

**Annual Report**

**2019/20**

Message from the Board Chair – Michelle McQuigge

Well, we made it. This year has been a dramatic and challenging one for organizations around the world, including BALANCE for Blind Adults. But thanks to exemplary leadership and dedication from our Executive Director, staff team, board of directors and volunteers, we’ve not only made it over the various hurdles current events have placed in our path but are emerging stronger at the other end.

The largest and most unexpected of these hurdles, of course, is the COVID-19 outbreak that forced BALANCE, along with everyone else, to reinvent the wheel in a matter of days. I would like to thank everyone who helped Balance make this transition so smoothly, but especially Deborah Gold and the staff team. Your collective leadership, flexibility, creativity and enthusiasm allowed Balance to continue serving clients, sometimes in more innovative ways that will serve us all well long after the pandemic has run its course. I’d also like to take this opportunity to wish ongoing health to the entire Balance community. This era of uncertainty is not over yet, and I hope you all stay safe and well as it unfolds.

We are living through tumultuous times on other fronts as well, and the social issues playing out on the world stage are not lost on Balance. We, as both individuals and an organization, are committed to denouncing and combatting racism in all forms -- particularly as it affects members of our Balance community. As part of our pledge to fight this deep-rooted social injustice, we will undertake a review of our practices across all aspects of the organization. We intend to back our words with actions, and we will share those actions with you in the weeks and months ahead.

It was a busy year for BALANCE even before these recent events, with much excellent work completed by our tireless group of volunteer board members. We started the year off by completing a revamp of our strategic plan, which is available to all for viewing on the Balance website. My sincerest thanks to the entire team who took on this mammoth task – Executive Director Deborah Gold, Consultant Dianne Macfarlane, and the entire board with particular gratitude to members of its strategic planning committee (Bob Stark, Keith Gordon and Anne MacPhee). The document we’ve developed should help us navigate through a climate of political uncertainty while continuing to serve Toronto’s sight-loss community in more varied and effective ways.

It was a strong year for fundraising, with more than $27,000 coming in through grants, the “Because of BALANCE” fundraising campaign and last year’s benefit concert. My thanks to all who worked so hard to make our efforts in this area so successful.

We were incredibly lucky to have a strong slate of board directors helping to steer BALANCE throughout the past year, and even more fortunate that nearly all of them have agreed to stay on through the next fiscal year. The one exception is Janis Davidson Pressick, who has opted to retire from the board as of this month. Janis, thank you for all you’ve done for Balance – your enthusiasm, communications and marketing savvy, wisdom and unfailingly positive presence will be very much missed.

The Board feels thanks are also due to the tireless, dedicated staff, both past and present, who make Balance the unique and valuable organization that it is. We literally could not do this without you. This includes Deborah, who is always looking for ways to expand our organizational horizons and keep us moving forward. All of you have responded to unforeseen challenges with professionalism, grace and skill, and we could not be more grateful.

The Board also wishes to acknowledge and thank the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network (TCLHIN) for its ongoing support, financial and otherwise.

I have already alluded to the excellence of our Board team, but would like to take a moment to personally thank them all again. This is a group of exceptionally intelligent and talented volunteers drawn from a wide array of professional and personal backgrounds. Together they ensure that BALANCE is guided by the best advice, all applied to the aim of ensuring the organization is there for its clients. Board members, thank you. I am grateful every day for your hard work and sound guidance. This includes our volunteer support administrator, Emily Johansen, without whom I’m certain we would not get nearly as much accomplished!

And finally, thank you to all our past and present clients. Your trust in BALANCE, patience during these trying times, and resiliency in the face of those trials is at the heart of everything we do. We promise the year ahead will see us work harder than ever to make sure BALANCE is there to provide you with the best service possible.

Respectfully submitted by

Michelle McQuigge,

Chair, Balance for Blind Adults Board of Directors.

June 22, 2020