  **Fundraise** – run your own event, hold a cake stall, enter a race, have fun while raising funds which will enable Vision Australia to provide valuable support.



For more information call 1800 42 20 77 or visit visionaustralia.org/fundraising-and-volunteering